US Recruitment: A Good Start for Fiscal 2026

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According to the United States Department of Defense (Pentagon), the recruitment campaign for the **fiscal year 2026** (which in the US began in **October 2025**) has started well. The administration describes it as a “strong and promising” start because, in the first few months, **almost 40%** of the target for the **Delayed Entry Program (DEP)** has already been reached.

What is the DEP? In simple terms, it is a sort of “entry list”: many young men and women sign up to enlist and then enter service after a certain period. Having many people already “booked” in the first months of the year is considered a positive sign because it reduces the risk that potential candidates might change their minds or choose something else.

The Pentagon also claims that, after years of difficulty, recruitment is experiencing a better period: from **November 2024** onwards, it states, the percentage of targets met or exceeded would be the highest **in over ten years**.

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The Results of Fiscal 2025: Almost All Above Targets

The statement cited in the article summarizes the results of **fiscal 2025**, presenting them as a “recovery” compared to the struggles of previous years. On average, the main armed forces would have reached about **103%** of their targets.

Here are the reported figures:

- **Army**: target 61,000 – enlisted **62,050** (**101.72%**)
- **Navy**: target 40,600 – enlisted **44,096** (**108.61%**)
- **Air Force**: target 30,100 – enlisted **30,166** (**100.22%**)
- **Space Force**: target 796 – enlisted **819** (**102.89%**)
- **Marine Corps**: target 26,600 – enlisted **26,600** (**100%**)

The picture, therefore, is positive for the active duty forces. However, there is an important detail: **not all reserves** achieved the same results. In particular, the **Army Reserve** would have reached **only 75%** of its target.

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What Helped Recruitment

The Pentagon attributes these results mainly to two practical interventions:

1. **Faster Medical Visits and Checks**
   A pilot program has been launched to speed up access and verification of medical information, reducing waiting times between the initial application and the appointment at selection centers (MEPS). The idea is that less waiting means fewer dropouts.
2. **Courses for Those “Almost Eligible”**
   Courses have been organized to help candidates improve **academic preparation**, test results, and **physical fitness**, to meet the minimum standards.

A Critical Note: The Issue of Tests

The article also recalls a less “positive” point: a report from the Department of Defense Inspector General highlighted that **Army and Navy** inaccurately counted some results because they considered scores obtained **after** preparatory courses instead of initial ones. Translated: the improvement is there, but it is important to be clear about **how** data is measured, otherwise the comparison risks being skewed.

Fiscal 2026: Higher Targets and Ongoing Challenges

The context of fiscal 2026 is not just about “recruiting well,” but also **increasing the total number of military personnel**. The article explains that the **NDAA 2026** (the law that sets

defense budget and guidelines) just signed by President **Donald Trump** increases the overall force by about **26,100 units**.

The indicated numbers are:

- **Army**: 454,000 military personnel (**+11,700**)
- **Navy**: 334,600 (**+12,300**)
- **Air Force**: 321,500 (**+1,500**)
- **Space Force**: 10,400 (**+600**)
- **Marine Corps**: no increase, remains at 172,300

This means that the good results of 2025 are not enough on their own: if the personnel increases, recruitment must continue, and at the same time, **compensate for those leaving** due to end of service, career change, or other reasons.

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In Summary: What to Watch in the Coming Months

- If the DEP “reservoir” will continue to grow without losing candidates along the way
- If the **reserves**, especially the Army Reserve, will manage to improve
- If data on tests and preparatory courses will be communicated with greater transparency

Conclusion: the Pentagon describes a favorable moment for recruitment, and the numbers for fiscal 2025 seem to support it. However, the increase in personnel in 2026 and some critical points (especially regarding reserves and the measurement of results) indicate that the game is

not over: the coming months will tell if it is a stable recovery or just a temporary rebound.

News link: https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-military/2025/12/22/military-recruiting-off-to-strong-start-for-fiscal-2026-dod-says/