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INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY PERSONNEL STUDY  
STAFFING: FBI\*

1. Current and Projected Skill Requirements and Quality of Staff

a. Critical Occupations

The FBI identifies its most critical staffing needs as special agents with a second language (most notably Spanish), professional linguists, data transcribers (data entry), secretaries/clerical, and professional computer systems personnel. Secretaries/clerical represent by far the largest of these specialties in terms of population groups making up over 11 percent of the total FBI authorized strength. Linguists, computer science and data transcribers are relatively small population groups (1.5 percent of strength or less). There is no specific data on the number of bilingual special agents required, but as of May 19, 1988 the FBI had on its rolls 780 special agents (approximately 8 percent of on-board special agent strength) with a foreign language proficiency of level 2 or better. After expending considerable effort to increase the number of bilingual special agents, the FBI has achieved limited success. As an incentive, the FBI has modified a long-standing policy and now allows newly hired special agents to be assigned to the same area from which recruited, if it is an urban area and has a documented need for linguists.

b. Hiring and Retention

During the period 1983-1987, data on on-board strength, hires and losses was as follows:

	<u>Sp. Agents w/lang</u>	<u>Ling.</u>	<u>Computer Systems</u>	<u>Secy/ Cler.</u>	<u>Data Trans</u>
Avg on-board strength	780**	189	175	2600	343
Avg # hires/year	40	22	29	460	112
Avg rate of attrition	.02	.063	.105	.163	.22
Percent of losses w/5 yrs (not avail) or less svc		.55	.67	.80	.90

\*\*as of May 1988

Overall attrition at the FBI during the period 1983-1987 was 8.2 percent, which is somewhat below that of comparable sized companies in the private sector as well as the government-wide average. Attrition in support skill positions for the same period average 11.6 percent,

\* This analysis encompasses total FBI personnel requirements. Personnel accounting procedures and organizational relationships within the FBI it impractical to sort out those resources devoted exclusively to the foreign counterintelligence mission alone.

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which was comparable to the private sector but still below the government average. The highest rates of attrition occurred in the secretary/clerical and data transcriber specialties, but these rates are not out of line with national averages for these high turnover specialties. Computer science and linguist attrition are also within expected norms.

Although the average attrition of special agents has remained very low, the resignation rate has increased recently, some of which is directly attributed to non-competitive salary rates in some of the major cities of the country. An especially critical problem has evolved in the New York City office because of the extremely high cost of living in that area. Vacancy and attrition rates are high and mission accomplishment has been adversely affected. The Bureau has initiated a number of special actions including changes to tour policy and efforts to obtain cost-of-living increase for assignees.

Approximately 1/3 of the secretary/clerical and data transcribers and 2/3 of the computer science losses were directly attributable to pay, especially at field offices in the larger urban areas. Most secretary/clericals and data transcribers left for better promotion prospects or to enter a new career field, and most went to private industry. The FBI adopted special salary scales approved by OPM in 1986, but as of mid 1988 these seemed to have had little impact on reducing attrition.

Although attrition of linguists has been relatively low, FBI attributes the loss of these valuable assets to limited career progression. Linguists can advance only to GS-11 at FBI field offices (some at GS-12 have recently been approved) and only to GS-13 at FBI Headquarters. A few linguists transfer to the intelligence research specialist career field or become special agents, if qualified.

#### c. Recruitment

The FBI has been able to recruit up to authorized levels each year. The Bureau does its own recruiting, selecting and appointing and all positions are excepted from the competitive service. About 600 special agents and 1,700 support personnel are hired each year. The FBI reports that the average cost per hire in 1987 was \$9,464, exclusive of training costs.

The FBI's hiring strategy for professionals (mostly special agents) focuses on five skill areas: law, accounting, language, engineering/science and generalists. They report being very successful in attracting large numbers of generalist candidates, but are less successful in hiring specialists. It is difficult to attract linguists, accountants, attorneys, engineer and computer science graduates due to the type of the work the FBI

CONFIDENTIAL  
- 2 -

does, their mandatory transfer policy and the entry salaries they must offer. The usual long delay caused by employment processing is also a significant disincentive. Although pre-employment processing delays are understood and accepted by most special agent applicants, an increasing number of highly qualified applicants (especially technically trained engineers and computer science graduates) cannot (or will not) wait a lengthy period of time for a job offer.

Although the special salary scales for secretaries/clericals, data transcribers, nurses and engineers do apply to FBI employees under OPM authority, the Bureau does not have its own authority to set salary or implement pay or bonus incentives where deemed needed. The same constraints apply to travel and transportation allowances and to educational benefits.

d. Quality Indicators

The FBI reports general satisfaction with the people it hires, especially its special agents. Competition is keen for entry into the FBI as a Special Agent and there is no shortage of applicants. In recent years, however, recruiting for Special Agents has not been as easy as in the past. The FBI believes non-competitive starting salaries and the trend away from public service careers probably account for this phenomenon. Various screening and testing devices are used and selection is very competitive. However, the Bureau would like to increase the number of technical professionals it attracts. Quality of the support staff is considered good except in the large metropolitan areas where it is very difficult to recruit and retain quality people. High attrition rates in these specialties are compounded by the fact that many of the best and most promising people leave.

e. Competition with the Private Sector

The major factors that negatively affect the FBI's ability to compete with private sector employers for top quality hires are: restricted salary levels, the FBI transfer policy, and odd hour scheduling in FBI work. Additionally, difficulties are experienced in recruiting for technical positions in Washington, D.C. because it is an extremely high cost living area.

f. Future Prospects

The FBI projects that the international aspects of foreign counterintelligence, terrorism, criminal and the legal attache programs will require more language specialists and more bilingual special agents. Technical advances in record keeping and fingerprint identification will create the need for more technically proficient people in these areas and in information processing.

## 2. Impact of Change in Authorization and Ability to Recruit and Staff

Since 1980, the FBI STAFF has increased by 20 percent. Increased resources to counter workload demands in the areas of drug trafficking, foreign counterintelligence and terrorism account for most of this growth. In the years 1970-72, the FBI experienced large staff increases (nearly 24 percent growth) due to enactment of the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970, new left radical extremism, aircraft hijackings, bombings and extremism, internal security, fingerprint identification, and training upgrading, notably the establishment of the new FBI academy. The time frame 1973-1981 was a period of no growth or staff reductions (a 6 percent reduction in authorized strength).

The greatly fluctuating increases and decreases in authorized strength has had a profound impact on the recruitment program. In periods of little or no growth or reduction, staff were assigned to other duties, recruitment sources dried up, and hiring continuity was disrupted. Conversely, in periods of growth, personnel resources were greatly taxed as hiring pipelines were reestablished, new people trained and the employment mechanisms put back into operation. Under these conditions, position staffing often lags behind hiring goals, at least initially.

## 3. NAPA Staff Views

The FBI conducts a generally effective hiring program and is able to meet most annual hiring requirements in terms of total numbers. Nothing has been reported by the FBI nor has analysis revealed any staffing problem of such critical nature as to adversely affect mission accomplishment. However, the Bureau cannot attract sufficient numbers of qualified technical professionals (including linguists) to satisfy growing needs. It is clear that for the FBI to successfully compete in this future job market, that greater flexibility in salary setting is essential. Additionally, demonstrated problems in recruiting and retaining quality people in high cost-of-living urban areas throughout the country require solutions.

The relatively high attrition rate being experienced by the FBI in some support areas (notably secretary/clerical and data transcribers) points to a need to look carefully at salary levels, and to examine career progression potential in these skills, especially at FBI Headquarters and field offices.

Career opportunities and promotion potential are also problems for FBI linguists. Limitations inherent in the FBI grade structure for this profession will surely result in unnecessary attrition, especially among the best and most valuable employees.

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- 4 -

#### 4. Suggested Courses of Action

The FBI should be given special authority similar to that currently approved for the other Intelligence Community agencies, to set salaries and establish special rates of pay for its employees, thereby providing the Bureau better capability to recruit and retain technical professional and support personnel. In addition, based on demonstrated and growing retention problems, especially in large metropolitan areas, authority to establish special cost-of-living rates for selected high cost areas, where specific justification exists, is also needed and should be granted.

A careful examination of the FBI language career structure should be conducted with a view to enhancing career advancement and promotion prospects for linguists and to encourage long-term retention in the career field. A similar look at the critical support skills should be taken for the same purpose. Enhanced training and career development programs are necessary for both the language and the support specialties.

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- 5 -

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