

An Alternative to Traditional ILE

■ By Maj. Christopher Paone

If you are getting ready to apply for the Command and General Staff College's Intermediate Level Education (ILE), or if ILE is on your five-year career timeline, let me recommend a unique alternative. In lieu of the traditional ILE or similar intermediate service school opportunities, you can participate in the Interagency (IA) Exchange Program working for a national agency such as the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

What Is the IA Exchange Program?

The IA Exchange Program began in 2009 under the direction of then Lt. Gen. William Caldwell, the commandant of the Command and General Staff College and the commanding general of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. In Caldwell's words, the IA program was designed to "improve how we as an Army work in conjunction with other governmental departments and agencies."

The program gives Army captains and majors the opportunity to be assigned to a national agency located in the national capital region for one year as an Army interagency fellow. In turn, that agency typically exchanges one of its own civilian government employees, giving that employee the opportunity to attend a one-year ILE-equivalent opportunity at any qualifying school—not just at Fort Leavenworth.

Is the IA Program Right for You?

Ask yourself these four questions to determine if the IA Exchange Program is right for you:

In the time that you worked with an interagency partner during deployments or training, did you find yourself curious about your interagency partner's work?

Would you and your unit have been more successful if you had a better understanding of each organization's capability early on?

Could you have benefited from an interagency relationship where you understood the interagency culture and its people?

Is it important to you to have the skill set to effectively communicate with civilian leaders in the Department of Defense (DOD), Congress, and the public?

Chances are that if you answered yes to any of those questions, the IA Exchange Program could prove to be a tipping point in your career. The program is a competitive fellowship, and if you are selected, it will provide you with the opportunity to help the DOD avoid redundancies and contradictory efforts in support of the national security strategy.

What Is It Like to Be an IA Fellow?

In my own IA program fellowship, I have experienced governance, statesmanship, and diplomatic perspectives while working as a FEMA emergency management planner.

In short, my role is to facilitate the relationship between our intra-agency and interagency partners and the DOD while working with multiple national, regional, state, local, and private-sector organizations to analyze emergency response and recovery preparedness and operations.

Some of my responsibilities include drafting and presenting inter-

agency plans, policies, procedures, and resourcing solutions; participating in national-level workgroups to integrate domestic interests into a broad range of policies; recommending courses of action to Congress and the executive branch in the development of legislation for response requirements; and reviewing state and local emergency preparedness measures.

The Army recognizes the importance of developing leaders with additional skill sets that help them to communicate and lead at the senior levels of our military and across the federal government. Tomorrow's Army will require multiskilled, adaptive, and innovative leaders who understand the effects of both hard and soft power, from warfighting to enterprise management.

If what I have outlined here sounds interesting, consider applying to the program. This is an outstanding professional development opportunity and a mechanism for imparting a field grade officer's full-spectrum experience to members of a national-level organization.

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