

Department of the Air Force

2019-20 Department of the Air Force Where Airmen Get Information (WAGI) Survey and Focus Groups: Results and Recommendations



**SAF/PAX
12 August 2020**

Department of the Air Force

Where Airmen Get Information (WAGI) Unit Leader Slides



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What is the WAGI?



- Periodic survey and focus groups conducted by SAF/PA
 - Examines where military and civilian personnel get USAF/USSF info
 - Collects feedback on what factors drives their information habits
 - Tracks information consumption trends over several decades
- 2019-20 study
 - Survey: 10,000 personnel invited, 1,633 responded, results weighted for accurate Total Force representation (results are generalizable)
 - Focus Groups:
 - 35 sessions with 207 personnel
 - Participation shaped by unit and research team constraints (results are not generalizable)
 - Participants were diverse but not representative of Total Force demographics (over-representative of active duty, officers, women, some non-white ethnic groups, and some MAJCOMs or specialties)



WAGI Findings



Overall: Units are doing a moderate to good job of keeping personnel informed and disseminating information. Personnel want more of what they consider important and less of what they don't.

Source Use and Access:

- Personnel most often access the Air Force Portal as a gateway to other sites, but report difficulty with their ability to navigate and search these sites.
- Personnel are dissatisfied with barriers to accessing official information outside of work and/or without a Common Access Card (CAC).
- Focus group participants display less awareness of brands or other distinctions among official (AF.mil, Portal) and unofficial (AF Times) sources as opposed to using the most readily available information that meets their quality standards.



WAGI Findings (cont'd)



Source Quality:

- Personnel want information that is personally relevant and timely.
- Personnel make distinctions between what they like (e.g., cool social media content) and what they find personally or professionally useful.
- Personnel want information from top-level leaders distilled by local leaders and supervisors to help them understand what it means for them on a personal and practical level.
- Survey responses indicated that one of the most effective communication channels is face-to-face communication (chain of command). Focus group feedback showed preferences for the in-person nature of town halls and commander's calls and the ability to have questions asked and answered in real time.
- Unofficial social media channels are popular due to the timeliness of information provided and the ability to interact anonymously.



Recommendations



- Make issues relevant for personnel
 - Lead with why it matters from an individual, small unit, or local perspective
 - Limit mass communication to what everyone needs to know
 - Provide options for people to receive or easily find info they like to know
- Engage in time for your people to hear about issues from you first
- Communicate the most important information everyone needs in multiple ways:
 - Person-to-person communication at all levels
 - Charge subordinate CCs, senior enlisted, and supervisors to engage
 - Use commander's calls and town halls
 - Provide options (anonymous when feasible) that allow personnel to get their questions answered or have their views heard
 - Official digital sources: work email, web sites, unit social media accounts
 - Unofficial sources: real or virtual community networks, news media

Department of the Air Force

Where Airmen Get Information (WAGI) PA Professional Slides



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Bottom Line Up Front: Findings



Overall: Units are doing a moderate to good job of keeping personnel informed and disseminating information. Personnel want more of what they consider important and less of what they don't.

Source Use and Access:

- Personnel most often access the Air Force Portal as a gateway to other sites, but report difficulty with their ability to navigate and search these sites.
- Personnel are dissatisfied with barriers to accessing official information outside of work and/or without a Common Access Card (CAC).
- The *Air Force Times* was rated in the survey as the most informative DAF-related media product and the easiest to find and use, whereas focus group participants did not report it as a frequently used information source.
- Focus group participants display less awareness of brands or other distinctions among official (AF.mil, Portal) and unofficial (AF Times) sources as opposed to using the most readily available information that meets their quality standards.



Bottom Line Up Front: Findings (cont'd)



Source Quality:

- Personnel want information that is personally relevant and timely.
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- Personnel want information from top-level leaders distilled by local leaders and supervisors to help them understand what it means for them on a personal and practical level.
- Survey responses indicated that one of the most effective communication channels is face-to-face communication (chain of command). Focus group feedback showed preferences for the in-person nature of town halls and commander's calls and the ability to have questions asked and answered in real time.
- Unofficial social media channels are popular due to the timeliness of information provided and the ability to interact anonymously.



Bottom Line Up Front: Recommendations



SAF/PA:

- Conduct additional research leading to feasible proposal(s) to better meet audience expectations for info consolidation, customizable delivery/browsing, mobile access, industry-standard search/navigation, and/or anonymous feedback.
- Share WAGI results with Portal site owners so feedback can be incorporated into future system design.

All PA Offices:

- Use multiple methods to communicate important command information. No one method of information delivery (face-to-face, social media, etc.) captures a majority of personnel.
- Expand options that allow personnel to receive personally prioritized information (i.e., feeds, email updates, or video channels organized by topic/squadron rather than location/wing).
- Expand links to public information accessible through high-traffic sites accessed from Portal.
- Continue to advocate for and facilitate the localization of DAF information for transmission to personnel through real or virtual town halls and commander's calls.
- Ensure that social media content remains relevant and timely to desired audiences. Do not equate popularity among all followers with effective communication to command personnel.



Stages of Research and Approaches: Survey and Focus Groups



Phase 1 | Survey:

- The Secretary of the Air Force/Public Affairs (SAF/PA) and Fors Marsh Group (FMG) surveyed Airmen from 21 October to 18 November 2019.
- Aim: To increase understanding of how personnel receive Department of the Air Force (DAF)-related information and what their preferences are.

Phase 2 | Focus Groups:

- SAF/PA and FMG conducted 35 focus groups with personnel from 2 February to 19 March 2020. Focus groups lasted around 90 minutes each.
- Aim: Complement and extend the Where Airmen Get Information (WAGI) survey results.

Note that survey findings can be generalizable but focus group findings are not representative of the DAF as a whole.

Note: See appendices for more detailed technical information on the survey methodology, sample, and weighting approach.



Survey and Focus Group Research Questions



The survey (Phase 1) aimed to answer several questions:

1. How do personnel assess the effectiveness of DAF communications?
2. How often are personnel accessing the different types of DAF-communicated information?
3. Which information sources (internal and external) are personnel using to access different types of information?
4. How often do personnel use official DAF-related media products?
5. How do personnel assess the effectiveness of DAF-related media products?
6. Why are personnel not using certain DAF-related media products?

The focus groups (Phase 2) aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. Why are personnel not using certain DAF-related media products?
2. What are personnel's media preferences while overseas (OCONUS only) and why?
3. How are personnel using social media for information?
4. What can DAF organizations do to keep personnel better informed?
5. What location-specific information or media are personnel using?



Key Findings from Phase 1: Survey



- **The Department of the Air Force is doing a moderate to good job of keeping Airmen informed (mean of 6.65 out of 10=*very good job*).**
 - This finding is consistent with findings from previous administrations of the WAGI survey: 6.27 in 2016, 6.43 in 2013, and 6.58 in 2011.
- **Personnel reported that available information meets their needs at a moderately adequate level (mean of 4.79 out of 7=*very adequate*).**
 - There is a gap between what exists and what personnel need that can be improved.
- **Personnel prefer to use the Air Force Portal (CAC login) over other Air Force-related media products.**
 - Not only do personnel use this source most often, they also find it the most believable (mean of 6.28 out of 7=*very believable*).
- **The *Air Force Times* is the most widely used third-party outlet providing information to personnel.**
 - Personnel reported the *Air Force Times* as the most informative DAF-related media product and the easiest to find and use.
- **The American Forces Network (AFN) continues to reach personnel while they are deployed or stationed overseas, although more options are available.**
 - Personnel reported frequently watching or listening to AFN television/radio while deployed or stationed overseas.

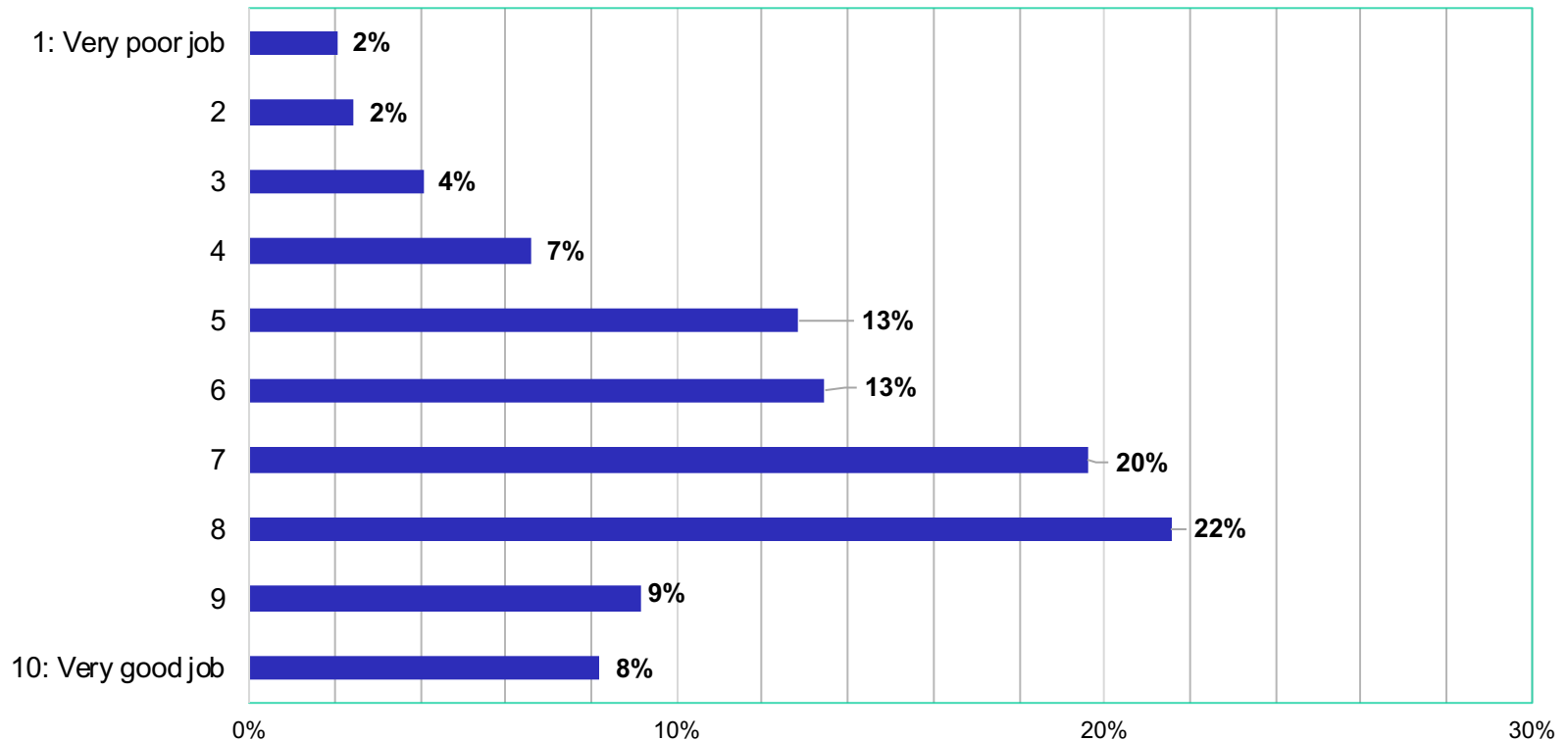


Key Findings from Phase 1: Survey Keeping Personnel Informed



On average, personnel reported that the DAF is doing a moderate to good job of keeping them informed (mean of 6.65 out of 10). The most frequently selected option was 8 out of 10, Very good job.

(Q1) In general, how would you rate the job the Air Force does of keeping you informed?



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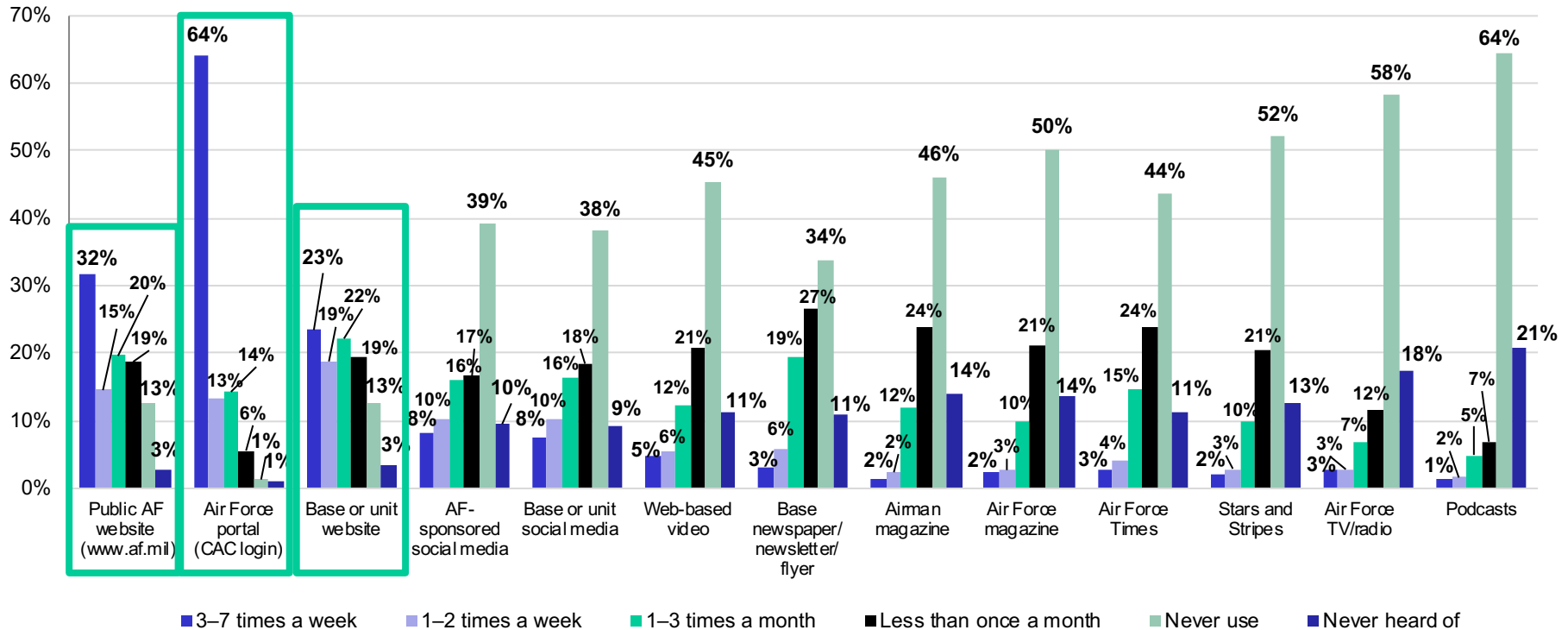


Key Findings from Phase 1: Survey DAF-Media Product Usage



Personnel reported using the Air Force Portal (CAC login) most often (92%, at least monthly), followed by the public AF website (www.af.mil) (66%) and base or unit website (64%, at least monthly). These findings are consistent with previous years.

(Q6) Thinking back over the past 12 months, please tell us how often you used the following AF-related media products.



Note: Refusals are not shown above; scale is: 1: 3-7 times a week to 6: Never heard of

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Key Findings from Phase 2: Focus Groups



DAF Media Products and Communication Channels:

- Most personnel reported using links accessed through the AF Portal most often.
- Targeting emails to be more career-specific was a common suggestion.
- Base town halls and commander's calls are popular ways to get base information, especially due to the ability to ask questions in real time.
- Personnel characterized AFN as an "okay" source of information while overseas, due less to its quality than its prevalence on base.

Social Media:

- To build on survey findings that social media is a popular external source of information, the focus groups found that personnel often turn to unofficial social media when they cannot find specific information through official sources.
- Personnel use unofficial social media for timely and relevant information, particularly the Airmen/NCO/senior NCO Facebook group and AF Reddit threads.

Overseas Media:

- Personnel who are deployed or stationed overseas reported a greater use of social media for communication, particularly with friends and family back home, due to easy access and connectivity.

Improving DAF Communication:

- Personnel want to see information aggregated into one central location instead of having to search through multiple sources.
- Relevant and timely communication that is specific to them is important to personnel.

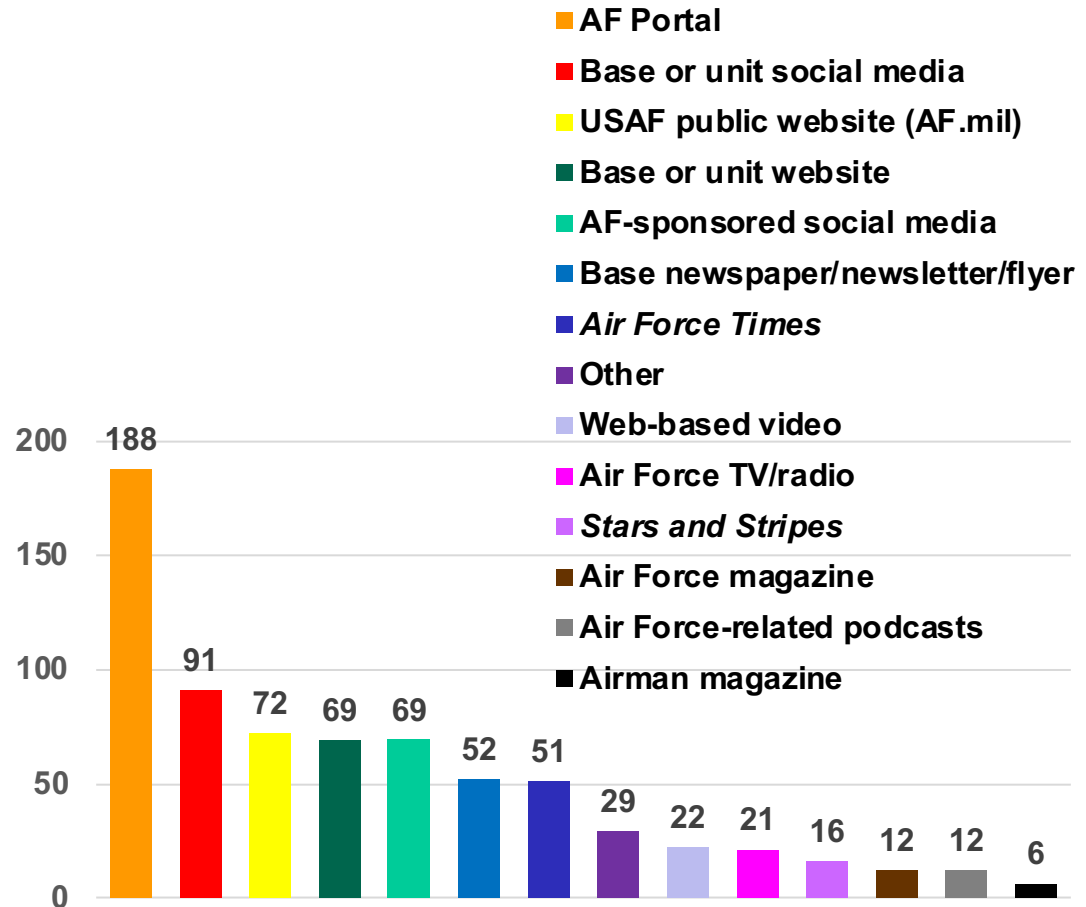


Key Findings from Phase 2: Focus Groups Air Force-Related Media Product Usage



Personnel reported using the Air Force Portal most often, followed by base or unit social media, and the public Air Force website (www.af.mil).

- Personnel use the AF Portal most often because they access it daily for resources and links to necessary sites, but not to find real-time information or updates.
- Some were confused about which sources are official versus unofficial.
 - They tended to know that the AF Portal, public Air Force website, and base or unit website are official.
- Personnel said they use certain media products more often due to daily needs, ease of use, convenience, accessibility, relevancy, and reliability of information.
- These results are fairly consistent with the survey, with base or unit social media ranking higher in the focus groups.



*Participants could mark more than one answer; responses are not mutually exclusive

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Future Research



- Separate study to define desirable and achievable features of a future command information system.
- Balance use of biggest bang for buck locations with more virtual or in-person focus groups to include more MAJCOM/OCONUS personnel
- Conduct focus groups with spouses, who personnel identified as an underserved audience
- Assess the use and quality of newly created US Space Force web and social media platforms



Air Force Public Affairs

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX 1: Phase 1 Methodology



2019 Air Force Where Airmen Get Information (WAGI) Survey

- An online survey was fielded 21 October through 18 November 2019.
- Airmen were contacted via email on a weekly basis until they completed the survey or they asked to be removed.
- A probability sample ($n = 10,000$) was independently drawn across active duty, Reserve, Guard, and civilian components.
- Final sample: 1,633 respondents and an estimated margin of error (MoE) of +/- 2.4% overall (higher for subgroups).

Active Duty (RegAF)	$n = 1,242$	MoE = 2.8%
Air Force Reserve	$n = 81$	MoE = 10.9%
Air National Guard	$n = 105$	MoE = 9.6%
Civilian	$n = 205$	MoE = 6.8%

- All statistics in this report are weighted by component, rank group, and major command.
- Statistical significance for subgroup comparisons is computed through ANOVAs, t tests, and chi-squared statistics for a 95% confidence interval. For chi-squared statistics, a proportion of 50% was assumed.
- This survey was designed to take 10 minutes to complete. Participants took a mean of 18 minutes to complete the survey, with the median completion time being 10 minutes. These averages include Airmen who paused and returned to complete the survey later.



APPENDIX 1: Phase 1 Methodology



- The probability-based sampling method was used to design the sampling plan so that each sample member had a known, non-zero selection probability.
- This sampling approach allowed the survey results to be generalized to the target population (i.e., total force) through weighting.
- Weights were calculated using the raking method, which applies a post-stratification procedure separately and iteratively to component, rank group, and MAJCOM.

Total Force

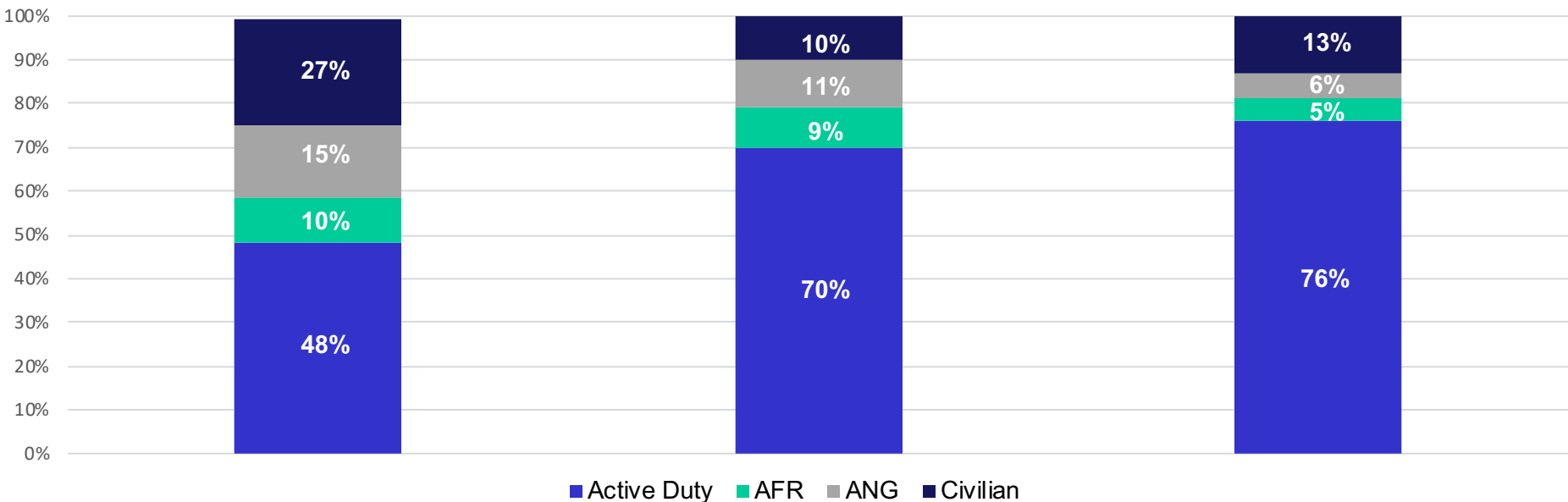
Total = 694,688

Invited Sample

Total = 10,000

Unweighted Respondents

Total = 1,633



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APPENDIX 2: Phase 2 Methodology

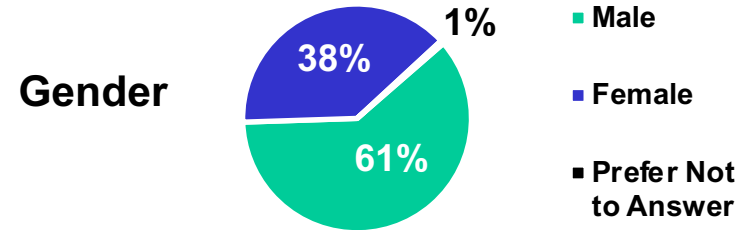


- A total of 207 Airmen participated in 35 90-minute focus groups.

Race ¹	Number
White	155
Black or African American	29
Asian	6
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2
American Indian or Alaska Native	1
Prefer Not to Answer	21

Ethnicity	Number
Hispanic or Latino	32
Prefer Not to Answer	6

¹Participants could indicate more than one race.



CONUS/OCONUS	Number of Groups
CONUS	25
OCONUS	10

Component Segment	Number of Groups
Enlisted	12
Officers	10
Civilians	7
Guard/Reserve	1
Mixed	5



APPENDIX 2: Phase 2 Methodology



Air Force Base	Location	Number of Groups
Tyndall	Panama City, Florida	3
Hurlburt	Destin/Fort Walton Beach, Florida	3
Luke	Glendale, Arizona	2
Davis-Monthan	Tucson, Arizona	3
Goodfellow	San Angelo, Texas	2
Randolph	San Antonio, Texas	4
Peterson	Colorado Springs, Colorado	3
Schriever	Colorado Springs, Colorado	1
Nellis	Las Vegas, Nevada	2
Creech	Indian Springs, Nevada	2
Mildenhall	Bury Saint Edmunds, United Kingdom	2
Lakenheath	Lakenheath, United Kingdom	3
Ramstein	Ramstein-Miesenbach, Germany	3
Spangdahlem	Spangdahlem, Germany	2
TOTAL		35

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APPENDIX 3: FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS



Information Topics of Interest



Air Force Public Affairs

Airmen seek career-specific information, timely updates on policy information, and more personal communications from senior leaders.²

Senior Leader Messages and Perspectives:

- Airmen want to receive information from local senior leadership that is more personal and relevant to them.
- One suggestion is to make emails less generic.

AF-Wide Policy, Guidance, or Command Information:

- Airmen want streamlined and consolidated information.
- Centralizing policy and guidance information by topic area or career field and making it easier to navigate are suggestions from Airmen.

Career and Benefits Information:

- Airmen cited a lack of awareness surrounding career opportunities and benefits.
- Consolidating and centralizing this information could help Airmen to be more aware of these opportunities and benefits.

²See slides 65–68 for quotes



Topic Areas of Interest



Airmen want relevant information on career trajectory and “Big” Air Force changes.

- Career-specific information was widely reported as an important topic.
 - Airmen are interested in learning about career progression trajectories and educational opportunities but are sometimes unsure where to find this information.
 - Airmen want more information on retirement planning and transitioning to civilian life.
 - Recent changes to Enlisted Performance Report (EPR) procedures are also a popular topic among enlisted Airmen, as these changes affect promotions and career mobility.
 - Civilians want information that is more pertinent to their day-to-day job functions.
- A popular topic among Airmen is uniform regulation changes.
 - Airmen want to provide input on changes and to be prepared for when uniform updates are put into full effect.
- Medical Airmen highlighted confusion surrounding transitions of military medical facilities (e.g., changes related to the Defense Health Agency [DHA]).
 - Medical professionals are uncertain how these changes will impact their career trajectory.
- Numerous Airmen are also interested in learning about Space Force developments.
 - Airmen reported receiving a lot of information through word of mouth, which may be inaccurate.



Selected Quotes

AF Topic Areas of Interest



- “What **resources** are available for active duty, veterans and retirees? Because eventually we’re going to leave the Air Force at some point...and I know they have the Transition Assistance Program. That transition out will be easier if we know...all our benefits, that we can utilize, in any arena, financial, family, anything like that.” —*Enlisted*
- “Changes to enlisted **promotion structure**, essentially. There have been a lot of changes lately. Every time there’s a change, I’m like ooh, what's going on?” —*Enlisted*
- “So as far as policy changes, if there is a change coming...For example, if it had to do with uniforms, we could go ahead and start buying those uniform items. So as soon as that **change was effective**, we were prepared for it.” —*Officer/Civilian*
- “Now that all military medical health is being taken over by DHA [Defense Health Agency], there is no clear information [in] regards to what’s going to happen to the civilian workforce.” —*Civilian*
- “Like the **Space Force** thing is really big right now, but I don’t feel like we’re getting enough channeled down about it. It’s kind of like [a] word-of-mouth Facebook type thing.” —*Officer*



Senior Leader Messages and Perspectives



Airmen want local/wing senior leadership communications that are personal and relevant.

- When asked about who comes to mind as senior leaders, many reported thinking of the Chief Master Sergeant Kaleth Wright, Chief of Staff David Goldfein, Chief of Space Force Operations John “Jay” Raymond, and Secretary of the Air Force Barbara Barrett.
 - Airmen also identified their direct command (e.g., wing commander) as senior leadership.
- Airmen reported receiving a wide range of information from “Big” AF leadership.
 - Airmen said that most information from senior leaders consists of emails (e.g., wishing happy holidays, upcoming major events), which are sometimes perceived as impersonal and generic.
 - Many like the social media presence of Chiefs Wright, Raymond, and Goldfein and said they find them to be very personable.
 - Airmen particularly like Chief Wright’s podcast because of his “realness” and personality.
- At the local level, Airmen prefer more face-to-face communications from leadership.
 - They want to see information better targeted and distilled.
- Strategies to improve these communications comprise of more face-to-face interactions (e.g., video), providing a bottom line up front (BLUF) in long emails, follow-up from direct leadership on impacts to individual units, cutting out the middle man when important issues arise, and increasing transparency.



Selected Quotes Senior Leader Messages and Perspectives



- “I think that [videos] could go along with face-to-face even though you are not allowed to ask questions. Like they previously just mentioned, you could probably take better credibility in seeing someone's face and having almost face-to-face contact.” — *Enlisted/Officer*
- “I would say that the **Chief of Staff of the Air Force, the Secretary of the Air Force, the Command Chief of the Air Force** do very well. And we see their message and we hear their message. But if you're considering them senior leaders, that's a win, I think. From that level we probably get all we need and it's great. But at a lower level than that, I think we probably fail.” — *Civilian*
- “I'm not a particular fan of commander calls, but **commander calls always have good information**, especially when it starts looking like a unit or the group level. But there's a lot of information that gets shoved down the email chain.” — *Enlisted*
- “Personally, I would rather read an **AMA, ask me anything, on Reddit from Chief Wright** than sit in an all-call and that awkward question-asking position, or watch a video where nobody wants to type anything, just because social media kind of kills the awkwardness of question asking.” — *Enlisted*



AF-Wide Policy, Guidance, or Command Information



Airmen want to see policy information and updates consolidated and more easily navigable.

- Airmen reported mixed sentiments regarding the effectiveness of policy change notifications.
- Most Airmen reported that policy changes are frequently communicated but sometimes information is buried in emails or difficult to find on official websites.
 - Conversely, other Airmen perceived that effectiveness is largely dependent on the type of policy.
 - Numerous Airmen reported only finding out about new Air Force Instructions (AFI) through word of mouth or unofficial social media (e.g., recent morale patch policy changes).
- Many reported that policy communications can be improved by streamlining and consolidating information.
 - Airmen reported that important policy changes shared via email should be marked as urgent and shared through multiple mediums.
 - When necessary, supervisors should follow up about key policy changes.
- This information is consistent with findings from the 2016 WAGI focus groups.



Selected Quotes AF-Wide Policy, Guidance, or Command Information



- **“I don’t know what I don’t know**, so I don’t know if the commanders are receiving things that they are supposed to disperse down to a squadron, but I don’t feel like in my squadron our commander is pushing out information that he may receive. And so, I would say that I don’t think as far as policy stuff it’s very effective.” —*Guard/Reserve*
- “Because Air Force has its own guides, values, regulations, everything. So superseding documents inside that because I operate under Navy regulations, Air Force regulations, Army regulations, SOCOM popular regulations and pretty much everything in between. And so, my knowledge bank for pubs and regs guidance is ...I lost count after a hundred on what I have to be able to reference for some of this stuff.” —*Enlisted*



Personnel, Career, and Benefits Information



Airmen miss out on career and educational opportunities due to a lack of consolidated information.

- Airmen are interested in learning more about career and educational opportunities; however, many reported confusion about available opportunities.
- Most reported learning about career development opportunities through word of mouth and wishing for a more centralized information location.
 - Airmen reported that information is difficult to find on official sites or that it is out of date with broken links.
 - One recommendation is to identify who owns these sites and updating information.
- Airmen reported that educational benefits and stipulations are often complex (e.g., Transition Assistance Program [TAP] benefits, changes to GI legislation), with information about graduate studies being even more convoluted.
- Some highlighted desiring more information on retirement benefits and transitioning to civilian positions.



Selected Quotes Personnel, Career, and Benefits Information



- “If there was just some sort of more, I guess **user-friendly way** in order to determine what things could be helpful for you. Or even if there’s just something that I wasn’t even aware of that I would want to try to do, then that would be really helpful for everybody.”
—*Enlisted/Civilian*
- “...**education benefits are extremely unclear**. And when you go to the education office, it’s not really clear what their roles and responsibilities are to help us with or educate us on about education benefits...So, maybe clarifying their role in how they help us, and I guess creating more opportunities to talk about just general education benefits, because I think that’s a big one for most people.” —*Officer*
- “A lot of folks don’t know where they’re at on the roadmap of their career. Important things like AMS, the Assignment Management System, there’s entire jobs you can volunteer for. And unless you just know someone else that introduced you to it, **you’ll never know about it.**” —*Officer*
- “I can download an app without ever having used it before and, if it’s designed correctly, I can intuitively navigate an extremely complex set of menus and functions and use it pretty easily within a day...but the Air Force is...All these things that kind of sound close to each other and separate websites, separate logins, separate passwords, and **the information is kind of similar, but it’s in two different [places].**” —*Officer*



RQ1: Findings



RQ1: Why are Airmen not using certain Air Force-related media products?

Communication Modalities:

- Some Airmen said they receive too many emails and have difficulty distinguishing which are important.
 - Emails from senior leaders are frequently deleted if deemed generic or irrelevant to their day-to-day operations and mission.
 - A suggestion is to have opt-in mailing lists for common topics of interest—family benefits, career field, education, etc. Another suggestion is to better train mid-level Airmen on how to filter information and communicate it effectively to those under their command.
- Those who do not work with computers or have limited computer access find email to be less effective.
- Face-to-face communication varies from job to job and is sometimes not viewed as important as a mode of communication compared to emails and other written communication.

Social Media:

- Official social media channels often lack posts that Airmen consider relevant because they are targeted to the public.

Air Force Media Products:

- Airmen said that they do not use certain media products due to difficulty of use, inconvenience (e.g., no CAC, lack of access at home, not having their work computer), and a lack of accessibility, reliability, and relevance.
- Airmen reported using the AF Portal most often due to daily necessity of accessing the platform, but report issues with navigability.
- Not having a consolidated and current website leads Airmen to turn to unofficial sources.
- The success of Air Force Connect was apparently related to efforts of local PA office.
 - Use of the Air Force Connect smartphone app was mixed—many are unaware of the app's existence whereas others said they use it often.



Preferred Channels



Communication needs to take a multi-method approach to reach the most Airmen.

- Airmen reported various preferred channels of communication (e.g., email, face to face, social media) based on their career, age, and base-specific communication practices, highlighting the need for a multi-method approach to communication efforts.

Email:

- Many Airmen reported preferring email when targeted to the appropriate audience that is timely, succinct, and not redundant.
- Preference for email communications is largely dependent on Airmen's email access.
 - Some who work non-office jobs (e.g., flight lines) typically lack easy computer access.
 - Some stated that email access is largely restricted off-base, making it more difficult to use.
- Numerous Airmen noted that they prefer a combination of email communications and face-to-face interactions.
 - Airmen especially want face-to-face communications and messaging on important topics to them (e.g., career guidance, personnel, policy issues) that are less clear-cut.
- They also want the ability to opt-in to mailing lists for all kinds of topics of interest – family benefits, career field specific, education, etc.

Social Media:

- Conversely, other Airmen expressed that they prefer social media communications, both official and unofficial, for time-sensitive issues such as gate closures, lockdowns, and accidents.
 - Official sources are viewed as slow but trustworthy, whereas unofficial sources are seen as faster but less accurate.



Selected Quotes Preferred Channels



- **“One-on-one communication.** I like to see it reinforced...if they say these are our top five priorities, and then if we see it in an email later that reinforces what they said, and then if somebody at a lower level, but still a squadron commander, also sends it to you, then you know it's got[ten] down to the lower levels and it even more reinforces that it's something very important.” —*Civilian*
- **“Social media.** I think that's the easiest. I follow a couple of the commanders on their Facebook, their official Facebook. Usually what they post is official for the most part. I don't think I've seen an unprofessional post from any of the ones I follow.” —*Officer*
- “The Airmen NCO, senior NCO page on **Instagram** is hugely popular, it's got like 250,000 followers. It can be **toxic**, I think, personally, but they do pass through all their information that the Air Force sometimes tries to hold onto.” —*Enlisted*
- “Basically [**email**] **it's the most secure** way to get information right now at the moment because the other way is through either mail or someone through where you work, but that's kind of not the most efficient way because you never...Sometimes you're going to have to be somewhere else, and maybe you don't get that information.” —*Enlisted*



Unit Level Email



Airmen's opinions on the effectiveness of unit-level email varied.

General:

- Airmen were divided 50/50 on their assessment of unit-level email effectiveness.
- Use of these emails varies by job position.
 - Those who do not have desk jobs reported that email is less effective.
- Airmen reported wanting to see messages that are relevant and timely.

Positive Aspects:

- Many said that they like receiving unit-level email and think that it is effective.
- Airmen reported that the ease of email is what makes unit-level email effective.
 - The quickness of receiving and reading emails and the ability to send emails to many people simultaneously contributed to Airmen's ease of use.

Negative Aspects:

- Participants said there were difficulties with accessing email because of internet issues and faulty technology (e.g., computers that do not work).
- An issue that participants collectively discussed was receiving too many emails.
 - One issue is that many can only access emails at work, so emails can "stack up" if they are away from their computers or do not have a desk job.



Selected Quotes Unit Level Email



- “You end up with a ton of them during the day, and you have to sort through them...at least in my experience, they're typically **not focused enough to be effective.**” —*Officer*
- “For me, it's honestly **hit and miss**...email can get lost in translation, so I purposely try to read my email, and the emails that come from my section two or three times, [and] have a couple people check it out, especially if it's something that has a lot of information, just to make sure that the message is passed clearly. But often that doesn't happen, and when that doesn't happen then there's confusion.” —*Officer*
- “I think unit level's pretty okay, because 99% of emails actually apply to what you do and your work and stuff like that, so I think unit emails are very effective, for me at least.” —*Enlisted*
- “Maybe it's been here at Luke, but I've seen a lot of spam mail from people...A lot of it's been cut back here so now we're getting **a lot more clear and concise messages** from leadership or other ground squadron. It's gotten better throughout the years.” —*Enlisted*
- “It can be very good. It can be very bad. A lot of maintainers, per se, where they **won't even check their email.**”—*Enlisted*



Face-to-Face or Chain Of Command Information



Overall, Airmen reported face-to-face or chain of command information to be effective.

Generally Positive Assessment:

- Most Airmen reported finding face-to-face or chain of command information effective, depending on their job and base.
 - The amount of face-to-face interaction ranged from often, to frequent, to none.
- Many reported preferring face-to-face communication because it reduces guesswork.

Caveats and Recommendations:

- Some Airmen said communication is not a priority for their commanders.
 - Some Airmen related that they find all-calls and commander's calls to be effective because they could ask questions and get answers in real time, whereas others said these meetings do not relay relevant information.
 - Several suggested providing an opportunity to submit questions anonymously for leadership to address during all-calls/commander's calls.
 - Several recommended making recordings of these meetings readily available for those unable to attend.
- Participants noted that specific improvements to face-to-face communications will depend on the job position.
- A few participants recommended developing educational tools about effective communication and listening.
- This information is consistent with findings from the 2016 WAGI focus groups.



Selected Quotes

Face-to-Face or Chain of Command Information



- “I think it **depends on individual leaders and unit size**...I’m in a very small unit where there’s a grand total of, I think, 36 active duty in my entire squadron. So, information flows much closer because...on a weekly basis, all gather up in our auditorium and the entire squadron is there. Whereas when they’re speaking, the message, the content, the way that they spread it is very different when you’re speaking to like 500 people versus when you’re speaking to 30.” —*Officer*
- “...going back to that whole all-call commander’s call...they jam too much information or not relevant information and it just goes over your head. Yeah, they have that in-person bit, but it’s not as effective as it could be, because it’s too much or too long, and then people check out.” —*Enlisted/Officer*
- “...you need to be personally invested in the people that you work with and that work for you. Because that’s how you build the trust in the communication and then actually get to understand what they want to know, what they need to know, what you think they need to know.” —*Enlisted*
- “...If I have to go in for a commander recall, squadron recall, then I’m just sitting there like I got so much stuff to do. It’s Tuesday. Why couldn’t this happen at 2:00, everybody come in, maybe give them a half hour, hour, go home kind of thing.” —*Enlisted*



Air Force TV/Radio



Air Force TV/Radio is not typically seen as a source of specific information, but rather for entertainment purposes.

- When asked about Air Force TV/Radio, many thought of the American Forces Network (AFN) that is available overseas.
- Airmen reported using Air Force TV for background entertainment.
 - Air Force TV/Radio was not typically seen as a source of information.
 - Several participants reported that the content looks outdated and that commercials were the main type of media.
- Many participants said they prefer audiovisual methods of communication over written forms.
 - Airmen said that they do not have time to read written communication.
 - Airmen reported that audiovisual communication grabs their attention more than written forms.
- Several OCONUS participants reported that AFN TV is effective but caveated that it was due less to quality than the service being one of the only forms of no- or low-cost broadcast communication available at locations overseas.



Selected Quotes

Air Force TV/Radio



- “I think the biggest thing I see folks use AFN for is to watch the World Series, Super Bowl. But outside of that, you really don't see a whole lot of people now, as I've deployed, really sit down to watch AFN.” —*Civilian*
- **“I don't think anybody watches it to get information from it,** I think they just put up with it because it's what's offered, and then they're waiting for their show just to come back on...” —*Officer*
- “...probably the most urgent reason to listen [to radio] is a base closure, if there's traffic that I need to avoid.” —*Enlisted*
- “It's cool. It's something to listen to on the way to work. Something just to zone out on, some background noise. Sometimes it has good info, sometimes it's just stuff going on in the area. Stuff you don't really care about, it's there.” —*Enlisted*

Ways to Improve:

- **“More updated stuff more often,** because watching it for the four days I think I was here; it was almost the same thing repeated. It would have just been nice to have maybe every week and a half something new versus every three weeks.” —*Enlisted*
- “Because you're dealing with a younger crowd also these days, that are more technologically savvy, find a way of linking that up...” —*Enlisted*



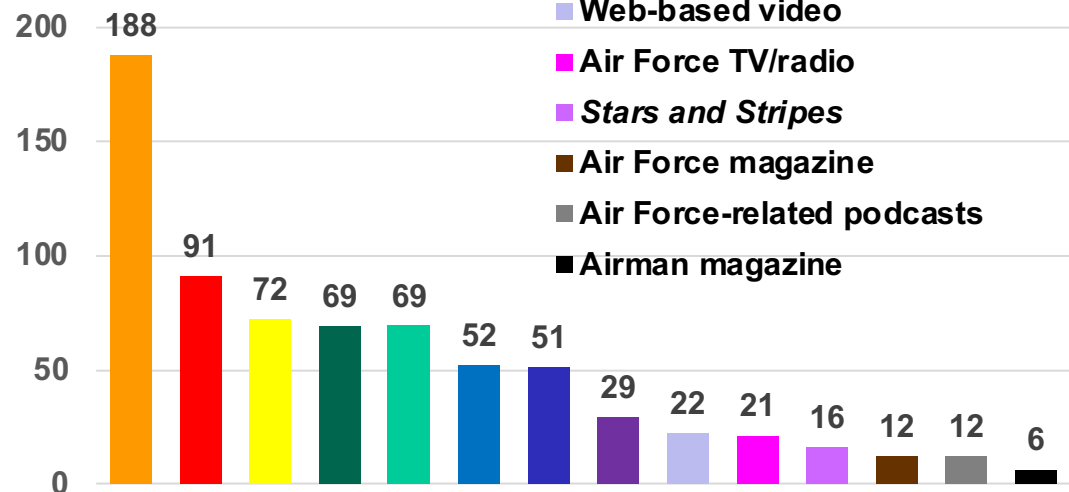
Air Force-Related Media Product Usage



Airmen reported using the Air Force Portal most often, followed by base or unit social media, and the public Air Force website (www.af.mil).

- Airmen reported using the AF Portal most often because they access it daily for resources and links to necessary sites, but not to find real-time information or updates.
- Several noted that they use myPers often for information.
- Some were confused about which sources are official versus unofficial.
 - They tended to know the AF Portal, public Air Force website, and base or unit website are official.
- Airmen said they use certain media products more often due to daily needs, ease of use, convenience, accessibility, relevancy, and reliability of information.

- AF Portal
- Base or unit social media
- USAF public website (AF.mil)
- Base or unit website
- AF-sponsored social media
- Base newspaper/newsletter/flyer
- *Air Force Times*
- Other
- Web-based video
- Air Force TV/radio
- *Stars and Stripes*
- Air Force magazine
- Air Force-related podcasts
- Airman magazine



*Participants could mark more than one answer; responses are not mutually exclusive

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Selected Quotes

Air Force-Related Media

Product Usage



■ Air Force Portal:

- “It’s your hub to get to most other information that the Air Force would provide. So you log in to Portal. It can get you to...My Page and training related things, and get you AFPC Secure—stuff that you might go to for AMS...everybody's going to have Portal...”
—*Officer*
- “Portal. Think the Portal’s the biggest one because that’s where everybody in the Air Force has an account, basically, because it’s mandatory. That’s where all your MyPay, LeaveWeb, fitness, everything is on there.” —*Enlisted*

■ Base/Unit Social Media; AF Sponsored Social Media:

- “I think “Big” Air Force page. Different base-related pages are always good. I think Facebook's actually become a really powerful tool.” —*Lakenheath, Enlisted*
- “For me, what I think that would be, Facebook. Like the Air Force page or AFPC page, or Tyndall page, or whatever.” —*Officer/Enlisted/Civilian*

■ AF Public Website:

- “The Air Force website. I mean, part of it is my job, part of it is that’s where I go to do a task. But I keep it up because sometimes it does scroll and I’m... Sometimes I'll pay attention, sometimes I'll look at something else. But sometimes I keep it up so that I don’t miss anything if it scrolls across.” —*Civilian*
- “I have to use the AirForce.mil and the Air Force Portal, usually—and base or unit social media, I only acquired it or added it because of the hurricane, and we needed to keep contact.” —*Enlisted*



Selected Quotes

Air Force-Related Media Products: Why Not Use



- “Honestly, I don’t choose to use them. I just do it because it's my normal job to start putting in my CAC and logging in and then going to...that mail to check out my pay or check on my leave status and that's something that I would do here and there. But then, I also use af.mil to go to MIT, JAG home page, my Amgen’s...” —*Enlisted*
- “Reliable. If it’s reliable information, so you can fact-check it.” —*Officer*
- “Depends on how easy it is. If it’s really easy for me and I don't have to waste too much time, then I'll go that route. I don't go out of my way to look for these things...” —*Enlisted*
- “Usefulness. Whether they give me the information I'm looking for. If I’m sitting here going, ‘Hey, what do I want to know what's happening.’ If they're a good source for it, then that works. If it doesn't seem to work for me, then I don’t go there.” —*Civilian*
- “Relevancy. How applicable is it to me?” —*Enlisted*



AF.mil Website



Airmen have mixed opinions on the USAF public website.

- Some Airmen said they use the af.mil website whereas others do not, primarily because it is more geared towards the public.
- Those who reported using the website said they visited it before joining the Air Force to:
 - Look up career options,
 - Find different bases and units,
 - Find links to SharePoint websites,
 - Find phone numbers, and to
 - Learn general updates about the Air Force.
- Some participants were confused about the difference between the AF Portal and the af.mil website—several thought these are the same.



Selected Quotes AF.mil Website



- [Moderator: Is there anything else that you're going to the af.mil website for?]
“I always like to know **what's going on our bases**, what's going to happen, if a new aircraft is going to be assigned there...That just keeps me involved with what's going on in the Air Force. Who's moving where, what general's moving where, and those kinds of things.”
—*Enlisted*
- “**I go to find units, to find different units, or to find phone numbers.** I know for ours, because we're JBSA, we have three different bases. So, if I need to figure out what base a unit is on, or the clinic. I need to find a phone number for a certain office of the clinic, I'll just go to airforce.mil. Go to a certain base, go this, and then that way I can find the number that I'm looking for.” —*Officer*
- “I used it before I joined to see **what kind of jobs were available**, and that kind of stuff, what the jobs do. But ever since I've joined, I haven't used it.”
—*Enlisted*
- “I thought that was the same thing as the portal?” —*Officer*



Air Force Connect



Airmen are mixed on level of awareness and use of the Air Force Connect smartphone app.

Current Uses:

- Some Airmen have never heard of it, some have heard of it, and some use it.
 - A few shared very positive comments about the app.
- Several uses of the app are to check when buildings are open; learn about base closures, gate times, and gate closures; look up personal training (PT) information; and receive news and emergency updates.
- Some said they would not use the app because when they are off duty, they want to “leave work at work.”
- Bases where PA offices advertised Air Force Connect were more likely to have Airmen who report having and using the app.
 - Airmen found it useful that the local PA officers would be responsible for managing the base-specific sub-app.
 - One recommendation is to better train local PA offices about the app’s features and how to communicate about it.

Recommended Features:

- Several Airmen noted that the app is not being used to its full potential.
 - Suggestions for improvements included having more push notifications and information about commander’s calls or newcomers’ briefings.
 - Another suggestion was to better advertise the app’s existence and capabilities.
- When asked about desired features, Airmen suggested timelier gate information, traffic delays around base, the ability to message other Airmen, and other practical information.
 - Many features that Airmen want are already available on the app, but they are not aware of them.



Selected Quotes

Air Force Connect App



- “I was today years old when I found out that existed.” —*Luke, Enlisted*
- “So, I mean, I think that’s part of frustration. That’s great...Why is this something that nobody’s known about? I mean, **individuals from different realms haven’t even heard of it**. And it would be very useful.” —*Officer/Enlisted/Civilian*
- “**That Connect app is pretty good**. I don’t think that gets pushed out enough, though. A lot of people don’t use it...But I think the app is a super good—that should be where if you have any questions, you go there first.” —*Enlisted/Officer*
- “I like it. I like that now it’s one app for all the bases, right? The app that I can keep. I’m stationed here at Ramstein, and I can download Ramstein, and then I’d move to Osan and now I have to download Osan’s. I like that you just switch your base inside the app. I like that.” —*Civilian*

What Airmen Use the App For:

- “Usually, it’s **weather notices**, potentially. Or some **emergency stuff**. Like maybe coronavirus updates or weather or if there’s a travel advisory for a certain country. That’s probably the most beneficial. The timely nature of those notifications is good. I don’t use the app really other than that. I downloaded it and then set up a login so that I’ve got it, so it’d push stuff if I need it. That may be part of the challenge is educating people on what it’s capable of.”
—*Civilian*
- “Gate times. That’s what my wife uses it for. She’ll look up **gate times and closures**, when the east gate closes instead of using a 24-hour gate.” —*Officer*



Selected Quotes

Air Force Connect App Continued



What Airmen Want to See in AF Connect App and How to Improve It:

- “Events, updates, news, new policies coming out. Like there should be a push notification that, ‘Hey, this [inaudible] was updated.’” —*Enlisted*
- “Here we go, if they can do like **messaging** on there too. Because a lot of people here, we use, like, WhatsApp and whatever to message each other. Then if they can also integrate something like that, so we don't have to download these third-party apps to message each other.” —*Officer/Civilian*
- “**Seen it but they’re not advertised well...**The newcomers briefing is where I found out about this app. And that's why I got it. And then it really made life a lot better in that moment, because now we have resources, we know where to go...” —*Enlisted*
- “And one of the things, too, is like for commander’s calls, like every quarter we have a speaker from a different agency come, whether it's the sexual assault prevention person come and talk to everybody. Maybe that could be something where public affairs or whoever comes and has a little display, ‘Hey, do you guys know this is out there?’” —*Officer/Enlisted/Civilian*



Unofficial/Outside Sources



Air Force Public Affairs

Airmen use unofficial sources to supplement official information and approach them with caution.

- Many Airmen reported using a mix of unofficial or outside information sources.
 - These external platforms, such as Reddit and Facebook, are often seen by Airmen as supplementary when official sources lack sufficient information.
 - A frequently mentioned unofficial source was the Air Force Amn/NCO/SNCO Facebook page.
 - Others described some of these unofficial sources as “toxic,” including negativity and complaints, and therefore avoided them.
- Airmen like when official Air Force leaders and SMEs post on unofficial platforms.
- Unofficial sources enable Airmen to receive more “honest” information that is less politically motivated or “cleaned up.”
- Several recognized that they often take unofficial information with a “grain of salt” because it is not always accurate and can be personally biased.
- Airmen reported that unofficial sources are more for entertainment, to ask about topics not easily available through official channels, and to learn about potential upcoming policy changes.
- This information is consistent with findings from the 2016 WAGI focus groups.



Selected Quotes

Unofficial/Outside Sources



- “The ***Air Force Times***, for example, is an unofficial news source. But everybody relies on that for news relevant to the Air Force.” —*Officer*
- “Seems like there’s been a **progression**, at least from what I’ve seen for Airmen now. They’ll see something on reddit or on Facebook. Then they’ll go to work, and the first thing they do is check their email to see if there’s something stating something they’ve seen on Reddit or Facebook.” —*Enlisted*
- “I bring up Facebook because **my career field also has a Facebook page**, so sometimes they post stuff on there, sometimes before it hits Air Force channels, which is probably not the right answer. So, getting stuff off of there, and with some of the other information that flows out, sometimes Facebook gets faster.” —*Officer*
- “Over in one of the Korean bases...there was one of the dorm buildings that didn’t have hot water for months...And then finally somebody put it on one of the unofficial Facebook pages saying, ‘Hey, we haven’t had heat in this building for months, or any hot water,’ and chances are it got seen by the right set of eyes higher up [in] Air Force. Next thing you know, that problem’s been resolved.” —*Enlisted*



Selected Quotes

Air Force-Related Media Product Usage, Official vs. Unofficial



■ Product: MyPers:

- “MyPers...you can go on there and find guidance...and different changes in the Air Force...it's just like a personnel center.” —*Enlisted*
- “If MyPers is one, I live in MyPers.” —*Enlisted*

■ Official vs. Unofficial:

- [MODERATOR: ...which of these do you consider official Air Force sources?] “Public Air Force website because it’s a .mil.” —*Officers*
- “...the Portal would be...Air Force-run, Air Force-managed. Everything else, I don’t know on.” —*Enlisted*
- “Airman Magazine I would say. Is that...I’ve never heard of those ones...base or unit’s social media. Web-based videos, that could be taken from somebody that added [them] from someone else.” —*Enlisted*



RQ2: Findings



RQ2: What are Airmen's media preferences while overseas (OCONUS only) and why?

- Airmen reported using social media more frequently while overseas because of the ease of access.
 - They often lack cell service to call and text friends and family members, but Wi-Fi is more readily available.
- Some reported not much of a difference in their media preferences while overseas because they can access the same media products.
- Airmen reported AFN as an “okay” source of information due to its overall high prevalence on base.

Please note that OCONUS findings were limited to 10 groups conducted at four USAFE bases. Additional planned OCONUS groups in PACAF and PACOM were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Selected Quotes

Media Usage While Overseas



- “For information, I’ll turn to **Facebook**, but for fun Air Force stuff, I’ll go to **Instagram**.” —*Enlisted*
- “I’ve heard AFN was on for the **sports**... Then don’t pay attention during the commercials. I’ve never actually got it in my house because we can pay to have better TV with no commercials. So, I think in the work environment, especially overseas, it’s used mainly for sports because your Monday Night Football game or your Sunday football games are Monday morning...” —*Officer*
- “They’d have CNN or some of the other cable networks in command, they’d pull them down off the satellites. So that’s really the only thing they had there. And **you’re subject to whatever they pull in**, that’s what you’re going to watch.” —*Civilian*
- “You **could pretty much get anything** that you had back in the States, over here, whether it’s through a Netflix, a Hulu, you can VPN, which [are] ways to get all the American things. I think with today’s technology, you pretty much have any show or news source, if you really want to look for it.” —*Officer*



Changes in Media Interactions



Changes in media interactions while overseas are due to differences in access to communications.

- Many Airmen said that changes in media interaction are due to whether they have cell phone service and internet access.
- Some reported that social media platforms are used as a main method of communication, so they use Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube more often when overseas.
- A few Airmen reported AFN as a main source of information.
 - Depending on their location, some said that AFN was the only source of information available to them while stationed overseas.
 - This information is consistent with findings from the 2016 WAGI focus groups.
- Time zone differences were noted as a main factor that impacts the effectiveness of communication overseas.



Selected Quotes

Changes in Media Interactions



- “Being stationed overseas, **I still consumed all my media the same way**. I still had Netflix; I still got my news the same way. I still did everything the same way I do it here now.” —*Officer*
- “I think because most of us are only here for two to four years, this whole **TV tax** is ridiculous for us. It’s like, I’m not paying that.” —*Enlisted*
- “I think here it spikes with **social media because it’s our form of communication because cell service here is terrible**. In the States, you at least have your phone, you could make a call, you just use your text messaging. But here it probably spikes because that’s where everybody gets their news, their Twitters and all that stuff.” —*Enlisted*
- “I don’t social media now, but when I was deployed in Afghanistan **when I could get internet, it [social media] was Facebook**. That’s how I connected to my friends and family. That’s how I talked to them. That was it.” —*Enlisted*
- **AFN is the main source**. Anything else was pretty much out. That's all they piped in and all you could get.” —*Officer*
- “I feel like it’s less effective because one, the **time difference** between the states.” —*Enlisted*



Changes in Information Priorities



Air Force Public Affairs

There are some differences in information priorities based on where Airmen are located.

- Airmen reported that, depending on their location, they pay more attention to news about the local region rather than events happening stateside.
 - They also reported being more aware of their surroundings for safety reasons while being overseas.
- Airmen are interested in consuming information that may affect them in their personal lives and in their jobs.
 - Some examples mentioned were politics, the stock market, coronavirus, natural disasters, and Brexit.
- Information priorities shift based on what is going on in a region.
 - This change is also observed stateside during times of hurricanes or other hardships.



Selected Quotes

Changes in Information Priorities



- “I think if it’s **something that could affect you**, or I guess our country, like the whole Trump impeachment stuff. That I was really interested in.” —*Enlisted*
- “**I don’t really think it changes too much**. Maybe you’ll do a little bit, maybe research if you’re going to go to a different country, versus if you were going to do to a different state. Other than that, I don’t think it really affects it, at least for me.” —*Officer*
- “Probably more aware of your surroundings because there are **different risks** opposed to being back stateside.” —*Enlisted*
- “**Safety alert-type things**, depending on again what part of the world you’re in, some of those things matter. Any security changes, any things that would be going on in the country that you may be in. Those become my priority because that could present different levels of danger depending on where you are.” —*Officer*



RQ3: Findings



RQ3: How are Airmen using social media for information?

Official AF Social Media:

- Official “Big” Air Force social media is not often a primary source of information.
 - Some said they use official social media to follow top Air Force leadership.
- Airmen prefer receiving quicker updates on social media that are more incomplete followed by more complete information later.

Unofficial/Outside Social Media:

- Many Airmen reported using unofficial sources to supplement information not provided on official social media.
 - Timeliness and anonymity are two main reasons for using unofficial social media.
- Airmen reported going to unofficial social media to be entertained, to ask questions, and to connect with other Airmen.
- Unofficial pages sometimes lead Airmen to official pages.
 - Airmen reported receiving official information on unofficial sources at times.
 - Some reported receiving responses from Air Force leaders on unofficial sources.

This information is consistent with findings from the 2016 WAGI focus groups.



Air Force Official Social Media



Official Air Force social media is not Airmen's top choice.

- Although many follow some official AF social media, others noted they do not follow any of these channels nor know of their existence.
 - Those who follow official pages commonly follow on Facebook, Instagram, senior leadership pages (e.g., Chief Wright), and the Space Force.
- Information on official Air Force social media is often perceived as believable.
 - However, many stated that posts are often boring, irrelevant to their day-to-day jobs, redundant with other communications, and sometimes politically biased.
- Additionally, some Airmen do not follow these accounts because they reported wanting more work/life balance and/or do not use social media altogether.
- However, Airmen reported that they are more likely to follow these pages when they are personally relevant (i.e., base- or career field-specific).
 - For example, Airmen find it helpful when base or gate closures are posted on social media because they can more readily check their phones while at home.



Selected Quotes

Air Force Official Social Media



- “The wing and lower-level Facebook pages, they give you more stuff that's relevant to you. The **higher you go, it's more just fluff.**”
—*Officer*
- “I think it's good, depending on what they put out. I follow [the] **Chief of Staff of the Air Force; I follow Chief Master Sergeant Wright.** I follow folks and just see what their thoughts are on leadership, on what they're putting out for their reading lists, on their thoughts of current events, things that are going on.” —*Civilian*
- “And a lot of people that don't necessarily have social media, like for Intel jobs, because of security reasons. So, then it's like some people may want to, but they feel like they can't.” —*Enlisted*



Unofficial/External Social Media



Several Airmen reported liking unofficial social media because is timelier and more uncensored.

- Unofficial accounts on social media platforms are popular among Airmen.
 - Airmen reported that these platforms enable fast, uncensored communication free of “Big Blue” political narratives.
 - Lower-level Airmen use these platforms to ask questions they may hesitate to ask supervisors in person, or to raise concerns (e.g., mold in housing).
- Reddit is a popular social media platform.
 - This platform allows them to post anonymously, receive more timely information, and can prepare leadership for potential questions that might arise.
 - Airmen reported liking how Reddit aggregates information, making it easier to find.
 - Several said that Google leads them to answers to questions on Reddit.
 - Airmen particularly like that senior leaders, such as Chief Wright, frequently comment on posts, even though Reddit is an unofficial source.
- Airmen commonly use unofficial Facebook pages to garner additional information not found through official channels (e.g., senior NCO page).



Selected Quotes

Unofficial/External Social Media



- “I like that [**Reddit**] it’s not an official source, you can actually get some real opinions from people...it generates some decent discussion and it’s more entertainment and gathering information about people who are in the same situation.” —*Officer*
- “When I was retraining a lot of people...around my work they didn’t know a lot of the information. The career advisor, he was gone somewhere, and there was a temporary person. So, I just went on **Reddit**, and everybody’s opinion...kind of led you in the right direction for that. It **wasn’t official, but it was correct.**” —*Enlisted*
- “Occasionally for entertainment purposes, I go on to **John Q. Public** and they have some incredible Air Force [content]... It’s an anonymous author of a website and they have some military people, Air Force people, all the time. If they see something, they think ...may be a good story or a ridiculous thing that happened, and they can capture a photo or a nice paragraph on it, they provide it to John Q. Public **anonymously**. And then you just have to determine yourself whether you think it's legit or not.” —*Civilian*



Official vs. Unofficial Social Media



Airmen would be more likely to follow official social media if it were more relatable and timelier.

- Most Airmen want sooner notice of information, knowing that more details will be provided later.
 - They prefer to receive timely information with partial updates then full information later.
- Social media is often a source of entertainment for Airmen, highlighting that they are more likely to follow pages that are personally relevant.
 - Airmen prefer official posts that are more personally interesting, such as Chief Wright's reading list recommendations or information specific to their jobs.
- Airmen perceive that official social media only highlight the positive aspects of the service.
 - Many want to see information that reflects all aspects of service, not just the positive ones.
- Airmen prefer unofficial social media because it encourages discussions, good and bad, that may not otherwise appear on official channels.
 - Some reported receiving more candid responses from unofficial sources.
 - Unofficial sources are a tool to stay updated on upcoming policy changes that may not be shared through official channels.
 - Airmen recognize that this information can be skewed by individual biases and understand the need to verify information through official sources in tandem.



Selected Quotes

Official vs. Unofficial Social Media



- “And then with the **younger people especially...They’re scared to say anything**. They’re scared to speak up...So on those [unofficial] pages, they can say, ‘Hey, the water’s been out for three days,’ and it’s instantly going to get attention...For me, it gives us all the opportunity to be able to do something about it, to promote change about it.” —*Officer/Enlisted/Civilian*
- “I guess the negative side is **we’re never going to see the bad side of things on social media accounts**, because they’re public. So, if we have an incident or a suicide or something, we’re not going to find out about it from [a] social media account. Most likely...But I do find a lot of that stuff from unofficial [sources]. This people chattering on social media.” —*Officer*



RQ4: Findings



RQ4: What can the Air Force do to keep Airmen better informed?

- Some Airmen want more timely, relevant information about career-specific updates, news, policy and command information, family information, and other relevant topics.
 - One suggestion is allowing Airmen to opt into various types of emails.
- Airmen reported that information tends to be scattered across different platforms and they prefer to see information effectively aggregated onto one platform.
 - Improving the AF Portal as a central location would be ideal, as it is the website Airmen most frequently use.
- To better tailor information, one suggestion is to have supervisors or local leadership more effectively distill information for those under them.
- Airmen want to see a consolidated emails rather than receiving many individual ones.
- Airmen want to see more BLUFS in longer, more complex emails to help summarize important information.
 - They also want emails designated with “Action Required” for important, time-sensitive information.

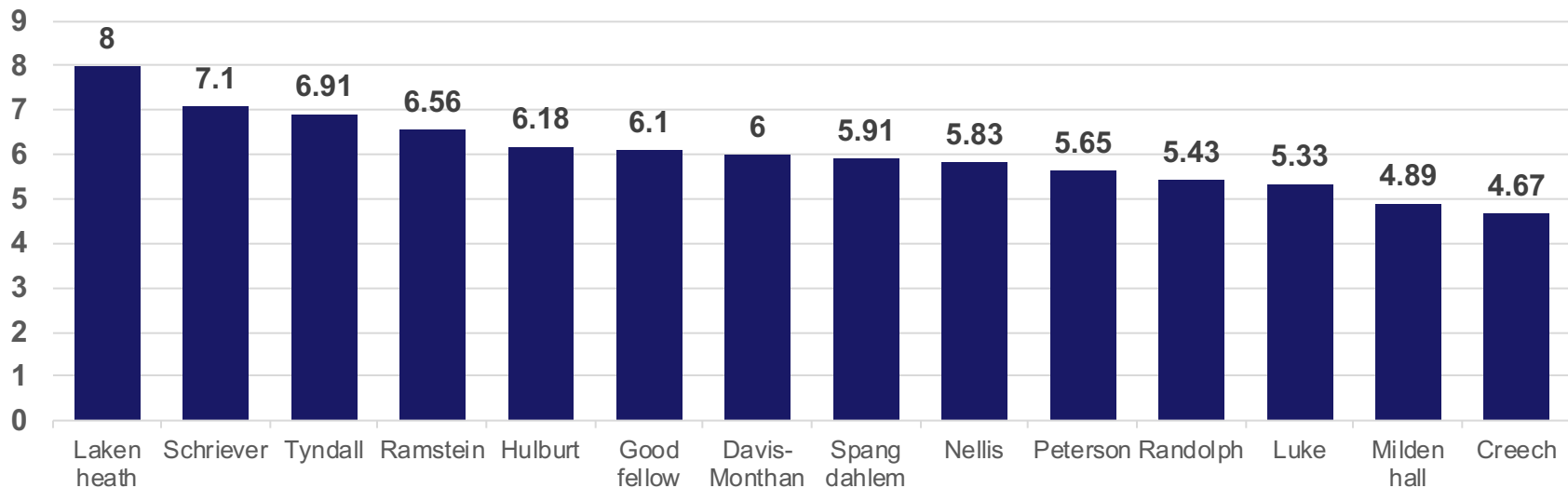


How Well the Air Force Keeps Airmen Informed



Air Force communication satisfaction varies by base.

- Airmen rated how well they think the Air Force does of keeping them informed on a scale from 1 (very poor job) to 10 (very good job).
- Across bases, Airmen reported the Air Force keeps them moderately informed (mean = 5.93),⁷ with minimal differences among most bases.
 - Creech reported the lowest average rankings (mean = 4.67), whereas Lakenheath reported the highest (mean = 8.00).



⁷The average rating in the WAGI survey was 6.65.



Selected Quotes

How Well the Air Force Keeps Airmen Informed



- “**Making it more streamlined** for starters, almost everything we do, you have to log, you have to go to the portal first before you go off into the other sites...Every website you go to, ‘cause some of the sites you do have to jump between four or five links and four or five sites to get to.” —*Enlisted*
- “If the Air Force wants us to know something and wants us to comply with it, they’re going to do a great job at sending it down, because they want us to follow exactly what they want us to do obviously. So, pushing it down Air Force-wide, I think they do a pretty good job of that.” —*Enlisted*
- “It comes down to a **balance between too much information and relevance**. So, you get all the information is there, it's all out there. A lot of it can get pushed to you, and it depends upon the relevance, right? Because once you get to that point where you’re saturated with information and it’s no longer useful, it might be there, it might be available, it’s in the same way that just getting blasted with emails doesn’t mean that you are wise to the ways of your unit.” —*Officer*



How the Air Force Can Improve Communication Efforts



The Air Force can improve communications efforts by ensuring that information is timely, accessible, and relevant.

Platforms:

- Several Airmen recommend that information be aggregated onto one platform to reduce confusion and save time.
 - Some suggested the AF Portal as a suitable site to house AF information.
- Airmen want to receive information in locations they frequently access, such as social media platforms.

Information Distribution and Presentation:

- Airmen desire more focused messages about how the information directly affects them.
 - Some want more concise communication, with a BLUF for lengthy emails.
 - Others want to see more information in email subject lines (e.g., Action Required).
- Airmen want to see better and more direct communication from wing commanders.
 - The Air Force needs to teach commanders to improve their internal comms and to distribute information more efficiently.
- Many want email to be more accessible through their mobile phones and home computers.
 - They prefer that emails be consolidated into a weekly round-up style format.
- They seek more timely and efficient information distribution.
 - One suggestion was sending the information that everyone needs to know in one email, rather than disseminating through the chain of command.



Selected Quotes

How the Air Force Can Improve Communication Efforts



- “I guess one of the biggest things I like to see is if they know something is changing soon, just **tell us they’re working on it**. Tell us it’s in the works. I understand they want to avoid people getting their hopes up about something to have it change and all that, and that’s fine. Just set realistic expectations but let us know that they’re working on something and blast it out as soon as they know that.” —*Enlisted/Officer*
- “I see that in different MAJCOMs...there are **10 different systems that do the same thing**. So, if they just had one universal Air Force one...the training would be better, the communication would be better.” —*Enlisted*
- “I think that just **having the information be regularly available** helps to make the Air Force a more viable option for everybody. Rather than just some individuals who come in on the enlisted side...and get out because they don’t know all the opportunities that are afforded to them. But if we are basically in the know about what opportunities are afforded to us outside of our specific Air Force career fields, then it may seem like we have the opportunity to advance outside of our career fields.” —*Enlisted*



RQ5: Findings



RQ5: What location-specific information or media are Airmen using?

In-Person:

- Airmen at several locations reported liking town halls and commander's calls as ways to obtain base information.
 - Airmen said they prefer the interactivity of these in-person briefings, including the ability to ask questions in real time. Several suggested having the opportunity to submit questions anonymously.
 - Some suggested having recordings or detailed notes of the commander's calls easily available for people who cannot attend in person.
 - Civilians wanted their own civilian groups/all-calls/commander's calls periodically, or part of these meetings that are geared towards civilians.

Base-Specific Sources:

- Social media, particularly Facebook, is a source of base-specific information.
 - Airmen also reported going to social media for crisis or emergency information.
- Generally, Airmen are not reading base newspapers, though some civilians do.
- At OCONUS locations, Airmen discussed spouse networks as important sources of base information.

Smartphones:

- Airmen reported wanting ready access to base information on their phones.
- In emergencies, Airmen reported wanting to receive text messages or push notifications.
- Availability and use of base-specific smartphone apps, particularly the Air Force Connect sub-apps for each base, varies by location and how well base PAs advertised the app.



All Bases Coronavirus and Town Halls



- 1) Airmen want to hear pertinent news information that affects them, including updated information about coronavirus.**
- 2) Airmen reported that town halls and commander's calls were effective ways to share information.**

- Coronavirus was brought up naturally across several bases.⁹
 - Many Airmen reported that they did not receive timely nor enough information about coronavirus.
- Airmen said they like attending town halls or commander's calls, find them effective ways to share information, and like the ability to engage in information dissemination in real time.
- Some civilian Airmen would like to see more time dedicated to issues relating to civilians.

⁹At the time of these focus groups (early February 2020), COVID-19 cases had begun to be reported in the United States but were not yet widespread. Social distancing measures had not been put into place.



Selected Quotes

All Bases

Coronavirus



- “I just think some things could still get lost in translation or certain folks are still learning how to communicate better, so therefore they don't communicate the things they should... Like, for instance, the coronavirus thing... **Unclear direction and improper communication.** And they knew about it, but we didn't...” —*Enlisted*
- “I just try to **distill the high points** for my team. We do something called a roll call every morning...And that's where if there's something important that we need to talk about, I'll try to bring it to that forum and say... like talking about coronavirus...” —*Officer*



Selected Quotes All Bases Town Halls



- “...If it’s a big issue affecting civilians, I think the wing commander addressing that. Especially if it's something like we're talking about furloughs or layoffs or something negative. But then have civilian personnel there, the subject matter experts, to answer the questions when we get to the question portion, because there would be a lot of questions on that kind of stuff.” —*Civilian*
- “I actually think that’s probably the better way that I receive information, is whether it's these **town halls or the face to face**. I think those are pretty effective.” —*Guard/Reserve*
- “I thought it was very informative because it was **a chance to hear straight from the horse's mouth**...now people got a chance to ask questions or get the info straight from the Wing Commander...” —*Officer/Enlisted/Civilian*



Emergent Themes: Relevance and Targeted Messaging



- 1) Airmen want to know how information is relevant to them.***
- 2) Airmen want messaging from the Air Force to be more targeted or career-specific.***

- Airmen are looking for more relevant information to their specific careers.
 - They want more targeted messaging that is specific to their career field and local base (e.g., base, gate closures, inclement weather).
- Airmen want to receive more updates and information that directly impact them and their work.
- An overwhelming amount of information is sent to Airmen, and they reported having trouble pulling out relevant key points.
 - Given that Airmen receive so many emails, information that is more relevant and targeted to the appropriate audience is more likely to be read rather than deleted.
- Airmen prefer face-to-face communications when topics are more specific to them so they can ask follow-up questions.
 - Some also stated that if news were important enough, someone would tell them in person.
- This information is consistent with findings from the 2016 WAGI focus groups.



Selected Quotes Relevance



- “I feel like the Air Force has so much information. I don't feel like I know everything about the Air Force. They inform us, but there's so much to inform us of and sometimes you feel irrelevant. So, **we're not really fully informed.**” —*Civilian*
- “From a senior-level perspective, if it is not something that directly impacts the Air Force mission or the people in the Air Force...I don't care.” —*Officer*
- “...if we're going to talk about **our career field**, Facebook group or whatever, I know what they post can be **relevant to myself, to my Airmen, to my job**, and to an extent “Big” Air Force, but mainly focused on the things that matter to me...Whereas the Air Force website itself have a lot of highlights of an Airman or this random thing that happened at this base that doesn't have any relevance to me.” —*Officer*
- “**How does this impact us?** And that's where it gets lost in the mud...Okay, we know what you're doing, how it impacts each entity that we're going to touch. And that's where the information stops. It's nice to know from leadership and the “Big” Air Force rural bubble, it's nice to know you guys made this decision, but did you think about the outcome and the impact of all the people that it's going to touch? And did you communicate that?” —*Civilian*



Selected Quotes Targeted Messaging



- “If it was filtered down, through the necessary people to the necessary people, then that would be pretty cool. It would help out a lot, actually. Participant #3 said someone in his office went out for leave and when he came back, he had 250 emails. Does he really need all 250 of those emails?” —*Enlisted*
- “I think a lot of it is also applicability, so I'm going to be interested in reading something **that's more pertained to what I do** rather than something that he does or that he does. So, when you look at *Air Force Times*, it's really general stuff. Most of the time, it's not very specific to what impacts me on a day-to-day basis.” —*Officer*
- “As far as personnel, benefits, all that stuff, **it's targeted messaging**. I'm [a] personnelist, so it's targeted messaging. So AFPC, they actually do all these nice fancy statistics to figure out who's eligible for X, Y, and Z, and they blast out the email only to those people. So, it's like if you want it, you can read the email and you can sign up for it, or you can compete for it. But a lot of people they won't know. They don't know that they're the only one of 50,000 people or whoever that got this email.” —*Officer*



Emergent Themes: Difficult to Navigate Info



Airmen said Air Force information is readily available, but it is in too many places, is hard to find, or takes a long time to get to the right information.

- Airmen reported that they struggle to find the right information due to the wide variety of websites and places that the Air Force points them to for information.
 - This information is consistent with findings from the 2016 WAGI focus groups.
- Many said the information is out there, but it can be difficult to find and navigate the Air Force websites.
- Many Airmen reported struggling on the AF Portal because it is not well-organized.
 - Several reported that information is not organized by topic area, which makes it difficult to find desired information.
 - Some suggested incorporating better search features.
- Airmen desired training on how and where to find information.
 - One recommendation is to include this kind of training into commander's calls or other in-person trainings.



Selected Quotes

Difficult to Navigate Info



- “...But if you need to find information on a website, then it's like they don't care. **The site navigation is horrendous.**” —*Enlisted/Officer*
- “I just feel there's too much on there, because once you go on the portal you have a list of everything...But I just feel you have to click to so many things to get to where you want to go.” —*Enlisted*
- “I think most of the information you need from the Air Force is out there. **It just takes a while to get to it...**it just takes a while to get there [and] navigate through all of that.” —*Enlisted*
- It's again back to the **information glut problem**. The Air Force does a great job of offering too many sources. To keep us informed, they produce a lot. They send out a lot and they over-communicate very well and that's the problem. It's kind of like the benefit. It's the good thing and it's also the problem.” —*Civilian*
- “On a day-to-day basis, I'm trying to find answers and trying to find, even about my personal career and Air Force in whole, I'm always having to seek that information and find where I can actually find it...” —*Officer*
- If you hunt for it, you can find it very well, but it takes a lot of work.” —*Officer*



Emergent Themes: Aggregate Information and Timeliness



- 1) Airmen want to see information aggregated into one collective location.***
- 2) Airmen want more timely information.***

Aggregate Information:

- Airmen reported wanting more structured dissemination of information through a more centrally located, better-organized platform.
- Several Airmen said that the AF Portal or SharePoint would be a good site for consolidation.
- Airmen also want to see Air Force social media and resources (e.g., sexual assault, suicide) more clearly linked via the Portal.

Timeliness:

- Airmen reported that they often receive information later than they should.
 - Airmen would like to receive more timely information, particularly career field updates.
- Airmen reported that they would like more timely updates on current events such as government shutdowns and natural disasters.
- Delayed information dissemination often leads Airmen to turn to unofficial sources.
 - Some reported getting information after something has already happened.
- Airmen often reported wanting to see more timely information on official Air Force social media, even if the information is more incomplete and would be updated later.
- This information is consistent with findings from the 2016 WAGI focus groups.



Selected Quotes Aggregate Information



- “I can't see why in this day and age we can't just hire out a company to do a website and move it all together, **put it all in one place**, and that way it all has the same platform.”
—*Enlisted*
- “You could have Air Force Instagram, Air Force Facebook, the airforce.net website. If you can just, **you can go to a section and click on it and we'll take you there**. Also, you can have SAPR [Sexual Assault Prevention and Response] stuff. I feel like sexual assault numbers, different advocate where it's really easy, just pull your phone, you've got all that information right there.” —*Enlisted*
- “**Searching by subjects** easier, so by a category of information.” —*Officer*
- “It would be nice to have a **one-stop shop**.” —*Civilian*
- “We had talked about like a **centralized location**, with a week by week, or month by month...listing of new things that have come out, broken down into categories, if needed. Then I asterisked forms, policies, AFIs, changes to the AFIs, if this already exists, I'm not aware. The Portal is good, but maybe something easily accessible by smartphone.”
—*Guard/Reserve*
- “...find one avenue that works instead of all these several different avenues that we have, like the base site and the Portal, Facebook. There's just so much out there. It would be nice to have **one place** where we can all go to find whatever we need.” —*Officer*



Selected Quotes Timeliness



- "...my daughter's at university and whenever something happens on campus, the president of the university will say something. And same with high schools and stuff. If there's a suicide or a death or something, they will address it right away, where I don't feel like they do that here." —*Civilian*
- "Yeah, and a good example...Christmas Eve being a day [off]... that was out on Facebook before it came out over email or anything on the base. I think it was almost a day later that it actually came out through email official that, 'Okay, yeah. There truly is a day off even though Facebook, President Trump'I mean, it was official, but the base didn't put it out until, like it was almost a day later." —*Officer/Enlisted/Civilian*
- "Making sure it gets there in a **timely manner**. So if you tell something to someone, and then you want them to go relay the message, you don't want them to wait a day, or two days...Instead just do it right away and then you don't have to worry that that person won't get the clear and concise message that needed to go up the chain." —*Enlisted*
- "Timeliness, I think they['ve] got to do a **better job of getting in front of the wave**, because stuff comes out there so fast in social media that a lot of times, we're playing catch-up." —*Guard/ Reserve*
- "I just found out I had an AFI change—it happened in November. I just found out [in February]. Those are the types of changes that are big, because we all deal with people. Every one of our job's deals with somebody in some way, but we're the last ones to find out how that information benefits us or doesn't benefit us, but it should be the first." —*Civilian*



Emergent Themes: Big AF Comms vs. Local



Airmen expressed receiving more detailed information from local or base communication.

- Airmen reported that they do not receive many “Big” Air Force communications.
 - Some reported deleting these emails sometimes due to lack of relevance.
 - However, Airmen appreciate when “Big” Air Force communications keep them in the loop on important changes and make them feel that their jobs are essential to overall operations.
- “Big” Air Force communications can sometimes be considered irrelevant because they are often perceived as sterile and written under political constraints.
- Airmen reported they are more likely to get more detailed information from their local bases and commanders.



Selected Quotes

Big AF Coms vs. Local



- “Most of the **information we get from higher leadership is very indirect**—it works its way down the chain of command until it gets to some of our flight chiefs or first sergeants, and then it gets to us. But maybe if some of the information was more direct, more on the higher end and it was coming straight to us Airmen, something along those lines. Cut off some of the middlemen, even if it's just a few.” —*Enlisted*
- “To me, the problem isn't communication from the Air Force level. I think, like I said, they've improved that vastly. And they've improved the way in which younger ranking people can find that information directly. But not everyone has a Facebook or a Twitter and not everyone frankly wants to read about the Air Force in their personal time. I don't blame them.” —*Enlisted*
- “**It's a bit lower when I think of Big, Big Air Force**, just because I don't get a lot coming down from them. But locally, I feel like if it was two different questions, they would be two different answers, because I feel like I get a lot of information locally.” —*Civilian*
- “But I think it's all **really sterile**, in my opinion. Near that high level you have to have political answers to things, unless you're willing to get fired, kind of thing. So down channel more, because it insulates them, but then maybe we can get more real messaging from down channel sources.” —*Officer*



Emergent Themes: Component Differences



Differences are seen between different Air Force components.

Civilians:

- Some civilians said that they sometimes lack the proper orientations or access to base information and resources compared to active duty Airmen.
- Many civilians reported that they want to have separate commander's calls and email information that are specific to civilians so they can better understand their role in the overall mission.

Guard/Reserve:

- A few Guard/Reserve Airmen reported that they often miss out on Air Force information, specifically base information, when they do not check outside sources (e.g., Facebook, group messaging applications).
 - Several reported struggling due to only being connected to email and the AF Portal once per month when they are on base.
- Some Reservist Airmen reported wanting more resources and tools to connect and communicate with other personnel off base.

Overall Ranks:

- Some Airmen said those lower in rank (lower Enlisted, in particular) are more likely to turn to unofficial sources, including social media, due to their timeliness and anonymity.



Selected Quotes Component Differences



Lower Rank:

- I'd say as lower-tier tactical players in the Air Force in general, we are more likely to get quick information from sources that may not be entirely vetted, like through **social media or Reddit**... perhaps those in command positions are more likely to only try and get information from vetted sources. It will probably be less timely in that case, but more likely to be accurate.” —*Enlisted*

Guard/Reserve:

- “...a traditional Reservist will only usually log in once a month when they come in for duty, so **we miss a lot of that in between**, if we're not connected through other means like Facebook...” —*Civilian*
- “For reservists, **completely ineffective**...What we need is a tool that is more, and there's plenty of them out there, like Slack, or all these other different collaboration tools...” —*Civilian*
- “...a lot of the times just due to probably cyber security, and stuff like that, as particularly for traditional Reservists, or Guardsmen, they can't get onto their mil email because name the reason, and even if **they can get onto it**, because of issues with...security, which is important, they can't read encrypted emails...” —*Civilian*



Selected Quotes Component Differences (cont.)



Civilians:

- [Discussion among participants]: “We have a civilian personnel office probably at every installation but when you get hired you just go directly to your work superior. There is no piece of... orientation with them at all.”...“**There's no orientation.**”...“Not for civilians.” —*Civilian*
- “So just that. To me, **it's a separation of military and civilian information.**” —*Civilian*
- “It’s encouraging senior leadership at the local level, so the wing commander on down, to **address civilians separately or specifically.** I often choose not to go to a wing commander's call because we're going to be there an hour and they may or may not address anything that addresses civilians.” —*Civilian*
- “I think a lot of **civilian-centric stuff**, because we see a lot of things that are for military. And so, they'll say, ‘Okay, we're going to do this event on Friday.’ Well, what does that mean for civilians? I just would like to know what my role is with those types of things, and also events that are coming up, because I see it on that news thing that comes out, the *Knightly News*. But a lot of times I see it after the event has happened, and I didn't know about it ahead of time.” —*Civilian*
- Our group is very heavily civilian. It's like 95% civilian. So, I actually think it's a disservice to the military members. And **they don't get the guidance that they may need.**” —*Civilian*



Emergent Themes: CONUS/OCONUS



CONUS and OCONUS Airmen had both differences in information usage and preferences.

- Some Airmen said that they do not always get timely information on domestic news while overseas due to country restrictions, problems with internet connection, and time zone differences.
- Airmen reported using social media more often while overseas to communicate and to get news compared to those in the United States.
 - OCONUS Airmen reported poor cell reception as a reason they turn to social media.
- OCONUS Airmen reported using Facebook Messenger as a communication tool they use often to stay connected on and off base.
 - Time zone differences are a huge driver of Airmen to this tool.
- OCONUS Airmen reported that they watch TV less often and get their news via other media outlets compared to CONUS Airmen.
- **Data collection at OCONUS locations was cut short due to COVID-19, so comparisons between CONUS and OCONUS Airmen are limited.**



Selected Quotes CONUS/OCONUS



- “**Facebook** is a good one because chances are everybody's already on it anyway. Being overseas we're scrolling to see what's going on with our family back home. Besides other than work we want to just see some funny memes come up. And I was starting to say that Facebook is an important tool, even the unofficial pages.” —*Enlisted*
- “...completely **different time zones**...So, it slows information down...you get very little directly from the horse's mouth. It's very much all email.” —*Officer*
- I have a lot of more messaging apps...” —*Officer*
- “So, you have **country restrictions**. You have to use a VPN or something or a proxy to bypass to get to certain things in the United States. If you're talking about Air Force level, your AFN and stuff, you're restricted to just what they're showing or what kind of contracts they get with certain providers to show. That's a restriction there. Basically, you're more limited to what you can access when you're overseas compared to back in the States.” —*Officer*
- “...if anything is in the States or in any other region, you have to wait. So, it's a **long time of waiting**. Or you come in and you have received an email and, well, now you have to wait until the end of the day to contact anybody. And by then you've probably forgotten and moved on to other tasks, because you have to call them stateside. So, it's going to be end of the day, which a lot of times I miss...” —*Officer*