Office of Inspector General

Audit Report

WHILE FAA TOOK STEPS INTENDED TO IMPROVE ITS CONTROLLER HIRING PROCESS, THE AGENCY DID NOT EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENT ITS NEW POLICIES

Federal Aviation Administration

Report Number: AV2017028

Date Issued: February 15, 2017

Memorandum

Subject: **ACTION:** While FAA Took Steps Intended To Improve Its Controller Hiring Process, the Agency Did Not Effectively Implement Its New Policies
Federal Aviation Administration
Report Number AV2017028

Date: February 15, 2017

From: Matthew E. Hampton
Assistant Inspector General
for Aviation Audits

Reply to
Attn. of: JA-10

To: Federal Aviation Administrator

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) employs approximately 14,000 air traffic controllers and is planning to hire more than 3,400 additional controllers over the next 2 years to offset estimated retirements. The Agency faces the significant challenge of selecting these new controllers and assigning them to air traffic facilities where they will have the best opportunity to be successful.

In February 2014, FAA began implementing changes to its controller hiring process. However, both Congress and stakeholders expressed concerns about the transparency and effectiveness of FAA's revised processes. For example, in its fiscal year 2015 appropriations report,[1] the House Appropriations Committee expressed concern after FAA's nationwide controller vacancy announcement yielded a much smaller number of candidates than expected. In addition, the Chairmen of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Subcommittee on Aviation requested we review FAA's air traffic control hiring programs and practices to fully examine any weaknesses in the integrity of the processes. Ranking Member Nelson of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation also expressed concerns about changes to the controller hiring process and requested that we look into the issue. Accordingly, our audit objectives were to determine (1) FAA's justification for adopting the new hiring process and (2) changes that have occurred since the new process was implemented.

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[1] Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2015.

We conducted this audit in accordance with generally accepted Government auditing standards. Exhibit A details our scope and methodology.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

FAA's decision to revise its controller hiring process was based on internal and external reviews of its policies, which identified both equal opportunity issues and other opportunities to improve the process. Specifically, FAA conducted internal assessments of its controller workforce from 2007 through 2013 to address barriers to equal opportunities. In 2011, the FAA Administrator also convened an Independent Review Panel (IRP) of industry and academic professionals to evaluate how the Agency hires, assigns, and trains new controllers. According to FAA officials, these reviews triggered further analysis, which led to changes intended to improve the hiring process. A 2012 external analysis conducted by Outtz & Associates found that four of seven decision points in FAA's process may include potential barriers to employment opportunities for women and minorities. To further analyze these concerns, FAA commissioned a second external review in 2013 to determine the root causes of these barriers. This review, conducted by APT Metrics (APT), identified additional concerns regarding the controller hiring process, including the use of multiple vacancy announcements (e.g., creating one vacancy announcement for Controller Training Initiative (CTI) program[2] students and one announcement for applicants from the general public), the Air Traffic Selection and Training (AT-SAT)[3] test, and a Centralized Selection Panel.[4] The review also recommended that FAA centralize the hiring process in the Office of Human Resources. This was expected to improve FAA's ability to recruit candidates, track and evaluate the hiring process, and coordinate hiring nationwide. As a result, FAA implemented numerous changes to its hiring process to address these and other concerns, as detailed below.

FAA's new hiring process, implemented in February 2014, included several significant changes. In particular, FAA reduced the role of the CTI program, eliminated the use of a Centralized Selection Panel, and revised the AT-SAT test. FAA also introduced a Biographical Assessment,[5] which was intended to predict controller performance by asking candidates a series of questions about typical behaviors or experiences. Due to the lengthy process for hiring and training a controller, it is too soon to determine whether FAA's new policies improved its

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[2] Collegiate Training Initiative (CTI) schools offer 2- and 4-year non-engineering aviation degrees that provide basic courses in air traffic control and aviation administration. The program is designed to provide qualified candidates for developmental air traffic control specialist positions.

[3] A computerized aptitude test comprised of eight subtests, which vary in composition, from traditional multiple-choice question to dynamic scenarios and simulations.

[4] A Centralized Selection Panel is comprised of FAA management with knowledge of the facilities within their regions that review the applicant lists and select individuals to fill controller vacancies.

[5] A new pre-employment screening tool introduced into FAA's air traffic controller hiring process in early 2014.

ability to hire applicants who are more likely to successfully become certified controllers. While FAA's new process incorporates changes recommended from its external reviews, the Agency did not have an effective rollout or communication strategy for implementing the new hiring process. As a result, stakeholders expressed concerns about the sudden and unexpected implementation of the new hiring process. In addition, FAA has experienced delays in hiring new controllers through the new process, and the Agency has not established an effective system to track applicants through the entire hiring process. Moreover, hiring delays limited FAA's ability to meet its hiring goals. FAA continues to review the hiring process and has established an internal review team to identify and mitigate problems, but it has not yet determined the full range of changes that will be made.

We are making recommendations to increase the effectiveness of FAA's air traffic controller hiring process.

BACKGROUND

There are about 14,000 controllers working at FAA air traffic facilities, of which about 10,800 are fully certified,[6] with the remaining number comprised of both newly hired trainees and certified controllers who transferred to a different facility but have yet to complete facility-specific training at their new location. In addition, as many as 19 percent of FAA's controllers are currently eligible to retire, lending urgency to FAA's task of selecting, hiring, and training new controllers.

After the conclusion of our audit work, Congress passed and the President signed Public Law 114-190, the FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act of 2016. Section 2106 of this Act includes changes to the hiring process for air traffic control specialists. For example, the Act requires that the Administrator give preferential consideration to qualified individuals maintaining 52 consecutive weeks of air traffic control experience. The Act also raises the maximum entry age for experienced controllers to 35 and eliminates the Biographical Assessment for the most qualified applicants, among other changes. Our audit work reviewed changes to the hiring process that FAA made before this Act was enacted.

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[6] Certified Professional Controllers (CPCs) are controllers who have achieved full certification on all positions within their assigned areas. They also act as On-the-Job Training Instructors for all new hires.

FAA REVISED ITS HIRING PROCESS BASED ON INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL REVIEWS

FAA's decision to revise its controller hiring process was based on internal and external reviews of its policies, which identified both equal opportunity issues and other opportunities to improve the process. Specifically, FAA conducted annual internal assessments of its controller workforce from 2007 through 2013, as required by law.[7] The internal assessments showed potential barriers to participation of women and minorities in the air traffic controller workforce. Even though these potential barriers had been identified annually since 2007, FAA officials did not fund a more detailed barrier analysis until 2012. In addition, in 2011, the FAA Administrator convened an external Independent Review Panel (IRP) of industry and academic professionals to evaluate how the Agency hires, assigns, and trains new controllers.[8]

According to FAA officials, these reviews triggered further analysis of the hiring process. In 2012, FAA contracted with Outtz & Associates to identify and analyze potential barriers to equal employment opportunities. The analysis found that four of the seven decision points[9] used to evaluate controller applicants were potential barriers to women and minorities. The decision points found to contain potential barriers included:

- **Minimum qualifications**—Established qualifications that all applicants have to meet.

- **AT-SAT testing phase**—A computerized selection test designed to assess worker requirements, aptitude, and personal characteristics associated with success on the job.

- **Generated referral list**—Lists are generated for each applicant source (e.g., general public, CTI students, military, etc.) and with vacancies based on the applicant's specified geographic location preferences.

- **Centralized Selection Panel**—Comprised of management representatives who have expertise in the air traffic controller specialist occupation and knowledge of the facilities within their regions.

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[7] Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Management Directive 715, requires all Federal agencies to perform barrier analyses to ensure the workplace is free of barriers that impede full opportunities to all persons in the workplace.

[8] FAA Independent Review Panel on the Selection, Assignment, and Training of Air Traffic Control Specialists, September 2011.

[9] FAA decision points for hiring controllers included (1) Minimum Qualifications, (2) AT-SAT Testing, (3) Generation of Referral Lists, (4) Centralized Selection Panel, (5) Interview, (6) Medical Screening, and (7) Security Clearance.

To further explore these issues and others, in 2013, FAA contracted with a second outside firm—APT—to conduct a root cause analysis of the potential barriers identified in the 2012 review and a broader analysis of the overall controller hiring process. APT's review determined that the root causes of the issues were FAA's "fairly complex hiring process." To address root causes, APT recommended changes to the overall hiring process such as centralizing the process and standardizing minimum qualifications for all applicants. The 2013 review developed corrective actions to address concerns within the hiring process.

FAA SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGED ITS HIRING PROCESS WITHOUT AN EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

FAA did not have an effective implementation or communication strategy when announcing the new process in 2013 and has not yet implemented a tracking system to effectively track the flow of candidates through the entire hiring process. In addition, FAA did not meet its hiring goals in fiscal years 2014 or 2015, and the Agency will not be able to determine whether these changes will result in the selection of applicants most likely to succeed for some time.

FAA Implemented Significant Changes to Its Hiring Process

In December 2013, FAA announced that it would implement a new hiring process to fill controller positions and would no longer use an inventory of candidates identified from prior job announcements. FAA's changes include the following:

- Established an Executive Steering Committee[10] responsible for providing oversight of the new hiring process and for implementing the recommendations identified in the analysis of potential barriers in the hiring process.

- Established the Human Resources office as the single organization to take charge and to centrally manage the process from announcement through placement into the FAA Academy (a process formerly conducted by the Air Traffic Organization).

- Standardized the hiring process and the minimum qualifications for all applicants. Eliminated multiple announcements for multiple hiring sources (e.g., creating one vacancy announcement for CTI program students and one vacancy announcement for applicants from the general public).

- Reduced the role of the CTI schools and opened the competition for jobs up to the general public, whereas the Agency had traditionally relied upon its

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[10] Comprised of FAA Department Heads: Deputy Administrator, Human Resources, Air Traffic Organization, Civil Rights, Office of Chief Counsel, Medical, and Security.

announcements to veterans or graduates of the 36 FAA-designated CTI schools.

Table 1 lists the differences between the prior and current hiring process:

Table 1. Comparison of FAA's Legacy Hiring Process to the New Hiring Process

Legacy Hiring Process[11]	New Hiring Process
Multiple Vacancy Announcements	Nationwide Vacancy Announcements
Multiple Qualifications/Eligibility Criteria Sets/No Biodata	One Set of Qualifications/Eligibility Criteria
AT-SAT	AT-SAT & Biographical Assessment[12]
Candidates Placed by Their Location Preference	Candidates Placed by Agency Needs
Centralized Selection Panel	No Centralized Selection Panel
Interview	No Interview

Source: OIG analysis of FAA documents

The new hiring process evolved into a two-track approach consisting of a general experience/education track and a specialized air traffic controller experience track. The general experience applicants were required to pass a Biographical Assessment to become eligible to take the AT-SAT and then pass the medical and security screening processes before being hired. Once these processes are complete, the applicant must complete basic training at the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City and continue with on-the-job training at an air traffic facility. The specialized track applicants have to pass the medical and security screening processes before bypassing the Academy and being placed at a facility for training. The specialized track is typically used for former FAA or military controllers.

FAA Introduced a Biographical Assessment as a Pre-Employment Screening Tool

A key change to the hiring process was the introduction of a new screening tool, referred to as the Biographical Assessment instrument, which replaced the Experience Questionnaire[13] part of the AT-SAT test. According to FAA, the

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[11] FAA's Air Traffic Control Specialist hiring process, prior to February 2014.
[12] Experienced controllers are not required to take the AT-SAT or the Biographical Assessment.
[13] Assessed whether participants possess certain work-related attributes by asking questions about past experiences.

instrument[14] predicts controller performance through a process of asking individuals to recall and report their typical and sometimes specific behaviors or experiences, generally from an earlier time in their lives.

In February 2014, FAA implemented the Biographical Assessment with its first all-sources job announcement. FAA subsequently revised the assessment for its second all-sources job announcement in March 2015, after testing the assessment on over 1,700 certified professional controllers. FAA officials stated that testing on current controllers was conducted to improve the correlation of the questions to controller job performance. However, the effectiveness of the assessment will not be known until controllers hired under this process become fully certified controllers, which could take several years.

FAA Did Not Have an Effective Roll-Out Strategy or Plan for Implementing the New Hiring Process

FAA did not have a documented plan to implement its new controller hiring process. After announcing the new process in December 2013, FAA began implementing it in February 2014, a little over a month later. FAA officials stated that the Agency implemented the new process relatively quickly because the FAA Training Academy had been closed for several months due to sequestration,[15] lending urgency to the need to hire new controllers. According to officials in FAA's Office of Human Resources, there was an inventory of over 2,000 applicants waiting to be processed, and, instead of relying on the old hiring process, the Executive Steering Committee[16] made the decision to implement the new hiring process with the first announcement in February 2014.

Stakeholders have expressed concerns about the sudden and unexpected implementation of the new hiring process. In particular, CTI program administrators[17] stated that FAA poorly managed the rollout by implementing it only 1 month after informing the CTI program administrators of the change, even though the new hiring process reduced the role of the CTI program for hiring new controllers. Students who had previously passed the AT-SAT were required to re-apply under the new hiring process.

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[14] OPM policy states that biographical data measures include items about past events and behaviors reflecting personality attributes, attitudes, experiences, interests, skills and abilities validated as predictors of overall performance for a given occupation. We did not independently assess the validity of the assessment.

[15] Congress withdrew funding for certain Federal programs, which shut down the Federal Government from October 1, 2013, through October 16, 2013, after it did not pass a spending bill.

[16] The Executive Steering Committee was established by the FAA Administrator to provide oversight for the new hiring process and responsible for implementing recommendations identified in the Barrier Analysis. The Committee included the Deputy Administrator and the Head of Human Resources.

[17] CTI was designed to establish partnerships with higher educational institutions to broaden the employment opportunities in the aviation industry, particularly among air traffic controllers.

FAA Experienced Delays in Hiring Applicants and Did Not Establish an Effective Tracking System To Monitor Candidates Through the Entire Hiring Process

FAA experienced delays with moving applicants through the new process. Many of the applicants were delayed entry by well over a year and in some cases 2 years after they applied due to delays in the hiring process, which includes medical screening, security screening, and entering the Academy for basic training. For example, 7 months after the first vacancy announcement in February 2014, only about 10 percent of the applicants selected had progressed to the Academy, while over 90 percent remained somewhere within the hiring process. According to FAA, this was due in part to the difficulty of advancing applicants through the hiring process. For example, many applicants did not promptly complete their medical or security screenings, delaying FAA's ability to bring them onboard. As a result of the delay in processing candidates under the new hiring process, the Academy had to cancel 34 air traffic basic classes, and 614 seats were left unfilled in 2015. This caused a ripple effect because the air traffic basics class is a prerequisite for follow-on controller training courses as well. By October 2015, the situation improved, as 741, or roughly half, of the applicants progressed to the Academy or were placed at a facility. However, FAA still lacks metrics on the time it should take an applicant to advance through the hiring process, and some applicants that received tentative offer letters never initiate the medical or security processes required to become a controller.

Moreover, FAA did not establish an effective tracking system to monitor candidates as they moved through the new hiring process. FAA officials told us that they cannot readily determine where applicants are at any time in the lengthy application process and had to review three different databases (Human Resources, Security, and Medical) to determine an applicant's status. In addition, there is no process in place for withdrawing offer letters for applicants who do not comply with the clearance requirements for medical and security. This means applicants remain in the hiring pipeline even though FAA does not know whether they remain viable candidates for the position.

FAA officials stated that the Agency is planning to develop a technical solution that integrates each stakeholder's existing tracking systems or create a new one to track candidates throughout the entire hiring process and entrance on duty at the Academy or facility. However, FAA has not yet established a timeline for completing the effort. In the meantime, these offices provide a biweekly report of the status of applicants to the Executive Steering Committee.

Recognizing that its new hiring process could be improved, in October 2015, approximately 20 months after implementing the new hiring process, FAA established an internal review team to identify noted inefficiencies with the new

hiring process. The internal review team has recommended changes to improve the process, including how to better inform applicants of their responsibilities in completing the medical and security screening and track applicants through the process. In addition, FAA officials stated they are working with the Chief Counsel's office to address the issue of how to handle applicants who do not initiate or complete either the medical or security clearance process. However, FAA has not determined when or what further changes will be implemented.

FAA Fell Short of Hiring Goals for the First 2 Years Under the New Hiring Process

FAA did not meet its hiring goals in the first 2 years following the implementation of the new hiring process. In fiscal year 2014, FAA missed its hiring goal controllers by 174 controllers (14 percent), and in fiscal year 2015 fell short by 427 (24 percent), as shown in figure 1. FAA told us this was due to several hiring and training challenges, which included restoring hiring activities following sequestration, reopening the Academy, and addressing concerns with the hiring process. The FAA Academy was closed from April 2013 to December 2013, and FAA issued one controller hiring job announcement in fiscal year 2014 and two in fiscal year 2015.

Figure 1. FAA's Controller Hiring Goals Compared With Actual Hires, 2009–2015
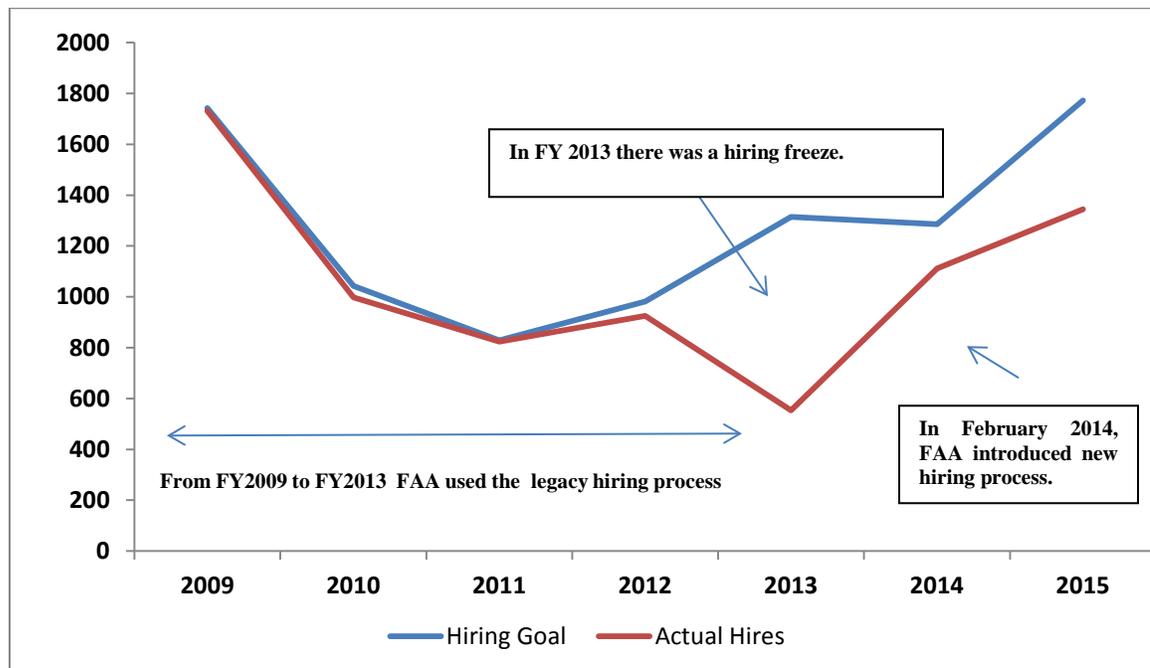
Source: OIG analysis of FAA data

To its credit, as of August 2016, FAA expected to meet its hiring goals for the current year. However, given the length of time it takes to move a controller through the process, it is too soon to determine whether controllers hired through FAA's new hiring process will complete training at the Academy and the facility at a more successful and faster rate.

It is also too soon to determine whether FAA's new hiring process has reduced barriers to hiring candidates from diverse backgrounds—a key driver for FAA's development of its new hiring process. However, our review did identify some concerns with the methods FAA used for documenting candidates' race and ethnicity. Specifically, FAA did not conduct visual observations of hired controllers when applicants did not disclose race or ethnicity identification in the application process. According to the Office of Personnel Management, when an individual elects not to disclose their race or ethnicity (which is voluntary), Federal agencies are required to attempt to identify their race and ethnicity by visual observation. For the first job announcement in 2014, we found that 454 of 1,124 hired controllers did not disclose their race and ethnicity. According to FAA officials there was a social media campaign among applicants not to self-identify, and during the application process candidates could only answer Ethnic Race Identification (ERI) questions by electing to attach answers to their application. As a result, FAA was not able to effectively collect data on the race and ethnicity of its controller applicants for the initial job announcement.

In 2015, FAA implemented a change to enable the application system to present the ERI question each time the applicant applied for an FAA job. In addition, after discussions with our office, FAA informed us that officials at the Academy are now visually observing newly hired controllers as of December 2015 to attempt to properly classify their candidates.

CONCLUSION

Maintaining our Nation's excellent aviation safety record depends on having a fully staffed and well trained controller workforce. While FAA has taken steps to improve its hiring processes, the Agency has opportunities to apply lessons learned as it works to roll out and implement future changes, such as the new changes mandated under the FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act of 2016. In addition, the Agency must establish a process to effectively track controller applicants and develop timeframes to move applicants more efficiently through the hiring process. Until then, FAA will continue to face challenges in meeting its hiring goals and ensuring it hires and trains enough new controllers to offset retirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To increase effectiveness of FAA's air traffic controller hiring process, we recommend that the Federal Aviation Administrator:

1. Implement a single system that individually tracks applicants through the entire hiring process but maintains data integrity.

2. Establish a process to address applicants who receive a tentative offer letter but fail to initiate the medical and/or security clearance processes.

AGENCY COMMENTS AND OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL RESPONSE

We provided FAA with our draft report on October 26, 2016, and received its formal response on December 8, 2016, which is included in its entirety as an appendix. In its response, FAA concurred with both recommendations and provided reasonable timeframes for completing the appropriate action plans.

In addition, FAA disagreed with some of our report's statements. Our specific responses to FAA's concerns are listed below:

- First, FAA stated that we mistakenly suggested that the new hiring process created more delays than the old process. We did not compare the current process to the old one; however, our review did find that significant delays were occurring under the new hiring process. For example, as noted in our report, many of the applicants were delayed by well over a year and in some cases 2 years due to the amount of time it took them to clear the medical and security screening processes and enter the Academy for training.

- Second, FAA stated that our report incorrectly asserted that the new hiring process reduced the role of the CTI program. In fact, as we reported, with the implementation of the new hiring process in 2014, FAA did diminish the role of the CTI schools and opened the competition for controller positions up to the general public, whereas traditionally the Agency had relied upon announcements to veterans or graduates of the 36 FAA-designated CTI schools.

- Third, FAA claimed that we inaccurately cited the FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act of 2016 by implying that CTI graduates and veteran controllers are considered the "most qualified applicants." However, our statement was based on 49 U.S.C. § 44506(f)(1)(A), entitled "Ensuring Selection of Most Qualified Applicants," which identifies controllers with 52 weeks of air traffic controller experience as the "most qualified." We were not referring to the CTI

graduates or veterans as the "most qualified applicants," but rather controllers with 52 weeks of experience.

- Finally, FAA disagreed that increasing the diversity of the controller workforce was the primary reason for the development of the new hiring process. However, our report did not identify any primary cause; rather, we noted that the decision to revise the hiring process was based on reviews that identified both equal opportunity issues and other opportunities to improve the process. This point is re-emphasized in our final report.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

FAA has provided appropriate actions and timeframes for both recommendations, and we consider these recommendations resolved but open until the planned actions are completed.

We appreciate the courtesies and cooperation of FAA representatives during this audit. If you have any questions concerning this report, please call me at (202) 366-0500.

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cc: The Secretary
     DOT Audit Liaison, M-1
     FAA Audit Liaison, AAE-100

EXHIBIT A. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We conducted our work from June 2015 through October 2016 in accordance with generally accepted Government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

To determine FAA's justification for adopting the new hiring process and the changes that have occurred since the hiring process was implemented, we interviewed officials from the Office of Chief Counsel, Office of Civil Rights, Office of Human Resources, the Air Traffic Organization, Office of Technical Training, Office of Aerospace Medicine, and the Security Office. In addition, we visited the Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and interviewed officials from the FAA Academy, Human Resources, and the Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI).

We reviewed three vacancy announcements under the new process—two were for all sources (February 2014 and March 2015) and one was for experienced controllers (January 2015)—e.g., former Certified Professional Controllers and former military with air traffic control experience.

We reviewed Outtz & Associates and Applied Psychological Techniques (APT) Metrics reports on their analysis of the barriers in the Air Traffic Control Specialist hiring process. In addition we compared the original hiring process to the process used for fiscal years 2014 and 2015 job announcements for controllers to determine the substantive changes and reviewed FAA's most recent Controller Workforce Plans.

EXHIBIT B. MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS REPORT

Name	Title
Robert Romich	Program Director
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Audre Azuolas	Writer/Editor

**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Memorandum

Date: December 8, 2016

To: Matthew Hampton, Assistant Inspector General for Aviation

From: H. Clayton Foushee, Director, Office of Audit and Evaluation, AAE-1

Subject: Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Response to Office of Inspector General
              (OIG) Draft Report: FAA's New Policies and Procedures for Hiring New Air Traffic
              Controllers

The 2016 hiring goal was surpassed. In the last three years, the FAA hired approximately 4,100
new air traffic controllers, including 1,680 new ATCS hires in FY 2016, nearly four percent above
the fiscal year target of 1,619. The FAA plans to hire more than 7,400 new controllers over the
next five years to keep pace with expected attrition and traffic growth[1].

The FAA believes that some of the assertions in the OIG draft report are inaccurate:

- The draft report mistakenly suggests the new process has created more hiring delays. In
  fact, the new hiring process is actually more efficient than the old process with regard to
  delays, which have been reduced in each successive hiring cycle.

- The draft report asserts that the new hiring process has reduced or eliminated the role of
  Collegiate Training Institute (CTI) programs. The data clearly show the opposite result.
  In the 10 years prior to 2014, 53% of new hires were graduates of CTI programs. In the
  2014-15 new hiring process, 58% of new hires were CTI graduates. In the 2016 hiring
  pool, CTI graduates represent 64% of the applicants in pool one.

- OIG inaccurately cites that the FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act of 2016
  eliminated the BA for the "most qualified applicants." The new law does remove the
  BA requirement for three groups of applicants: experienced controllers; some CTI
  graduates; and three different types of veterans. However, the statute does not deem
  these applicants to be "most qualified."

- The draft report states there was "an inventory of over 2,000 applicants waiting to be
  processed as controllers" before the 2014 announcement. This is a reference to previous
  applicants, who had not been considered for selection and it is not accurate to imply that
  this pool was eligible for hiring.

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[1] (2016) A Plan for the Future; 10-Year Strategy for the Air Traffic Control Workforce;
https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/controller_staffing/media/cwp_2016.pdf

While the Agency agrees that increasing the diversity of controller workforce was an important factor, we disagree that it was the primary reason for development of the new hiring process. The utilization of better selection tools was equally important. Emphasizing all sources when recruiting is a sound human resource practice. Tools like the Biographical Assessment (BA) allow the agency to efficiently screen thousands of applicants for these ATCS positions. Numerous reviews both inside and outside the Agency identified other necessary enhancements, such as replacing the overexposed Air Traffic Selection and Training (AT-SAT) test battery, eliminating subjective and inefficient centralized selection panels, and changing from an applicant-focused geographical selection process to a process that assigns applicants to facilities based on Agency needs. The FAA is committed to recruiting, hiring, and training a world-class air traffic controller workforce utilizing a fair and transparent hiring process. The clear goals of the hiring process are to identify applicants most likely to fully qualify and succeed throughout their careers as Air Traffic Control Specialists (ATCS) from the broadest possible applicant pool.

The Agency recognizes the need to continually enhance the hiring process. We must move quickly to improve our ability to track applicants from hiring through training and ultimately to full ATCS qualification. We must also continue to improve our marketing and communications strategies to better communicate with potential applicants.

The FAA concurs with both OIG recommendations as written. We plan to implement recommendation 1 by March 31, 2017. Regarding recommendation 2, we believe we have complied with the intent of recommendation and request closure. In May 2016, FAA established a "Failure to Respond" process to re-engage applicants who have failed to initiate steps to complete the medical and/or security clearance within a reasonable amount of time. Applicants who have received a tentative offer with instructions to initiate the medical and/or security clearance process and who have failed to respond are sent a notice from FAA human resources with instructions to initiate the clearance process within ten calendar days. If they fail to respond to this notice, applicants are advised that their tentative job offer will be rescinded. This process is now operational and enhanced FAA's ability to determine the number of truly viable ATCS applicants remaining in the process.

We appreciate the opportunity to review the OIG draft report. Please contact H. Clayton Foushee at (202) 267-9000, if you have any questions or require additional information regarding these comments.

Appendix. Agency Comments