



ACQUISITION RESEARCH PROGRAM SPONSORED REPORT SERIES

Examining Options to Optimize the Air Force Enlisted Feedback System

December 2025

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Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943.

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ABSTRACT

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) faces persistent challenges in delivering effective developmental feedback to enlisted Airmen, with many reporting that guidance from supervisors is inconsistent, transactional, or insufficient to support meaningful growth and promotion readiness. These issues stem from systemic gaps in supervisory training, cultural inconsistencies across units, and a lack of structured processes that promote continuous dialogue and developmental accountability. This thesis examines these challenges through a user-centered lens focused on a single Civil Engineering unit in the DAF. Using Hacking for Defense (H4D) methodology, and the output of 84 semi-structured interviews, the authors developed The Prepare, Align, Carry Out, Evaluate (PACE) framework, a cyclical feedback model built to enhance clarity, structure, and two-way communication between raters and ratees. Pilot testing demonstrated that the framework improves goal alignment, deepens developmental conversations, and supports greater ownership of professional progression, even within high-tempo operational environments. The authors recommend broader implementation, digital integration, and continued research to evaluate long-term effectiveness across diverse DAF contexts.



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This work is dedicated with deep gratitude to the enlisted leaders who walked beside us throughout this journey. Your honesty, vulnerability, and hard-earned wisdom turned our interviews into conversations and our ideas into something worth fighting for. Leadership is often a thankless job, so here is our *thank you* to you: for the long shifts, late hours, and hard conversations, thank you for the sacrifices you make, and the greatness that you give.



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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACA	Airman Comprehensive Assessment
AF	Air Force
AFI	Air Force Instruction
AFSC	Air Force Specialty Code
ALS	Airman Leadership School
ALQ	Airman Leadership Qualities
CC	Commander
CES	Civil Engineer Squadron
CGO	Company Grade Officer
CIV	Civilian
DAF	Department of the Air Force
DoD	Department of Defense
DOR	Date of Rank
DAFI	Department of the Air Force Instruction
DAFMAN	Department of the Air Force Manual
EFDP	Enlisted Force Distribution Panel
EPB	Enlisted Performance Brief
FGO	Field Grade Officer
H4D	Hacking for Defense
JQS	Job Qualification Standard
MMC	Mission Model Canvas
MVP	Minimum Viable Product
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NCOA	Non-Commissioned Officer Academy
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School



PACE	Prepare, Align, Carry Out, Evaluate
PAYCE	Prepare, Align, Year Map, Carry Out, Evaluate
PFA	Physical Fitness Assessment
PME	Professional Military Education
RRIS	Ratee Relevant Information Sheet
SCOD	Static Closeout Date
SEL	Senior Enlisted Leader
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SNCO	Senior Non-Commissioned Officer
SNCOA	Senior Non-Commissioned Officer Academy
TDY	Temporary Duty
USAF	United States Air Force
VPC	Value Proposition Canvas



I. INTRODUCTION

Across the broader Department of Defense (DoD), feedback is foundational to the development, motivation, and retention of enlisted personnel. Informal feedback and formal evaluations inform service members of their career trajectory, provide context to substantiate performance during promotion boards, and ultimately shape how military personnel perceive their value within a unit (Department of the Air Force, 2025). In the authors' experience, despite its significance, the process by which feedback is delivered remains inconsistent across commands and ranks. Across 61 semi-structured interviews conducted between September and December of 2024, supervisors reported a lack of standardized training and resources, leading to subjective assessments and uneven developmental experiences among service members. As a result, feedback frequently becomes a procedural requirement rather than a meaningful developmental dialogue, undermining trust, professional growth, and retention of high-performing troops.

Within the Department of the Air Force (DAF), feedback is governed by the Airman Comprehensive Assessment (ACA) process, which mandates an initial, midterm and end-of-reporting-period feedback session for each Airman (Department of the Air Force, 2025). In practice, however, compliance and quality vary significantly between units and supervisors. Based on interview data collected in 2024, many Airmen reported that initial sessions are often delayed or treated as a checklist item, while midterm and end-of-reporting feedback rarely occurs. When feedback does take place, direction can often be too vague, generic, or disconnected from promotion expectations to drive meaningful improvement. These shortfalls contribute to a ripple effect throughout the force, impacting motivation, leadership credibility, and the perceived fairness of the evaluation and promotion system.

The realities of the feedback process highlight a deep institutional challenge. According to interviews conducted from September to December 2024, while the Air Force (AF) recognizes the importance of feedback in policy, its realistic implementation at the squadron level relies on the experience, priorities, and workload of individual frontline supervisors. In efforts to better understand and address the disparity in how feedback is



experienced, delivered and valued among enlisted troops, the authors' research focused on a single operational Civil Engineer Squadron (CES) in the United States Air Force (USAF), subsequently referred to in this thesis as the 'Pilot Unit'. By examining the Pilot Unit through the lens of the Lean Startup model and Hacking for Defense (H4D) innovation framework, the authors sought to identify root causes of feedback breakdowns and prototype a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) capable of improving feedback quality, consistency, and overall developmental impact across the DAF.

This thesis is organized into two primary focus areas, the initial 10-week design sprint, and the following 6-month pilot study. Chapter II details the 10-week sprint, or, Phase 0, encompassing the customer discovery process, problem analysis, and initial development of MVP iteration 1.0 through the H4D methodology. Phase 0 establishes the foundational insights that shaped the authors' solution and explains the rationale behind its design. Chapters III through V describe Phases 1 through 4; refinement of MVP iteration 2.0, training on the tool and implementation within the Pilot Unit, documentation and analysis of user experience, and final development of MVP iteration 3.0. By distinguishing the initial design phase from the implementation phase, this thesis illustrates the full progression of the authors' work, from identifying the problem, to developing the authors' prototype and ultimately translating that prototype into an applied, field-tested system.



II. BACKGROUND

The Lean Startup model, created by Eric Ries and refined by Steve Blank, served as the foundation of the authors' research process. Its emphasis on iterative learning, real-time feedback, and validated experimentation made it an ideal framework for addressing a user-centric problem within a bureaucratic system (Ries, 2011). H4D, an adaptation of Lean principles, originated in 2016 as an academic course at Stanford University taught by Steve Blank, Joe Felter, and Peter Newell to address defense-related problems. The goal of the course was for students to experience Lean methodologies and apply them to defense problem statements by interviewing stakeholders and building and testing MVPs (Decker et al., 2024). Since its conception, H4D has expanded into a national academic program in partnership with the DoD, intelligence community, and other defense innovation stakeholders to solve problems that are diverse, complex, and critically important. By leveraging agile methodologies and iterative experimentation, H4D provides students with tools and opportunities to engage directly with problem sponsors, conduct customer discovery interviews, and prototype mission-driven solutions (Decker et al., 2024). Stemming from the authors' own experience with the H4D program, Lean principles were applied to a defense setting by following a sequence of structured phases designed to move systematically from problem identification to prototype deployment and refinement.

A. SPONSORED PROBLEM

The topic of this thesis originated from a sponsored problem submitted to the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) MN-3307 Enterprise Innovation Design course by a member of the Pilot Unit, hereafter referred to as Sponsor 1. Sponsor 1 identified persistent inadequacies within the existing AF enlisted evaluation system, a recurring challenge within their organization. The original problem statement submitted by Sponsor 1 read, "Enlisted Airmen need an evaluation system that equitably recognizes top performers and promotes realistic personal and professional development to advance retainment efforts." (Sponsor 1, personal communication, September 2024). Sponsor 1 elaborated that current AF processes and tools, such as the ACA, Enlisted Force Distribution Panel (EFDP), and



broader subjectivity within the promotion process, were specific components contributing to evaluation system inequities and dissatisfaction.

B. CUSTOMER DISCOVERY

To validate and refine the sponsor's concern, the authors' team engaged in an iterative customer discovery process that included 61 semi-structured interviews across the Pilot Unit and Subject Matter Experts (SME) across the military community. *Table 1 – 10-Week Sprint Demographics*, details the participants of these interviews. For the purposes of this thesis, references made to the statements of these participants will be made by the Participant ID numbers indicated here. ID numbers utilize two characters: (S) to indicate 10-Week Sprint participants, and a (#) to indicate participant number 1 through 61. To facilitate readability, participants have been grouped by demographic and Pilot Unit membership. As detailed in Table 1, participants represented a broad range of supervisors and supervisees, consisting of 16 junior-enlisted (E-1 to E-4), 16 Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) (E-5 to E-6), 14 Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCO) (E-7 to E-9), 11 Company Grade Officers (CGO) (O-1 – O-3), 1 Field Grade Officer (FGO) (O-4 – O-6), and 3 Civilian (CIV) personnel.

Table 1. 10-Week Sprint Demographics

Participant ID	Quantity	Demographic	Pilot Unit Member
S-1 – S-12	12	Junior Enlisted	X
S-13 – S-16	4	Junior Enlisted	
S-17 – S-27	11	NCO	X
S-28 – S-32	5	NCO	
S-33 – S-36	4	SNCO	X
S-37 – S-46	10	SNCO	
S-47	1	CGO	X
S-48 – S-57	10	CGO	
S-58	1	FGO	
S-59 – S-61	3	CIV	
TOTAL	61		

Note 1.1: For the purposes of this thesis, references made to the statements of participants in Phase 0, the 10-Week Sprint, will be made by the Participant ID numbers indicated here.

Note 1.2 – Participant ID Key:

(S) – Indicates 10-Week Sprint Participant

(#) – Indicates Participant #



Primary interviews during Phase 0 focused on junior enlisted and their direct supervisors. To benchmark best practices, secondary and tertiary demographics included flight and squadron level leadership. In efforts to maximize diversity of perspective regarding mission and leadership style, interviews conducted within the Pilot Unit encompassed four out of ten of its functional sections. This broad sampling allowed observation of the effects of policy, culture, and operational tempo on feedback practices across different shops.

Three dominant themes emerged consistently throughout initial customer discovery interviews conducted between September and December 2024. First, among AF supervisees, initial feedback was reported to occur less than half the time, while midterm and end-of-reporting-period feedback was identified as rarely conducted. Second, supervisors reported a lack of training and confidence in providing actionable feedback and career guidance, often relying on personal experience rather than formal guidance from the DAF. Lastly, among those interviewed, promotion outcomes were largely perceived as inconsistent and highly subjective based on the visibility of the shop assigned and the experience of the assigned supervisor, rather than objective performance standards. These findings related to completion of feedback, supervisor competency and system subjectivity were not isolated incidents, but reflective of a larger cultural and structural issue within the AF evaluation system.

As part of the customer discovery process, a review of AF policy also revealed a clear divergence between DAF intent and field-level understanding. A common statement among Phase 0 interviewees, was that completion of feedback, and its direct influence on evaluation results was not authorized to be viewed and verified by anyone outside the supervisor supervisee relationship. However, this belief is in direct contrast to policy guidance under Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36–2406 *Officer and Enlisted Evaluation Systems* Paragraph 2.9, which states that ratees may grant access to their feedback to anyone within the chain of command (Department of the Air Force, 2025). A second common misconception identified in initial interviews was that the responsibility for development of supervisory skills resides at the DAF enlisted developmental education level. However, policy under AFI 36–2406 Paragraph 1.6.1.2. dictates that Commanders



(CC) are responsible for ensuring supervisors are properly trained and re-trained on a recurring basis, and a review of AFI 36–2685 *Total Force Enlisted Developmental Education* revealed that supervisory skills were a minimal focus of the Enlisted Airmanship Continuum, the enlisted development model (Department of the Air Force, 2025). Finally, the EFDP process is designed to promote fairness and transparency, with promotion allocations typically limited to 5 percent “Promote Now” and 10 percent “Must Promote” designations (Department of the Air Force, 2025). The response from those interviewed indicated a significant level of mystery surrounding the procedures and results of these panels. However, in accordance with AFI 36–2506 Paragraph 4.18.2, while these panels are required to maintain confidentiality, they are also required to publish local procedures prior to the accounting date and conduct out-briefs for eligible members to enhance understanding of results (Department of the Air Force, 2025).

Despite clearly defined policy regarding individual responsibilities, overall interviews during the 10-Week Sprint revealed that the expectations and requirements behind the enlisted promotion process were not clearly understood among the junior ranks. Most supervisors in the S-17 through S-32 demographic were unfamiliar with the training or the accountability mechanisms available to ensure feedback sessions were conducted properly and on time, while supervisees S-1 through S-16 displayed a general lack of understanding of DAF level guidance on the process altogether. Customer discovery takeaways such as these contributed to development of two key H4D tools, the Mission Model Canvas (MMC) and Value Proposition Canvas (VPC).

C. MISSION MODEL CANVAS

Within the H4D methodology, the MMC serves as a system-level planning tool for identifying and aligning the critical components of a mission-driven solution. The MMC organizes problem understanding through whole picture elements in three primary areas: Desirability, Feasibility and Viability (Decker et al., 2024). Together, these components provide a structured view of the problem space, linking people, processes, and resources to the outcomes and metrics required for success (Decker et al., 2024). During Phase 0, the authors used the MMC to synthesize early discoveries and visualize the environment



surrounding the problem statement within the Pilot Unit. The canvas translated policy analysis and qualitative interview insights from customer discovery into a coherent framework that clarified who was involved, what actions were necessary, and what value needed to be created to improve enlisted feedback.

The Desirability portion of the MMC focuses on components of the problem statement that ensure the proposed solution is valuable and ultimately form the foundation of the VPC (Decker et al., 2024). Desirability is comprised of four focus areas; Beneficiaries, Buy-In and Support, Deployment, and Value Propositions (Decker et al., 2024). In relation to Sponsor 1's problem statement the authors defined Beneficiaries, or those most directly impacted by the problem statement, largely as junior enlisted Airmen and their direct supervisors within the Pilot Unit. Their lived experiences guided each stage of the research, from hypothesis development to MVP design. Regarding Buy-In and Support, the authors determined the problem to be most applicable at the unit level, and that prioritization from squadron-level leadership would be most beneficial to embedding the solution into existing structures and sustaining accountability over time. For Deployment of the solution into the Pilot Unit, the authors determined that buy-in from the training team, mandatory initial training for end-users of the MVP, and mandatory annual feedback reporting and accountability would be essential for a smooth transition and maintained use of the proposed solution. Lastly, various Value Propositions, or recommendations for a potential solution, were proposed by the authors to include increased transparency in evaluations, standardized feedback procedures, improved feedback quality, enhanced mentorship, and accessible tools to support accountability and consistency across units.

The Feasibility section highlights the three components needed to ensure the successful implementation of a potential MVP: Key Partners, Key Activities and Key Resources (Decker et al., 2024). Within this framework, Key Partners were identified as individuals and organizations whose engagement was essential to understanding and addressing the problem, primarily Sponsor 1 and Sponsor 2 from the Pilot Unit. Their support provided operational context and a pathway for leadership endorsement, ensuring alignment between research objectives and unit priorities. Key Activities centered on



diagnosing systemic issues through both policy review and field analysis. By examining AF guidance, the EFDP process, and existing professional development programs, the authors identified gaps in supervisory training, feedback delivery, and understanding of evaluation standards. These findings underscored the need for a culturally informed and operationally feasible solution. To support Key Activities, several Key Resources were identified including active leadership engagement, access to subject-matter experts, and firsthand input from Airmen across a variety of ranks. These resources ensured that data collection and solution development reflected both institutional realities and user perspectives.

Lastly, Viability focuses on two considerations to determine if a proposed solution is realistically sustainable: Mission Budget/Cost, and Mission Achievement/Impact Factors (Decker et al., 2024). Mission Budget factors included time and manpower for training and manpower to maintain the MVP. The authors determined key indications of Mission Achievement would include measurable improvements in feedback frequency, quality, and equity.

Collectively, the completed MMC offered a comprehensive, systems-level understanding of the problem set. It ensured that subsequent design efforts remained grounded in real-world conditions and stakeholder needs, serving as a critical bridge between the customer discovery phase and the development of the VPC, which further refined the specific needs, pain points, and motivations of the project's primary beneficiaries.

D. VALUE PROPOSITION CANVAS

The VPC, another tool derived from the H4D framework, is designed to align the “value” a solution provides with the “pains,” and “gains” experienced by end users (Decker et al., 2024). It enabled the authors' team to translate broad mission-level findings from the MMC into user-centered insights that would guide MVP design and ensure the solution directly addressed the daily challenges of both groups. Building upon the insights derived from the MMC, the VPC template focused more deeply on the specific needs, frustrations, and motivations of the project's two primary beneficiary groups: junior enlisted Airmen



and their direct supervisors. For each beneficiary group, the VPC was organized into six interrelated components: Customer Jobs, Pains, Gains, Products and Services, Pain Relievers, and Gain Creators. Each component served to map how the problem statement affected supervisees and supervisors, and how the proposed solution could alleviate those barriers.

For junior enlisted Airmen, Customer Jobs represented the tasks and goals they aimed to accomplish within the enlisted evaluation system including navigating promotion systems, understanding career development expectations, and balancing workload with personal and professional growth. The Pains for this group reflected widespread frustration with high subjectivity in evaluations, inconsistent feedback from supervisors, limited mentorship, and the perception that networking and visibility often outweighed performance. Gains expressed their desire for standardized, transparent, and fair evaluation criteria, structured development pathways, and mentorship programs that paired them with experienced supervisors who could help them progress confidently toward promotion goals.

Corresponding Pain Relievers focused on providing regular, actionable feedback that prepared Airmen well in advance of promotion boards, while Gain Creators emphasized clear and fair advancement criteria, access to experienced mentors, and structured transparency in developmental opportunities. These components together represented how the MVP would support Airmen's professional growth while strengthening trust in the fairness of the evaluation process. To address these challenges, the Products and Services the authors' team proposed included a standardized supervisor training and mentorship program, a revised evaluation system, transparent promotion criteria, and a consolidated feedback toolkit with standardized templates and evaluation frameworks.

For direct supervisors, Customer Jobs revolved around providing consistent, meaningful feedback, navigating evaluation boards, and developing their subordinates in alignment with promotion expectations. Their Pains mirrored those of their subordinates but from a leadership perspective; inconsistent feedback cycles, inadequate training in evaluation systems, subjective or unclear criteria, and a perception that favoritism or bias



could influence outcomes. Supervisors also cited limited accountability for ensuring that feedback was timely and constructive. The Gains for this group included clearer expectations for performance and promotion standards, transparent evaluation processes that improve morale, and access to training materials and tools that make feedback easier to deliver and document.

The associated Pain Relievers provided structured guidance on conducting effective feedback sessions, standardized criteria for Enlisted Performance Briefs (EPBs) and evaluations, and mechanisms to ensure feedback cycles were completed on schedule. The Gain Creators emphasized building trust in a transparent evaluation culture, supporting supervisors' mentorship roles, and equipping them with templates and resources to enhance communication and consistency across the unit. To meet these needs, the proposed Products and Services for supervisors included a streamlined, standardized feedback process integrating clear timelines and accountability mechanisms, along with comprehensive training modules on evaluation systems and developmental leadership.

By mapping the experiences of both supervisees and supervisors through the VPC, the team identified overlapping needs for clarity, accountability, and developmental structure, key areas that directly informed the design of MVP 1.0. The VPC served as a connection between customer discovery insights and prototype design, ensuring that the resulting MVP 1.0 not only addressed procedural inefficiencies but also addressed the deeper cultural and interpersonal dynamics that shaped the feedback environment within the squadron.

E. VALIDATED HYPOTHESES

Throughout the customer discovery phase and referencing the insights gained from development of the MMC and VPC, the authors' team formulated and tested a series of hypotheses to identify the root causes of evaluation system breakdowns and validated them through user input. Each hypothesis was tested through focused interviews and policy review, and ultimately, four hypotheses were validated.

- Hypothesis 1: If Airmen receive accurate feedback, their evaluations will be strong enough to compete for a promotion statement.



- Hypothesis 2: If Airmen receive timely feedback, they will meet the performance benchmarks required to achieve their goal evaluation rating.
- Hypothesis 3: If supervisors do not receive mandatory training on supervision, feedback delivery, and evaluation board processes, supervisees will receive vastly different developmental experiences.
- Hypothesis 4: If the feedback process is not standardized at the squadron level, the ratee's experience will depend heavily on the standards and culture of their specific shop or leadership team.

F. VALIDATED PROBLEM STATEMENT

Iteration 1 of Sponsor 1's problem statement stated, "Enlisted Airmen need an evaluation system that equitably recognizes top performers and promotes realistic personal and professional development to advance retainment efforts." (Sponsor 1, personal communication, September 2024). Synthesizing data gathered from sponsor input, customer discovery interviews, and hypothesis testing, the authors refined and validated the problem initially posed by the sponsor.

Interviews and field observations conducted during the 10-week sprint from September to December 2024 confirmed that enlisted feedback challenges were not isolated incidents or the result of individual inattention, but rather gaps in training, implementation, and accountability. Supervisors consistently reported that they were expected to deliver meaningful feedback but had received little to no instruction on how to do so effectively. Many were unaware of how to translate AF evaluation criteria into actionable guidance for their subordinates, while junior Airmen described feedback sessions that were either perfunctory, delayed, or skipped altogether. Findings from both internal and external interviews reinforced these conclusions. Supervisors indicated that Professional Military Education (PME) does not adequately prepare them to deliver developmental feedback, while Airmen expressed frustration with a lack of mentorship and transparency in how evaluations translate into promotion outcomes. The authors also observed that leadership guidance for the EFDP process was either unclear or inconsistently applied, resulting in confusion and perceived inequity. Cumulative evidence



pointed to a root cause beyond procedural oversight, and these insights collectively contributed to a reframed problem statement as more accurately representative of broader AF challenges.

Upon careful analysis of the factors above, the authors refined final iteration of the problem statement to read, “Supervisors of junior enlisted Airmen are not trained or equipped to provide clear guidance and adequate feedback that proactively informs Airmen of the expectations, professional development, and performance standards required to compete during promotion cycles.” This refined statement more accurately reflected the cultural and structural realities of the Pilot Unit, emphasizing the absence of deliberate supervisor preparation and consistent feedback mechanisms across ranks.

The validation process revealed two interconnected goals that shaped the direction of the authors’ proposed solution. The first was to create a toolkit and mentorship program to enhance supervisor effectiveness by providing practical resources, templates, and developmental tools. The second was to establish structured guidance endorsed by leadership to standardize how evaluation processes, such as the EFDP, are communicated and executed across units. Together, these objectives underscored that any viable solution would need to address not only the procedural gaps within the feedback cycle but also the leadership culture and expectations that govern it.

This refined and validated problem statement became the foundation for developing an MVP in a manner designed to improve the frequency, quality, and equity of enlisted feedback. At this point in research, the authors transitioned from customer discovery and hypothesis testing to rapid prototyping and iteration. The following section details the creation of MVP 1.0: a lightweight, scalable Supervisor Development Toolkit that combines structured guidance, accountability mechanisms, and accessible resources to strengthen feedback delivery across the unit.

G. DEVELOPMENT OF MVP 1.0

The validated problem statement became the foundation for *Appendix B – MVP 1.0 Supervisor Development Toolkit*. The resulting prototype, termed the Supervisor Development Toolkit, consolidated essential resources into a simple, adaptable package



for use across multiple shops within the Pilot Unit. The MVP was designed to deliberately avoid a technology-first approach, recognizing that the challenge was cultural and behavioral as much as it was procedural, and was built to complement existing AFIs and forms such as the ACA, while filling the gaps in leadership preparation and communication. Development focused on creating a solution that addressed three critical dimensions of the problem: the absence of standardized supervisor training, the lack of structured developmental tools to guide meaningful feedback, and the need for transparency and accountability throughout the evaluation process. The toolkit consisted of five primary components, each designed to address a component of the validated problem statement.

Command Charter: To proactively inform beneficiaries of expectations, the authors designed a leadership-endorsed statement clarifying expectations for feedback, mentorship, and developmental accountability across the squadron. This document served to formalize supervisor responsibilities and reinforce the importance of feedback as a leadership priority.

Feedback Completion Tracker: To verify feedback was adequately provided to all beneficiaries, the authors' team incorporated a standardized form to record, monitor, and validate that feedback sessions occurred in accordance with ACA requirements and squadron timelines.

Resources Reference Sheet: To provide standardized professional development and performance guidance, the authors developed a consolidated guide compiling key policy and feedback best practices to improve supervisor confidence and consistency in counseling sessions.

Supervisor Job Qualification Standard (JQS): To address and standardize supervisor training, the JQS provided a structured list of supervisor knowledge benchmarks for developmental milestones.

Year Plan: To provide each ratee with clear guidance, the authors included a guided goal planning and performance tracking tool for both supervisors and supervisees.



MVP 1.0 was conceived as a practical, field-ready resource for supervisors, built to strengthen feedback culture rather than replace existing AF systems. This lightweight, adaptable framework was designed to enhance feedback delivery without imposing additional administrative burden. The overarching intent of the MVP 1.0 was not to overhaul the existing evaluation system, but to enable supervisors to deliver more consistent, purposeful, and developmental feedback using tools that aligned with operational tempo and leadership expectations. By combining structured guidance, practical templates, and leadership endorsement, the Supervisor Development Toolkit represented a scalable, low-friction solution designed to strengthen the foundation of enlisted professional growth and performance feedback across the unit.

The development of the Supervisor Development Toolkit marked a shift from conceptual design to structured research execution. With MVP 1.0 complete, the project moved beyond hypothesis validation and into the implementation and evaluation phase. The following stage, the 6-Month Pilot Study within the operational environment of the Pilot Unit, focused on testing the toolkit's usability, effectiveness, and alignment with operational feedback objectives. To guide this process, the authors applied the H4D methodology as the overarching research framework, designing each phase of testing, feedback, and refinement to follow a disciplined, evidence-based approach. The subsequent chapter outlines this methodological framework in detail, describing how customer discovery-driven learning, iterative testing, and stakeholder engagement were used to translate the prototype into a validated, field-informed solution.



III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research framework and practical approach used to explore and address enlisted feedback challenges within the Pilot Unit. This study applied Lean Startup and H4D methodology, emphasizing stakeholder engagement, rapid experimentation, and iterative validation, making it well-suited to investigating complex, human-centered challenges within hierarchical organizations within the DAF. The authors' methodology centered on customer discovery-driven learning, iterative hypothesis testing, and continuous stakeholder feedback, all aimed at translating qualitative insights into a functional MVP for field use. To support this, all semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed using Otter AI, ensuring accurate capture of participant perspectives and organized, searchable transcripts for analysis. This process provided a structured yet adaptive approach to exploring the underlying causes of inconsistent and ineffective feedback practices among enlisted Airmen and their supervisors. Rather than beginning with a preconceived solution, the research team used repeated learning cycles to progressively clarify the problem, test assumptions, and refine tool iterations based on direct user input.

This study was intentionally designed to mimic the annual feedback rhythm of a military environment. Each phase of research, from problem framing to MVP deployment, was shaped by the realities of time availability, duty schedules, and the cultural norms of the Pilot Unit. This alignment ensured the research process and resulting solution would be both operationally feasible and institutionally relevant.

By employing the H4D framework, the authors' were able to apply the Lean principle in a defense context. The use of iterative methodology encouraged hypothesis testing over assumption, validation through customer discovery, and iterative adaptation in response to evidence rather than theoretical planning. Each MVP iteration brought the team closer to a design that addressed both procedural and cultural dimensions of the enlisted feedback process.



From insights gained during interviews conducted during the initial 10-week sprint September through December 2024, the authors used H4D methodology to determine that feedback within the AF is not merely an administrative transaction, but a systemic and interpersonal process shaped by leadership behaviors, institutional incentives, and cultural expectations. Viewing feedback as a system rather than a checklist allowed the authors' team to identify misalignments between policy intent and real-world execution. Using a systems perspective informed how customer discovery interviews were structured, how patterns were analyzed, and how the MVP was ultimately designed to address both surface-level inefficiencies and underlying cultural drivers.

By utilizing a phased approach, the authors' team emphasized the iterative and adaptive nature of innovation within defense organizations (Decker et al., 2024). The MVP was not conceived as a static deliverable, but as a living toolkit, one capable of evolving through user experience and continued testing. The following section, Phased Approach, outlines how this methodology was implemented through a series of four structured research phases, beginning with initial customer discovery and problem framing and culminating in the design, testing, and final development of the MVP.

A. PHASED APPROACH

Each phase of research was interconnected and guided by H4D principles. Phase 0, the authors' initial 10-Week Sprint captured in Chapter I of this thesis, established the foundation of the authors' research through customer discovery and problem framing. Following transition to the authors' 6-month pilot study, Phase 1 captured baseline user experiences, Phase 2 ensured operational readiness through training, Phase 3 deployed and tested the prototype, and Phase 4 consolidated those lessons into a refined, final, deployable product. Together, these phases formed a continuous learning cycle that transformed an abstract problem into a validated, field-tested solution designed to improve enlisted feedback consistency, quality, and developmental impact within the AF.

Phase 0 – Initial 10-Week Sprint: Research began with a ten-week sprint emphasizing problem framing, customer discovery, and rapid prototype development. During this phase, the authors' team worked closely with Sponsors 1 and 2 to clarify the



problem statement, define scope, and identify key stakeholders within the Pilot Unit. Using tools such as the MMC and VPC, the authors translated the sponsor's concerns into testable hypotheses. Table 1 indicates the demographics of interviews under phase 0.

Phase 1- Baseline Interviews and Development of MVP 2.0 – Plan, Align, Year Map, Carry Out, Evaluate (PAYCE): Following the initial 10-Week Sprint, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with several participants to establish a qualitative baseline for current feedback practices. A targeted sampling approach was used to select participants from multiple shops to ensure a cross-sectional representation of feedback experiences. Table 2 – Pilot Study Demographics details the participant pool for the 6-Month Pilot Study, or Phase I through IV. For the purposes of this thesis, references made to the statements of participants in this pool will be made by Participant ID number. Each ID number consists of three characters: (P) indicating a pilot study participant, (A or B) indicating the participant's capacity as a Supervisor (A) or Supervisee (B) regarding the study, and a (#) indicating their participant number 1 through 23. The (X) symbol under each stage of the interview process, to include surveys, indicates participation in that stage for each participant. () indicates a lack of participation. (N/A) indicates participation not required.

The participant pool, detailed in Table 2, was comprised of 10 supervisors and 13 supervisees with varying levels of experience, including individuals who had recently undergone the promotion feedback process, or had previously expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the current system. Interviews were also conducted with two sponsors and two members of the Pilot Unit's command team. The purpose of Phase 1 was to capture how feedback was currently conducted, perceived, and acted upon under the ACA system. This phase identified recurring themes, which informed development of MVP 2.0, The PAYCE Tool, visible under Appendix D – MVP 2.0 PAYCE.



Table 2. Pilot Study Demographics

Participant ID	Shop ID	Initial Interview	MVP Training	MVP Initial	Survey Forms Midterm	Survey Forms Final	Final Interview
P-A1	Shop 1	X	Recording	X	X		X
P-B2	Shop 1	X	Recording				X
P-A3	Shop 2	X	Virtual	X	X	X	X
P-B4	Shop 2	X	Virtual	X	X		X
P-A5	Shop 3	X	Virtual	X	X	X	X
P-B6	Shop 3	X	Virtual	X			
P-A7	Shop 4	X	Recording	X	X	X	X
P-B8	Shop 4	X	Virtual	X		X	X
P-B9	Shop 4	X	Recording	X			X
P-A10	Shop 5	X	Recording	X	X		X
P-B11	Shop 5	X	Recording	X			X
P-A12	Shop 6	X	Recording			X	X
P-B13	Shop 6	X	Recording				
P-B14	Shop 6		Recording				
P-A15	Shop 7	X	Virtual	X	X	X	X
P-B16	Shop 7	X	Recording	X	X		X
P-A17	Shop 8	X	Virtual	X	X		
P-B18	Shop 8	X	Virtual				
P-A19	Shop 9	X	Recording	X			X
P-B20	Shop 9		Recording	X			
P-B21	Shop 9	X	Virtual	X			X
P-A22	Shop 10	X	Virtual	X		X	X
P-B23	Shop 10	X	Virtual	X		X	X
Sponsor 1	Shop 11	X	Virtual	N/A	N/A	N/A	X
Sponsor 2	N/A	X	Virtual	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
SEL	N/A	X	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
CC	N/A	X	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note 2.1: For the purposes of this thesis, references made to the statements of participants in Phase I through IV, the 6-Month Pilot Study, will be made by the Participant ID numbers indicated here.

Note 2.2 – Participant ID Key:

(P) – Indicates Pilot Study Participant

(A/B) – Indicates Supervisor (A) or Supervisee (B)

(#) – Indicates Participant #

Note 2.3 – Participation: The (X) symbol under each stage of the interview process, to include surveys, indicates participation in that stage for each participant. (___) indicates a lack of participation. (N/A) indicates participation not required.



Phase 2 – MVP 2.0 PAYCE Training: Upon conclusion of baseline interviews and tool refinement, Phase 2 focused on preparing participants for implementation. This phase included orientation sessions for all participants, introducing the framework, explaining its intended use, and establishing expectations for participation. Training was delivered both virtually and via recording to accommodate operational schedules. The objective of this phase was not to evaluate MVP effectiveness, but to ensure participants were familiar with its structure and purpose before field deployment.

Phase 3 – MVP 2.0 PAYCE Deployment & Observation: Phase 3 centered on real-world testing and feedback. In their individual capacities, supervisors and supervisees used the PAYCE Tool at three intervals on an expedited timeline structured to mimic annual feedback requirements. The research team sustained communication via Microsoft Forms to gather usability insights, document challenges, and record informal feedback at each stage of the process. Post-deployment interviews captured user perceptions of the MVP's clarity, accessibility, and developmental value. Data from this phase guided incremental design adjustments and informed recommendations for long-term application and potential scalability across other units.

Phase 4 – Final MVP Development: Final development involved synthesizing feedback from all prior stages to establish MVP 3.0. This phase integrated revisions based on user commentary, supervisory input, and leadership observations collected during testing. The refined MVP emphasized cultural alignment, simplicity, and adaptability across AF environments. Phase 4 concluded with documentation of the MVP design rationale, final layout, and recommendations for future sustainment and institutional adoption. All supporting materials, guides, templates, and videos, were consolidated and provided to the Pilot Unit's leadership following a summary briefing.

Collectively, these phases established a practical foundation for implementing, evaluating, and refining the MVP within an operational context. In the following chapter, the authors expand on the 6-Month Pilot Study, containing Phases 1 through 3, while focusing on the MVP's real-world usability, user suggestions for improvement, and the overall findings from implementation.



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IV. PILOT STUDY

This chapter documents the three phased pilot study conducted with the test unit to evaluate and refine the authors' MVP. The pilot study aimed to understand existing feedback challenges, train participants on the updated MVP model and observe the MVP's impact during implementation. Phase 1: Baseline Interviews and the Creation of MVP v2.0 summarizes the unit's experience with the current feedback system and how those insights shaped the early design of MVP v2.0. Phase 2: MVP v2.0 PAYCE Training, outlines the instructions on how to use the framework and how participating members can apply it in an operational context. Finally, Phase 3: MVP PAYCE Deployment and Observation, analyzes how the PAYCE framework functioned within the authors' test unit.

A. PHASE 1: BASELINE INTERVIEW

The goal of Phase 1 was to establish a detailed baseline understanding of the challenges Airmen and supervisors experience within the existing ACA process. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with 23 participants, following a set list of interview questions to ensure comparability across participants while allowing for individual expression (see Appendix A). Through these interviews the authors were able to identify several systemic and interpersonal barriers that limit the effectiveness of developmental feedback:

- **Feedback is Inconsistent and Transactional.** Feedback sessions are rare, inconsistent, or simply treated as “check in the box” actions (Baseline Interview, P-A22). Several participants mentioned that they have never received meaningful feedback in their careers, or that sessions occur only to fulfill paperwork requirements, not to foster growth (Baseline Interview, P-B6; Baseline Interview, P-B13). This resulted in participants feeling disengaged and unsupported (Baseline Interview, P-A3).
- **Quality Depends Heavily on the Supervisor.** The usefulness and depth of feedback seem to vary widely based on the supervisor's commitment and experience (Baseline Interview, P-A15). Supervisors who “put in the extra



work” provide more valuable guidance, while newer or less-engaged supervisors may lack skills or motivation, leading to ineffective feedback for their troops (Baseline Interview, P-A22)

- **Lack of Training and Confidence for Supervisors.** Many supervisors, especially newer ones, feel underprepared and wish for more training in leadership, communication, and giving feedback (Baseline Interview, P-A3). While junior Airmen attend Airman Leadership School (ALS) to build leadership skills as an upcoming supervisor, the course mainly focused on disciplinary measures, not proactive development (Baseline Interview, P-A15).
- **Lack of Personalization and Genuine Dialogue.** Some participants perceive the ACA feedback form as overly formal, impersonal, or generic, limiting open, honest discussion (Baseline Interview, P-A17). Members desired more conversational, individualized sessions tailored to career and personal goals rather than “one-size-fits-all” documentation (Baseline Interview, P-B23)
- **Limited Clarity of Expectations and Career Path.** Some Airmen reported feeling unclear about the supervisor expectations and their own professional progression between formal evaluation deadlines (Baseline Interview, P-A22). There is ambiguity in both daily and long-term objectives, with multiple participants expressing that they do not feel empowered to own their goals or advocate for their growth (Baseline Interview, P-B16).
- **Administrative Burden and Redundancy.** The existing ACA forms and processes are seen as compliance-driven and often redundant with other documents (Baseline Interview, P-A15). This administrative focus can detract from meaningful conversation and the development process.
- **Lack of Early and Continuous Feedback:** Members feel as though there is insufficient emphasis on initial and midterm feedback. Some participants recommended more structured initial feedback for new Airmen and periodic



check-ins so growth can be tracked, and adjustments made proactively (Baseline Interview, P-A15; Baseline Interview, P-B4).

- **Difficulty for Airmen to Advocate for Themselves.** Junior Airmen often do not know what to ask or how to their own development, leading to a passive approach toward feedback and growth (Baseline Interview, P-A15). Young Airmen are more on the “back burner of their career” because the current feedback system does not empower young Airmen to take ownership (Baseline Interview, P-A22).
- **Barriers to Candid Negative Feedback.** Supervisors sometimes struggle with providing constructive criticism and the current system does not create a safe or effective environment to address areas for improvement (Baseline Interview, P-A3; Baseline Interview, P-A22)
- **Impact of Operational Tempo and Manpower Shortages.** High workload and frequent changes in assignments due to deployments or supervisor rotations often prevent supervisors from providing regular, quality feedback (Baseline Interview P-A22; Baseline Interview, P-A15)

The findings from Phase 1 underscored the need for a more consistent, developmental approach to feedback. In response, the authors’ team developed version 2.0 of the MVP, called the PAYCE Framework, which was built to transform the feedback process from a transactional requirement into a structured, collaborative cycle of growth.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF MVP 2.0 – PAYCE

The PAYCE framework (see Appendix B) is designed to bridge the structural and interpersonal challenges presented in the current feedback system. Each step of the PAYCE framework has a specific purpose for tailoring meaningful feedback:

PREPARE. This phase lays the groundwork for self-reflection and readiness. Airmen are required to reflect independently on their strengths, challenges, personal goals, and values, while supervisors are expected to review performance documents, prior feedback, training records, and key timelines related to their supervisee. Both parties



should consider upcoming milestones such as performance evaluations, promotion eligibility and timelines, and professional growth opportunities. The goal of the Prepare step is to ensure both parties arrive at the initial feedback session well informed and ready for purposeful discussion.

ALIGN. During the Align phase, the supervisor and supervisee meet to discuss aspirations, developmental needs, and mutual expectations. A Foundational Conversation Prompts document (see Appendix C) is embedded into the Align phase as a conversation tool to foster personalized, two-way dialogue. The collaboration during this phase should build mutual understanding while co-developing two to four Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound (SMART) goals. This phase connects supervisor expectations with supervisee career ambitions, so feedback corresponds with individual and mission goals.

YEAR MAP. The Year Map itself is a structured Microsoft Excel template (see Appendix D) that visualizes the calendar year. In this phase, both parties will take the identified SMART goals and collaboratively build a visual timeline using the Year Map template to capture agreed-upon goals, actions, and milestones. The Year Map automatically populates important career events and deadlines depending on the supervisee's rank, giving both supervisor and supervisee a shared reference point. The Year Map serves as a living document for joint accountability and allows continuity even when supervisors or assignments change.

CARRY OUT. This phase operationalizes the plans made in the Year Map through consistent engagement and progress tracking. Supervisors are encouraged to conduct monthly or quarterly check-ins using guided prompts on topics such as progress, motivation, development, barriers, and needed support. Supervisees should continuously update their progress in the Year Map while communicating wins and obstacles with their supervisor. The phase reinforces continuous feedback loops, encourages self-advocacy, and underpins mentoring even during high operational tempo.

EVALUATE. This phase highlights purposeful reflection. The supervisor and supervisee will review the Year Map together and assess progress and lessons learned. Both



will identify which goals were achieved, where adjustments were needed, and what should carry into the next goal cycle. This phase serves as both a closure for completed goals, and a launch point for the next Prepare phase, ensuring feedback remains development rather than episodic.

In short, each step of the PAYCE framework builds upon itself to create a loop of reflection, alignment, action, and evaluation, transforming feedback from a one-time administrative requirement into a sustained partnership for growth and performance excellence. The table below highlights the solutions that the PAYCE framework provides relative to the pain points previously addressed.



Table 3. PAYCE Solutions

PAIN POINT	PAYCE SOLUTION
Feedback is Inconsistent and Transactional	PAYCE replaces ad-hoc, compliance-driven check-ins with a structured and cyclical process. The Prepare and Evaluate phases formalize reflection before and after action, while monthly or quarterly check-ins during the Carry Out phase ensure ongoing feedback between supervisors and supervisees rather than one-time sessions. This sustains engagement and growth rather than check-the-box interactions
Quality Depends Heavily on the Supervisor	The PAYCE framework standardizes quality across supervisors by providing clear conversation prompts, SMART goal templates, and a Year Map template, reducing feedback variance caused by individual supervisor motivation or experience. The framework itself acts as a structured guide so even inexperienced supervisors can facilitate meaningful dialogue, leveling the quality of developmental feedback.
Lack of Training and Confidence for Supervisors	PAYCE embeds leadership-by-practice within the process. Supervisors are encouraged to leverage the Foundational Conversation Prompts and guided through the structured progression of PAYCE to teach them what meaningful mentorship may look like. This fills training gaps that ALS or Non-Commissioned Officer Academy (NCOA) often leave, cultivating confidence and communication skills through applied leadership rather than lectures.
Lack of Personalization and Genuine Dialogue	The Align phase of PAYCE requires both parties to discuss personal goals, values, and ambitions. Using shared reflection prompts, Airmen can articulate aspirations and challenges, while supervisors listen and co-create individualized development plans. This section emphasizes a relationship-driven, two-way dialogue tailored to each supervisee's pathway.
Limited Clarity of Expectations and Career Path	Through the Year Map template, the framework visually links short-term actions to long-term milestones identified in the Align phase such as Static Close Out Dates (SCOD), PME, EPBs, and other career driven events. Both supervisors and Airmen track goals and deadlines via the Year Map, clarifying roles, expectations, and providing a transparent, living roadmap for progression through evaluation cycles.
Administrative Burden and Redundancy	PAYCE consolidates goal tracking, progress notes, and evaluation cycles into one framework and digital template. The Year Map automatically populates key timelines relevant to an airmen's rank and embeds recurring review checkpoints, eliminating the need for redundant documentation like the ACA.

PAIN POINT	PAYCE SOLUTION
Lack of Early and Continuous Feedback	The emphasis of initial, midterm, and final feedback checkpoints are baked into the PAYCE structure itself. To complete the Prepare, Align, and Year Map phase, it is highly recommended that the supervisor meet with their supervisee's to discuss the initial components of PAYCE. Supervisors are then expected to review progress continuously throughout the year, using prompts on motivation, progress, barriers, and next steps that are organized in the Carry Out phase. The recurring nature of the Carry Out phase emphasizes consistency and communication, preventing long gaps between formal evaluations. The Evaluate phase allows the supervisor and Airmen to address achievements, lessons learned, and restructure goals for the next year, establishing a strong feedback loop.
Difficulty for Airmen to Advocate for Themselves	PAYCE teaches self-advocacy by having Airmen complete their own Prepare section before engaging with their supervisor. The supervisee's Prepare phase introduces the Foundational Conversation Prompts, allowing users to identify strengths, aspirations, and needs before entering the Align Phase. This pre-work empowers Airmen to voice their personal goals to eventually track them in the Year Map, transforming them from passive recipients into active participants in their professional development.
Barriers to Candid Negative Feedback	The Evaluation phase of PAYCE creates psychological safety for difficult discussions by framing feedback as development rather than disciplinary. By encouraging the supervisor and supervisee to reach a mutual trust and understanding during the Align phase, any negative feedback can be provided through a constructive lens.
Impact of Operational Tempo and Manpower Shortages	The continuity design of PAYCE allows development to persist through supervisor turnover, deployments, or even permanent change of station (PCS). Because the Year Map documents the tailored goals and progress for each Airmen, a new supervisor can engage where the last supervisor left off, maintaining developmental continuity despite disruptions in personnel or operational tempo.

C. PHASE 2: MVP TRAINING

After the creation of the PAYCE tool, the authors' team conducted a virtual training orientation with the pilot study unit on June 16, 2025, via Microsoft Teams. The objective of this session was to ensure participants understood (1) how to use the PAYCE framework,



(2) their roles and expectations as supervisors or supervisees, and (3) the structure and timeline of the pilot study itself.

The training began with background context explaining how the unit's problem statement had driven the research and how the PAYCE Framework was designed as a user-informed, modular tool to address recurring issues identified during the baseline interviews. The session walked participants through each step of the process, emphasizing that the PAYCE framework was not a rigid checklist, but a flexible resource to encourage accountability, clarity, and intentional goal setting.

Participants were then divided into supervisor and supervisee groups, each receiving tailored guidance on their respective responsibilities. Supervisors were instructed to reach out to their respective supervisees and conduct initial, midterm, and final check-ins, either in person or virtually, over a three-month period using the PAYCE framework accordingly. Supervisee were asked to communicate with their supervisors and follow along the phases of the framework. However, all participants were asked to submit anonymous survey forms after each check-in to capture real-time reflections on the PAYCE tool. Below are the key deadlines that were outlined for completing the required initial, midterm and final feedback including the respective survey due dates:

- Initial feedback would be conducted between the supervisor and supervisee pairs from June 16, 2025, to July 14, 2025, with participants completing the Prepare, Align, and Year Map phases. Each participant was expected to submit the Initial Feedback Survey to the authors no later than July 15, 2025.
- Midterm feedback would be conducted between the supervisor and supervisee pairs from July 15, 2025, to August 14, 2025, with participants completing the Carry Out phase. Each participant was expected to submit the Midterm Feedback Survey to the authors no later than August 14, 2025.
- Final feedback would be conducted between supervisor and supervisee pairs from August 15, 2025, to September 15, 2025, with participants



completing the Evaluate phase. Each participant was expected to submit the Final Feedback Survey to the authors no later than September 15, 2025.

By the end of the training period, both supervisors and supervisees were familiar with the PAYCE framework's structure, expectations, and reporting requirements. Participants had received all necessary materials, conducted all their initial planning activities, and demonstrated readiness to begin applying the framework within their daily operations. With this foundational preparation complete, the pilot study progressed into Phase 3.

D. PHASE 3: MVP 2.0 DEPLOYMENT AND OBSERVATION

The transition into Phase 3 marked the first independent use of the PAYCE framework by the pilot study unit. The purpose of Phase 3 was to observe how the tool functioned within an operation environment without direct researcher facilitation. Unlike Phase 1 and 2, this phase required minimal involvement from the authors; the authors served primarily as observers, maintaining communication through reminder emails at key milestones to prompt participant check-ins and feedback submissions.

The pilot study unit conducted all feedback sessions autonomously, following the established schedule of initial, midterm, and final check-ins between June 16, 2025, and September 15, 2025. During this period, supervisors and supervisees used the PAYCE tool to guide their developmental discussions and record progress within their respective timelines. Participants submitted anonymous feedback via digital forms after each meeting, which served as the primary data source for evaluating the framework's usability, perceived value, and alignment with operational demands.

This passive implementation design allowed the research team to assess the tool's performance under realistic conditions, specifically how well the PAYCE framework sustained engagement, structured feedback conversations, and supported goal tracking without active oversight. Data collection during this phase formed the basis for identifying pain points, usage trends, and user suggestions that directly informed the next design iteration, MVP 3.0.



V. PHASE 4: FINAL MVP DEVELOPMENT

The structure of Phase 4 begins with the authors analyzing the Initial, Midterm, and Final feedback survey results, identifying usage trends throughout the pilot study, and capturing suggestions for improvement. After analyzing the survey results, the authors synthesized the feedback and findings collected throughout the Closing Interviews. In addition to closing interviews conducted with the pilot study participants, the authors also conducted an external interview with a senior enlisted AF member from a different career field to gather a wide range of feedback on the PAYCE framework.

Based on these three areas of feedback, the authors iterated the framework to create MVP 3.0, which was presented to the AF Spark Cell and several AF NCOs that did not originally participate in the pilot study. Based on the data gathered from the Spark Cell and the NCO preliminary review, MVP 4.0 was created, and presented to the CC and Senior Enlisted Leader (SEL) of the pilot study unit.

A. PILOT STUDY SURVEY STRUCTURE

For each stage of Phase 3 (initial, midterm, and final), the authors required each participant to submit a survey to capture both descriptive and evaluative data from supervisors and supervisees. First, all respondents identified their role (supervisor or supervisee), the shop they are a part of, their supervisory counterpart in the pilot study, which stage of Phase 3 they were reporting on, and documented how and when the check in when conducted. Second, participants rate a series of phase-specific statements on a Likert scale (Appendix G) with parallel wording for supervisors and supervisees at each stage. Third, each survey concluded with open-ended questions asking about overall experience with the check-in and suggestions for improving the framework which provided qualitative data used to refine the subsequent MVP.



B. INITIAL FEEDBACK SURVEY RESULTS (PREPARE, ALIGN, YEAR MAP)

The Initial Feedback Survey examined how supervisors and supervisees experienced the Prepare, Align, and Year Map phases during their first PAYCE check-in between June 16, 2025, through July 14, 2025. About 82% of the pilot study participants submitted an Initial Feedback Survey, including nine supervisors and nine supervisees. Participants reported that initial feedback was conducted primarily in-person or via phone call, with several supervisors pairing the session with the formal ACA for comparison (P-A3, P-A5, P-A7, P-A1, P-A22).

Across the Likert-scale items, when asked if the Prepare section improved conversation focus, six supervisors selected “Yes” and two selected “Somewhat.” Similarly, when asked if the PAYCE helped supervisors arrive at the initial feedback better prepared, six supervisors selected “Yes” and two selected “Somewhat” (P-A3, P-A5, P-A7, P-A1, P-A22, P-B8). Six supervisors also agreed that the Align section improved their understanding of supervisee needs and that the Year Map increased clarity around benchmarks and goals (P-A19, P-A3, P-A15, P-A5, P-A22, P-A1), although some supervisors marked “Somewhat” to reflect a learning curve with the PAYCE tool (P-A17, P-A7). Supervisees similarly reported that the Prepare and Align phases expanded their awareness of career paths, helped them see realistic options, and supported the development of more concrete goals (P-B16, P-B4, P-B21, P-B23, P-B2, P-B6). However, one supervisee reported that the volume of information provided during the Prepare and Align phase felt dense at first (P-B6).

Qualitative comments at the initial stage revealed that many supervisors experienced PAYCE as more engaging and effective than the ACA. One supervisor described the experience as “a lot better than the ACA,” noting that the framework allowed for better two-way communication and clearer expectations with deadlines both parties could see (P-A5). Another supervisor highlighted that the sections “lead to better unscripted conversation rather than just filling in the blanks,” emphasizing that PAYCE facilitated more natural dialogue instead of rigid form completion (P-A19). Two supervisees echoed this sentiment, explaining that the process was “more detailed on



expectations and goals” and that the questions “spawned more conversation” compared to past feedback sessions (P-B16, P-B4).

At the same time, survey respondents revealed early design frictions that would directly inform future MVP iterations. Two participants viewed the PAYCE portable document format (PDF) as “too busy” and it was difficult to manage multiple tabs and documents during live conversations (P-A10, P-A22). One supervisor noted that using three different tabs to keep track of every piece of the framework “slowed the process down tremendously,” particularly when working with newer Airmen who did not need all the listed resources (P-A10). Two other participants commented that the Year Map, while conceptually useful, felt like a standard planner and was less intuitive than an electronic or physical calendar for tracking due dates and tasks (P-A3, P-A10). These comments directly informed the authors that the future design of the PAYCE should include a streamlined operational version of PAYCE with a more user-friendly, visual representation of the Year Map.

C. MIDTERM FEEDBACK SURVEY RESULTS (CARRY OUT)

The Midterm Feedback Survey evaluated how supervisors and supervisees experienced the Carry Out phase during their second PAYCE check-in between July 15, 2025, through August 14, 2025. About 44% of the pilot study participants submitted a Midterm Feedback Survey, including seven supervisors and two supervisees with most midterm check-ins conducted in person.

Across the midterm Likert items, when asked if the Carry Out section helped supervisors provide more purposeful guidance and direction to their supervisees, two supervisors selected “Yes” while three selected “Somewhat” (P-A15, P-A5, P-A3, P-A17, P-A7). Additionally, when asked whether the PAYCE tool supported focused follow-up conversations, four supervisors selected “Yes” and one selected “Somewhat” (P-A15, P-A5, P-A22, P-B16, P-A3). Supervisors frequently indicated that their supervisees seemed more engaged than in previous midterm feedback sessions and that the PAYCE tool helped them track whether goals were being actively pursued or needed adjustment (P-A15, P-A3). Likewise, supervisees reported that midterm discussions centered on whether



previously identified goals were being met, what barriers existed, and what timelines or plans were needed to stay on track (P-B4, P-B23).

Qualitative responses underscored the value of structured, recurring conversations. One supervisor stated that the questions “made more of an open two-way communication,” allowing both parties to be more engaged and to have an open discussion beyond simple checklist items (P-A5). Another supervisor described the midterm PAYCE check in as “informative,” enabling them to see where the supervisee stood on goals and to provide targeted guidance (P-A15). Two of the supervisees reported that the midterm session focused on ensuring that goals were being met or had a clear plan for completion and appreciated that the framework required timelines and adjustments when circumstances changed (P-B4, P-B23).

However, midterm survey data also surfaced concerns about redundancy, time burden, and compressed implementation. One supervisor noted that there were “more questions that were similar [...] to questions in previous feedback,” suggesting that scripted prompts sometimes felt repetitive and less personal when re-used during the midterm (P-B8). Another participant emphasized that the condensed timeline of the pilot study offered “little time to effectively carry out any goals,” implying that PAYCE’s full benefits might be more apparent over a standard year-long feedback cycle rather than the three-month pilot study (P-A17). These comments led the authors to consider simplifying the midterm prompts, removing unnecessary repetition, and clarifying how Carry Out should be tailored for ongoing conversations rather than re-starting initial discussions.

D. FINAL FEEDBACK SURVEY RESULTS (EVALUATE)

The Final Feedback Survey focused on the Evaluate phase and the extent to which supervisors and supervisees completed a closing review of goals, progress, and lessons learned during the final PAYCE check in from August 15, 2025, to September 15, 2025. Seven supervisors submitted the Final Feedback Survey, but a notable portion of responses indicated that final check-ins were “not conducted” or “not available,” primarily due to TDYs, leave, shift misalignment, or deployments during the compressed pilot window (P-A12, P-A3, P-A5, P-B4, P-B6, P-B14). This attrition highlighted the operational realities



that shaped Phase 3 and limited the availability of full end-to-end PAYCE cycles within the test period.

Among the supervisors who completed final check-ins, when asked if the Evaluate section was helpful for staying updated on supervisee progress and for identifying limiting factors that affected goal completion, three selected “Yes” and one selected “Somewhat” (P-A15, P-A22, P-A7, P-A5). When asked whether the final check-in saved them time and provided a clear roadmap for future development, three supervisors selected “Yes” while one selected “Somewhat” (P-A15, P-A22, P-A7, P-A3). One supervisee who completed the final survey reported feeling more accountable because their goals were written down and revisited, describing the document as making their goals “more tangible” (P-B23).

Final stage qualitative comments highlighted both the strengths and constraints of the Evaluate Phase. One supervisor described the Evaluate roadmap as helping guide feedback with “clear objectives to measure against,” noting that it provided a natural flow for setting new milestones and continuing progression beyond the pilot study (P-A22). Another supervisor emphasized that the process helped him identify limiting factors and improvement for future cycles, reinforcing PAYCE’s role in reflective learning rather than one-time evaluations (P-A7). At the same time, participants pointed out that deployments, TDYs, and leave made it difficult to complete final check-ins, and one supervisor explicitly linked the incomplete final session to a compressed implementation timeline rather than to the PAYCE framework itself (P-A12, P-A3, P-A5).

Several participants recommended enhancements to better support flexibility and documentation at the final stage. One supervisor suggested adding a section to list notes and updates for goals throughout the cycle so that progress could be tracked and easily reviewed at the end (P-B23). Another supervisor requested a more streamlined version of the PAYCE PDF for experienced supervisors, with a more concise format than the training-oriented version used during the pilot study (P-A22, P-B23). These recommendations informed the authors of subsequent focus on integrating more dynamic goal-tracking features for the framework.



Across Initial, Midterm, and Final stages, participants consistently described PAYCE as more engaging, structured, and developmentally focused than the existing ACA process, even as they highlighted areas where the tool felt heavy or complex. Supervisors and supervisees reported that PAYCE improved clarity of expectations, formalized goal setting, and prompted deeper conversations, aligning with the framework's intent to shift feedback from a transactional requirement to a collaborative development process. Multiple comments signaled that PAYCE helped remove "supervisor quality as a limiting factor" (P-A10) by embedding conversation prompts and structured templates that guided less-experienced supervisors toward meaningful dialogue (P-B16).

Simultaneously, the pilot study surveys revealed operational and design limitations that informed future iterations. Participants frequently cited the framework's visual density, overlapping questions, and the challenge of using multiple documents concurrently as barriers to efficient use, especially under high operational tempo. Several users requested a more streamlined, calendar-like Year Map, and a simplified PAYCE version geared toward experienced supervisors who did not need extensive prompts for every conversation (P-A10, P-A22). Finally, the difficulty of completing final check-ins under compressed timelines and dynamic manning highlighted the need for better support for asynchronous interactions, continuity through supervisor changes, and a goal adjustability when life circumstances shifted mid-cycle.

These findings collectively shaped the design requirements for MVP 3.0, emphasizing the need to preserve PAYCE's developmental strengths such as its clarity, structure, and depth, while reducing cognitive and administrative burden, improving adaptability, and better aligning the framework with real-work operational constraints.

Following the completion of the pilot study and the survey submissions, the authors coordinated Closing Interviews with each participant to compare their experiences to the Baseline Interview from Phase 1. Closing Interviews also acted as an opportunity for the authors to gather suggestions about the PAYCE from participants who were unable to submit any surveys during the pilot study.



E. CLOSING INTERVIEW RESULTS

The authors conducted semi-structured Closing Interviews from September 16, 2025, through October 27, 2025, via Microsoft TEAMS meetings to gather a holistic understanding of each participant's experience with the PAYCE tool. The Closing Interviews followed a similar structure to Phase 1 and utilized a standardized list of questions to maintain comparability between interviews (Appendix H). In addition to the Closing Interviews, on October 20, 2025, the authors conducted one semi-structured interview via Microsoft TEAMS with a senior enlisted member unrelated to the pilot study unit, henceforth known as External Interviewee 1 (EI-1). EI-1 was provided with the PAYCE PDF via email prior to the scheduled interview and requested to review the framework's viability and provide any suggestions or constructive criticism. Table 4 highlights key themes, an overall summary, and notable critiques of the PAYCE throughout the closing interviews.

Table 4. Closing Interview Summary and Critiques

COMPONENT	GENERAL CONSENSUS	SUMMARY	NOTABLE CRITIQUES
Overall Value vs. ACA	Positive	P-B8, P-A3, P-A5, and P-A22 reported that the new tool enables deeper, clearer, more structured development conversations than the ACA's surface level, "check the box" format. P-B23, P-A3, and P-A22 reported that the PAYCE was highly effective as a development tool.	P-A1 reported that having an area to "see your whole Airman's timeline like Date of Rank (DOR) and BTZ window" would be beneficial for both supervisors and supervisees. P-A3 reported that while the initial training was sufficient, more directional videos would be helpful for inexperienced users, especially if they are unfamiliar with Microsoft Excel.
Complexity and Layout	Mixed	P-A5, P-A22, and P-A3 appreciated the structured layout but	P-A5 and P-A22 suggested that PAYCE would benefit from two



COMPONENT	GENERAL CONSENSUS	SUMMARY	NOTABLE CRITIQUES
		noted that the framework can feel dense, especially for first time users.	separate instruction guides (supervisor and supervisee versions).
Year Map Usability	Positive	Participants consistently valued the Year Map. P-A3 stated that the Year Map made “conversations richer and faster” while P-A22 and P-A19 valued the Year Map for planning milestones, anchoring goals to time, and making check-ins more focused.	P-B23 suggested that adding a progress checker to the Year Map would improve the visual appeal.
Goal Tracking and Measurement	Mixed	P-A22 and P-A3 liked having clearer, time-bound goals, and more focused check ins, but P-B23 and P-A19 reported the need for clearer measurement prompts and built in progress cues to reduce mental overhead.	P-A22 suggested that the tool should offer role-specific tasks, so it is clear who is responsible for goal progress. P-A3 requested more guidance for creating SMART goals for users unfamiliar with goal planning.
Accountability and Cadence	Positive	P-A22 and P-B11 reported that the structure of PAYCE increased follow-through and preparedness. P-B11 reported that their supervisees arrived at the midterm with updates and “next steps in mind.” P-A3 stated that the Year Map highlighted the importance of follow-ups and continued accountability throughout the year.	P-B23 suggested building progress cues such as “percentage of goals completed” or other progress indicators so weekly or biweekly check-ins reference the same “source of truth.” P-A19 also proposed the inclusion of checkboxes or “a way to update status without hunting through the packet.”



COMPONENT	GENERAL CONSENSUS	SUMMARY	NOTABLE CRITIQUES
Time Cost and Efficiency	Mixed	P-B23 and P-A1 reported that the initial investment to learning the PAYCE was worthwhile to create clarity, preparedness, and a shared roadmap. P-A5 reported that there was a 50%-time reduction during the midterm when using the framework. However, P-A22 reported that the PAYCE did not save him any time since the Prepare, Align, and Year Map portion were “very time consuming.” Overall, the benefits of the tool were recognized, but there was uneven efficiency due to operational realities and tooling friction.	P-B11 suggested that the instructions for the PAYCE should be separated for “supervisors and Airmen who are already familiar with the tool and do not need repeat directions” to reduce the visual and mental application of PAYCE. P-B23 also suggested a reduced PAYCE framework with “necessary components only.”
Operational Constraints and Culture	Mixed	Overall, cultural acceptance of the PAYCE was higher where the PAYCE aligns with existing operational rhythms, but constraints such as time, manning, and deployments limit consistent adoption. P-B23 reported that the midterm was done via email because he did not work the same shift as his supervisee. P-A19, P-A1, and P-A5 were given additional duties outside of their	P-B21 reported that the initial feedback was extremely beneficial, but the Year Map and Carry Out were “not very useful” due to the heavy administrative load it put on supervisees. P-B23, P-A1, P-A19, and P-B21 reported not being “technically savvy” with excel, which added another administrative load to using the PAYCE.



COMPONENT	GENERAL CONSENSUS	SUMMARY	NOTABLE CRITIQUES
		daily responsibilities and reported a lack of bandwidth to support midterm feedback. However, both P-A5 and P-A3 had supervisees on deployment who were able to complete the midterm and final feedback through email.	

The Closing Interviews reinforced that participants generally viewed PAYCE as a meaningful improvement over the legacy ACA system, particularly for structuring deeper, clearer developmental conversations and supporting more consistent follow-through on goals. Overall, the themes presented in Table 4 suggest that PAYCE’s developmental value is widely recognized, but long-term success depends on reducing cognitive and administrative burden while preserving structure, flexibility, and continuity across changing operational conditions. Building on this internal perspective, the authors also examined how an external senior enlisted member, EI-1, evaluated the framework’s viability, scalability, and fit within the AF.

The overarching consensus of EI-1 was supportive and constructive—she believed the tool was a strong foundation that could materially improve enlisted feedback but noted that successful onboarding and sustained adoption require top-down buy-in, clearer alignment with official terminology and regulations, and more human-centered connection to drive engagement (External Interview, EI-1). Firstly, she recommended that proper implementation of a feedback tool “needs to start from the top down” and that “more senior people need to know and understand how to use this tool” to promote it effectively (External Interview, EI-1). EI-1 also recommended standardizing the language to say “rater” and “ratee” instead of “supervisor” and “supervisee” respectively to maintain alignment with AF regulation and common practice (External Interview, EI-1). When discussing the content of the PAYCE, EI-1 recommended that the authors (1) add a



dedicated tab or tracker somewhere in the tool to transfer goals into narrative statements that are applicable for an EPB, (2) provide more information regarding the resources in the Foundational Conversation Prompts for inexperienced raters and ratees, (3) adding more check-in milestones to encourage quarterly updates between supervisory pairs, and (4) to include more “getting to know you” prompts to establish personal connection during the Prepare phase (External Interview, EI-1).

Based on the feedback provided throughout the surveys, closing interviews, and external interviews, the authors iterated MVP 2.0 and created MVP 3.0 (Appendix I) to address the areas of improvement.

F. MVP 3.0 DEVELOPMENT

Both MVP 2.0 and MVP 3.0 follow the same core five-step loop (Prepare, Align, Year Map, Carry Out, Evaluate) but are structured and packaged differently, reflecting the shift from an explanatory, training framework (2.0) to a more operational, form-like tool (3.0). Table 5 compares the design changes from MVP 2.0 to MVP 3.0 and the rationale behind each edit.

Table 5. Evolution from MVP 2.0 to MVP 3.0

Component	MVP 2.0	MVP 3.0	Rationale/Feedback Addressed
Purpose and Packaging	MVP 2.0 was a highly guided framework document with explanations of purpose, barriers, roles, and step-by-step blocks for both supervisor and supervisees.	MVP 3.0 is a streamlined, form-style tool centered on a single ratee-rater pair, with fillable sections, checklists, and an auto-populating sheet designed for direct use in real feedback cycles	The initial framework needed to shift from an instructional concept into a useable and sustainable tool. MVP 3.0 consolidates instructions into a single, form driven layout with clear fields, reducing narrative overhead.
Audience Handling	MVP 2.0 repeatedly distinguishes between supervisors and supervisees with mirrored instructions	MVP 3.0 combines usage into one document orientated around the ratee and rater. MVP 3.0 is	For the framework to be sustainable, subsequent uses had to feel lighter than the first run-through



	and separate instruction sections for each role at each phase.	primarily written from the rater's workflow perspective, with one shared tool rather than two parallel tracks	while still providing structure. By embedding auto-populating fields, reusing goal and data across sections, and centralizing progress trackers, MVP 3.0 reduces duplicative effort.
Prepare Phase	MVP 2.0 Emphasizes why PAYCE exists, the barriers it addresses, and how supervisors should review documents such as the supervisees SURF, training records, timelines, and other key documents before the feedback session. MVP 2.0 provides separate Prepare guidance for supervisees and supervisors, including reflection prompts about career plans, life events, and key timelines.	MVP 3.0 moves the Prepare page into an operational document with concrete example questions with optional clickable prompt categories (e.g., Ice breaker prompts, work, and career questions, etc.). The Prepare page includes an explicit checklist for "major life events" as well as a checklist for information the ratee is interested in that will automatically populate a separate sheet of information titled the Ratee Relevant Information Sheet (RRIS). The RRIS is a printable document, and has buttons to clear the page contents as well as an email button so the rater can send tailored references to the ratee	Early preparation had to capture key personal and career information without turning into unstructured conversation that was difficult to reuse. MVP 3.0 creates a repeatable way to surface critical context and give the ratee a tangible reference product.
Align Phase	MVP 2.0 provides conceptual guidance as well as the Foundational Conversation Prompts and guides supervisors and	MVP 3.0 presents a focused SMART-goal section that explicitly tells raters to prioritize and create SMART goals based on ratee interests. The Align	Goal setting required more scaffolding so that both experienced and inexperienced users could generate actionable, measurable



	supervisees through creating 2–4 SMART goals, clarifying expectations on both sides, and flagging actions for the Year Map.	portion embedded definitions and links to examples and templates for SMART goals. MVP 3.0 makes it clear that goals from Algin are intended to be transferred into the Year Map and later tracker, reinforcing a tighter pipeline from conversation to the calendar.	objectives. MVP 3.0 gives the rater autonomy to establish SMART goals with their ratee while tightening the link between conversation and concrete commitments.
Year Map Phase	MVP 2.0 treats the Year Map as an external template (a Microsoft Excel attachment) with instructions for selecting rank, auto-populating SCOD and midterm dates, filling an Action List, and using it to hold supervisees accountable to goals.	MVP 3.0 integrates all the useful components of the Excel sheet (the Rank drop-down button that calculates EPB SCODs and the countdown until the SCOD) into a PDF, streamlining the PAYCE into one virtual tool instead of two. Potential quarterly check in dates and a “percentage of goals completed” tracker are included into the Year Map. This makes the Year Map feel more like a live planning dashboard within the too	The framework required a more intuitive way to visualize the entire year, key career dates, and goal timelines in one place. MVP 3.0 turns the abstract idea of a living roadmap into a visible, updatable planning surface.
Carry Out Phase	MVP 2.0 focuses on conversation guidance: multiple themed prompt sets (Goal Progress, Connection & Motivation, Support & barriers, Learning, Timelines, Wrap-Up) to structure monthly/quarterly	MVP 3.0 converts the Carry Out phase into a structured quarterly tracker. The tracker includes separate sections for Quarter 1–4 with lines to enter quarter date ranges, percentage of goals completed in this quarter, and repeated	Ongoing follow-through required a shared mechanism for tracking progress over time, not just prompting discussion. MVP 3.0 introduces structured quarterly pages that log each goal status, notes and calculates completion



	check-ins, but with minimal structured data captured fields.	tables where each goal is marked as completed, not met, or adjusted, and notes on what went well, what was learned, and what hindered progress. This shifts Carry Out from guidance-only to quantitative and qualitative tracking mechanisms tied to percentages and status labels.	to provide a progress record that can be reviewed throughout the year.
Evaluate Phase	MVP 2.0 keeps the Evaluate Phase focused on reviewing the Year Map, marking goals as achieved, not met, or adjusted, identifying barriers, and choosing which goals or focus areas should carry into the next cycle.	MVP 3.0 adds a full Airmen Leadership Qualities (ALQ) evaluation section that details the four ALQ domains (Executing the Mission, Leading People, Managing Resources, and Improving the Unit), the sub-elements of each ALQ, and the proficiency scale (from needs improvement through exceptionally skilled). MVP 3.0 also includes a section for ratees to provide feedback for the rater as well as a Ratee Achievement Tracker where goals from the Year Map feeds a drop-down list, and the ratee can convert them into narrative statements, linking PAYCE directly to documentation and performance products.	The end-of-cycle reflection needed to be translated directly into an evaluation language and performance documentation. MVP 3.0 incorporates an ALQ based proficiency section aligned with AF evaluation criteria, replacing the need for the ACA.



Overall Structure and Usability	MVP 2.0 functions as a comprehensive, narrative guide plus clickable structure, aimed at teaching PAYCE, framing barriers, and walking both roles through mindset and process. It also relies on external templates (Year Map) and attachments for much of the structured data entry.	MVP 3.0 operates as an integrated functional tool that combines the key components of Prepare, Align, Year Map, Carry Out, and Evaluate into a useable PDF that not only guides ratee career progression, but creates a purposeful, two-way conversation between the rater and ratee.	The tool needed to remain usable when in-person meetings were difficult or when personnel rotated. MVP 3.0 supports this by offering printable and email-ready pages and a central Year Map that can be updated asynchronously, allowing raters and ratees to maintain goals and progress even across shifts or deployments.
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The evolution table shows that MVP 3.0 deliberately transforms MVP 2.0 from a conceptual training framework into a streamlined, operational tool that directly supports preparation, goal setting, tracking, and evaluation across the full feedback cycle. Each component (Prepare, Align, Year Map, Carry Out, and Evaluate) was redesigned to capture critical information in structured fields, reduce redundant effort through auto-population, and connect developmental conversations to visible timelines, quarterly progress metrics, and evaluation products such as ALQ ratings and narrative-ready achievements. Together, these changes addressed earlier concerns about density, ambiguity, and limited traceability by embedding clearer SMART-goal scaffolding, a more intuitive calendar view, and concrete progress indicators that could sustain accountability over time.

Because these design changes were guided by user experience but still grounded in the authors' assumptions about how the tool would perform, it was necessary to re-engage participants and new stakeholders to validate whether MVP 3.0 resolved the identified pain points and introduced any new challenges. From November 17, 2025, to November 21, 2025, the authors traveled to the pilot study unit to conduct additional external interviews using MVP 3.0 to assess its usability in practice.



G. SECOND ROUND OF EXTERNAL INTERVIEWS

On Tuesday, November 18, 2025, the authors started their second round of external interviews by meeting with four personnel at one of the AF's Spark Cells to propose MVP 3.0. An AF Spark Cell is a local innovation team, typically embedded at the wing or installation level, which helps Airmen identify operational problems and rapidly test, refine, and scale solutions using existing tools, small funding, and connections to higher-level innovation pathways (AFWERX, n.d.). Spark Cells operate as part of the AF's broader innovation ecosystem and are intended to bridge the gap between front-line ideas and enterprise decision makers by offering design support, technical guidance, and pathways to resources rather than owning programs themselves (AFWERX, n.d.). Within the DoD, Spark Cells contribute to "disciplined innovation" by helping units modernize workflow, leverage digital infrastructure such as DAF365, SharePoint, and automation tools, and align local projects with service-level priorities for readiness, talent management, and deliberate development (Spark Cell Interview, SC-1).

The authors engaged the Spark Cell to (1) obtain external feedback on whether MVP 3.0 addressed real feedback gaps, (2) to explore options for integrating the tool within existing AF systems, and (3) to understand what technical and organizational steps would be required to transform a PDF-based prototype into a scalable, AF ready solution. Because Spark Cells focus simultaneously on local implementation and AF-wide scalability, the Spark Cell personnel were ideal partners to stress-test the design, surface integration, and cultural challenges, and inform the authors of recommendations for future development.

The Spark Cell panel consisted of one CIV (SC-1), one SEL (SC-2), and two NCOs (SC-3 and SC-4). Overall, their assessment of MVP 3.0 was mixed to positive: they agreed that the tool can improve feedback, quality, clarity of expectations, and accountability if it is structured, easy to use, and automated (SC-1, SC-2, SC-3, SC-4). At the same time, they emphasized cultural and operational constraints such as inconsistent rater and ratee interactions, training gaps, and operational tempo that could hinder consistent adoption without tight integration into existing workflows (SC-2, SC-3). The Spark Cell members provided several suggestions to improve MVP 3.0:



- **Clarify Expectations and Metrics Using ALQ and Job-specific Standards.** SC-3 recommended building an “expectations” section that sits before the Year map where supervisors explicitly define what meet, exceed, or do not meet expectations in each ALQ in relation to the ratee’s career, position, and rank (SC-3). This section should include prompts or templates for job proficiency and tie ALQ language directly to unit-specific metrics (e.g., what counts as positive results, initiative, or leading people when the member has no direct reports) (SC-3).
- **Provide Embedded Guidance and Templates for Raters.** The Spark Cell members also recommended adding short, in-line guidance under key sections (e.g., the Expectation and Evaluate phase) that supervisors can fill in rather than starting from a blank page (SC-3, SC-4). Examples include pre-populated text blocks for each ALQ or “major graded area” where supervisors describe what meets, exceeds, or falls short of expectations, and basic templates that can be reused and tailored for various positions (SC-3, SC-4).
- **Moving Toward a Web-Based, Automated Workflow.** It was strongly encouraged for the authors to transition from a static PDF to a web-based or SharePoint-back implementation that can (1) pre-populate data from existing personnel systems, (2) email questionnaires and reminders to raters and ratees, and (3) automatically schedule and track required feedback events such as the initial, midterm, and final feedback based on SCODs or other key dates (SC-2, SC-3). They note that DAF365 tools like SharePoint, Power Automate, and Power BI could support automated notifications, digital signatures, retention policies, and dashboard metrics without waiting for full AF level system integration (SC-3).
- **Plan for Scalable Hosting and Access.** The authors were encouraged to think in terms of a centralized “development or evaluation SharePoint site” that could host the latest version of the tool, supporting base-level or



MAJCOM-level adoption and allowing thousands of users to download and use the most current version (SC-1, SC-3). The Innovation Cell emphasized the importance of scope control—keeping the site narrowly focused on evaluations and development—and using dynamic permission groups and retention policies so that feedback records can be stored, time-limited, and audited as needed (SC-3).

- **Align with Existing AF Systems and Requirements.** For the MVP to be optimally effective, the Spark Cell recommended that the tool should integrate with or complement existing enterprise systems such as myEval and MyVector, rather than duplicating effort. They recommended framing the MVP to operationalize required feedback, link to mandatory artifacts like the AF benefits sheet, and potentially replace or subsume underused tools if integrated at higher headquarters levels (SC-1, SC-3, SC-4).
- **Design for Different Career Fields, Ranks, and Cultures.** The group highlighted that feedback realities differ sharply between office-based units and 24/7 operations like maintenance and security forces, where supervisors may rarely see their airman and have limited time to conduct quality feedback (SC-1, SC-2, SC-4). They recommended planning for tiered content or configuration (e.g., rank-specific expectations or options that work for shift workers), and cautioned that without leadership emphasis and scheduled time, even a well-designed tool may not overcome cultural resistance to feedback (SC-2, SC-4).
- **Support Intrinsic Motivation and Multiple User “Types.”** The Spark Cell members observed that Airmen vary widely—some want deep personal connection and mentorship, others want a clear checklist to earn positive marks and awards, and some are strictly transactional with a “tell me what to do and I will do it’ attitude” (SC-4). They encouraged keeping the tool flexible enough to surface intrinsic motivation where it exists,



while still providing structure and value for more transactional users by clearly linking goals, timelines, and outcomes.

In summary, the Spark Cell emphasized that the MVP's long-term impact would be greatest if the framework eventually migrated from a static form into a web-based, automated workflow embedded in platforms such as SharePoint, myEval, or other DAF365 tools. Although valuable input, the authors did not have dedicated funding, developer support, or system-owner sponsorship to build or integrate a web-based solution within the scope of this thesis. As a result, the authors maintained a PDF-based framework that could be implemented locally by units using existing office software and SharePoint storage, without requiring enterprise-level changes to myEval or other personnel systems. The web-based recommendations from the Spark Cell are therefore captured in the thesis as forward-looking design considerations and are incorporated into the final recommendations chapter as potential lines of effort for future innovation rather than direct features of the final MVP.

While the Spark Cell offered critical insights on scalability, integration, and automation, their perspective reflected a high-level innovation lens rather than the day-to-day experience of typical users. To balance these views and assess how MVP 3.0 would be perceived by potential adopters beyond the original test group, the authors conducted a third round of external interviews with several noncommissioned officers from the pilot study unit who had not participated in the initial pilot study. The next section examines how these NCOs evaluated the tool's usability, relevance, and feasibility within their own operational contexts.

H. THIRD ROUND OF EXTERNAL INTERVIEWS

On November 19, 2025, the authors organized a third round of external interviews in a focus group format with 10 NCOs and one CIV supervisor from the pilot study unit who were not originally part of the pilot study participants. This interview was held in a collaborative group setting where the authors presented MVP 3.0 and requested the NCOs provide any feedback or suggestions to improve the MVP. Building on the Spark Cell's enterprise and integration perspective, the session was designed to capture how front-line



supervisors and stakeholders perceived the tool's usefulness, workload implications, and fit with existing feedback practices.

The NCO review group consisted primarily of mid-grade NCOs drawn from multiple shops within the pilot study unit. Participants were mostly active duty enlisted personnel with supervisory responsibilities over junior enlisted personnel. A concise demographic summary for the third round of external interviews is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Third Round Interview Demographics

Participant ID	Shop ID	Demographic	Supervisory Role
3P-1	Shop 3	Junior Enlisted	N/A
3P-2	Shop 3	Junior Enlisted	N/A
3P-3	Shop 6	NCO	First Line Supervisor
3P-4	Shop 4	NCO	First Line Supervisor
3P-5	Shop 5	NCO	First Line Supervisor
3P-6	Shop 4	NCO	First Line Supervisor
3P-7	Shop 11	NCO	First Line Supervisor
3P-8	Shop 7	NCO	First Line Supervisor
3P-9	Shop 7	NCO	First Line Supervisor
3P-10	Shop 11	SNCO	First Line Supervisor
3P-11	CIV	CIV	First Line Supervisor

Overall, the NCOs expressed a mixed to positive assessment of MVP 3.0. They generally agreed that MVP 3.0 addressed real gaps in the existing ACA by making expectations more explicit, providing structure for the feedback conversation, and giving Airmen better access to relevant career information (Third Round Interview, 3P-3; Third Round Interview, 3P-4; Third Round Interview, 3P-5; Third Round Interview, 3P-6). Several participants highlighted the RRIS output in the Prepare phase as particularly valuable since it pre-populates resources on topics based on the ratee's interests, thereby streamlining conversation and empowering Airmen to answer their own questions (Third Round Interview, 3P-3; Third Round Interview, 3P-4; Third Round Interview, 3P-5; Third Round Interview, 3P-6; Third Round Interview, 3P-10).

At the same time, many NCOs worried that the full MVP, if treated as a single mandatory form, was too long, too complex, and at risk of becoming another administrative



burden in already time-constrained work centers (Third Round Interview, 3P-3; Third Round Interview, 3P-4; Third Round Interview, 3P-8; Third Round Interview, 3P-11). Participants emphasized that any replacement for the ACA must be simple, clear, and easy to complete within realistic time and workload restraints, otherwise supervisors may revert to the check-the-box behavior or avoid using portions of the tool altogether (Third Round Interview, 3P-3; Third Round Interview, 3P-4, Third Round Interview, 3P-8). The consensus was that the underlying concepts were sound, but the implementation needed to be streamlined and more deliberately divided between core mandatory requirements and optional development aids. Listed below are the MVP 3.0 categories that were addressed during the NCO review session and the results of the discussion.

1. Suggestions for the Prepare and Information Sections

The NCOs were generally enthusiastic about the Prepare phase's combination of "get to know you" prompts, life-event checklists, and an auto-generated information sheet tailored to the ratee's interest (Third Round Interview, 3P-3; Third Round Interview, 3P-4; Third Round Interview, 3P-8). Some members stated that this feature could reduce the time supervisors spend manually answering routine questions and help Airmen identify resources on their own, particularly for topics such as SCODs, BTZ windows, parental leave, and cross-training opportunities (Third Round Interview, 3P-6; Third Round Interview, 3P-8). Participant 3P-6 recommended adding at least one additional free-text option for unique circumstances not listed in the original checklist for product depth. Participant 3P-6 also requested clearer guidance on how the Prepare section should be used in practice. Several NCOs found it confusing that the introductory questions could be read as either a pre-work assignment for the ratee or a live conversation guide for the feedback session, and they asked the authors to standardize the expected flow (Third Round Interview, 3P-3; Third Round Interview, 3P-4; Third Round Interview, 3P-8; Third Round Interview, 3P-11). Specifically, they recommended that the tool explicitly state, near the top of the Prepare page, whether the section is intended to be completed (1) by the ratee before the meeting, (2) by the rater and ratee together during the session, or (3) as a hybrid approach. They argued that clearer instruction would avoid the ambiguity seen in the



current ACA, where Airmen sometimes fill in “something” solely because they think “the blank box is unacceptable” (Third Round Interview, 3P-8).

2. Expectations and ALQ-Based Standards

The NCOs broadly supported the idea of using the MVP to make expectations more transparent and to link them explicitly to the ALQs. Many supervisors described the current ACA practice as vague, noting that the existing form provides limited space to articulate concrete standards for what meets or exceeds expectations, leaving too much room for subjective interpretation and recency bias (Third Round Interview, 3P-6; Third Round Interview, 3P-5). They saw value in an expectations section that connects ALQs to observable behaviors and clear standards that can be discussed with the ratee.

At the same time, participants were divided on how much free-text work supervisors should be expected to perform in this section. Some supervisors valued the ability to write highly specific standards (Third Round Interview, 3P-4), while others viewed extensive free-text entry as redundant and burdensome given that many expectations already exist in the enlisted force structure and local operating instructions (Third Round Interview, 3P-3; Third Round Interview, 3P-8). The group’s overall recommendation was a hybrid expectations sheet that could auto-populate baseline expectations based on the member’s rank and general enlisted responsibilities mapped directly to the ALQs while providing a smaller, dedicated free-text area where supervisors could capture shop or role specific nuances (Third Round Interview, 3P-3; Third Round Interview, 3P-4; Third Round Interview, 3P-8).

Several NCOs also recommended that the tool allow supervisors to reference or attach key local documents such as job specific operating instructions to avoid rewriting detailed standards inside the form while still anchoring expectations in existing, authoritative guidance (Third Round Interview, 3P-11; Third Round Interview, 3P-8; Third Round Interview, 3P-9).



3. Clarifying Ownership (Rater vs. Ratee Sections)

A recurring theme in the NCO feedback was the need to clearly delineate which parts of the MVP are owned by the supervisor and which are owned by the Airmen. Participants observed that, without explicit labels, ratees might either overfill or underfill the form, and supervisors might feel compelled to manage sections that were never intended to be their responsibility (Third Round Interview, 3P-11; Third Round Interview, 3P-3; Third Round Interview, 3P-8). This concern was mostly directed towards the Year Map and Carry Out sections.

To address this, the group suggested that each major section be labeled prominently as “Rater,” “Ratee,” or “Shared,” with brief descriptors such as “mandatory” or “optional” (Third Round Interview, 3P-8; Third Round Interview, 3P-6). For example, they recommended marking the Year Map and Carry Out pages as primarily the ratee responsibility, while the expectations and Evaluate section would be marked for the Rater (Third Round Interview, 3P-4). This labeling would reinforce the intended division of labor and reduce the risk that the tool is perceived as an ever-expanding checklist for supervisors.

4. Year Map and Carry Out as Ratee Toolkit

The Year Map and Carry Out components produced the most divergent reactions. Some NCOS appreciated the Year Map’s ability to visualize key dates such as EPB SCODs, fitness test dates, and quarterly check-ins, and they saw value in giving Airmen a clear sense of when to expect feedback (Third Round Interview, 3P-2; Third Round Interview, 3P-4; Third Round Interview, 3P-5; Third Round Interview, 3P-10). Others, however, worried that embedding detailed monthly and quarterly goal tracking within the core feedback form would create unrealistic expectations that supervisors manage individual Airman goal progress throughout the year (Third Round Interview, 3P-3; Third Round Interview, 3P-8; Third Round Interview, 3P-11).

The emerging consensus was that these sections should be retained but reframed as part of a separate ratee-focused toolkit rather than a core element of the MVP (Third Round Interview, 3P-4; Third Round Interview, 3P-5). In this construct, supervisors could introduce the Year Map and Carry Out pages as optional tools for initiative-taking Airmen



or those preparing for promotion boards or awards. Ratees would own the responsibility to maintain their progress logs, and supervisors would engage with these materials primarily at midterm and final feedback as evidence of goal pursuit and raw material for narrative statements. Some supervisors cautioned that if these components were left instead the MVP without clear optional labeling, these sections could become a liability by giving Airmen grounds to argue that supervisors failed to support every individual goal entered in the tool (Third Round Interview, 3P-3; Third Round Interview, 3P-11).

5. Narrative and Bullet Tracking Features

The NCOs responded favorably to the MVP's narrative tracking component. They noted that Airmen often struggle to recall specific accomplishments or produce award-quality bullets at the end of a reporting period, and a built-in tracker could encourage them to capture metrics, context, and outcomes in real time (Third Round Interview, 3P-4; Third Round Interview, 3P-5; Third Round Interview, 3P-6). Participants felt that this feature would be especially helpful for award packages and EPBs, as supervisors frequently rely on ratee inputs to build narrative statements (Third Round Interview, 3P-6).

At the same time, NCOs again suggested keeping this feature as a ratee responsibility instead of embedding it into the core MVP requirements (Third Round Interview, 3P-3; Third Round Interview, 3P-8). They proposed that supervisors introduce the bullet tracker as an optional resource, particularly for higher performing Airmen, while acknowledging that not every ratee is ready for or interested in managing an extensive document (Third Round Interview, 3P-4; Third Round Interview, 3P-6). This approach would preserve the developmental benefits for those who choose to use the tracker without imposing additional documentation expectations on supervisors or on Airmen still struggling to meet basic job standards.

6. Implications for Refining MVP 3.0

The NCO review reinforced several design principles for the final MVP. First, front-line supervisors broadly endorsed the conceptual shift toward structured, expectation-driven, ALQ-linked feedback and appreciated the inclusion of ratee-centered information outputs. Second, they emphasized the need to simplify the tool by clearly distinguishing



between mandatory feedback content (e.g., the Prepare, Align, and Evaluate phase) and optional developmental aides (e.g., the Year Map and Carry Out components) that might be packaged as a separate ratee toolkit. Third, they highlighted the importance of explicit role labeling, standardized baseline expectations, and alignment with existing authoritative documents to prevent uneven implementation and unnecessary supervisory workload.

Combining the feedback from the Spark Cell and the NCO preliminary review, the authors made notes to preserve the core structure of the Prepare, Align, Year Map, Carry Out, and Evaluate cycle while pruning and re-categorizing certain sections to reduce complexity and clarify ownership. In the subsequent design iteration, the authors focused on (1) tightening instructions at the start of each major section, (2) exploring ways to auto-populate rank-based expectations from existing guidance, and (3) reposition goal-tracking and narrative features as option, ratee-led tools that supervisors can employ selectively based on Airman readiness and motivation.

I. FINAL MVP 4.0 DEVELOPMENT

The third round of NCO interviews confirmed that MVP 3.0 was conceptually strong, but operationally heavy, and that supervisors needed clearer ownership, tighter alignment with ALQs, and more ratee-centric tools that did not add supervisory burden. In response, the authors refined the framework into MVP 4.0, titled Prepare, Align, Carry-Out, Evaluate (PACE) (Appendix J). PACE preserves the cyclical structure of Prepare, Align, Carry Out, and Evaluate, but rebalances roles, sharpening ALQ integration, and restructuring the Year Map and narrative tools to function as ratee-owned development tools. The evolution from MVP 3.0 to MVP 4.0 – PACE is detailed in Table 7.



Table 7. Evolution from MVP 3.0 to MVP 4.0

Component	MVP 3.0	MVP 4.0	Rationale/Feedback Addressed
Naming and Framing	Labeled as PAYCE with 5 sections (Prepare, Align, Year Map, Carry Out, and Evaluate) and minimal role labels	Rebranded as PACE with each step explicitly tagged to the owner: Prepare (Rater-Led, Ratee Input), Align (Rater-Led, Ratee Input), Carry Out (Ratee-Led), Evaluate (Rater-Led).	Responds to NCO confusion regarding rater and ratee ownership by explicitly reinforcing individual responsibilities.
Prepare Phase Enhancements	Prepare includes guiding questions, life-event checklist, and an interest checklist that feeds a RRIS with email and clear-page buttons.	Prepare retains guiding questions and checklists but expands and categorizes interests into four domains (Promotion & Performance, Career Pathways & Job Development, Airmen Benefits & Resources, Transition & Future Planning).	Incorporates NCO and Spark Cell feedback to make the information sheet more logically organized around promotion, benefits, and transition while simplifying controls and reducing clutter.
Prepare Phase (Key Dates and ALQs)	No dedicated page explaining ALQs. ALQs appear later in the Evaluate phase only, with no clear bridge between ratee performance and evaluation criteria.	Adds a “Prepare (Continued by Rater)” page where raters pull key dates like DOR, BTZ window, EPB SCOD, Physical Fitness Assessment (PFA) dates, and other timelines in the ratee’s SURF. This page also includes a review section for all four ALQs with an embedded	Directly addresses the Spark Cell and NCO emphasis on transparency, ALQ grounding, and promotion-window awareness by front-loading key dates and ALQ expectations in the initial conversation.

Component	MVP 3.0	MVP 4.0	Rationale/Feedback Addressed
		proficiency table and an open-text box for rater notes.	
Align Phase Refinements	Align provides space for SMART goals with example and template buttons, but no formal acknowledgement of agreement.	Align retains SMART goal guidance and example/template buttons and adds signature blocks for rater and ratee with dates	Formalizes mutual commitment to the agreed-upon goals and creates a documented record that expectations and development objectives were discussed and acknowledged.
Year Map vs. Carry Out Ownership	The Year Map is framed as a combined calendar and tracking tool with EPB SCOD, days until SCOD, potential quarterly check in dates, and a percentage of goals completed. The Carry Out portion provides four quarterly tracking pages for ratees to log goals, but ownership is not explicitly stated.	The Year Map view is no longer a separate entity but is combined under the Carry Out portion as a developmental tool for the ratee.	Incorporates NCO feedback that these sections should be clearly ratee-owned planning tools, not additional supervisory workload, by relabeling and re-wording the section to center ratee responsibility and optionality.
Narrative and EPB Integration	Includes a separate “Ratee Achievement Tracker” page where a dropdown populated from the Year Map lets ratees select a goal/achievement and type a narrative statement.	Integrates a more structured “Narrative Statement Tracker” directly under Carry Out. This tool allows ratees to type in a goal or action with related metrics (money, time, quantity, impact level, speed, mission readiness)	Responds to NCO desires for better bullet support and measurable impact by turning the tracker into a simple narrative generator that forces ratees to capture metrics and outcomes aligned to EPB expectations.



Component	MVP 3.0	MVP 4.0	Rationale/Feedback Addressed
		and generate a draft narrative statement.	
Evaluation Section Continuity	The Evaluate page rates ALQs on a five-level proficiency scale (from Needs Improvement to Exceptionally Skilled) with sub-elements and comment boxes for each ALQ, plus a follow-on page for mutual feedback.	MVP 4.0 preserves the same ALQ-based proficiency scale, sub-element definitions, and comment structure.	Maintains continuity with AF-wide ALQ guidance and with earlier feedback from the NCO review session that the Evaluate structure was clear and useful.

In summary, the evolution from MVP 3.0 to MVP 4.0 reflects a deliberate response to front-line supervisors and Spark Cell advisors by clarifying rater-ratee ownership, deepening ties to ALQs and promotion milestones, and strengthening ratee-centric tools for tracking goals and narrative input without imposing unsustainable supervisory workload. By the time MVP 4.0 was finalized, the MVP had matured from a promising prototype into a structured, implementable framework that the authors could confidently present to the pilot study unit's CC and SEL as a ready-for-use replacement for the existing ACA process, positioned for official adoption at the squadron level and potential scaling across the wing.

J. FINAL REVIEW OF MVP 4.0

On November 21, 2025, the final leadership review of MVP 4.0 marked the transition from iterative prototyping to unit-level adoption planning as the authors presented PACE to the pilot unit CC, the SEL, and several key squadron stakeholders. The briefing synthesized over a year of customer discovery, pilot testing, and external interviews, and framed PACE as a CC-owned, squadron-level solution for delivering structured, ALQ-focused feedback to all E-1 to E-6 personnel.



Squadron leadership responded very positively to the final MVP. The unit CC regarded the PACE framework as a tool the unit “should have had years ago” to improve feedback, expectations, and professional development. The CC and SEL noted that the auto-generated information sheet, promotion timeline visibility, and ALQ based expectations directly addressed real conversations they had been having about why Airmen did not understand key milestones or how to prepare for promotion opportunities. They also highlighted PACE’s value for inexperienced supervisors, emphasizing that the embedded questions, resource links, and ALQ definitions effectively provide a built-in “cheat sheet” and training scaffold for giving quality feedback. The SEL saw the narrative statement tracker’s metric prompts as especially helpful for Airmen who “don’t know where to start” when capturing accomplishments, and for supervisors who rely on those inputs to build awards and EPBs. At the same time, both the CC and SEL recognized the same structural hurdles identified in earlier phases such as deployments, high operational tempo, generational differences in supervision, platform constraints, and culture around feedback verification and acknowledged that local policy and enforcement would be needed to ensure PACE is used as intended rather than reduced to another checkbox.

In terms of concrete next steps, the unit CC and SEL expressed strong intent to adopt PACE as an internal standard for enlisted feedback, beginning with a planned rollout to E-1 through E-6 personnel starting in January 2026. The CC and SEL discussed using local policy to require that PACE artifacts be uploaded into myEval or maintained in squadron documentation as evidence before EPBs are processed, reinforcing feedback completion. The CC also volunteered to champion PACE beyond the squadron, indicating the command team would brief the tool to other CCs, senior enlisted personnel, and first sergeants on base to encourage broader wing usage.

Finally, the unit leadership reiterated their willingness to continue testing future iterations, offering to collect additional feedback once the tool is deployed across the squadron and to support incremental updates. Ultimately, the final review not only validated MVP 4.0 as a viable, squadron-level tool, but also positioned the pilot study unit as early adopters and advocates for expanding a structured, beneficiary-aligned feedback process across the DAF.



VI. LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the pilot study demonstrated the PACE framework's potential to strengthen developmental feedback, it also surfaced practical constraints and opportunities for continued refinement. This chapter distills the most significant insights from the pilot to outline the study's major limitations and offers clear guidance on how the framework can be refined, implemented, and supported moving forward. Additionally, it identifies areas where additional research would deepen understanding and improve long-term effectiveness. Together, these components shape a focused set of next steps for advancing the PACE framework beyond this initial pilot and into broader DAF application.

A. LIMITATIONS

Although the pilot study provided meaningful insight into developmental feedback challenges across the DAF, several limitations influenced both the depth and generalizability of the findings. These constraints emerged from the design of the MVP itself, the operational realities of the unit, the limited scope of participants, and the compressed timeline of the pilot. Together, these factors shaped what could be reasonably measured within the study. Despite these limitations, the pilot yielded rich and actionable insights, revealing consistent themes that mirror broader AF feedback challenges and identifying areas for future research and refinement.

Design: The most significant design-related challenges stemmed from the alternative formatting between the existing ACA form and the newly introduced PACE Framework. While PACE was intentionally built using automated coding to ease administrative and cognitive burden, participants identified some friction related to platform versatility. These concerns included confusion regarding PDF and Excel features, usability constraints with requiring transition to multiple documents, and for shops operating in field environments with limited computer access, the inability to print and execute the form manually. These complexities occasionally disrupted workflow and reduced the intuitive feel of the framework.



Secondly, because the authors served simultaneously as developers and evaluators of the MVP, an unavoidable degree of bias existed in how participants perceived and provided feedback. While mitigation measures were implemented to reduce overt influence, including anonymous digital submissions and limited researcher intervention during Phase 3, it is possible that some participants responded more positively due to perceived expectations or professional courtesy. The design of the tool itself was also constrained by the authors' limited technical expertise. Although the framework was grounded in user feedback, its construction relied on basic software capabilities rather than specialized knowledge of digital product design, automation, or user-interface development. As a result, the tool remains functional but not fully optimized for ease of use, accessibility, or technological efficiency. Future iterations would benefit from collaboration with SMEs in areas such as application design, human–computer interaction, automated form development, and digital workflow integration. Access to these technical resources could significantly enhance the tool's functionality, streamline user experience, and support long-term scalability across diverse AF environments.

Additionally, the structure of the DAF feedback system itself contributes to an ongoing challenge in feedback verification. Responsibility for execution of formal feedback on a tri-annual basis lies almost entirely with the rater and ratee, and verification lies with a single check box upon submission of a member's final evaluation confirming they received feedback during the reporting period. The design of Phase 3 in the pilot study mirrored autonomy with surveys rather than reviewing completed forms to preserve the realism of the study. As a result, the authors could not independently verify the uniformity or completeness of the initial, midterm, and final portion of each participant's form. This limitation constrained the ability to determine whether every phase of the process was consistently and uniformly applied.

Operations: Operational realities within the squadron created additional constraints on data collection and process consistency. Deployments, exercises, Temporary Duties (TDY), shift rotations, and fluctuating operational tempo frequently interrupted scheduled check-ins or prevented participants from completing full feedback cycles. These disruptions were not only expected but illustrative of the environment in which



developmental feedback must function. While they limited the completeness of the dataset, they also underscored a central truth: any feedback framework must withstand the pressures of real-world operations. The interruptions observed in this study highlight the inherent challenge of sustaining deliberate developmental dialogue in units with highly dynamic mission demands.

Scope: Notably, the study was intentionally scoped to a single CES, with one supervisor–ratee pair per shop participating in the pilot. This structure allowed the authors to capture rich, qualitative insights, but limited the range of leadership experiences, supervisory styles, and workplace cultures represented. The narrow scope prevented comparative analysis across multiple Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC), units, and mission sets, restricting the ability to generalize findings beyond the Pilot Unit. While many of the challenges identified are consistent with broader DAF trends, the results should be interpreted as most representative of the unique environment, culture, and operational tempo of the participating squadron. Future studies would benefit from implementation in a wider range of squadrons and fields.

Timeline: Lastly, the three-month duration of the pilot significantly constrained what could be observed. Developmental feedback is inherently cyclical and longitudinal, with many intended outcomes, such as supervisory confidence, quality of narrative statements, clarity of expectations, and promotion competitiveness unfolding over an annual cycle. Because the PACE framework is designed to function as a year-long feedback loop, the compressed timeline prevented the authors from measuring sustained behavioral change, long-term accountability, or full-cycle progression from Prepare through Evaluate and back into a new cycle. This limitation restricts the ability to draw conclusions about the enduring cultural impact or long-term performance outcomes associated with the framework.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings and limitations identified throughout this study highlight several areas where continued research could meaningfully advance the development, implementation, and long-term impact of the PACE framework. While the pilot study demonstrated that



structured, cyclical feedback processes can significantly strengthen communication and developmental clarity within the Pilot Unit, broader evaluation is required to determine how the framework performs across different ranks, mission sets, and operational environments. The following recommendations outline key pathways for future inquiry that would enhance the effectiveness, adaptability, and enterprise-level scalability of the framework.

E-1 – E-6 Rollout: Within the scope of this study, the PACE framework was designed primarily to support the developmental needs of Airmen in the E-1 to E-6 tiers. These ranks rely most heavily on structured guidance to navigate evaluations, PME requirements, and promotion timelines, making them the population most likely to benefit from a standardized, cyclical feedback process. Implementing the framework across a full annual timeline, beginning with supervisees within these ranks and their supervisors, would provide a meaningful opportunity to evaluate PACE’s measurable development and career impact across the ranks it is specifically designed to support. Accordingly, the authors recommended a 2026 squadron-wide rollout within the Pilot Unit.

- **Future Research:** Although the framework is optimized for junior enlisted Airmen, the authors anticipate that its structure could be adapted to support developmental vectoring for senior enlisted (E-7 to E-9) and commissioned officers (O-1 to O-6). Future research should explore the modifications required to align PACE with senior enlisted and officer career milestones, expectations, and evaluation processes. Such studies could assess how tier-specific adaptations influence clarity of expectations, supervisory engagement, mentorship quality, and the accuracy and consistency of performance documentation across broader segments of the force.

Cross-AFSC and Multi-Base Validation: Because this study focused on a single CES, broader validation is necessary to understand how the PACE framework performs across different AFSCs, mission sets, and organizational cultures. Units such as logistics, operations, security forces, medical, maintenance, or headquarters staff may experience unique developmental challenges that differ from those of a CE environment. Comparative



testing across multiple bases would help identify which components of PACE are universally effective, and which require AFSC-specific or mission-specific tailoring. Cross-unit implementation would also generate insights into how culture, tempo, manning structures, and supervisory models influence developmental practices, thereby informing refinements that support wider enterprise adoption.

- **Future Research:** Future studies should explore the effects of multi-base and multi-AFSC pilot programs, comparing developmental outcomes, user experiences, and adoption patterns across diverse units. Research could investigate whether certain career fields benefit from customized versions of the Year Map, different feedback pacing, or tailored conversation prompts. Additionally, evaluating implementation in both CONUS and OCONUS settings, in high-tempo versus steady-state units, and in deployed environments would offer valuable insight into how well the PACE framework withstands operational variability. Findings from such studies would provide a robust foundation for determining the framework's enterprise-level scalability and identifying the refinements needed for Total Force adoption.

Peer Advocacy: A key insight from the pilot study was the significant role that leadership-to-leadership advocacy plays in sustaining and expanding new developmental practices. Within the Pilot Unit, the Pilot Unit CC and SEL noted that the most effective path to broader adoption would be through formal advocacy to their peer leaders across the wing. Advocacy at this level helps normalize the framework, signals its organizational priority, and reduces the perception that PACE is an isolated initiative rather than a shared developmental standard. When CCs and SELs communicate the value of the framework to fellow leaders, they help shape a consistent developmental culture and encourage subordinate units to adopt the tool with greater trust and buy-in. Establishment within the Pilot Unit's wing would allow further study on the adaptability of the framework within different operational contexts under an aligned mission-set.

- **Future Research:** Further study should examine how leadership-driven peer advocacy influences adoption and sustainment across larger



organizational structures, such as MAJCOMs, career-fields, and intra-base networks. Research could also explore how CC and SEL endorsement affect unit culture, supervisor engagement, and willingness to integrate structured feedback processes. Expanding this line of inquiry across multiple wings or MAJCOMs would provide insight into how top-level advocacy accelerates diffusion and strengthens developmental ecosystems across the broader DAF.

Establish a Continuous Feedback Loop: Another critical recommendation emerging from the pilot study is the need for a structured mechanism that enables routine evaluation and refinement of the PACE framework. Establishing a continuous feedback loop through a survey platform, and recurring framework reviews would help units identify usability challenges early, monitor trends in supervisor and Airman engagement, and ensure the framework remains aligned with evolving mission demands in real time. Such processes create a sustainable rhythm of assessment and adjustment, reinforcing PACE as a living developmental model rather than a static tool. This approach is especially important as rollout expands to additional units with varying needs and operational tempos, where applicability of the framework may vary widely.

- **Future Research:** Future inquiry could examine how different models of continuous feedback such as digital analytics, periodic working groups, or integration into existing CC-led review processes would affect long-term usage and refinement of the framework. Studies may also compare the impact of quarterly versus annual assessments on cultural adoption, supervisor competency, and maintenance of developmental continuity. Additionally, research should explore how continuous review cycles can be institutionalized to ensure enduring support and adaptability as mission requirements, personnel cycles, and organizational priorities evolve.

Developmental Education: Participants across multiple ranks consistently noted that existing PME does not sufficiently prepare Airmen for the developmental responsibilities required in day-to-day supervisory skills. Current curricula emphasize disciplinary authority, policy knowledge, or leadership theory, but provide limited practical



instruction on conducting meaningful developmental conversations, setting goals with subordinates, or navigating evaluation systems. Incorporating PACE principles into PME such as ALS, NCOA, Senior Non-Commissioned Officer Academy (SNCOA), and leadership courses for company-grade officers, could build a shared developmental language across the force and equip leaders with foundational skills before they assume supervisory roles. Embedding the framework at the PME level also ensures continuity as Airmen transition between units and duty stations, strengthening the long-term cultural impact of structured feedback.

- **Future Research:** Future studies should explore how PACE-aligned developmental modules could be integrated into PME curricula in a way that complements existing instruction rather than expanding course load. Research might compare the supervisory performance and feedback behaviors of graduates who receive PACE-based training with those who do not, examining differences in confidence, communication quality, and developmental engagement. Additionally, evaluating instructor perspectives and PME institutional constraints would help determine the most effective and scalable method for embedding structured feedback principles into training pipelines.

Leverage Innovation Pipelines: While the current PACE Framework proved functional during the pilot, its static format could limit ease of use and accessibility among units with limited computer access. These constraints point to a clear opportunity for digital innovation. Leveraging existing AF innovation pipelines, such as Spark Cells, AFWERX, or Kessel Run, could enable the development of a mobile or web-based application that streamlines workflow, automates goal tracking, and integrates with AF systems such as myEval or myPers. Collaboration with SMEs in user-interface design, application development, and human-computer interaction would greatly enhance usability, reduce administrative burden, and support scalability across diverse units. A digital solution would also allow for additional benefits including automated reminders, supervisor continuity features, and consolidated supervisory links and resources.



- **Future Research:** Future studies should examine the feasibility, cost, and impact of migrating the PACE framework into an AF-supported digital platform and integrating the framework into existing systems. Research could explore user preferences for mobile versus web-based versus hard copy tools, evaluate the effectiveness of automated prompts and progress dashboards, and assess how integration with enterprise systems influences adoption and continuity. Additionally, pilot testing a digitally enabled version of PACE within multiple AFSCs or wings would provide insight into how technological enhancements shape user experience, developmental outcomes, and long-term sustainability of the framework.

Long-Term Outcome Measurement: A final area for expanded inquiry involves assessing the long-term developmental, cultural, and performance impacts associated with sustained use of the PACE framework. Because developmental feedback is inherently cyclical and evolves over months or years, longitudinal evaluation is essential to understanding whether PACE produces durable improvements in supervisory practices and Airmen outcomes. Areas of particular interest include promotion competitiveness, the quality and accuracy of narrative statements, increased supervisory confidence, greater Airmen ownership of their career progression, and improvements in transparency surrounding evaluation and EFDP processes. Studying these outcomes over extended periods would help determine whether PACE contributes to a more consistent, equitable, and development-focused culture across the force.

- **Future Research:** Future studies should track units using the PACE framework across multiple evaluation cycles to assess long-term effects on performance documentation, promotion selection rates, retention trends, and developmental climates. Research might also analyze whether PACE influences measurable indicators such as disciplinary incidents, supervisor turnover effects, or readiness metrics tied to leadership development. Additionally, comparative studies between PACE-adopting units and control units not using structured feedback frameworks could offer deeper insight into causal impacts. Such longitudinal research would provide a



more comprehensive understanding of the framework's enduring value and inform decisions about enterprise-level adoption.

Together, these recommendations outline a path for strengthening, expanding, and validating the PACE framework beyond the initial pilot. They highlight not only where further refinement is needed, but also where meaningful opportunities exist to enhance developmental culture across the force. By exploring these avenues through continued research, collaboration with SMEs, and broader implementation across diverse units, the AF can build a more consistent, transparent, and empowering feedback environment, one that better equips Airmen to navigate their careers with clarity, confidence, and shared accountability.



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VII. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the root causes behind Sponsor 1's problem statement, and to create a solution that strengthens the connection between supervisory practices and the professional growth of enlisted Airmen. At its core, this research reveals a disconnect between policy intent and lived experience. Although feedback is meant to guide performance, clarify expectations, and prepare Airmen for career advancement, the system frequently fails to provide the timely, structured, and developmental conversations required to achieve those outcomes. Supervisees interviewed described feedback as inconsistent or perfunctory, and supervisors voiced limited supervisory preparation, unclear expectations, and competing operational demands. These findings underscore that feedback challenges are not the result of isolated behavior, but the product of systemic gaps in training, culture, continuity, and process design.

Several themes emerged across interviews within the Pilot Unit that illuminate the nature of this problem. Supervisors operate without standardized guidance on how to mentor their Airmen, and the absence of shared structure leads to a wide variation in feedback quality. Junior Airmen lack visibility into promotion pathways and often navigate their development reactively rather than proactively. Unit culture, operational tempo, and frequent turnover disrupt continuity, further weakening opportunities for meaningful engagement. These systemic factors collectively erode trust in the evaluation process and limit Airmen's ability to prepare for success. The need for a structured, repeatable, and user-centered approach to feedback is clear.

The PACE framework developed through this research provides a feasible and scalable response to these challenges. Rather than attempting to overhaul existing AF systems, PACE reinforces and operationalizes them by guiding supervisors and Airmen through a cyclical process of preparation, alignment, carrying out goals, and evaluation. The framework shifts feedback from a one-time administrative event to an ongoing developmental conversation grounded in shared expectations and deliberate planning. Importantly, PACE is not a technological solution, but rather a behavioral and structural model designed to standardize guidance in diverse work centers and adapt to the realities



of high-tempo operations. Its emphasis on two-way communication, individualized goals, and transparent timelines reflects the needs expressed directly by users and addresses the underlying causes of inconsistent feedback observed across the Pilot Unit and the DAF.

The results of the pilot study demonstrate that structured, intentional frameworks meaningfully strengthen the quality of developmental conversations. Supervisors reported greater clarity and confidence in guiding their Airmen, and supervisees felt more informed, supported, and empowered to participate actively in their own progression. Even in an environment marked by deployments, manpower constraints, and demanding operational rhythms, participants were able to use PACE to create deeper dialogue, track goals, and clarify expectations. These outcomes indicate that developmental feedback improves most when supervisors are equipped with practical tools, and supervisees are empowered with the resources to guide their own career development, not when it is treated as a compliance exercise.

While the study was limited by scope and a compressed timeline, the consistency of insights across participants suggests that the challenges and opportunities identified here are not unique to a single CES. Instead, they reflect systemic developmental needs across the enlisted force. The limitations encountered, such as platform constraints, operational disruptions, and sample size also point to clear areas for future refinement, particularly in the development of a streamlined digital interface and expanded testing across additional AFSCs and installations. Moreover, the findings highlight the importance of leadership engagement in sustaining developmental culture and ensuring that frameworks like PACE are consistently applied and reinforced.

Ultimately, this thesis affirms that high-quality developmental feedback is central to readiness, retention, morale, and merit-based advancement. Airmen thrive when expectations are clear, when supervisors are trained and supported, and when the feedback process is structured and transparent. The PACE framework offers a practical and scalable path toward achieving these conditions. By combining user-driven design, deliberate structure, and continuous reflection, PACE strengthens the foundation of enlisted professional development and contributes to a more equitable and mission-ready force.



As the AF continues to modernize talent management and refine development pathways, locally driven, adaptable solutions like PACE can serve as catalysts for cultural and structural improvement. With continued research, iterative refinement, and broader implementation, the framework developed through this thesis has the potential to support a more informed, empowered, and developmentally aligned enlisted corps, one equipped not only to meet mission demands, but to grow into the future force the DAF requires.



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APPENDIX A. PHASE 0 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General Experience:

- How long have you been in, what is your assignment background? What are your typical job tasks / operational tempo?
- Roughly how many people have supervised you and what was their range of ranks?
- Roughly how many people have you supervised and what were their range of ranks?
- Have you ever supervised multiple troops at once? Any challenges associated with that?
- Have you ever had multiple supervisors in one reporting period? Have you ever been a supervisor for just part of the reporting period?
- How would you describe your overall experience with the current AF Enlisted Evaluation System?
- Were you formally taught about professional writing as an airman? Would educating junior E's in self-advocacy improve feedback/EPBs?
- How do you feel about the evaluation 'culture' in your field compares to other career fields?

Feedback Cycle:

- Do you feel the mid-term feedback provides you with enough guidance for improvement before the final EPB? Why or why not?
- In your experience, do you/your airmen receive *timely* feedback? If not, how does this impact your final evaluations?
- In your experience, do you/your airmen receive *accurate* feedback? If not, how does this impact your final evaluations?



- How surprised are you by your yearly performance review during the EPB? Can you give an example of when this happened?
- How does your shop and proximity to leadership impact your ability to be evaluated more favorably (if at all)?

Supervisor's Influence:

- How do you feel about the weight your supervisor's feedback carries in your career progression?
- Have you ever felt that negative feedback from your supervisor had a disproportionate impact on your career? If so, can you elaborate?
- To your understanding, are supervisors properly trained/educated on the feedback/evaluation process to deliberately develop Airmen? What is the extent of their training?
- Are supervisors educated on *how* to advocate for their Airmen?

CC's Role:

- Do you believe the CC's role in the final ranking fairly reflects your performance compared to your supervisor's evaluation?
- How do you feel about the fact that positive remarks from supervisors carry little to no weight in career mobility?
- To your understanding are CCs prepared on *how* to advocate for their Airmen?

Quota System:

- How does the limited quota system (i.e., only 5% of Airmen can receive a 5 rating and 10% a 4) affect your motivation and perception of the evaluation process?
- Can you share an instance where you or a colleague felt deserving of a higher rating but were limited by the quota system?



Promotion Process:

- What challenges have you faced with the promotion system, particularly the differences in promotion criteria between Senior Airman through Technical Sergeant and Master Sergeant through Chief Master Sergeant?
- Do you feel the current or previous systems impacted retainment? Is the lack of retention due to members not promoting then being kicked out? Or is it due to job dissatisfaction after not promoting?

EFDP Process

- When does EFDP normally take place?
- What is the process for setting up an EFDP? Who establishes the ROEs and the expectations for racking and stacking Airmen?
- Who is selected to sit on the panel, is it always the same position?
- Do you believe that the EFDP panel (the FCs, supervisors, NCOs, etc.) would benefit from clearer guidance from leadership on their expectations of must promote/ promote now Airmen?
- What does the selection / evaluation process look like at the Flight level?
- Is there a quota system for pushing Airmen forward to the board?
- What does a “deserving” Airmen look like when you are evaluating all the promotion eligible Airmen? How do you determine who deserves the push statement?

Improvement Suggestions:

- What changes would you suggest improving the fairness and transparency of the Enlisted Evaluation System?
- If you could change one thing about the current evaluation system, what would it be and why?



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APPENDIX B. MVP 1.0 – SUPERVISOR DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

Command Charter

Purpose

To establish a structured and standardized framework for providing feedback, documenting performance, and conducting evaluations for all junior enlisted personnel within [REDACTED]. This charter aims to ensure transparency, fairness, and consistency while fostering professional development and mission readiness.

Vision Statement

To create a culture of continuous improvement where every airman is empowered with actionable feedback, supported in their professional growth, and evaluated fairly to enhance individual and squadron-wide performance.

Mission Statement

To implement a robust feedback and evaluation process that aligns with Air Force core values, enhances career progression, and strengthens [REDACTED] operational effectiveness.

Scope

This charter applies to all personnel listed below:

- Airmen (E1–E4)
- Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) (E5–E6)
- Supervisors and Command Leadership

Key Objectives

1. **Standardize Feedback:** Implement structured, regular feedback sessions for all personnel.
2. **Improve Documentation:** Ensure accurate and detailed recording of performance achievements and developmental needs. Utilize the following documents:
 - Consolidated Development Toolkit
 - Feedback Completion tracker
 - AFJQS
 - Year Plan
 - Resources
3. **Enhance Transparency:** Establish clear criteria for evaluations and promotions.
4. **Promote Professional Growth:** Provide resources and guidance for certifications, training, and career advancement.
5. **Foster Accountability:** Ensure supervisors are trained and held accountable for providing meaningful feedback.

Roles and Responsibilities

Command Leadership (Commander, SEL):

- Oversee the feedback and evaluation process.
- Set clear expectations and criteria for performance reviews.
- Provide resources and training for supervisors.

Supervisors (NCOs, Senior NCOs, CGOs):

- Conduct initial, midterm, and end-of-term feedback sessions.



- Maintain detailed documentation of supervisee performance using the Development Toolkit.
- Advocate for airmen during promotion panels and evaluation boards.

Airmen:

- Actively participate in feedback sessions.
- Maintain a personal record of accomplishments and goals.
- Seek mentorship and guidance for career progression.

Unit Training Manager:

- Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the feedback and evaluation process.
- Oversee timely completion of task qualification for the Air Force Job Qualification Standard (JQS) for supervisors.
- Coordinate training sessions on feedback delivery and evaluation criteria.
- Provide updates to leadership on system effectiveness.

Evaluation Criteria

1. **Executing the Mission:**

- **Job Proficiency:** Demonstrates knowledge and professional skill in assigned duties, achieving positive results and impact in support of the mission.
- **Initiative:** Assesses and takes independent or directed action to complete a task or mission that influences the mission or organization.
- **Adaptability:** Adjusts to changing conditions, to include plans, information, processes, requirements and obstacles in accomplishing the mission.

2. **Leading People**

- **Inclusion and Teamwork:** Collaborates effectively with others to achieve an inclusive climate in pursuit of a common goal or to complete a task or mission.
- **Emotional Intelligence:** Exercises self-awareness manages their own emotions effectively; demonstrates an understanding of others' emotions, and appropriately manages relationships.
- **Communication:** Articulates information in a clear and timely manner, both verbally and non-verbally, through active listening and messaging tailored to the appropriate audience.

3. **Managing Resources**

- **Stewardship:** Demonstrates responsible management of assigned resources, which may include time, equipment, people, funds and/or facilities.
- **Accountability:** Takes responsibility for the actions and behaviors of self and/or team; demonstrates reliability and transparency

4. **Improving the Unit**

- **Decision Making:** Makes well-informed, effective and timely decisions under one's control that weigh constraints, risks, and benefits.
- **Innovation:** Thinks creatively about different ways to solve problems, implements improvements and demonstrates calculated risk-taking.

Process Workflow

1. **Feedback Cycle**

- **Initial Feedback:** Conducted within 30 days of new supervision assignment.
- **Midterm Feedback:** Scheduled halfway through the evaluation period.



Category	Program	Description	Link
Academic	AFCOOL	Air Force COOL is a pathway for enlisted DAF members to earn industry recognized professional certifications, licenses to enhance their active-duty work, and to prepare them as they transition to the civilian job market.	https://afvec.us.af.mil/afvec/af-cool/welcome
Academic	CCAF	Community College of the Air Force to earn a degree	Community College of the Air Force
Academic	AFVEC	The Air Force Virtual Education Center (AFVEC) offers a wide array of on-line services to empower you to actively participate in all aspects of your education to include the creation and management of funding requests. For more information, click the link below.	AFVEC
Academic	TA	Tuition Assistance for Airmen looking to complete a bachelor's degree	https://www.afpc.af.mil/benefits-and-entitlements/military-tuition-assistance-program/
Academic	Skillbridge	SkillBridge is a program that provides eligible transitioning DAF members opportunities to develop their career skills through civilian on-the-job training, employment skills training, apprenticeships, and internships	https://afvec.us.af.mil/afvec/skillbridge/how-skillbridge-works
Commissioning Programs	SOAR	Program for enlisted members to attend college full-time with ROTC Provides up to \$18,000 annually plus monthly stipend Must complete degree within 2-4 years	https://www.afrotc.com/scholarships/enlisted/ascp-soar/
Commissioning Programs	POCERP	For airmen who have 2 years or less remaining to complete their degree No scholarship funding but includes monthly stipend	https://www.afrotc.com/scholarships/enlisted/poc-erp-necp/
Commissioning Programs	LEAD	A full 4-year military academy program or 10-month preparatory school Full scholarship with cadet pay	https://www.academyadmissions.com/prepare/enlisted/
Commissioning Programs	SLECP	SLECP allows designated Air Force and Space Force senior leaders to directly select exceptionally performing, highly talented enlisted Airmen and Guardians for commissioning through OTS	https://www.afrotc.com/scholarships/enlisted/slecp/
Commissioning Programs	ASCP	Program for enlisted members to attend college full-time with ROTC Provides up to \$18,000 annually plus monthly stipend Must complete degree within 2-4 years	Enlisted Airmen ASCP & SOAR Scholarships U.S. Air Force ROTC
Commissioning Programs	OTS	8-week program for those who already have or are close to having a degree Highest selection rate for active duty members Can apply one year before graduation	Officer Training School
Commissioning Programs	NECP	For enlisted members pursuing a nursing degree Provides up to \$15,000 annually for tuition Includes 5-week Commissioned Officer Training	https://www.afrotc.com/scholarships/enlisted/poc-erp-necp/
Commissioning Programs	IPAP	Two-phase program to become a Physician Assistant Phase I is 16 months, Phase II is 13 months Includes 5-week Commissioned Officer Training	https://www.100fss.com/document-manager/education-training/399-commissioning-programs/file/
Commissioning Programs	MSC	For medical administrators Requires specific prerequisites Includes 11-week Health Service Admin Course	SummaryofCommissioning-Programs.pdf
Commissioning Programs	EMDP2	24-month program to prepare for medical school For those pursuing a medical doctor degree	SummaryofCommissioning-Programs.pdf
Commissioning Programs	HPSP	For various medical professions (dentists, pharmacists, physicians, etc.) Provides full scholarship plus monthly stipend of \$2,229.30 2-4 year program with service commitment	SummaryofCommissioning-Programs.pdf
Language	DLPT	How to Sign up For the DLPT: 1. Go to https://afvec.us.af.mil/afvec/dashboard (Air Force Virtual Education Center) 2. Create an Account/Sign In 3. Go to "Scheduled Tests" 4. Click "Schedule Test" 5. Location = [INSERT BASE] 6. Test Type = DLPT , then search for your language Find a Preferred Date, Click on one of the green dots to schedule your time	https://www.dlflc.edu/resources/dlpt-guides/
Language	LEAP	Language Enabled Airman Program	AFCLC Language Studies
DAFI	Re-Enlistment	DAFI regarding the regulations, criteria, and process of re-enlistments	https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_a1/publication/dafi36-2606/dafi36-2606.pdf
Guidance	Retraining for First Term Airmen	Provides guidance on the process for retraining for First Term Airmen	View File
Doctrine	Air Force Purple Book	The Joint Force	PurpleBook.pdf
Doctrine	Air Force Blue Book	Core Values	BlueBook.pdf
Doctrine	Air Force Brown Book	The Enlisted Force Structure	BrownBook.pdf
DAFI	Enlisted & Officer Evaluation System	AFI regarding the regulations, expetations, and process of evaluation systems	afi36-2406.pdf
Guidance	Transition Assistance Program (TAP)	The Transition Assistance Program is administered locally at your Military and Family Readiness Center. The mandatory components of TAP are applicable for all service members who have at least 180 continuous days or more on active duty	Transition Assistance Program
DAFI	Total Force Assignments	DAFI regarding assignments, PCS, TDY, Deployment, Base of Preference (BOP), etc.	dafi36-2110.pdf
Resource	BTZ Calculator	Calculates Airmen's BTZ window based on the date they entered the Air Force and Date of Rank (DOR) to A1C	https://btzcalculator.com/
Language	Total Force Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Program	DAFI regarding the Foreign Lanuage Proficiency Bonus (FLPB), etc	dafi36-4005.pdf



Air Force Job Qualification Standard (AFJQS)					
Pilot - Form (INH)					
ACCESSIBILITY: Publications and forms are available on the e-publishing website at www.e-publishing.af.mil for downloading or ordering.					
RELEASABILITY: There are no releasability restrictions on this publication.					
1. PURPOSE. This Air Force Job Qualification Standard (AFJQS) offers a framework of discrete, tangible tasks that measure an Airman's ability to serve as a Noncommissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC) or Section Chief in the United States Air Force. It will bridge the gap between Professional Military Education (PME) and on the job experience, allowing for individuals stepping into this new role to develop some key skills, knowledge, and abilities prior and during the assumption of responsibilities. Demonstrating proficiency in these hard leadership skills will be required prior to inheriting additional responsibilities levied on new NCOIC and Section Chiefs to fulfill their potential, and grow a more capable force. This document applies to the Total Force, but may be supplemented to capture unique requirements not common across the Total Force, such as unique MAJCOM/Wg/Gp/Sq specific processes. This is a stand-alone product and does not require an accompanying Master Training Listing (MTL) and/or Individual Training Record (ITR). 2. TASK QUALIFICATION. All personnel will be qualified to the GO/NO GO standard for all tasks listed in this AFJQS. GO means the individual can perform the task without assistance utilizing appropriate instructions or other procedural guidance. If required training listed in Part II of this instruction is provided through OJT, distance learning (DL), or web-based courses, a supervisor/trainer from that respective functional area will complete the trainer's block to document training completion. Newly appointed NCOICs/Section Chiefs should complete all task qualifications in this AFJQS before being assigned to a Section Chief position. Training must be completed within twelve months, beginning 1 September of the year of promotion. This JQS can be used in conjunction with the Supervisor JQS to ensure the new NCOIC/Section Chief is capable of leading their Airmen and managing their section. 3. ADDITIONAL DUTY or TASK. If personnel are assigned an additional duty or task not listed in this AFJQS, the supervisor will develop an AF IMT 797, Job Qualification Standard Continuation/Command JQS. The supervisor/trainer will then develop a plan for the member to receive training. 4. TRAINING DOCUMENTATION AND TRAINER/CERTIFIER IDENTIFICATION. Document training required by this AFJQS in accordance with DAFMAN 36-2689, <i>Training Program</i>. All trainers authorized to sign off tasks in Part II of this AFJQS will be identified in the identification block of this AFJQS. There are no tasks requiring third-party certification. 5. This AFJQS has been coordinated with all CFMs and applicable SMEs. Overall POC for this AFJQS is AIDL.					

PART II. AFJQS NCOIC / SECTION CHIEF TASK LIST						
TASK NUMBER	TASKS, KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNICAL REFERENCES	CERTIFICATION				
		START DATE	COMPLETE DATE	TRAINEE INITIALS	TRAINER INITIALS	CERTIFIER INITIALS (IF REQUIRED)
1 Understanding Workcenter Manpower/Organization: TR: AFI 38-101, Manpower & Organization, Air Force Doctrine Publication 1						
1.1	Understand Unit Manning Document (UMD) and impacts on work center					
1.2	Explain and Understand how to read a UMD					
1.3	Understand requirements vs. authorizations vs. assigned					
1.4	Understand and Implement Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) Action Orders					
1.5	Explain the Unit Personnel Management Roster (UPMR)					
1.6	Understand workcenter Unit Personnel Management Roster					
1.7	Explain impacts of UPMR/UMD to mission and unit					
1.8	Explain Manning Personnel Appropriation (MPA) days/manning assists					
1.9	Understand Base Level Service Delivery Model (BLSDM) reports- alpha, gains, losses roster					
2 Air Force System Navigation: TR: MyFSS Articles						
2.1	Navigate MyFSS					
2.2	Navigate MyDecs					
2.3	Demonstrate how to generate decorations					
2.4	Navigate/Explain MyVector					
2.5	Navigate MyFitness					
2.6	Navigate E-Pubs					
2.7	Demonstrate finding Air Force Forms					
3 Air Force Fitness Program: TR: DAFMAN 36-2905, DoDI 1308.03, Local Policy						
3.1	Understand the Air Force PT program /JC's Admin Actions					
3.2	Explain diagnostic testing					
3.3	Explain waist measurement program					
4 Professional Military Writing : TR: DAFH 33-337,The Tongue & Quill; DAFMAN 90-161, Publishing Processes and Procedures; DAFI 36-2110, Total Force Assignments						
4.1	Demonstrate how to properly draft an appointment letter					
4.2	Demonstrate understanding of email writing					
4.3	Explain the Comment Resolution Matrix (CRM) process when reviewing/coordinating on appropriate policy/publication					
4.4	Assist workcenter personnel with exceptions to policy (ETP)					
4.5	Draft Official Biographies					
4.6	Demonstrate understating of email etiquette					
5 Deployment Readiness: TR: DoDI 6025.19, Individual Medical Readiness Program; AFI 10-250, Individual Medical Readiness; DAFI 36-2110, Total Force Assignments; DAFMAN 48-108, Physical Evaluation						
5.1	Understand Air Force Force Generation (AFFORGEN) cycles					
5.2	Explain required Ready Airmen Training (RAT)					
5.3	Explain Medical readiness					
5.4	Understand medical waivers and impacts on workcenter					
5.5	Understand Assignment Limitation Codes (ALC)					
5.6	Create CBRND Task Qualification Training (TOT)/exercise plan					
6 Scheduling/Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)/Managing Section: TR: DAFI 90-160, Publications and Forms Management; DoDI 1342.19, DAFI 36-2110, Total Force Assignments; DAFMAN 36-2689,						
6.1	Develop workcenter calendar/SharePoint site for info sharing and deconfliction					
6.2	Assist in the development of an Operating Instruction (OI)/local policy					
6.3	Explain the purpose of developing Family Care Plans					
6.4	Create shift schedule/job rotation plan					
6.5	Develop Master Task Listing (MTL)					
6.6	Develop a workcenter immersion for newly assigned personnel (important POCs, leadership vision,					
6.7	Develop/Maintain continuity books/Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)					
6.8	Plan/execute workcenter/team building events					
6.9	Understand workcenter accountability and recall roster procedures					
6.10	Define unprofessional relationships					



6.11	Develop Training Task Groups for workcenter					
6.12	Initiate Change of Reporting Official (CRO)					
6.13	Understand a civilian Position Description (PD)					
6.14	Explain security clearance guidelines and the effect on the workcenter					
TASK NUMBER	TASKS, KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNICAL REFERENCES	CERTIFICATION				
		START DATE	COMPLETE DATE	TRAINEE INITIALS	TRAINER INITIALS	CERTIFIER INITIALS (IF REQUIRED)
7	Continuous Evaluation: TR: The Joint Team, The "Purple Book"; AFI 90-301, Inspector General Complaints Resolution; DAFI 90-302 The Inspection System of the Department of the Air Force; Local Policy					
7.1	Develop continuous evaluation procedures and battle rhythm					
7.2	Explain Wing Inspector General (IG) playbook/schedule					
8	Leave: TR: DAFI 36-3003, Military Leave Program, Local Policy					
8.1	Understand leave policy					
8.2	Explain Use or Lose leave					
8.3	Understand Emergency leave					
8.4	Understand Regular/Special Passes (authorized absence from duty)					
9	Awards: TR: AFMAN 36-2806 Awards and Memorialization Program; DAFPD 36-28, Awards Program					
9.1	Understand award schedule and implement recognition plan					
9.2	Murder Boards/Grading Packages					
10	Assignments: TR: DAFI 36-2110, Total Force Assignments, AFI 40-701, Medical Support to Family Member Relocation & Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP);					
10.1	Understand Command sponsorship					
10.2	Explain the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)					
10.3	Define Expedited Transfers					
10.4	Identify members for Developmental Special Duty (DSD) consideration					
10.5	Explain Retraining Process					
10.6	Explain Report Not Later Than Date (RNLT)/Report Not Earlier Than Date (RNETD) change requests					
10.7	Explain Time on Station (TOS) requirements for PCS eligibility					
10.8	Explain special assignments: EFMP/Exceptional Assignments requirements					
10.9	Understand Projected Departure Date (PDD) & Port Call Date					
10.10	Explain Base of Preference (BOP) requirements					
10.11	Understand Join Spouse Codes					
10.12	Understand Personnel Processing Codes (PPC)					
10.13	Understand PALACE CHASE/FRONT Programs					
10.14	Understand the Air Force Enlisted Classification Directory (AFECD)					
11	Budget: TR: DAFI 64-117, Government Purchase Card Program; AFI 65-601 v1,					
11.1	Explain How to purchase basic needs for your section (Office Supplies, Tools, Cold Weather gear)					
11.2	Prepare budget recommendations/requests for consideration					
11.3	Forecast, Price, and Budget necessary Temporary Duties (TDYs) for section					
12	Roles and Responsibilities: TR: AFI 38-101, Manpower & Organization, Then Enlisted Force Structure "The Brown Book"; AFI 36-2113, The First Sergeant; DAFI 36-2670, Total Force Development					
12.1	Understand Career Field Manager (CFM)/Functional Assignment Manager (FAM)/MAJCOM					
12.2	Understand 1st Sergeant Roles & Responsibilities					
12.3	Understand the Enlisted Development Team (EDT) process					
13	Resources & Programs: TR: AFI 44-172, Mental Health; AFI 51-304, Legal Assistance, Notary, Preventive Law, & Tax Programs; DAFI 36-2670, Total Force Development; AFMAN 44-197, Military Drug					
13.1	Explain the Unite Program (https://www.acc.af.mil/About-Us/The-Bridge/UNITE)					
13.2	Explain Fraud, Waste, and Abuse (FWA) Program					
13.3	Understand the Drug Demand Reduction (DDR) Program					
13.4	Understand Suicide Prevention Program and resources					
13.5	Promote Mental Health and what options are available for members					
13.6	Understand Legal Assistance Program- What services are available to members					
13.7	Understand Development Advisor (DA) Roles & Responsibilities					
13.8	Understand Enlisted Professional Military Education (EPME) eligibility					
13.9	Assist subordinates with navigating Defense Travel System (DTS) and routing procedures (POCs)					
13.10	Demonstrate understanding of the Air Force Sponsor program					
13.11	Explain unconscious bias and develop course of action for potential barriers in workcenter					
TASK NUMBER	TASKS, KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNICAL REFERENCES	CERTIFICATION				
		START DATE	COMPLETE DATE	TRAINEE INITIALS	TRAINER INITIALS	CERTIFIER INITIALS (IF REQUIRED)
14	Promotions: TR: DAFI 36-2406, Officer & Enlisted Evaluations Systems					
14.1	Understand Promotion process (eligibility chart, record verification, etc.)					
14.2	Explain Forced Distribution/Enlisted Force Development (EFD) Process					
14.3	Understand Below The Zone (BTZ) Process					
15	Reenlistment & Extension: TR: AFI 36-2606, Reenlistment & Extension of Enlistment					
15.1	Understand the Selective Retention Bonus (SRB) Program					
15.2	Explain the Importance of Career Job Reservations (CJR)					



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APPENDIX C. BASELINE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Optimizing USAF Enlisted Feedback

Crooks, Anastasia ... Vina, Chryslin

Supervisee Pre-Implementation Interview Questions:

Background Questions

1. What is your current rank and how long have you been in the Air Force?
2. How long have you been at the 366 CES?
3. What shop are you currently apart of? Have you been a part of any other shops?
4. How many units have you been in throughout your career?
5. How many supervisors have you had during your time in service?
6. Have you received a PN or MP before? If so, how many times, and at what ranks?
7. Are you currently in a supervisory role? If yes, how many Airmen do you supervise?

Current Feedback System Experience

8. How would you describe the current enlisted feedback process in your own words?
9. How often have you received formal feedback in the past year?
10. Do you feel the current feedback system adequately informs you of your performance standing? Why or why not? In what ways does your formal feedback connect to your promotion goals?
11. What aspects of the current feedback system do you find most valuable?
12. What aspects of the current feedback system do you find least effective?

Career Progression and Goal Setting

13. Are the standards required for you to promote clear to you?
14. Are the expectations of the next rank clear to you?
15. How does the current feedback system help you set measurable goals for promotion?
16. What information would be most valuable to receive in feedback sessions to help with your career progression?
17. How do you currently track your progress toward promotion requirements?
18. Do you feel the feedback you receive directly correlates to the results of the promotion board? Why or why not?
19. What resources do you currently use to guide your career progression outside of formal feedback?

System Inhibitors and Challenges

20. What barriers prevent you from receiving consistent, constructive feedback?
21. How does your workload impact the feedback process?
22. How comfortable do you feel discussing performance concerns with your supervisor?

Resource Identification

23. What tools or resources would help make the feedback process more effective?
24. What specific improvements would make the feedback system more valuable to you?
25. What kind of documentation or tracking would help you better understand your progress?
26. How could technology be leveraged to improve the feedback system?
27. Were you trained on the requirements of the feedback and evaluation process? If so, by whom?
28. What information should be included in a feedback tool to make it most useful?

FLOATING PROMPTS

1. "Could you tell us more about your experience?"
2. "Could you expand on that?"
3. "Please describe that in further detail"
4. "Please give us an example of a time that occurred"



Optimizing USAF Enlisted Feedback

Crooks, Anastasia ... Vina, Chryslin

Supervisor Pre-Implementation Interview Questions:

Background Questions

1. What is your current rank and how long have you been in the Air Force?
2. How long have you been at the 366 CES?
3. What shop are you currently apart of? Have you been part of any other shops?
4. How many units have you been in throughout your career?
5. Are you currently in a supervisory role? If yes, how many Airmen do you supervise?
6. How many members have you supervised during your time in service?
7. Have your troops ever received a PN or MP? If so, for what ranks and what were the circumstances?

Current Feedback System Experience

8. How would you describe the current enlisted feedback process in your own words?
9. How often have you given formal feedback in the past year?
10. Do you feel the current feedback system adequately informs your supervisees of their performance standing? Why or why not?
11. What aspects of the current feedback system do you find most valuable?
12. What aspects of the current feedback system do you find least effective?

Career Progression and Goal Setting

13. How does the current feedback system help you encourage measurable goals for supervisees?
14. In what ways does your formal feedback connect to your supervisees promotion goals?
15. What resources do you currently use to help guide career progression outside of formal feedback?

System Inhibitors and Challenges

16. What barriers prevent you from providing consistent, constructive feedback? What challenges do you face in providing quality feedback to your Airmen?
17. How does your workload impact the feedback process?
18. How comfortable do you feel discussing performance concerns with your subordinates?
19. What specific improvements would make the feedback system more valuable to you?
20. Approximately how many hours per week do you devote to supervisor duties?

Resource Identification

21. What tools or resources would help make the feedback process more effective?
22. What kind of documentation or tracking would help you make supervisee progress more understandable?
23. How could technology be leveraged to improve the feedback system?
24. What training do you think supervisors need to provide better feedback?
25. What information should be included in a feedback tool to make it most useful?

FLOATING PROMPTS

1. "Could you tell us more about your experience?"
2. "Could you expand on that?"
3. "Please describe that in further detail"
4. "Please give us an example of a time that occurred"

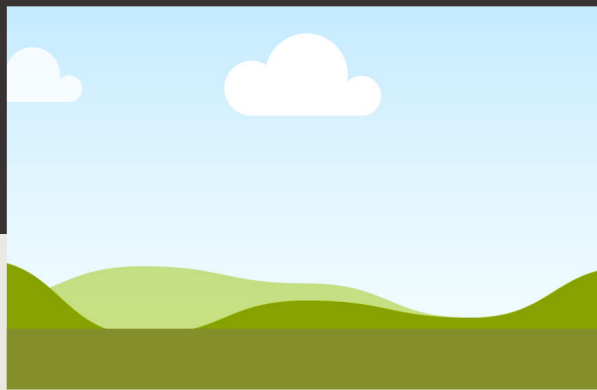


APPENDIX D. MVP 2.0 – PAYCE FRAMEWORK

THE PAYCE FRAMEWORK

PREPARE. ALIGN. YEAR MAP. CARRY OUT. EVALUATE

Welcome to PAYCE — a structured, living tool designed to improve feedback, goal alignment, and professional development between Airmen and their supervisors.



The PAYCE Framework is being tested as part of a pilot program—your honest feedback is crucial to improving it for future Airmen and supervisors.

CONTACT

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*Click here or scan
To submit feedback!*



THE PURPOSE OF PAYCE

The PAYCE Framework is a structured, repeatable, and collaborative process designed to support meaningful feedback, proactive goal-setting, and career development for enlisted Airmen. It empowers both supervisors and supervisees to move beyond checklist feedback and instead create shared, actionable plans for growth throughout the year.

BARRIERS WE HOPE TO ADDRESS

1. **Assumed Understanding with Rank** – Once Airmen reach a certain rank, there's often an assumption that they already know what to do, so supervisors stop asking questions or offering support.
 - This tool reintroduces structured conversations at every rank, ensuring no one gets overlooked just because they "look squared away."
2. **Support During Transitional Periods** – Airmen going through transitions, like PCS, deployments, or working under civilian supervisors, often lack mentorship or developmental guidance.
 - This tool provides a consistent framework that Airmen and supervisors can follow, regardless of who's in the seat or how often it changes.
3. **Supervisor Quality as a Limiting Factor** – When a supervisor is unavailable, inexperienced, or not invested, growth opportunities often stall.
 - This tool empowers Airmen to self-advocate and guides supervisors with clear prompts, helping both parties drive productive, developmental conversations.
4. **Inconsistent Communication During TDYs/Deployments** – Supervisors on TDY or deployed can't always provide timely mentorship, leading to gaps in feedback and planning.
 - This tool maintains continuity by offering a trackable structure that allows progress to continue, even when leadership is physically absent.
5. **Structuring the "How" in Leadership** – Many supervisors are expected to lead, but they've never been shown what that looks like in action.
 - This tool seeks to teach leadership through practice by guiding meaningful conversations that build trust, clarify goals, and demonstrate care in real time.

HOW IT WORKS?

PAYCE follows a 5-step framework for both supervisors & supervisees

SUPERVISORS

- **Prepare** – The supervisor prepares themselves by reviewing their troops' previous performances/documents
- **Align** – The supervisor coordinates a feedback session with their troop to discuss their goals and ambitions
- **Year Map** – The supervisor and Airman co-create a timeline of goals, actions, and check-ins
- **Carry Out** – Both parties follow through, providing support, feedback, and course correction as needed
- **Evaluate** – The team reflects on progress, revises goals, and prepares for the next cycle

SUPERVISEES

- **Prepare** – The Airman reflects independently to identify strengths, areas for growth, and personal goals
- **Align** – The Airman communicates their development needs and aspirations
- **Year Map** – The supervisor and Airman co-create a timeline of goals, actions, and check-ins
- **Carry Out** – Both parties follow through, providing support, feedback, and course correction as needed
- **Evaluate** – The team reflects on progress, revises goals, and prepares for the next cycle





SUPERVISORS

START HERE

CLICK ON EACH STEP



PREPARE



- Review prior feedback, EPRs, or development notes
- Gather relevant resources
- Schedule a focused session



ALIGN



- Go through Foundational Conversation Prompts
- Create SMART goals with the supervisee



YEAR MAP



- Use the Year Map Template to plan out goals, milestones, and timelines
- Document agreed-upon actions for follow-up



CARRY OUT



- Check in monthly/quarterly
- Provide resources
- Recognize progress and adjust where necessary



EVALUATE



- Revisit goals from the Year Map
- Discuss accomplishments and challenges
- Capture lessons learned and next steps

SUPERVISEES



START HERE

CLICK ON EACH STEP



PREPARE



- Review recent feedback, accomplishments, and challenges
- Prepare using Foundational Conversation prompts



ALIGN



- Share what matters to you in your career (e.g., training, PME, leadership)
- Ask for resources or opportunities that support your growth



YEAR MAP



- Create a year plan with your supervisor



CARRY OUT



- Keep the Year Map alive—this is your roadmap



EVALUATE



- Review goals and what was accomplished
- Identify barriers and solutions for next time





PREPARE



BLUF:

- Review prior feedback, EPRs, or development notes
- Gather relevant resources that may support professional growth
- Schedule a focused session



1

Prepare for a feedback session by reviewing your troop's documents and identifying key points:



- **SURF**
 - Have they completed ALS or NCOA (if eligible)?
 - Have they started or completed their CCAF?
- **Individual Training Record (retrieve from UTM)**
 - Are they up to date on Upgrade Training? Do they need to be upgraded?
- **Previous EPRs / EPBs and previous ACA forms**
 - Review performance progression (have they continued to meet/exceed standards? If not, how can it be improved?)
 - Identify opportunities to build a stronger EPB through volunteering, academics, or awards.
- **Personnel Information File (PIF)**
 - Do they have any adverse actions that may delay or prevent potential opportunities (i.e., control roster)

2

Understand Key Timelines



- BTZ eligibility and board date
- EPB Static Close Out Date (SCOD)
- PME windows (ALS, NCOA, etc)
- Career-specific events (Exercises, TDYs, deployments, etc)

3

Gather Supporting Resources:



- CCAF
- AFCOOL
- TA
- Retraining
- Local opportunities

4

Schedule a Feedback Session With Clear Expectations:



- Create a calendar invite
- Provide your troop with the PAYCE Framework PDF to prepare
- Express your expectations for the feedback session (ex. "Highlight portions of the PAYCE you do not understand so we can discuss them" or "Bring last years ACA so we can review", etc)

5

Review the Brown Book & PAYCE Framework as needed:



- Understand the Air Force's expectations of each rank and align it with your own performance expectations
- Understand the cycle of PAYCE to walk your troop through it and answer any questions



ALIGN





ALIGN



BLUF:

- Review the Foundational Conversation prompts
- Fill out this form to create SMART goals



REVIEW THE DEVELOPMENT CONVERSATION WITH YOUR TROOP

Review the **Foundational Conversations** attachment.

What additional information do you need? What goals are you interested in pursuing?

PRIORITIZE THEN CREATE SMART GOALS

Choose 2-4 realistic goals that your troop can strive for. Break down each goal into SMART objectives.

SMART Goals:

- **Specific** = What exactly is the goal? Is it clear and focused?
- **Measurable** = How will we know it's achieved? What metrics or milestones apply?
- **Achievable** = Is the goal realistic based on current resources, timelines, and readiness?
- **Relevant** = Does it align with the Airman's role, career goals, and mission needs?
- **Time-Bound** = When will this be completed or checked in on? Can we tie it to a date or event?

Example: I want to submit for a quarterly award package

SMART Goal: "I am going to volunteer for the booster club in February and enroll for a class in February towards my CCAF so I can submit a quarterly award package in March"

CLARIFY RESPONSIBILITIES AND CONFIRM ALIGNMENT

What are your **expectations and standards for your troop**?
What are your troop's expectations of you?

FLAG TIME-LINE READY ACTIONS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR TROOP'S YEAR MAP

Based on the SMART goals, **list out action items** with due dates and times. This list will be filled into the Year Map template.

SMART Goal: "I am going to volunteer for the booster club in February and enroll for a class in February towards my CCAF so I can submit a quarterly award package in March."

ACTION ITEM: (1) Volunteer for booster club president in Feb, (2) Take CCAF class in Feb, (3) Submit award package by 31 March



PREPARE



YEAR MAP





YEAR MAP



BLUF:

- Click [HERE](#) for the Year Map Template (excel sheet)
- Fill out the Year Map Template with your supervisee



ENTER NAME BELOW
SNUFFY
SRA

1

OPEN THE YEAR MAP TEMPLATE

Once its open, Insert your supervisee's name into the block and select their rank

Upcoming EPB SCOD	Days Until SCOD	Midterm Feedback Due
31-MAR-26	295	2-OCT-25

2

Once you select a rank, the following fields will auto-populate:

- Their upcoming EPB SCOD
- A countdown until their SCOD
- An estimated midterm feedback date

3

Fill in the Action List with any actionable items that were discussed during the Align Phase. You can categorize these actions and set reasonable deadlines for your troops to achieve them.

ACTION LIST				
Don	Action	Category	Deadline	Days til Du
☐	Volunteer	Volunteer	25-Aug-25	77
☐	Submit Quarterly Award	Awards	1-Oct-25	114
☐	Take 1 class for CCAF	Academic	3-Dec-25	177
☐	Find a mentor	Personal	1-Nov-25	145
☐				-
☐				-
☐				-
☐				-
☐				-

COMMON DATES TO INCLUDE
Followup Feedback Session
WAPS Testing
Quarterly Awards Submission Dates
Annual Awards Submission Dates
SCODs
Birthdays/Holidays
Planning Out Parental Leave
Planning Out Use/Lose
"Busy" Work Months
When to Take Academic Classes

Review the list of common dates and include as many as necessary to ensure your troop has a detailed plan of success for the year!

4

Any items you include in the Action List will auto-populate under the month the action is "due". This helps create urgency and keeps both supervisor and supervisee on track for goal completion.

OCTOBER-25		NOVEMBER-25		DECEMBER-25	
Due	Goal	Due	Goal	Due	Goal
01	Submit Quarterly Award	01	Find a mentor	03	Take 1 class for CCAF

5

Supervisors can use this layout to hold troops accountable during their Carry Out phase. Supervisors can review any completed or missed goals during the Evaluation phase to guide next year's improvements!





CARRY OUT



BLUF:

- Maintain communication with your supervisee regarding their goals
- Review the Action List with your troop regularly and encourage them to complete it!



USE THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS TO GUIDE PURPOSEFUL AND FOCUSED MONTHLY/QUARTERLY CHECK-INS



Goal Progress & Reflection

- What progress have you made toward your goals this month?
- What's one win you're proud of since we last spoke?
- What part of your Year Map feels most urgent right now?
- Have your goals shifted based on mission or personal needs?
- Are any goals unclear or starting to feel out of reach?

Timelines & Milestones

- Are we still aligned with your projected milestones?
- Do we need to adjust anything on the Year Map?
- Are there upcoming events (WAPS, BTZ, TAP, EFDP, ALS, etc.) that we should start prepping for?

Support & Barriers

- What's one thing that's made your progress easier?
- What's getting in your way—and how can I help remove that?
- Are you using all the resources available to you (TA, AFCCOL, etc.)?
- Is there a course, opportunity, or event you've heard about that we can explore?

Connection & Motivation

- Is there anything you need more (or less) of from me as your supervisor?
- How motivated are you feeling about your current goals?
- Do you feel seen and supported in your development?
- Are there any leadership or team dynamics that are affecting your growth?

Learning & Development

- What's something you've learned recently—on or off duty—that's helped you grow?
- Are there any skills or topics you're curious about developing more?
- Have you looked into your CFETP requirements or any level-up certifications?
- Would a shadowing or stretch assignment help you grow in your career field?

Wrap-Up & Follow-Through

- What's your next immediate step?
- What should I follow up on before our next check-in?
- Is there anything you'd like to track more formally or recognize as a milestone?



YEAR MAP



EVALUATE





EVALUATE



BLUF:

- Review the Year Map for goal completion
- Select new goals/focus areas for next year



Review the Year Map with your troop. Go through each goal or objective on the Year Map:

- Was it achieved, adjusted, or not met?
- What were the influencing factors (positive or negative)?
- Identify which goals will carry forward and which are no longer relevant.

GOAL REVIEW & YEAR MAP PROGRESS

GOAL(S)	Achieved / Not Met / Adjusted	NOTES
Ex) Study for WAPS testing 1 hour everyday from 1 April - 30 May	☐ Achieved ☐ Not Met ☒ Adjusted	1 hour per day was overwhelming/unrealistic. 2 hours/week is more manageable
Which goals or ideas should carry into the next cycle?		What are 1-2 new focus areas to consider next?



CARRY OUT





PREPARE



PURPOSE:

- This is an internal, self-guided phase to reflect on goals, values, challenges, and career interests.



Click to return to the main menu

Review the **Foundational Conversations attachment** and think about the following: (1) What do you want out of your Air Force career? (2) Are you considering staying in or getting out? (3) Are there any programs, assignments, or leadership opportunities that interest you?

What major life changes are you expecting, if any (Marriage/divorce, planning for a family, PCS'ing, deployments)? How might these events affect your stress levels or impact your workload?

Are you familiar with important timelines relevant to your career (i.e. BTZ window, WAPS testing, SCODs, ALS/NCOA dates, etc)? If not, write them down to discuss with your supervisor!



ALIGN





ALIGN



BLUF:

- Review the Foundational Conversation prompts with your supervisor
- Fill out this form to create SMART goals



Click to return to the main menu

REVIEW THE DEVELOPMENT CONVERSATION WITH YOUR SUPERVISOR

Review the **Foundational Conversations** attachment.

What additional information do you need? What goals are you interested in pursuing?

PRIORITIZE THEN CREATE SMART GOALS

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- **Achievable** = Is the goal realistic based on current resources, timelines, and readiness?
- **Relevant** = Does it align with the Airman's role, career goals, and mission needs?
- **Time-Bound** = When will this be completed or checked in on? Can we tie it to a date or event?

Example: "My goal is to get better at public speaking."

SMART Goal: "I will complete 2 public speaking activities (e.g., briefings or training) by May and request one peer eval."

CLARIFY RESPONSIBILITIES AND CONFIRM ALIGNMENT

What are the expectations and standards for the troop? What are the troop's expectations of the supervisor?

FLAG TIME-LINE READY ACTIONS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR YEAR MAP

Based on the SMART goals, **list out action items** with due dates and times. This list will be filled into the Year Map template.

SMART Goal = "I will complete 2 public speaking activities (e.g., briefings or training) by May and request one peer eval."
ACTION ITEM = Lead a CFETP training in April



PREPARE



YEAR MAP





YEAR MAP



BLUF:

- Click **HERE** for the Year Map Template
- Fill out the Year Map Template with your supervisor



ENTER NAME BELOW
SNUFFY
SRA

1

OPEN THE YEAR MAP TEMPLATE

Once its open, Insert your name into the block and select your rank

2

Once you select a rank, the following fields will auto-populate:

- Your upcoming EPB SCOD
- A countdown until your SCOD
- An estimated midterm feedback date

3

Fill in the Action List with any actionable items that were discussed during the Align Phase. You can categorize these actions and set reasonable deadlines for your troops to achieve them.

ACTION LIST				
Don	Action	Category	Deadline	Days til Du
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☐				-
☐				-
☐				-
☐				-
☐				-

COMMON DATES TO INCLUDE
Followup Feedback Session
WAPS Testing
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Annual Awards Submission Dates
SCODs
Birthdays/Holidays
Planning Out Parental Leave
Planning Out Use/Lose
"Busy" Work Months
When to Take Academic Classes

Review the list of common dates and include as many as necessary!

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Any items you include in the Action List will auto-populate under the month the action is "due". This helps create urgency and keeps both supervisor and supervisee on track for goal completion.

OCTOBER-25		NOVEMBER-25		DECEMBER-25	
Due	Goal	Due	Goal	Due	Goal
01	Submit Quarterly Award	01	Find a mentor	03	Take 1 class for CCAF

5

Supervisors can use this layout to hold troops accountable during their Carry Out phase. Supervisors can review any completed or missed goals during the Evaluation phase to guide next year's improvements!



ALIGN



CARRY OUT





CARRY OUT >

BLUF:

- Follow through with your goals and action items!



Click to return to the main menu

USE THESE STEPS TO HELP CARRY OUT YOUR GOALS



1

TAKE OWNERSHIP OF YOUR YEAR MAP

- Review your development goals monthly.
- Track progress (e.g. completed tasks, new certifications, leadership roles).
- Update your Year Map or digital tracker as you complete milestones.

2

SCHEDULE OR PROPOSE MONTHLY CHECK-INS

- Reach out to your supervisor if you need:
 - Feedback
 - Guidance on a stalled goal
 - Help accessing resources
 - More performance opportunities

3

ACTIVELY SEEK OPPORTUNITIES:

- Look for tasks, roles, or events that align with your goals (e.g., volunteer for a lead role, complete PME early, get involved with your unit).
- Apply for programs you discussed in the Align Phase (TA, AFCOOL, ALS, etc).

4

COMMUNICATE PROGRESS & BARRIERS

- Share your accomplishments to keep supervisors in the loop (ex. "I completed a course towards my CCAF. I am applying for another class next month.")
- Share your struggles and request guidance (ex. "I'm having trouble balancing this certification with my shifts—can we adjust my timeline?")

MONTHLY PROGRESS CHECKLIST:

- Review your Year Map or goals for this month
- Complete at least one action step towards a goal
- Keep track of your progress
- Schedule or complete a check-in with your supervisor
- Seek out new opportunities or learning resources
- Update any changes to your goal or timeline

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What progress did I make this month?
2. Write down at least 1–2 key wins or steps forward.
3. What challenged or slowed me down?
4. Be honest—was it time, motivation, lack of clarity, other priorities?
5. What feedback did I receive, and how did I apply it?
6. Do my goals still reflect where I want to go? Why or why not?
7. What do I need from my supervisor right now?
8. (Clarity, resources, time, support, mentorship)
9. What's one thing I'll do differently next month?



YEAR MAP



EVALUATE





BLUF:

- Review the Year Map for goal completion
- Select new goals/focus areas for next year



Review the Year Map with your supervisor. Go through each goal or objective on the Year Map:

- Was it achieved, adjusted, or not met?
- What were the influencing factors (positive or negative)?
- Identify which goals will carry forward and which are no longer relevant.

GOAL REVIEW & YEAR MAP PROGRESS

GOAL(S)	Achieved / Not Met / Adjusted	NOTES
Ex) Study for WAPS testing 1 hour everyday from 1 April – 30 May	☐ Achieved ☐ Not Met ☒ Adjusted	1 hour per day was overwhelming/unrealistic. 2 hours/week is more manageable
Which goals or ideas should carry into the next cycle?		What are 1–2 new focus areas to consider next?



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APPENDIX E. FOUNDATIONAL CONVERSATION PROMPTS

FOUNDATIONAL CONVERSATIONS: PROMOTION & ADVANCEMENT READINESS

(AB – A1C ONLY) DO YOU KNOW WHAT AIRMEN BELOW THE ZONE (BTZ) IS? WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN PURSUING THAT?

Airmen Below-the-Zone (BTZ) is a competitive early promotion program that offers Airmen the opportunity to promote to the next rank 6 months earlier.

☐ Do you know when you are eligible to compete for BTZ? <https://btzcalculator.com/>

☐ Do you know what criteria you need to compete?

☐ Are you interested in being postured to create a competitive package (i.e. being put up for volunteer opportunities, etc)

ENLISTED PERFORMANCE BRIEF (EPB) & STATIC CLOSE OUT DATE (SCOD)

☐ Do you know what an EPB is and what it is used for?

- An EPB is a standardized, board-ready document that consolidates data points reflecting an Airman's performance, potential, and professional development
- EPBs are analyzed during an EFDP (see below) to determine promotion statements.

☐ Do you know what a SCOD is? Do you know when your SCOD is and where to find it?

- The Static Closeout Date (SCOD) is the official date when your Enlisted Performance Brief (EPB) is scheduled to close out each year, based on your rank.
- SCODs can be found in AFI 36-2406 Officer and Enlisted Evaluation System

☐ Are you interested in opportunities to build a strong EPB (to include, but not limited to):

- Volunteering
 - Booster club
 - Airmen's Council
 - Participating as a proffer, MC, set-up, or clean-up crew for promotion ceremonies and Change of Command ceremonies
 - PTL
- Academic achievements
 - Taking courses towards a CCAF/Bachelor's degree
- Strong work performance
 - *AFSC dependent. Ask your supervisor about their expectations for work performance

WEIGHTED AIRMEN PROMOTION SYSTEM (WAPS) TESTING & THE ENLISTED FORCED DISTRIBUTION PANEL (EFDP)

☐ Do you know what the Weighted Airmen Promotion System (WAPS) test is?

- WAPS testing is part of the Air Force's promotion process for Staff Sergeant (E-5) and Technical Sergeant (E-6). It includes two tests:
 - The Promotion Fitness Examination (PFE) tests your general Air Force knowledge, including customs, history, and regulations. It's based on the Professional Development Guide (PDG).
 - The Specialty Knowledge Test (SKT) tests your specific job knowledge based on your career field's CDCs, AFIs, and technical manuals.

☐ Do you know when your next test is projected? Do you need any resources or study materials to prepare?

☐ Do you know what the Enlisted Forced Distribution Panel (EFDP) is?

- The EFDP is a process in the Air Force where large units nominate promotion-eligible Airmen to a panel led by the senior rater. The panel determines promotion recommendations (Promote Now, Must Promote, Not Ready Now, or Do Not Promote) based on discussions with the member's supervisory/rating chain.

☐ (If applicable) Would you like to schedule a date to discuss EFDP results with your supervisor?



FOUNDATIONAL CONVERSATIONS: TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT UNDERSTANDING

CAREER FIELD EDUCATION AND TRAINING PLAN (CFETP)

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Do you understand your CFETP and how it applies to your career field? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search your CFETP by typing "CFETP[insert AFSC] in the search bar of https://www.e-publishing.af.mil/Product-Index/ | ☐ Do you know when you are expected to complete your skill-level requirements? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (When applicable) establish a timeline for completion with your supervisor |
|--|---|

ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE BROWN BOOK AND YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AT THIS RANK? DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF OTHER RANKS?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Responsibilities of an Airman Basic (AB) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Air Force customs, courtesies, and standards of conduct • Adapting to military lifestyle and expectations • Performing basic tasks under close supervision • Striving to gain occupational and military proficiency • Beginning to understand chain of command and communication norms | ☐ Responsibilities of an Airman (Amn) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrating understanding of military customs and courtesies • Displaying compliance with Air Force standards (uniform, behavior, etc.) • Performing job-related tasks with growing confidence • Beginning to build technical proficiency • Still requires close supervision and mentoring |
| ☐ Responsibilities of an Airman 1st Class (A1C) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully compliant with Air Force standards and professional appearance • Developing and refining technical skills within their AFSC • Demonstrating reliability in multiple task areas • Beginning to contribute more actively to the team and mission • Still receiving consistent supervision, but with more independence | ☐ Responsibilities of a Senior Airman (SrA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a strong understanding of Air Force standards and professionalism • Sets the example in customs, courtesies, dress & appearance • Shows proficiency in assigned duties and tasks • Pursues 5-skill level completion and begins applying technical knowledge • Begins taking initiative in team tasks and contributing ideas • Prepares for leadership roles by observing and learning from NCOs • Receives routine supervision, but functions with increasing independence |
| ☐ Responsibilities of a Staff Sergeant (SSgt) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embraces and enforces Air Force standards, mentoring junior Airmen • Begins full transition into Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) responsibilities • Completes and applies 5- or 7-skill level training • Manages and supervises daily work center operations • Leads and develops junior Airmen, providing feedback and accountability • Takes ownership of assigned missions and ensures task completion • Acts as the first-line supervisor and enforcer of standards • Pursues Professional Military Education (ALS) and personal development | ☐ Responsibilities of a Technical Sergeant (TSgt) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Models exemplary conduct in line with core values and professionalism • Serves as a technical expert in the career field • Manages people, programs, and resources to accomplish mission objectives • Mentors SSgts and junior Airmen on leadership and career progression • Balances supervisory duties with hands-on technical tasks • Leads by example, holding others accountable while developing leadership potential • Prepares for SNCO responsibilities and continues PME (e.g., NCOA) |



FOUNDATIONAL CONVERSATIONS: SITUATIONAL ADD-ONS (USE WHEN APPLICABLE)

IF THE TROOP IS APPROACHING THE END OF HIS/HER ENLISTMENT

- ☐ If the troop is approaching the last 1–2 years of their contract, discuss the following:
 - **The Re-Enlistment vs Extending Process**
 - Are they interested in Re-Enlisting or Extending?
 - Do they understand the process and eligibility requirements for Re-enlistment IAW DAFI 36-2606?
 - Do they understand the difference between re-enlisting and extending is?
 - Do they understand the pros/cons of both options?
 - **Transition Assistance Program (TAP)**
 - If they are interested in getting out of the Air Force, make an appointment with the Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

THE TROOP IS ELIGIBLE TO PCS FROM THEIR CURRENT DUTY STATION

- ☐ Do they know what Base of Preference (BOP) is? Do they know what is currently available to them?
 - Review DAFI 36-2110, Base of Preference Program for information regarding BOP

IF THE TROOP IS INTERESTED IN ALTERNATE CAREERS/RETRAINING

- ☐ Is the troop a First Term Airman?
 - First Term Airmen are individuals who are on the: (1) first enlistment (including Airmen who have extended their enlistments); (2) first EAD tour; or (3) first enlistment with prior active service of less than 24 months.
 - **First Term Airman Retraining Program.** The First Term Airman Retraining Program is designed to retrain First Term Airmen in conjunction with a reenlistment, into skills where shortages exist, and additionally, allows a limited number of Airmen the opportunity to pursue other career paths in the AF

If the troop is NOT a First Term Airman, they may qualify for the Noncommissioned Officer Retraining Program

- **The Noncommissioned Officer Retraining Program** is designed to retrain second-term and career Airmen from overage Air Force Specialties into shortage specialties to optimize the enlisted force to best meet current and future mission needs.

*Review the **AFMAN 36-2100, Military Utilization and Classification**, for more information

IF THE TROOP IS PROFICIENT IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

- ☐ Are they interested in taking the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) in their target language?
 - The DLPT is a test that measures one's proficiency in a specific foreign language.
 - <https://www.dlflc.edu/resources/dlpt-guides/>
- ☐ If they have taken the DLPT, do they qualify for the Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus (FLPB)?
 - The FLPB is a monetary incentive paid with funds allocated by the DoD
 - Review the DAFI 36-4005, Chapter 3 for FLPB eligibility

IF THE TROOP IS INTERESTED IN DEVELOPMENTAL SPECIAL DUTIES

- ☐ The Air Force has 10 Special Duty Identifiers (SDIs) as enlisted DSD positions. They require Airmen who can lead, mentor, and develop other Airmen:
 - 8A100, Career Assistance Advisor (CAA)
 - 8B000, Military Training Instructor (MTI)
 - 8B100, Military Training Leader (MTL)
 - 8B200, U.S. Air Force Academy Military Training NCO (AMT)
 - 8C000, Airman and Family Readiness Center NCO (RNCO)
 - 8F000, First Sergeant
 - 8G000, USAF Honor Guard NCO
 - 8H000, Airman Dorm Leader (ADL)
 - 8R000, Enlisted Accessions Recruiter
 - 8T000, Professional Military Education (PME) Instructor

Review **DAFI 36-2110, Total Force Assignments** for more information

IF THE TROOP IS INTERESTED IN COMMISSIONING

Review **DAFMAN 36-2032, Military Recruiting and Accession** for more information

- Airman Scholarship and Commissioning Program (ASCP)
- Scholarships for Outstanding Airmen to ROTC (SOAR)
- Professional Officer Course – Early Release Program (POC-ERP)
- Senior Leader Enlisted Commissioning Program (SLECP)
- Nurse Enlisted Commissioning Program (NECP)
- Interservice Physician Assistant Program (IPAP)
- Doctor of Physical Therapy Program (DPT)
- Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology Program
- Enlisted to Medical Degree Preparatory Program (EMDP2)
- Leaders Encouraging Airmen Development (LEAD)
- Enlisted to Funded Legal Education Program (E-FLEP)



FOUNDATIONAL CONVERSATIONS: RESOURCE SHEET

ARE YOU AWARE OF THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU AS A MILITARY MEMBER?

Log in to MyPay (DFAS) and click on Personal Statement of Military Compensation (PSMC), and click on "Additional Considerations."

- This page will display your military benefits, including retirement benefits, discount services (such as education and travel), insurance programs, and more.

View all your Air Force Benefits at

<https://myairforcebenefits.us.af.mil>

- Airman Services
- Casualty / Survivor
- Education
- Family Services
- Health Care & Life Insurance
- Pay
- Permanent Change of Station (PCS) / Relocation
- Social Security
- Transitioning & Retirement
- Veterans Affairs (VA)

Academic Resources

- AFCCOL – Credentialing & licensing support for enlisted members preparing to transition into civilian careers
- CCAF – Community College of the Air Force associate degree program
- AFVEC – Virtual platform for managing educational goals and funding requests
- Tuition Assistance (TA) – Financial support for college courses while on active duty
- SkillBridge – Career skill training or internships for transitioning Airmen
- LEAP – Language Enabled Airman Program
- Total Force Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Program – Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus and related development



YEAR MAP TEMPLATE (PDF PRINTABLE)



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APPENDIX G. PILOT STUDY SURVEY QUESTIONS

Feedback on the PAYCE Framework [🔗](#)

* Required

Demographics

1. Rank *

- ☐ A1C
- ☐ SrA
- ☐ SSgt
- ☐ TSgt
- ☐ MSgt
- ☐ Other

2. First & Last Name *

3. Phone Number *

4. Email *



Supervisors

7. Which supervisees did you conduct this study with? (Rank First & Last - list as many names as applicable) *

8. What stage of Phase III are you providing feedback for? *

- ☐ Initial (Prepare, Align, Year Map) - Supervisors
- ☐ Midterm (Carry Out) - Supervisors
- ☐ Final (Evaluate) - Supervisors



Supervisees

9. Which supervisor did you conduct this study with? (Rank First & Last) *

10. What stage of Phase III are you providing feedback for? *

- ☐ Initial (Prepare, Align, Year Map) - Supervisees
- ☐ Midterm (Carry Out) - Supervisees
- ☐ Final (Evaluate) - Supervisees



Initial Feedback (Prepare, Align, Year Map) - Supervisors

11. What date did you complete your initial check-in with your supervisee(s)? *

12. How was this check-in conducted? *

- ☐ Email
- ☐ In Person
- ☐ Microsoft Teams
- ☐ Phone Call
- ☐ Text
- ☐ Other

13. Was this check-in conducted in conjunction with an ACA? (not required) *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No



14. Initial Feedback Questions *

	Yes	Somewhat	No
The 'Prepare' section improved the focus of my conversation with my supervisee(s).	☐	☐	☐
The 'Align' section improved my understanding of the needs of my supervisee(s).	☐	☐	☐
The 'Year Map' section improved my understanding of this year's benchmarks and goals for my supervisee(s).	☐	☐	☐
Overall my supervisee(s) seemed more engaged than previous initial feedback sessions.	☐	☐	☐
Overall, the initial check-in saved me time as a supervisor.	☐	☐	☐

15. What was your overall experience conducting this check-in with the supervisee(s)? *

16. What suggestions do you have for improving this framework? What can we add, or take away, that would make this framework better? *



Initial Feedback (Prepare, Align, Year Map) - Supervisees

17. What date did you complete your initial check-in with your supervisor? *

18. How was this check-in conducted? *

- ☐ Email
- ☐ In Person
- ☐ Microsoft Teams
- ☐ Phone Call
- ☐ Text
- ☐ Other

19. Was this check-in conducted in conjunction with an ACA? (not required) *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No



20. Initial Feedback Questions *

	Yes	Somewhat	No
The 'Prepare' section improved my understanding of the career paths that are realistic and available to me.	☐	☐	☐
The 'Align' section improved my understanding of the steps necessary to achieve my goals.	☐	☐	☐
The 'Year Map' section improved my understanding of this year's benchmarks and suspense's for my goals.	☐	☐	☐
Overall my supervisor provided more focused and purposeful direction than previous initial feedback sessions.	☐	☐	☐
Overall, the initial check-in provided more in-depth guidance as a supervisee.	☐	☐	☐

21. What was your overall experience conducting this check-in with your supervisor? *

22. What suggestions do you have for improving this framework? What can we add, or take away, that would make this framework better? *



Midterm Feedback (Carry Out) - Supervisors

23. What date did you complete your midterm check-in with your supervisee(s)? *

24. How was this check-in conducted? *

- ☐ Email
- ☐ In Person
- ☐ Microsoft Teams
- ☐ Phone Call
- ☐ Text
- ☐ Other

25. Was this check-in conducted in conjunction with an ACA? (not required) *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

26. Midterm Feedback Questions *

	Yes	Somewhat	No
The 'Carry Out' section helped me provide more purposeful guidance and direction to my supervisee(s).	☐	☐	☐
Overall my supervisee(s) seemed more engaged than previous midterm feedback sessions.	☐	☐	☐
Overall, the midterm check-in saved me time as a supervisor.	☐	☐	☐



27. What was your overall experience conducting this check-in with your supervisee(s)? *

28. What suggestions do you have for improving this framework? What can we add, or take away, that would make this framework better? *



Midterm Feedback (Carry Out) - Supervisees

29. What date did you complete your midterm check-in with your supervisor? *

30. How was this check-in conducted? *

- ☐ Email
- ☐ In Person
- ☐ Microsoft Teams
- ☐ Phone Call
- ☐ Text
- ☐ Other

31. Was this check-in conducted in conjunction with an ACA? (not required) *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No



32. Midterm Feedback Questions *

	Yes	Somewhat	No
The 'Carry Out' section helped me progress toward my goals in a measurable way.	☐	☐	☐
Overall my supervisor provided more focused and purposeful direction than previous midterm feedback sessions.	☐	☐	☐
Overall, the midterm check-in provided more in-depth guidance as a supervisor.	☐	☐	☐

33. What was your overall experience conducting this check-in with your supervisor? *

34. What suggestions do you have for improving this framework? What can we add, or take away, that would make this framework better? *



Final Feedback (Evaluate) - Supervisors

35. What date did you complete your final check-in with your supervisee(s)? *

36. How was this check-in conducted? *

- ☐ Email
- ☐ In Person
- ☐ Microsoft Teams
- ☐ Phone Call
- ☐ Text
- ☐ Other

37. Was this check-in conducted in conjunction with an ACA? (not required) *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No



38. Midterm Feedback Questions *

	Yes	Somewhat	No
The 'Evaluate' section helped me stay updated on the progress of my supervisee(s), and recommend meaningful adjustments to their goals.	☐	☐	☐
Overall my supervisee(s) seemed more engaged than previous final feedback sessions.	☐	☐	☐
Overall, the final check-in saved me time as a supervisor.	☐	☐	☐

39. What was your overall experience conducting this check-in with your supervisee(s)? *

40. What suggestions do you have for improving this framework? What can we add, or take away, that would make this framework better? *



Final Feedback (Evaluate) - Supervisees

41. What date did you complete your final check-in with your supervisor? *

42. How was this check-in conducted? *

- ☐ Email
- ☐ In Person
- ☐ Microsoft Teams
- ☐ Phone Call
- ☐ Text
- ☐ Other

43. Was this check-in conducted in conjunction with an ACA? (not required) *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No



44. Midterm Feedback Questions *

	Yes	Somewhat	No
The 'Evaluate' section helped me keep track of my progress toward my ambitions and make meaningful adjustments to my goals.	☐	☐	☐
Overall my supervisor provided more focused and purposeful direction than previous final feedback sessions.	☐	☐	☐
Overall, the final check-in provided more in-depth guidance as a supervisee.	☐	☐	☐

45. What was your overall experience conducting this check-in with your supervisor? *

46. What suggestions do you have for improving this framework? What can we add, or take away, that would make this framework better? *

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APPENDIX H. CLOSING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Optimizing USAF Enlisted Feedback

Crooks, Anastasia ... Vina, Chryslin

Supervisee Post-Implementation Interview Questions:

MVP Effectiveness

1. How has your experience with the new feedback tool compared to the previous system?
2. In what ways has the MVP helped you understand your performance standing?
3. How has the MVP affected your ability to set measurable goals toward promotion?
4. Which features of the MVP did you find most useful? Why?
5. Which features of the MVP did you find least useful? Why?

Implementation Experience

6. What challenges did you encounter when using the new feedback tool?
7. How intuitive was the MVP to use? What aspects were confusing?
8. How much time did the new process take compared to the previous approach?
9. Did you require additional training to use the MVP effectively? If yes, please explain.
10. How consistently were you able to implement the new feedback process?

Impact Assessment

11. How has the MVP changed your feedback conversations with your supervisor?
12. Has the frequency of feedback changed since implementing the MVP? In what ways?
13. How has the MVP affected your understanding of promotion requirements?
14. In what ways has the MVP changed how you approach your career development?
15. Has the MVP helped address any of the challenges you previously identified in the feedback system?

Resource Evaluation

16. What additional resources were required to implement the MVP effectively?
17. Were there any unexpected costs or challenges associated with the MVP?
18. How sustainable do you think this solution is for long-term use?
19. What support would you need to continue using this solution?
20. What improvements or modifications would make the MVP more effective?

Overall Assessment

21. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate the effectiveness of the MVP in improving the feedback system?
22. Would you recommend implementing this solution across other units? Why or why not?
23. What aspects of the MVP should be preserved in any future iterations?
24. What aspects of the MVP should be modified or removed in future iterations?
25. How has the MVP affected morale and career motivation in your unit?

Focus Group Questions

26. What common challenges have you observed with the current feedback system?
27. How has the implementation of the MVP affected team dynamics?
28. What unexpected benefits or drawbacks emerged during the MVP implementation?
29. How do you think this solution would scale to larger units or different mission types?
30. What recommendations would you make for Air Force-wide implementation?

FLOATING PROMPTS

1. "Could you tell us more about your experience?"
2. "Could you expand on that?"
3. "Please describe that in further detail"
4. "Please give us an example of a time that occurred"



Optimizing USAF Enlisted Feedback

Crooks, Anastasia ... Vina, Chryslin

Supervisor Post-Implementation Interview Questions:

MVP Effectiveness

1. How has your experience with the new feedback tool compared to the previous system?
2. In what ways has the MVP helped your troop understand their performance standing?
3. How has the MVP affected your ability to help your troops set measurable goals toward promotion?
4. Which features of the MVP did you find most useful? Why?
5. Which features of the MVP did you find least useful? Why?

Implementation Experience

6. What challenges did you encounter when using the new feedback tool?
7. How intuitive was the MVP to use? What aspects were confusing?
8. How much time did the new process take compared to the previous approach?
9. Did you require additional training to use the MVP effectively? If yes, please explain.
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Impact Assessment

11. How has the MVP changed your feedback conversations with your subordinates?
12. Has the frequency of feedback changed since implementing the MVP? In what ways?
13. How has the MVP affected your understanding of promotion requirements?
14. In what ways has the MVP changed how you approach your career development?
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28. What unexpected benefits or drawbacks emerged during the MVP implementation?
29. How do you think this solution would scale to larger units or different mission types?
30. What recommendations would you make for Air Force-wide implementation?
31. *Address any specific form responses.*

FLOATING PROMPTS

1. "Could you tell us more about your experience?"
2. "Could you expand on that?"
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4. "Please give us an example of a time that occurred"



Optimizing USAF Enlisted Feedback

Crooks, Anastasia ... Vina, Chryslin

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Optimizing USAF Enlisted Feedback

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2. "Could you expand on that?"
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APPENDIX I. MVP 3.0

Ratee Name: _____ Unit: _____ Rater Name: _____ Date: _____

1. PREPARE

Begin by going through some initial questions to get to know the Ratee. The example questions are *suggestions* – Rater's are free to curate the conversation as they see fit. Afterwards, the Rater should discuss the Ratee's potential Major Life Events and areas of interest.

Example Initial Guiding Question:

1. How do you prefer to learn: hands on, formal training, verbal mentoring, online resources?
2. How do you prefer to receive feedback on your performance?
3. What type of support from your peers or supervisors helps you be more effective?
4. Is there anything you wish you understood better about your role or the Air Force overall?

(Optional) For more guiding questions, click on the links below:

- **Icebreaker & Small Talk** (Quick "get-to-know-you" questions, etc.)
- **Personal Interests & Hobbies** (Hobbies, favorite media, leisure activities, etc.)
- **Work & Career** (Job experiences, professional achievements, work habits, etc.)
- **Teaming & Collaboration** (Working styles, valued traits in teams, etc.)
- **Values & Motivation** (Personal philosophies, causes you care about, etc.)
- **Reflection** (Personal growth, challenges overcome, etc.)

Notes:

Is the Ratee anticipating any Major Life Events this year?

Check all that are applicable. Relevant Information will be populated on page 2.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Vacation plans (CONUS, OCONUS, etc.)
☐ Wanting to start a family/New addition(s) to family
☐ Family concerns (sick family members, etc.)
☐ Change in marital status (marriage, etc.)
☐ Moving (out of dorms/off base/new home) | ☐ Making a large purchase (buying a house, car, etc.)
☐ Pursuing academic career (CCAF, bachelor's degree, master's degree, etc.)
☐ Deployment
☐ Eligible for WAPS testing |
|---|---|

What other information is the Ratee interested in?

Check all that are applicable. Relevant Information will be populated on page 2.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ What is a Static Close Out Dates (SCODs)? When is my SCOD ?
☐ What is an Enlisted Performance Brief (EPB)? What should I include on my EPB ?
☐ What is the Weighted Airmen Promotion System (WAPS) Test? When is my test date?
☐ What is the Enlisted Force Distribution Panel (EFDP)? How does it apply to me?
☐ What is a Career Field Education & Training Plan (CFETP)? How does it apply to me?
☐ What is a First Term Airmen (FTA)? What benefits do I have as an FTA ?
☐ What benefits are allotted to me as member of the United States Air Force?
☐ What are Developmental Special Duties (DSDs)? How can I apply for these opportunities? | ☐ I want to pursue my education, what academic resources are available to me?
☐ I am interested in learning a new language / I can speak multiple languages , what resources are available to me? How can I benefit from these skills?
☐ I am interested in Commissioning , what opportunities are available to me? What should my career goals look like?
☐ I am interested in making a career and becoming a Chief , what should my career goals look like?
☐ I am interested in pursuing career opportunities outside of the military , what resources are available to me?
☐ I am seeking more mentorship/to be a mentor , what resources are available? |
|---|--|



Ratee Relevant Information Sheet (Printable)

Clear Page

Email Page

Type directly into the blue box to add or delete information. Click "Clear Page" to delete all page contents. Click "Email" to email the document. Provide this document to the Ratee for reference.

2



2. ALIGN

Raters should discuss future development based on Ratee's anticipated life events and potential interests highlighted in the Prepare phase. Where applicable, create SMART goals and discuss deliverables to drive Ratee performance.

Prioritize and Create SMART Goals Based on Interests / Aspirations

Develop realistic goals that the ratee can strive for based on the discussed interests. Break down each goal into SMART objectives.

The intent is for these goals to be transferred to the Year Map.

SMART Goals:

- **Specific** = What exactly do you want to accomplish? Who is involved? Where will it happen? Why is it important?
- **Measurable** = How will you know you've met your goal? What will you measure, and how?
- **Achievable** = Is this goal realistic? What steps will you take? What resources do you need?
- **Relevant** = Does it align with your role, career goals, and mission needs?
- **Time-Bound** = When will you achieve this goal? What is your deadline?

Click below for a SMART Goal **example**

Goal Example

Click below for a SMART Goal **template**

Goal Template



3. YEAR MAP									
Input the Ratee Name and select their Rank from the drop-down menu. This will auto-populate relevant timelines for the Ratee. Click on the cell "Jan-2026" and select the preferred start date. The calendar will auto-populate the calendar year based on the start date. Input relevant goals/dates into the calendar by typing directly into the text boxes.									
Enter Ratee Name & Rank	Today's Date	EPB SCOD	Days Until SCOD	Potential Quarterly Check-in Dates				% of Goals Completed	
	18 Nov 2025			Q1		Q2		0.00%	
				Q3		Q4			
Relevant Dates:									
Due Date	Jan-2026	✓	Due Date	Feb-2026	✓	Due Date	Mar-2026	✓	
		☐			☐			☐	
		☐			☐			☐	
		☐			☐			☐	
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		☐			☐			☐	
		☐			☐			☐	
Due Date	Apr-2026	✓	Due Date	May-2026	✓	Due Date	Jun-2026	✓	
		☐			☐			☐	
		☐			☐			☐	
		☐			☐			☐	
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		☐			☐			☐	
Due Date	Jul-2026	✓	Due Date	Aug-2026	✓	Due Date	Sep-2026	✓	
		☐			☐			☐	
		☐			☐			☐	
		☐			☐			☐	
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Due Date	Oct-2026	✓	Due Date	Nov-2026	✓	Due Date	Dec-2026	✓	
		☐			☐			☐	
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5. EVALUATION					
Based on the Ratee's performance throughout the year, the Rater will evaluate if the Ratee is proficient in the four Airmen Leadership Qualities (ALQs). Proficiency ranges from Needs Improvement to Exceptionally Skilled.					
PROFICIENCY SCALE:					
1. Needs Improvement: Member needs further growth to enhance understanding and/or performance.	→	2. Developing: Member understands the ALQ and how that quality is illustrated in behavior but requires prompting to consistently demonstrate.	→	3. Proficient: Member understands the ALQ and demonstrates it consistently, illustrated through the Airmen's behavior, forming a part of their character.	→
			→	4. Highly Proficient: Member understands the ALQ and consistently illustrates it in their behavior while influencing other members in the organization to further develop the same quality.	→
					5. Exceptionally Skilled: Member consistently illustrates this ALQ in their behavior and proactively influences others' growth in this quality at an organizational scale.
Executing the Mission: Effectively uses knowledge initiative, and adaptability to produce timely, high quality, quantity results to positively impact the mission.					
Job Proficiency: Demonstrates knowledge and professional skill in assigned duties, achieving positive results and impact in support of the mission.				☐	☐
Initiative: Adjusts to changing conditions, to include plans, information, processes, requirements and obstacles in accomplishing the mission.				☐	☐
Adaptability: Assesses and takes independent or direct action to complete a task or mission that influences the mission or organization.				☐	☐
Comments					
Leading People: Fosters cohesive teams, effectively communicates, and uses emotional intelligence to take care of people and accomplish the mission.					
Inclusion & Teamwork: Collaborates effectively with others to achieve an inclusive climate in pursuit of a common goal or to complete a task or mission.				☐	☐
Emotional Intelligence: Exercises self-awareness; manages their own emotions effectively; demonstrates an understanding of others' emotions and appropriately manages relationships.				☐	☐
Communication: Articulates information in a clear and timely manner, both verbally and non-verbally, through active listening and messaging tailored to the appropriate audience.				☐	☐
Comments:					
Managing Resources: Manages assigned resources effectively and takes responsibility for actions and behaviors to maximize organizational performance.					
Stewardship: Demonstrates responsible management of assigned resources, which may include time, equipment, people, funds and/or facilities.				☐	☐
Accountability: Takes responsibility for the actions and behaviors of self and/or team; demonstrates reliability and transparency.				☐	☐
Comments:					
Improving the Unit: Demonstrates critical thinking and fosters innovation to find creative solutions and improve mission execution.					
Decision Making: Makes well-informed, effective and timely decisions under one's control that weigh constraints, risks, and benefits.				☐	☐
Innovation: Thinks creatively about different ways to solve problems, implements improvements and demonstrates calculated risk-taking.				☐	☐
Comments:					



5. EVALUATION (Continued)

Does the Ratee have any suggestions, recommendations, or feedback for the Rater? Check if applicable

- Set clearer expectations for my roles and responsibilities
- Offer constructive feedback more frequently
- Help me create clearer growth objectives
- Be more available for mentorship or guidance
- Give timely feedback on both strengths and areas for growth
- Involve the team more consistently in important decisions
- Foster a more inclusive and open team environment
- Allow more opportunities for me to take ownership and make decisions independently

Other:

Overall Evaluation Notes

Ratee Name

Date

Rater Name

Date



RATEE ACHIEVEMENT TRACKER

This is a tool for the Ratee to transfer their goals/achievements into a narrative statement and create direct inputs for their EPBs. The drop-down menus under Goal/Achievement are populated directly from inputs in the Year Map.

[illegible]

APPENDIX J. MVP 4.0 – PACE

1. PREPARE (RATER-LED, RATEE INPUT)			
The RATER may begin with the Get to Know Your RATEE section. The RATER shall then discuss any MAJOR LIFE EVENTS and RATEE INTERESTS with the RATEE to develop the RATEE Relevant Information Sheet (RRIS).			
RATEE Name (Last, First, MI)	Rank	Unit	RATEE Name (Last, First, MI)
	Amn		
OPTIONAL: Get to Know Your Airman (Background & Values) RATERs may use this section to better understand their RATEE beyond current duties. Skip if the RATER already has this context.			
Example Questions: - Tell me a little about your story so far—where are you from and what led you to the Air Force? - Outside of work, what do you enjoy or care about?			
Interested in asking different questions? Click below (Optional) - Values & Motivations (Personal drive, what matters to them as a person) - Life Outside Uniform (Hobbies, interests, etc.) - Strengths & Areas for Growth (Personal strengths, how they want to grow)			
Is the RATEE anticipating any MAJOR LIFE EVENTS this year? Check ALL that are applicable. Relevant Information will be populated in the RRIS (pg 2) .			
☐ Change in marital status (marriage, etc.) ☐ Deployment ☐ Family concerns (sick family members, etc.) ☒ Wanting to start a family/New addition(s) to family ☐ Making a large purchase (buying a house, car, etc.) ☐ Moving (out of dorms/off base/new home)		☐ Pursuing academic career (CCAF, bachelor's degree, master's degree, etc.) ☐ PCS ☐ WAPS testing ☐ Planning to re-enlist or extend ☐ Transitioning out of the military	
What other information is the RATEE INTERESTED in? Check ALL that are applicable. Relevant Information will be populated in the RRIS (pg 2) .			
Promotion & Performance ☐ What is Airman Below-the-Zone (BTZ)? Am I eligible? How do I pursue that? ☐ What is a Static Close Out Dates (SCODs)? When is my SCOD? ☐ What is an Enlisted Performance Brief (EPB)? What should I include on my EPB? ☐ What is the Weighted Airmen Promotion System (WAPS) Test? How do I find my test date? How do I prepare? ☐ What is the Enlisted Force Distribution Panel (EFD)? How does it apply to me?		Airman Benefits & Resources ☐ What benefits are allotted to me as member of the United States Air Force? Where can I find the AF Benefits Sheet? ☐ What is a First Term Airmen (FTA)? What benefits do I have as an FTA? ☐ I want to pursue my education, what academic resources are available to me? ☐ I am interested in learning a new language, what resources are available to me? ☐ I can speak multiple languages; how can I benefit from these skills? ☐ I am interested in athletic sports and want to participate in the AF World Class Athlete Program (WCAP) ☐ I am seeking more mentorship/to be a mentor, what resources are available? ☐ I need legal counseling; how can I contact the Area Defense Council (ADC)? What other resources are available to me?	
Career Pathways & Job Development ☐ What is a Career Field Education & Training Plan (CFETP)? How does it apply to me? ☐ I am interested in Commissioning, what opportunities are available to me? What should my career goals look like? ☐ I am interested in making a career and becoming a Chief, what should my career goals look like? ☐ I am interested in cross-training, what resources are available to me? ☐ What are Developmental Special Duties (DSDs)? How can I apply for these opportunities?		Transition & Future Planning ☐ I am interested in pursuing career opportunities outside of the military, what resources are available to me? ☐ I am planning to transition out of the military, what should I know? What resources are available to me?	

1



RATEE RELEVANT INFORMATION SHEET (RRIS)

Clear Page

Type directly into the blue box to add or delete information. Click "Clear Page" to delete all page contents.

2



1. PREPARE (RATER-LED)							
The RATER will fill out the following dates related to the RATEE. Dates for TAFMSD, ADCSD, DOR, and DAS can be found on RATEE'S SURF .							
TAFMSD	ADCSD	DOR	DAS	BTZ Window	EPB SCOD	PFA Dates	AEF Indicator
				Enter DOR			
Click on each of the four AIRMAN LEADERSHIP QUALITIES (ALQs) below. Each ALQ has 2-3 sub-categories known as MAJOR PERFORMANCE AREAS . The proficiency scale details what performance looks like at the Developing, Proficient, Highly Proficient, and Outstanding level.							
1.EXECUTING THE MISSION		2.LEADING PEOPLE		3.MANAGING RESOURCES		4.IMPROVING THE UNIT	
Major Performance Area	What does performance look like at the DEVELOPING level?	What does performance look like at the PROFICIENT level?	What does performance look like at the HIGHLY PROFICIENT level?	What does performance look like at the OUTSTANDING level?			
INCLUSION & TEAMWORK (Leading People)	Assists others in completing tasks	Collaborates effectively with others to achieve a positive environment and accomplish a goal or complete a task or mission	Works effectively with others to create a positive environment; exhibits flexibility and compromises when needed, and seeks	Leverages a broad network of relationships across the organization and fosters an environment where all individuals feel valued when accomplishing a task or			
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (Leading People)	Works to maintain composure during work challenges or difficult situations	Exercise self-awareness; remains composed and maintains healthy relationships in challenging or difficult situations	Adept at self-awareness and its impact on team performance; excels in dynamic situations and effectively builds strong connections while managing relationships	Exceptional at recognizing their own emotions and those of the team; leverages self-awareness to optimize organizational performance and builds strong, trusting relationships to secure commitment from others			
COMMUNICATION (Leading People)	Receives and shares information, but has room for improvement in clarity, delivery, or timeliness of messages	Actively listens; articulates verbally and non-verbally in a clear and timely manner	Effective listener, delivers and simplifies difficult or complicated messages to a wide range of audiences; enables open dialogue to inform decisions and	Great listener; inspires others with their words; conveys complicated messages in a clear, concise, and confident way; facilitates open dialogue across organizational levels; fosters relationships and			
RATER Notes (Job Standards, Performance Expectations, etc.)							



2. ALIGN (RATER-LED, RATEE INPUT)			
RATERS shall discuss future development based on RATEE'S interests and RATER expectations highlighted in the Prepare phase. Where applicable, the RATER shall assist the RATEE in creating SMART goals for both professional and personal ambitions.			
Prioritize and Create SMART Goals Based on Interests / Aspirations			
The RATER shall help the RATEE develop realistic goals that the RATEE can strive for based on the discussed interests. Break down each goal into SMART objectives.			
SMART Goals: • Specific = What exactly do you want to accomplish? Who is involved? Where will it happen? Why is it important? • Measurable = How will you know you have met your goal? What will you measure, and how? • Achievable = Is this goal realistic? What steps will you take? What resources do you need? • Relevant = Does it align with your role, career goals, and mission needs? • Time-Bound = When will you achieve this goal? What is your deadline?			
Click below for a SMART Goal example			
Goal Example			
Click below for a SMART Goal			
Goal Template			
RATEE Signature		Date	RATER Signature Date



3. CARRY OUT (RATEE TOOLKIT – YEAR MAP)							
The RATEE may use this Year Map as a tool to track yearly goals, due dates, and timelines. Review the Year Map with your RATER.							
Today's Date		Days Until DOR		PFA Dates	Quarterly Award Suspense Dates (Optional – Confirm dates with RATER)		% of Goals Completed
08 Dec 2025					Q1	30 Apr 2025	Q2 31 Jul 2025
					Q3	31 Oct 2025	Q4 01 Jan 2026
Relevant events to include in your timeline:							
Tips: Click “Jan-2026” and select a new date to change the starting month. Type directly into the blue boxes to add goals/plans							
Due Date	Jan-2026	✓	Due Date	Feb-2026	✓	Due Date	Mar-2026
Due Date	Apr-2026	✓	Due Date	May-2026	✓	Due Date	Jun-2026
Due Date	Jul-2026	✓	Due Date	Aug-2026	✓	Due Date	Sep-2026
Due Date	Oct-2026	✓	Due Date	Nov-2026	✓	Due Date	Dec-2026



3. CARRY OUT (RATEE TOOLKIT – NARRATIVE TRACKER)	
This tool helps the RATEE transfer their actions into a <u>narrative statement</u> and create inputs for their EPBs/awards packages	
Fill in all applicable inputs. If a question is not applicable, leave the text box blank. Not sure how to start? Click the example buttons below.	
Ex) Executing the Mission Ex) Leading People Ex) Managing Resources Ex) Improving the Unit	
1. ACTION: Briefly describe what you did. Start with a past-tense action verb (e.g., 'streamlined...', 'built...', 'led...', 'fixed...')	WHEN: What quarter did this action occur?
2. CONTEXT: What was happening before you took action? Describe the problem or task—what wasn't working, was slow, or needed to be improved?)	
3. BENEFICIARIES: How many people benefited from your action? Who were they? List the people or groups who were helped (e.g., "120 Airmen in 3 flights", "3 squadrons across the wing", etc.)	
4. NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES: If you had NOT done this action, what negative consequences may have occurred? (e.g. failed safety compliance, failed inspection, mission delayed for x amount of time, etc.)	
5. LEVEL OF IMPACT: What level did this impact? (e.g., Section, flight, squadron, wing level, MAJCOM level, base-wide, etc.)	
6. TIME: Did your action save time? How much and how often? (e.g. 'saved 4 hours per week for Airmen', 'cut processing from 30 days to 10', etc.)	
7. MONEY: Was any money saved or gained due to your action? (e.g., 'saved \$20k annually', 'avoided \$12K in rework', etc.)	
8. RECOGNITION: Was anyone (you, your team, the unit, etc.) recognized for this action? (e.g. coined by commander, won team award, etc.)	
GENERATE STATEMENT EPB Draft Narrative Statement	
More Resources	Add Statement to Narrative Tracker Clear All Inputs



RATEE NARRATIVE TRACKER[Clear Page](#)

Quarter 1 (January – March)

Quarter 2 (April – June)

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RATEE NARRATIVE TRACKER[Clear Page](#)

Quarter 3 (July – September)

Quarter 4 (October – December)

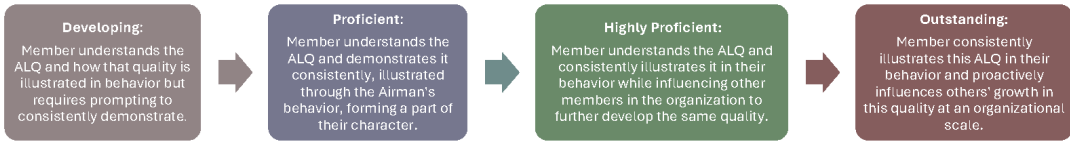
8



4. EVALUATION (RATER-LED)

The RATER will conduct a **MIDTERM** evaluation of the RATEE'S performance in all four of the Airman Leadership Qualities (ALQs). Proficiency ranges from Needs Improvement to Exceptionally Skilled.

PROFICIENCY SCALE:



Executing the Mission: Effectively uses knowledge initiative, and adaptability to produce timely, high quality, quantity results to positively impact the mission.	Not Met	Developing	Proficient	Highly Proficient	Outstanding
Job Proficiency: Demonstrates knowledge and professional skill in assigned duties, achieving positive results and impact in support of the mission.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Initiative: Adjusts to changing conditions, to include plans, information, processes, requirements and obstacles in accomplishing the mission.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Adaptability: Assesses and takes independent or direct action to complete a task or mission that influences the mission or organization.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Comments					
Leading People: Fosters cohesive teams, effectively communicates, and uses emotional intelligence to take care of people and accomplish the mission.	Not Met	Developing	Proficient	Highly Proficient	Outstanding
Inclusion & Teamwork: Collaborates effectively with others to achieve an inclusive climate in pursuit of a common goal or to complete a task or mission.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Emotional Intelligence: Exercises self-awareness; manages their own emotions effectively; demonstrates an understanding of others' emotions and appropriately manages relationships.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Communication: Articulates information in a clear and timely manner, both verbally and non-verbally, through active listening and messaging tailored to the appropriate audience.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Comments:					
Managing Resources: Manages assigned resources effectively and takes responsibility for actions and behaviors to maximize organizational performance.	Not Met	Developing	Proficient	Highly Proficient	Outstanding
Stewardship: Demonstrates responsible management of assigned resources, which may include time, equipment, people, funds and/or facilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Accountability: Takes responsibility for the actions and behaviors of self and/or team; demonstrates reliability and transparency.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Comments:					
Improving the Unit: Demonstrates critical thinking and fosters innovation to find creative solutions and improve mission execution.	Not Met	Developing	Proficient	Highly Proficient	Outstanding
Decision Making: Makes well-informed, effective and timely decisions under one's control that weigh constraints, risks, and benefits.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Innovation: Thinks creatively about different ways to solve problems, implements improvements and demonstrates calculated risk-taking.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Comments:					



5. EVALUATION (RATER Continued)

Does the RATEE have any suggestions, recommendations, or feedback for the RATER? **Check if applicable**

- Set clearer expectations for my roles and responsibilities
- Offer constructive feedback more frequently
- Help me create clearer growth objectives
- Be more available for mentorship or guidance
- Give timely feedback on both strengths and areas for growth
- Involve the team more consistently in important decisions
- Foster a more inclusive and open team environment
- Allow more opportunities for me to take ownership and make decisions independently

Other:

Evaluation Notes

RATEE Name

Date

RATER Name

Date



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GENERATIVE AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Generative artificial intelligence tools were used in preparing this work. Specifically, AI was employed for the following purposes: improving sentence clarity, grammar, formatting, assistance with writing and debugging code for the PACE PDF, and assistance in conducting systematic thematic analysis of transcript data. The use of these tools was approved according to institutional and faculty guidance, in alignment with NPS policy on generative AI use. ChatGPT, Perplexity AI, and Otter AI were the AI models used.

All recommendations and suggestions provided by the AI were reviewed and applied at the author's discretion, and final editorial decisions were made by the authors to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the content. All ideas, arguments, interpretations, and analyses presented in this work are entirely the authors' own. Efforts were made to mitigate any risks related to AI-generated inaccuracies, over-reliance on automated recommendations, or misuse of field-specific terminology by verifying changes and consulting with academic resources when appropriate. All AI-generated outputs were independently verified for factual accuracy before inclusion.



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