

Identifying Process Related Recruiting and Retention Challenges at U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)*



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Understanding the Issues

One of the priority missions for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is preventing terrorists and terrorist's weapons, including weapons of mass destruction, from entering the United States. Other focuses of CBP, specifically the Border Patrol include, but are not limited to, interdicting illegal drugs and other contraband, apprehending persons entering the country illegally, enforcing immigration laws, and protecting U.S. agriculture from pests and diseases. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks heightened the need for increased border security, and as a result, President Bush called on CBP to dramatically increase its number of Border Patrol Agents. This effort remains ongoing and as more challenges are presented, the requirement to aggressively recruit, train, and retain more Border Patrol Agents remains a top priority.

This required surge in the number of Border Patrol Agents, combined with the need to widen and deepen agent skill sets to counter new terrorist threats presents unique recruiting and retention challenges. CBP has had a difficult, challenging, and constantly evolving mission, even prior to the new security requirements. The new requirements put an even greater strain on agents and the agency. In the face of these challenges, CBP leadership remains focused on maintaining quality standards for recruiting agents. Whether recruited from one of the Nation's top universities or after military service, the same rigorous standards apply to all candidates. These standards include: a written test, command and discipline requirements, physical fitness assessment, Spanish language proficiency, and a rigorous background investigation among others.

CBP and Border Patrol leadership have indicated that these same stringent standards lead to challenges in recruiting and retaining candidates who would ultimately become Border Patrol Agents. In some cases, data has shown that a pool of more than 30 candidates identified in the recruiting process may only yield one Border Patrol Agent. CBP and Border Patrol leadership attribute this challenge to the rigorous background investigation, Spanish language proficiency, command and discipline requirements, and sometimes challenging initial duty location.

Once candidates have become Border Patrol Agents, challenging work/life conditions and high marketability of an experienced Border Patrol Agent present retention challenges. In an effort to address these challenges, CBP leadership are considering initiatives such as tuition reimbursement and 'stay' bonuses within the Federal government among other options to increase their retention numbers. While these efforts are a start, additional recommendations must be identified for addressing challenges in recruitment and retention among new, recently recruited Border Patrol Agents and those with approximately one to three years of experience. These combined recruiting and retention challenges make meeting the new staffing surge requirements even more difficult.

The purpose of this concept paper is to present CPB leadership with a recommended approach to identify the root-cause(s) of existing recruiting and retention challenges with new, recently recruited Border Patrol Agents and those with approximately one to three years of experience. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)'s strategy to identifying these challenges focuses on documenting current recruiting and retention processes, analyzing associated data to identify trends that may contribute to these challenges, and developing recommendations to address these trends.

Approach

Common process-related challenges that may cause inefficiencies or lack of optimal performance include:

- **Process and effort duplication** – duplication of effort caused by redundant processes may be a result of lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities
- **Process and data alignment** – inaccurate process results may result from the wrong data either being provided as an input or produced as an output
- **Information availability** – lack of or untimely information sharing required for processes to perform optimally may be a result unclear reporting relationships within the organization

In order to accurately identify the root cause(s) of CBP's recruiting and retention challenges, PwC recommends that CBP document their current recruiting and retention processes, including all relevant process information such as policies and procedures, supporting systems among others. Following the documentation effort, PwC recommends a detailed analysis of the recruiting and retention process data to identify information trends that potentially contribute to recruitment and retention challenges. Finally, the results of the analysis should be used to develop and prioritize recommendations for addressing current challenges.

To accomplish this, PwC recommends the following three-phased approach to assist CBP and Border Patrol leadership in addressing current recruiting and retention challenges:

- **Phase I: Document Current State of Processes** – document current recruitment and retention processes to provide a baseline for identifying recruiting and retention challenges.
- **Phase II: Analyze Process Data** – analyze recruiting and retention process data to identify trends that may be the root-cause of any challenges as well as improvement opportunities.
- **Phase III: Develop Recommendations** – develop recommendations to address findings in Phase II and suggest plan of action.

Phase 1: Document Current State of Processes

Documenting the current state of recruiting and retention processes will provide CBP and Border Patrol leadership a thorough understanding of internal operations and will assist in understanding the root-causes of current recruitment and retention challenges. Some questions one might want to inquire about regarding root-causes may be: is the high ratio of candidates not graduating due to language requirements; at which point in the on-boarding process are background investigations conducted; is an inefficient vetting process performed during recruiting? The critical first step in answering these and similar questions is to leverage existing process information to thoroughly document the current processes and all critical drivers (e.g. legislative requirements, internal procedures, system-related issues, etc.) that influence how the processes are executed.

This documentation process can be accomplished by first facilitating Process Review Sessions with key subject matter experts. These sessions should be facilitated with the intent of building an accurate inventory of CBP Recruiting and Retention processes and gathering all relevant information (e.g. policies and procedures, supporting systems,

process cycle times, etc.) needed to accurately document the recruiting and retention processes.

Once this data has been gathered, CBP should use the data to develop Process Maps of all recruiting and retention processes. Once created, the detailed process maps should be validated by stakeholders that participated in the Process Review Sessions to ensure their accuracy and completeness. For example, the following steps may want to be performed:

Steps:

1. Review documentation and conduct structured Process Review Sessions with key CBP recruiting and retention personnel. This step will provide an accurate inventory of existing recruiting and retention processes, systems and identify process owners, inventory relevant data and other key information, and key supporting business processes.
2. Document the current state through process flow mapping and and inventorying existing processes, process data, and any system integration points.
3. Validate documentation with key stakeholders.

Phase 2: Analyze

The next step in determining the root cause(s) of CBP's recruiting and retention challenges lies in analyzing the process operations data (e.g. input and output data) to identify information and trends that may show CBP and Border Patrol leadership where their recruiting and retention challenges may exist. The purpose of Phase 2 is to analyze process data and documented processes developed in Phase 1 to identify potential root cause(s) of those challenges.

Once trends have been identified in recruiting and retention operations data (e.g. strong correlation between a location of recruits and a low retention rate), CBP should focus on categorizing this trend data into an analysis framework. This framework should be developed in such a way that will facilitate the identification and prioritization of potential improvement opportunities. For example, categorizing information trends by efficiency (e.g. low, medium, high), effectiveness, resource effort/cost, and overall value will allow for much easier prioritization of improvement opportunities later in Phase 3.

Steps:

1. Gather essential process management and governance information, including organizational charts, documented policies and procedures, management reports.
2. Conduct research using other available program assessments, such as Inspector General (IG) and General Accountability Office (GAO) reports related to recruitment and retention processes to determine how other Federal agencies area meeting their recruitment and retention goals.
3. Develop operational data analysis construct and evaluate the current state documentation of Recruiting and Retention processes for redundancies, weaknesses, and other gaps.

Phase 3: Recommend

Phase 3 should focus on analyzing the collective findings from Phases 1 and 2 to identify and agree upon opportunities for addressing the recruiting and retention challenges. Certain types of opportunities might include:

- Determining how retention data/metrics may best be used to improve recruiting tactics and vice versa;
- Finding potential consolidation points amongst systems to improve the use of recruiting and retention data;
- Reassigning CBP resources in new or modified roles within the processes to leverage economies of scale and scope (e.g. what is the best mix of Border Patrol Agents and civilian personnel for current and future workload?);
- Redesigning processes around improvement opportunities to streamline activities, leverage data, and improve efficiencies.

Using a four step approach (outlined below), CBP should develop an action plan for identifying improvement opportunities, evaluating each opportunity based on potential impact (e.g. effort vs. value), and prioritizing opportunities by the potential impact and benefits. As a part of this exercise "quick wins" should be identified which will assist CBP to meet short-term goals and realize an immediate return on the analysis conducted. Conducting a Best Practices Study at this time will also illustrate how high-performing public and/or private sector organizations have addressed similar challenges thus assisting with evaluating opportunities for improvements.

The specific suggested steps are as follows:

Steps:

1. Employ analytic tools and methods to identify improvement opportunities that address Recruiting and Retention challenges (e.g. process redundancies, efficiency weaknesses, etc.).
2. Evaluate and weight improvement opportunities.
3. Perform benchmarking to identify leading practices.
4. Agree on improvement opportunities and develop a Recommendations Report to include action-oriented next steps toward addressing improvement areas.

Conclusion

One of the primary goals of meeting the increasing demand to recruit and retain Border Patrol Agents is to maximize the effectiveness of CBPs recruiting and retention processes. By identifying the root-cause(s) of existing recruiting and retention challenges through documenting current recruiting and retention processes, analyzing associated data, and identifying trends that may contribute to these challenges CBP will be better able to develop recommendations to maximize their recruiting and retention effectiveness.

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