Signal Corps Direct Commission Program

Talent management

Maj. Alisha Garcia
Office Chief of Signal, U.S. Army Signal School

Historically, direct commissioning has been available to qualified professionals in the medical, dental, legal, and religious fields, but new authorities outlined in the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act allow direct commissioning for all services up to the grade of O-6. Since then, the Army Talent Management Task Force has been working with the Combined Arms Center and others to identify technical and occupational skill gaps across all career fields, and the Army published a directive guiding the direct commission process for branch proponents.

Army Directive 2019-27 makes direct commissioning available to the Signal Corps, specifically for Functional Area (FA) 26 areas of concentration 26A/network systems engineers and FA26B/data systems engineers. The Signal Direct Commission Program accepts civilians, enlisted, and warrant officers with relevant experience and education to be directly appointed as commissioned officers in the Regular Army (RA), Army National Guard (ARNG), and United States Army Reserves (USAR) to perform critical roles for the Army.

The main intent of the Signal Direct Commission Program is to offer an alternate commissioning source for exceptionally qualified individuals. The program does not replace or adversely affect Officer Candidate School or other commissioning programs.

Ideal candidates have professional experience and skills in innovating, developing, or reverse engineering data and network systems-related capabilities and technologies, especially with experience in 5G network engineering, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, cloud security, data engineering, data storage, machine learning, network engineering, software defined networking, zero trust architecture, software development, or other highly specialized IT-related career fields.

Minimum Qualifications

1. Must be a U.S. citizen.
2. A four-year degree; STEM degree is preferred.
3. Ability to obtain and maintain a Top Secret security clearance.
4. Four years of work experience in networking or information technology post Baccalaureate degree or two years of experience after an advanced degree.
5. Prior service candidates must have an honorable discharge.
6. Pass the Army medical screening and meet basic fitness standards.
7. Regular Army applicants must be able to complete 10 years of active commissioned service by the date they have completed 20 years of active federal service (AFS). Waivers are available for candidates with experience in specific technologies.
8. All waivers must be adjudicated before a board interview will be scheduled.

Selected candidates help build and establish the future of the Army's network capabilities and technologies as an officer. Rank varies from captain to colonel and is dependent on relevant education and work experience. There is no age limit for RA applicants. ARNG and USAR have age requirements based on assessed rank, but waivers are available for highly qualified applicants.

The Process

The Signal direct commission process includes several steps. First, the Office Chief of Signal - Officer Division (OCoS-OD) screens packets for accuracy and minimum qualifications. Using the experience outlined in a candidate's resume and transcripts, OCoS-OD determines assessed rank and begins processing any required waivers. Once initial screening is passed, a selection board consisting of at least five field grade officers conducts virtual interviews with qualified candidates. There are currently two boards conducted each year in May and November.

Once the selection board's results are approved by the Directorate of Military Personnel Management, candidates begin the onboarding and scrolling process. This includes a medical examination at the nearest Military Entrance Processing Station and a complete background investigation and security clearance initiation if the candidate does not already have one.

After a candidate's scroll is approved, OCoS-OD works with Human Resources Command (HRC) to complete appointment and assignment orders. OCoS-OD also ensures candidates are enrolled in appropriate military training prior to reporting to their first unit.

The process is lengthy, taking anywhere from 12-24 months from application submission to taking the Officer Oath of Office. Some aspects that can take more time are medical screenings, waiver processing, security clearance adjudication, and availability of

required training courses. There is no limit to the number of times a candidate can apply to the program. Selected applicants should plan to attend the Army's six-week Direct Commission Course at Fort Moore, Georgia, and the Signal Captain's Career Course and Functional Area 26 Course at Fort Eisenhower, Georgia.

From applicant screening, board interviews, onboarding and assignment, OCoS-OD tracks candidates from initial inquiry through commissioning and initial professional military education requirements. To date, the Signal Corps has directly commissioned three officers into the RA and USAR, with over 40 additional applicants being considered in various stages of the process. By leveraging the diverse background and expertise of signal direct commission applicants, the Army will continue to maintain readiness and adaptability within an increasingly complex and data-driven landscape.

For more information, please contact OCoS-OD at usarmyfteisenhowersignalschllistOCOS-OD@army.mil.

Capt. Derrick Kozlowski, left, U.S. Army Signal School, made history on Nov. 16, 2023, by becoming the first Signal Corps candidate to receive a direct commission through the Army's Direct Commission Program. In March 2021, the Signal Corps became the third branch to execute the program, following the Cyber Corps and Military Intelligence Corps. (Photo by Laura Levering, U.S. Army Signal School)