

# AFSO21

## Tool enables Reservists to work smarter, continuously improve important processes

By Bo Joyner

**"C**ontinuous process improvement" is not a new concept for the Air Force. For most of the service's 60-year history and especially in the last 15 years, members of the Air Force team have been encouraged to take a long look at the work they are doing and come up with ways of doing it better. But today, as the Air Force continues to fight the Global War on Terror amid manpower cuts and budget constraints, working smarter is more important than ever.

That's why the Air Force has come up with a tool to help people strive for continuous process improvement in everything they do. It's called Air Force Smart Operations for the 21st Century, or AFSO21 for short, and Air Force Reserve Command leaders are dedicated to making sure all members of the Reserve team know what it is and how to use it.

"Even the world's finest Air Force can improve, and it is critical to the protection of our nation that we continually improve," said Col. Eric Sitrin, director of analyses, lessons learned and AFSO21 at Headquarters AFRC, Robins Air Force Base, Ga. Colonel Sitrin is leading the effort to implement AFSO21 throughout the command. "It is essential to eliminate unnecessary work and barriers for Airmen so they can accomplish their most critical work."

Lt. Gen. John A. Bradley, AFRC commander, is convinced now is the right time for AFSO21 in AFRC.

"Our Reservists are being asked to participate more now than they've ever been asked before," General Bradley said. "It's vital that we take a close look at everything we are doing, eliminate the things we don't really need to be doing and find the most efficient way to do the things that are left."

The general said "leveraging the process improvement experience many of our Reservists already possess as a result of their civilian employment should help the command put AFSO21 into practice."

"The Air Force has been on a road of process

improvement for several years but with some key omissions," Colonel Sitrin said. "Organizations operating separately may have used one program or another to continuously improve, but now with AFSO21, we have the commitment to utilize CPI from the highest levels of leadership in the Air Force."

"Additionally, our CPI activity will be strategically aligned to the command's planning priorities and objectives that will underpin our new strategic plan. AFSO21 combines the best industry tools that facilitate Air Force-wide transformational change, not simply incremental change."

In developing AFSO21, Air Force officials took some tried-and-true improvement methods used in commercial business and industry — like Lean, Six Sigma and the Theory of Constraints — and tailored them to fit the Air Force. Now, the task at hand for AFRC is to get the word out about AFSO21, train key members of the Reserve team and implement it across the command.

"AFRC is providing its senior leaders, including headquarters directors, numbered air force commanders and wing commanders, with training that will enable them to identify process improvement initiatives and deploy AFSO21 at their organizations, and align activity to our command's strategic objectives," Colonel Sitrin said.

Other key leaders from the headquarters and NAFs, as well as group and squadron levels, will receive training in the use of AFSO21 tools from trained Level 1 and 2 facilitators, enabling them to lead their organizations in process improvement activities. All members of the AFRC team will receive basic AFSO21 awareness training, explaining the purpose of AFSO21 and, hopefully, inspiring a desire to learn and do more, Colonel Sitrin said.

Finally, each wing will have one person trained to function as the AFISO21 point of contact. These wing process managers will be qualified to facilitate week-long rapid improvement events as well as conduct awareness education for organizations within their wings.

Once they are trained, Reservists will be looking to achieve results guided by AFISO21's five desired effects:

- Productivity — Encouraging all Airmen to continuously examine and improve the way they work. Doing more of the right things with the same or less effort.

- Resource Availability — Creating a stronger Air Force by making sure equipment and people are mission ready and available more efficiently and effectively. AFISO21 seeks to improve all resource availability, from aircraft and information technology to range space.

- Agility — Improving response time to the war-fighter at all levels of the Air Force. A 50-percent reduction in process cycle times is the general goal.

- Safety — Sustaining and enhancing the safe use of all Air Force assets and promoting the safety of all Air Force people. AFISO21 seeks to help the Air Force achieve the secretary of defense's mandate to reduce injury rates by 75 percent by the end of fiscal year 2008.

- Energy Efficiency — Finding better ways to save energy, finding alternative forms of energy and encouraging a culture where Airmen make energy conservation a consideration in everything they do.

Throughout the Air Force, people have



**Airmen inspect a C-17 Globemaster III during a home station check in a hangar at Charleston Air Force Base, S.C. Charleston Airmen recently participated in a Lean event to eliminate waste and save time during the process.**

already started seeing how AFISO21 can help them eliminate wastes of time and resources in their daily jobs. At Eglin AFB, Fla., for example, members of the AIM-120D missile production team conducted an AFISO21 rapid improvement event and were able to cut their acquisition process time from 48 weeks to 20 weeks.

At Hanscom AFB, Mass., the 66th Air Base Wing and Electronic Systems Center discovered a potential annual savings of more than \$200,000 by simply tasking organizations to identify and turn in unused telephone lines across the base.

"After you've been through an AFISO21 event, you never look at things the same way again," said Scott Larkin, a director with Mainstream Management who is helping AFRC train its people in continuous process improvement.

"We had a Lean event at Hill AFB, Utah, in the landing gear wheels overhaul shop, and the culture totally changed. The people there have reduced the time the overhaul process takes from 47 days to 10 days, and they are constantly looking for ways to go even lower. Now, the shop is a benchmark for private industry to learn from."

At AFRC headquarters, AFISO21 has already started to produce rewards. Officials in the Manpower Personnel and Services

Division organized a rapid improvement event and were able to reduce the overall processing time for discharge packages by 30 percent and decrease the significant backlog of packages that already existed. Another team is looking at establishing an automated time and attendance record across the headquarters that should help reduce the timesheet error rate. In both of these instances, the benefits derived from AFISO21 can also be seen in improved customer service, Colonel Sitrin said.

"The command's strategic plan will provide a disciplined framework to meet Air Force priorities by leveraging cross-functional teams using AFISO21 tools," said Brig. Gen. Neil Rohan, AFRC's director of plans, programs and requirements. "The strategic plan aimpoint champions and objective process owners will shape the command's priorities, develop policies and more effective processes, and continually update objectives using AFISO21 practices. Providing support through efficiencies to our commanders and Airmen is key to moving our command forward."

Colonel Sitrin believes members of the Reserve team, guided by the new strategic plan and using AFISO21 tools, can make AFRC a more effective and efficient organization that continuously strives to improve.

"One of the best things about AFISO21 is it is based on the idea that process improvement will never be complete," he said, "and that we can always find ways to work smarter! ★"



## AFRC commander leading AFISO21 Caring for People process

By Maj. Heather Zwicker

Developing and caring for Airmen and their families is a top Air Force priority. However, many Airmen may not know there is an Air Force Smart Operations for the 21st Century process dedicated to this endeavor.

Caring for People, one of the 10 key AFISO21 processes, was established to encourage programs and initiatives that enhance the morale and quality of life for Airmen and their families.

Lt. Gen. John A. Bradley, commander of Air Force Reserve Command and chief of Air Force Reserve, not only works AFISO21 issues from a command perspective but is also actively involved in larger issues at the corporate Air Force level. As the Caring for People process owner, he believes taking care of Air Force people is more important now than ever before.

"To meet the mission of the Air Force, we need Air Force warriors ready to participate in the joint fight, anywhere and at anytime," General Bradley said. "And for Airmen to perform well under the stresses of a demanding operations tempo, they should not be preoccupied with their own basic well-being or that of their families."

To that end, Col. Colleen Steel, the Caring for People process team lead, contacted the Air Force Inspection Agency and asked the organization to craft a questionnaire to get insight into what quality of life issues might be on Airmen's minds.

The questionnaire was distributed through major command AFISO21 offices and garnered 15,000 responses from regular Air Force, Reserve and Air National Guard members. Groups surveyed included home station as well as deployed Airmen and their family members.

Some of the top issues identified by home station Airmen and their families were medical care and Tricare benefits, base exchanges and commissaries, and fitness centers. Deployed groups and their families identified communication, housing at deployed locations and family support programs as their primary concerns.

Reserve members singled out access to medical care and support to deployed members' families as areas of concern, said Ray Nishikawa, Air Force Reserve Family Matters chief.

"Even though there is room for improvement for most issues, more than 95 percent of Reservists surveyed are satisfied with their levels of support," Mr. Nishikawa said. "The satisfaction rate for medical and family support issues was

approximately 70 percent."

The Caring for People Executive Steering Group will soon identify key themes and potential follow-on actions. Then the process team will work with major commands and functional staff elements to align current and future process improvement efforts.

"Caring for People allows us the unique opportunity to facilitate full collaboration throughout the Air Force," General Bradley said.

An early success story in the Caring for People process is a big improvement in the way the Air Force handles legal claims for disasters and lost and damaged items people experience during permanent change of station moves, the general said.

In the past, these claims were handled at base level and would often take weeks or even months to get through the system, he said. A legal community process improvement initiative created the Air Force Claims Service Center in Kettering, Ohio, near Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

The center, operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week, streamlines claims processing and has saved the Air Force both manpower and money.

"This is a perfect example of how we can improve the way we take care of our people," General Bradley said.

Chosen by the secretary of the Air Force because of his reputation for being a people person, the general said he's excited to lead this process.

"I'm honored the secretary selected me because there is nothing more important than the people we have working for us and their families," he said. "The Air Force is a high-technology force with a lot of great equipment and airplanes, but it's our people who make this the greatest Air Force in the world."

"The way we treat people has a direct impact on whether they stay with us for the long haul. If we take care of people, they will work harder for us and be happier."

"Airmen are the heart and soul of our business. The bottom line is we have to take care of our people, and AFISO21 provides us with some tools we can use to improve the way we do that." ★

(Major Zwicker is a member of the AFISO21 Caring for People process team at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.)



**Air Force senior leaders take a tour of Boeing's 737 production facility in Seattle as part of the AFISO21 industry exchange program.**

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