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## Army to Take Over 4,000 Acquisition Jobs

By Marjorie Censer

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The Army is planning over the next five years to move in house more than 4,000 acquisition jobs that are currently performed by contractors as part of a larger effort to bolster its buying workforce, service officials said last week.

Edward M. Harrington, deputy assistant secretary of the Army for procurement, said the service is in the process of assessing about 4,150 positions in the acquisition and contracting components of its workforce as candidates for insourcing -- or moving the work from contractors to government employees.

"Our process needs to be as pure as we can make it," Harrington said.

More broadly, Army officials said they are seeking to rebuild the acquisition workforce, which they said was dramatically downsized in the 1990s. Army Contracting Command, which handles about 80 percent of the service's contracting, is ramping up its recruitment of interns, or entry-level contract specialists; mid-level contracting officers who have four to 15 years of experience; and soldiers in the contracting career field.

In the next fiscal year, the Army plans to hire 70 interns, about 450 mid-level employees and 60 soldiers, the command said.

In particular, the Army's contracting workforce needs to "reconstitute" its technical skills, said Kim D. Denver, director of contracting for the Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps of Engineers is the second-largest Army contracting organization behind Army Contracting Command.

Hampered by a limited supply of experienced contracting officials, the Army has sought to attract employees making mid-career changes, such as those who previously worked in industries like steel or automotives, as well as interns out of college.

"Our largest challenge is hiring people that have experience," said Jeffrey P. Parsons, executive director of Army Contracting Command. "We are in a huge developmental cycle right now where we're building the base."

Meanwhile, Army Contracting Command and the Expeditionary Contracting Command are soon leaving the area. Now based at Fort Belvoir, the posts will move to Huntsville, Ala., by August of next year as part of a larger Pentagon base realignment and consolidation. As a result, about 310 jobs will be relocated, according to Parsons.

Harrington warned that rebuilding the workforce with "savvy, seasoned" buyers will take time -- despite the growing workload.

"We've got tremendous challenges with balancing the workforce with the workload," he said.

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