

## Info Paper: The Army FAO MEL-4 Training Pipeline

The Army FAO training pipeline is designed to certify newly accessed FAOs with MEL-4 qualification and consists of 4 distinct phases as outlined in AR 600-3 – language acquisition, advanced civil schooling, in-region training, the Joint FAO course, and completion of ILE. Lasting between 37 and 44 months, the FAO pipeline aims to provide the Army and Joint Force with language-enabled regional experts capable of taking on the full spectrum of FAO operational assignments. This information paper will provide an overview of the training phases from accession to utilization.

*Accession:* New FAOs are accessed into the FA48 community typically by VTIP, which occurs two times per calendar year. ETPs are VTIP officers whose basic branches do not have an IN/OUT chart conducive to accession. Therefore, ETP applicants must have at least one of the training requirements (language, qualifying grad degree, or extensive overseas experience) already complete. VTIP messages target specific year groups and the branch recruits officers with sufficient career timelines to complete all required FAO training and be able to amass 3 FAO OERs prior to their LTC PZ board. An officer's file strength as determined by HRC plays the most pivotal role in accession, but other contributing factors include DLAB score, undergrad GPA, current language proficiency and associated DLPT scores, AOC preference, and the quality of the "why I want to be a FAO" MFR. The Force Alignment and Development Division (FADD) at HRC is responsible for conducting a board that finalizes the list of officers being brought into the career field. HRC and FAO Proponent collaborate to assign AOCs based on officer KSBs, preferences, and needs of the Army by AOC and year group to balance the population with FAO structure (billets).

*Training Plan:* FAO training managers (TMs) at HRC are the primary drivers of developing a newly accessed FAO's training plan with direct oversight from FAO Proponent Regional Managers. Considerations include availability date as set by the new FAO's basic branch command, officer's DLAB score, the availability of language quotas and the respective start dates of those classes. In the event an officer is accessed with a minimum 2/2 in a language spoken in their AOC, FAO Proponent has the authority to waive language training. Historically FAOs coming in with a heritage language were afforded the opportunity to learn another language pertinent in the AOC, but due to recent initiatives to economize training timelines, these opportunities will likely be minimized. In the current model, an officer's language assignment is largely dependent on timing – alignment between an officer's availability date and language course start dates.

The next phase of training is often determined by the availability of ACS quotas and IRT sites. Because most IRT sites are governed by State Department NSDD-38 positions, incoming and outgoing IRT FAOs cannot double-encumber billets at Embassies for more than a few weeks. The timing of language class graduation dates and the availability of ACS quotas and/or IRT sites is akin to a giant puzzle in which pieces must fit together with minimal gaps. Approximately 2 weeks after a FAO is notified of accession, the training manager contacts the officer to determine availability date and any additional factors (MACP, pregnancy, family considerations, etc.) that may play a role in timeline development and IRT location placement. Officers may be offered one or two COAs or be directed to a single COA. In 2024, in the name of talent management, HRC began programming training timelines for some officers to coincide with follow-on training (i.e. SCO training, JMAS) and first utilization assignment. Upon concurrence of an officer's training plan between the HRC training manager, FAO Proponent regional manager, and the officer, changes to timelines are rare and only considered for extenuating circumstances.

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*Language.* Unless an officer was granted a waiver for achieving a 2/2 in a language specific to the AOC of their designation, the first phase of FAO training is typically at DLIFLC in Monterey, CA or DLI-Washington in Arlington, VA. Language courses are between 9 months long for CAT II (i.e. French, Spanish) and up to 16 months long for CAT IV (i.e. Chinese-Mandarin, Arabic). Officers in language school are often enrolled in the special projects curriculum to segregate FAOs from cryptolinguists and focus on conversational language with the goal of meeting the DLIFLC standard of a 2/2/1+ DLPT. This graduation standard deviates from the Army standard of achieving a 2/2 in any two modalities to be considered language proficient. If an officer reaches the end of their language training but fails to meet the 2/2 standard, they may be eligible for GRIT training (5 weeks of post-DLPT language tutoring with DLIFLC faculty) and re-attempt the DLPT. Some officers that do not meet the 2/2 Army standard do move on to the next phase of training, whether that be graduate school or IRT, with the understanding that they must continue to improve their language score and achieve a 2/2 prior to utilization. Officers receive a DA 1059 Service School AER upon completion of DLI.

*JFAOC.* JFAOC consists of a service-specific day facilitated by Army FAO Proponent and Joint service days managed by the FAO Director, DLIFLC. New FAOs and their spouses are introduced to FAO fundamentals, with a deep focus on living overseas on Embassy country teams. FAO general officers from the Army, Navy, and Air Force handle the keynote speeches and experienced FAOs at the O6 level provide mentorship, regional expertise, and guidance throughout the course. Takeaways from JFAOC tend to be for new officers to begin building their networks, answer questions about the career field, steer expectations, and alleviate concerns. JFAOC occurs twice per year and the student population is usually pulled out of language classes for a week in order to attend.

*Advanced Civil Schooling.* Well in advance of their graduate school start date, officers are advised on the process to apply and receive funding through the ACS program, administered by the FADD at HRC. Funding for ACS is through HQDA G-3/5/7 DAMO-TR, based on Army and the Director of Training's priorities. These funds are chopped into ACS quotas by FADD and then distributed via ACS board at HRC and derivative OML. Funding for ACS has come under scrutiny, more intensely in 2023 and FA48 is likely to experience funding cuts in future years as budgets continue to be further constrained. This likely means a reduction in high-cost (\$62k), and medium-cost (\$48k) quotas to FAOs and more reliance on low-cost (\$28k) or even no-cost options (NIU, in-residence CGSC, etc). One of FAO Proponent's key responsibilities is to advocate to the Director of Training for continued ACS funding at high levels, but with cuts across the entire spectrum of ACS programs, Proponent is facing an uphill battle.

HRC concludes an ACS OML board, based on file strength, once a year with the results posted to officers in the summer. The OML determines which officers are awarded high, medium, and low-cost quotas. This enables officers to negotiate with schools on the FAO Proponent approved list with a specific maximum dollar amount in mind. The Proponent approved list consists of the nation's best quality graduate programs in international relations and policy that can offer a degree in 12 months. Officers can request to attend schools outside the list, and are generally approved provided they can negotiate admission, tuition, ensure the program is no longer than 12 months, and can provide AOC-specific regionalized focus. FAO Proponent reviews officer course lists to ensure proper regional concentration (60% according to AR 600-3). Historic data shows a propensity for officers to preference NPS in Monterey following graduation from DLIFLC, which allows for family stabilization. Promotable CPTs and MAJs also extend their term at NPS from 12 to 15 months to complete ILE. Another high concentration of Army FAOs attend SAIS at JHU and subsequently complete ILE at nearby Ft. Belvoir.

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Upon graduation, officers submit an DA 1059-1 Civilian Institution AER to HRC to document their accomplishment.

*In-Region Training.* IRT was envisioned as a capstone event for a FAO that has achieved language proficiency and is armed with a graduate level education ready to immerse into the region. A majority of Army FAO IRT is still Embassy-based, but there are some officers who attend foreign staff colleges, or, in the case of most 48Es, base out of the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies (GCMC) in Garmisch, Germany. The intent is to PCS an officer and their family to a foreign country in their AOC so they can learn how to live and operate proficiently in that environment. Ideally, officers are sent to a location where their control language (CLANG) is spoken but increasingly that has not been the case in some AOCs. Six months prior to arriving at their IRT site, officers should receive orders, process diplomatic/official passports and visas (per the E-FCG) for themselves and their families and contact their site supervisor and members of the Country Team. Rating chain tends to vary by AOC, but is gravitating toward a standard - officers are rated by their site supervisor, typically an A/ARMA or OSC Chief, and senior rated by the ASCC SCD Chief. Officers who attend a staff college for IRT will generally receive an AER that indicates JPME I completion in lieu of an OER.

Upon arrival in-country, IRT FAOs in-process at the Embassy and either move into embassy-leased housing (ELH) or must find accommodations on the economy funded through overseas housing allowance (OHA). FAO Proponent funds ELH bills and also validates ICASS requirements through communications with EMB Financial Management Officers (FMOs). IRT FAOs submit their Programs of Instruction (POIs) to FAO Proponent after having received approval from their site supervisor. FAO Proponent encourages active communications between the rated officer and senior rater at the ASCC by including the SR on all email traffic including POIs and trip reports. The POI outlines the officer's plans to improve proficiency upon seven IRT objectives and includes a timeline of proposed regional travel.

While a standing IRT travel budget of \$35-40k was envisioned in the past, fiscal realities have reduced this number down to an unspecified, variable dollar amount. An officer on IRT can typically expect to be funded for in-region travel and conduct 5-8 week-long trips at a cost of approximately \$3k per trip, but this varies wildly by AOC and country visited. FAO Proponent reviews all trip requests in DTS to ensure IRT meets JTR and FAO training requirements. Without exception, Embassy office calls are mandatory for officers conducting an official TDY to visit a country. Office calls are facilitated by an IRT FAO's peer assigned to the Embassy to be visited and coordinated through an APACS request. A trip report functions as an after-action report where the officer provides detailed feedback on the visit, who they spoke to and what they learned about the country/region, viewed through the lens of strategic competition.

There are two notable exceptions to this IRT model. The first concerns officers attending foreign staff colleges, which accounts for approximately 15% of all IRT FAOs. These officers have limited opportunities to conduct Embassy business or regional travel. Their focus is in developing long-term mil-to-mil relationships with their host-country and third-country student officer peers. For those schools taught in a foreign language, language improvement is generally automatic. In many situations, FAOs who have graduated from their staff college are viewed more favorably, thereby accelerating relationship-building should the officer return to the country as a SCO Chief or SDO/DATT. FAOs maximize their limited opportunities to conduct regional travel by executing during class breaks and taking a multi-country trip following graduation and prior to their PCS.

The other exception is for the 48E population, which has established a regional center focused IRT based out of the George C. Marshall Center in Garmisch, Germany. These officers attend specialized

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Russia-focused training, other European seminars, and take lengthy TDYs of 60 to 90 days at Embassies across Eurasia in order to achieve their IRT objectives. The model will start incorporating ILE qualification at the NATO school and ACS through University of Munich, creating training model efficiencies. Such innovative changes may start taking shape in other AOCs upon deeper analysis of the FAO training pipeline.

*ILE.* ILE is programmed by training managers that best align with an officer's timeline for promotable CPTs and MAJs. Satellite ILE at Ft. Belvoir is appended onto an officer's training following ACS within the NCR, while officers at NPS have the option to add ILE qualification. Other officers are designated to pursue ILE qualification via distance learning (DL) and complete the "box of books" option during ACS and/or IRT. Notably, a few officers per year are subject to a return to basic branch (RTBB) should they approach their LTC PZ board while not being ILE complete due to failure to complete DL ILE. Officers attending foreign staff colleges are mandated to take a short online course and then are considered ILE complete by attending a foreign school listed on the JS J7's JPME I Equivalency MFR. They have no requirement to take satellite ILE or DL ILE.

*RTBB.* Officers who cannot meet standards in any of the above phases are considered for a RTBB. FAO Proponent and HRC have agreed to examine the officer holistically and consider Army requirements prior to initiating an RTBB. Officers who have been returned to their basic branch usually fall under one of the following conditions – failed to meet language standards and demonstrated inability to pass the requisite coursework at DLIFLC or DLI-Washington, did not pass graduate school (usually associated with an integrity violation), received a referred OER or AER from IRT (usually as a result of a PNG by the COM), or failed to complete DL ILE within the prescribed time. FAO Proponent, through recommendation by HRC, initiates the RTBB and HRC's FADD technically changes an officer's MOS from FA48 to their previous designation.

*Funding.* Funding to support officers through this timeline comes from multiple sources which are experiencing a reduction in budget. Some costs, such as officer salaries, BAH/OHA, PCS moves or ICASS costs fall under Program Evaluation Groups (PEGs) that are largely transparent. The primary PEG that FAO Proponent must keep a watchful eye on is the Training PEG, or TT-PEG. TT-PEG funds ACS and IRT. With anticipated reduction in TT-PEG, FAO Proponent must communicate with stakeholders in the G-3/5/7 on the strategic importance of FAO training and certification in order to avoid taking deeper cuts. Additionally, FAO Proponent receives funding through its Management Decision Package (MDEP), called TFAO. TFAO provides lines of accounting for IRT travel, FACT training, JFAOC, NPS regional certifications, Army Strategic Broadening Seminars (SBS), Military Personnel Exchange Programs (MPEP), Schools of Other Nations (SONs), and FA59 (Strategist) programs. The topline dollar amount for TFAO was decremented in the last 2 fiscal years and is expected to continue to decline.

*Utilization.* Upon completion of the above requirements, officers participate in the AIM or DAS markets to compete for their first utilization assignment or follow-on training. Approximately 6 months before their last phase of training, they transition from coordinating with their HRC training managers to their HRC career managers to seek counsel on utilization. There is no formal recognition or ASI assigned to a FAO that has completed all requirements – officers receive assignment instructions and PCS orders to a FAO assignment, which effectively concludes their MEL-4 training.

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