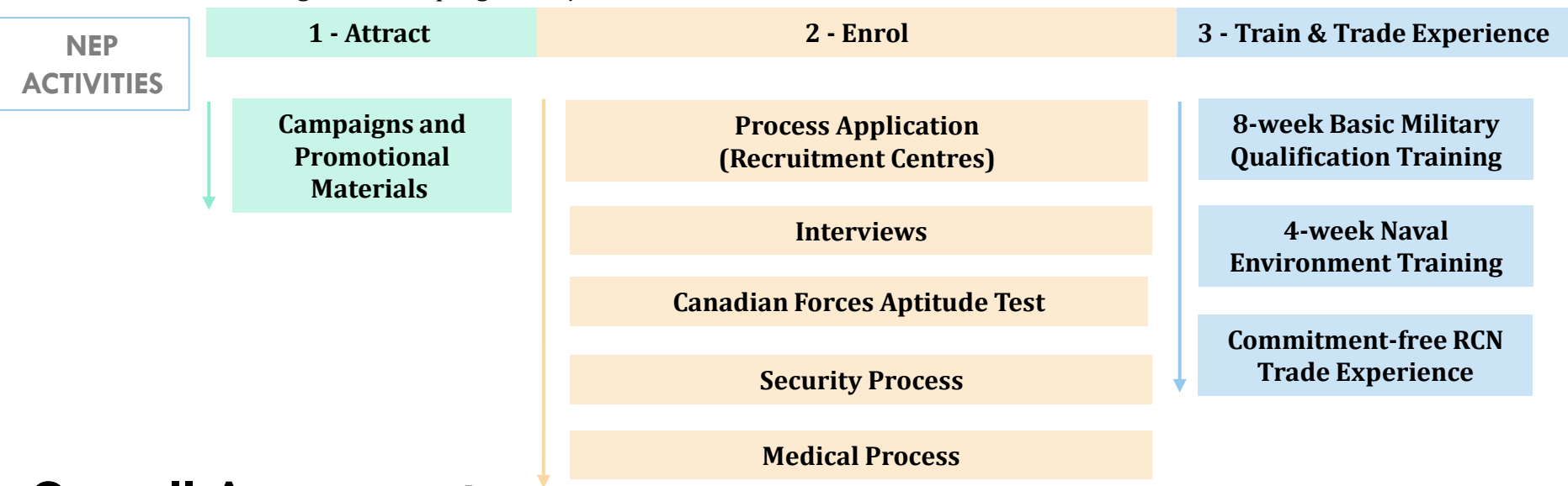# Evaluation of the Naval Experience Program

Developmental Evaluation of the Naval Experience Program

This evaluation was conducted between March 2023 and May 2024 and provides a targeted assessment against key evaluation questions regarding early program effectiveness and efficiency. The focus was on the initial stages of the recruitment process: attraction and enrolment (Program 3.1 Recruitment). Evidence was gathered and analyzed using mixed methods. Advisory assistance was provided to the program during Year 1 of pilot implementation using a Developmental Evaluation (DE) approach, with emphasis on the development of key performance metrics. DE products were developed in collaboration with the program, including:

- Performance Measurement Framework: collaborative development of immediate, intermediate and ultimate performance indicators, in alignment with the program logic model, to guide the program in the collection of data. This enabled the program to develop benchmarks for Year 1 of the pilot, track progress and report key metrics to senior management.

- Theory of change: development of "program logic and processes," with consideration of program assumptions validated through interviews, as well as internal and external influencing factors. This enabled the program to visualize the many factors impacting the pilot's progress and begin to address them through concrete program adjustments.

About the Naval Experience Program

The Naval Experience Program (NEP) is a five-year pilot program that falls under the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) recruitment program. NEP addresses low recruitment levels and responds to the Arbour Report recommendation to "restructure and simplify [the Canadian Armed Forces] recruitment, enrolment and basic training processes." In alignment with the successful Australian Defence Force Gap Year program, NEP attracts participants through marketing campaigns, enrols them using a streamlined entry process, then trains them before providing a commitment-free experience that exposes them to various RCN trades. Following NEP, participants can then apply to a specific trade of interest within the RCN or other environments, or they can off-ramp from the Canadian Armed Forces with "no strings attached."

NEP ACTIVITIES	1 - Attract	2 - Enrol	3 - Train & Trade Experience
	Campaigns and Promotional Materials	Process Application (Recruitment Centres)	8-week Basic Military Qualification Training
		Interviews	4-week Naval Environment Training
		Canadian Forces Aptitude Test	Commitment-free RCN Trade Experience
		Security Process	
		Medical Process	

Overall Assessment:

Main takeaway: During Year 1 of the pilot, NEP surpassed its short-term recruitment target; however, applicant to enrollee ratios and file closure data indicate that sustainability is unclear. The target related to the streamlined entry process is more challenging to achieve due to processes outside of the RCN's purview, such as medical, security and recruitment. NEP likely heightened attention to these enabling factors but with some unintended consequences for the Chief of Military Personnel (CMP) in advancing priority recruitment projects. After Year 1 of the NEP pilot, the net benefit to recruitment overall is not clear.

Ongoing work: Using their Performance Measurement Framework, NEP and Navy Public Affairs are currently addressing marketing and data collection barriers as they arise. NEP-specific recruitment questions are currently being developed by NEP, Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis, and the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG) respectively to validate assumptions underlying the program logic. CMP initiatives such as the Digital Transformation of the Recruitment Enterprise will impact NEP in the long term. For Year 2 of the pilot, close collaboration with CMP and CFRG will be required to validate targets.

Key Takeaways

Key Takeaway 1: The Naval Experience Program social and traditional media campaign had a high initial uptake in engagement/interest; however, activity has declined over time. The current absence of demographic-related targets may be impeding future marketing planning and is being addressed by the Naval Experience Program.

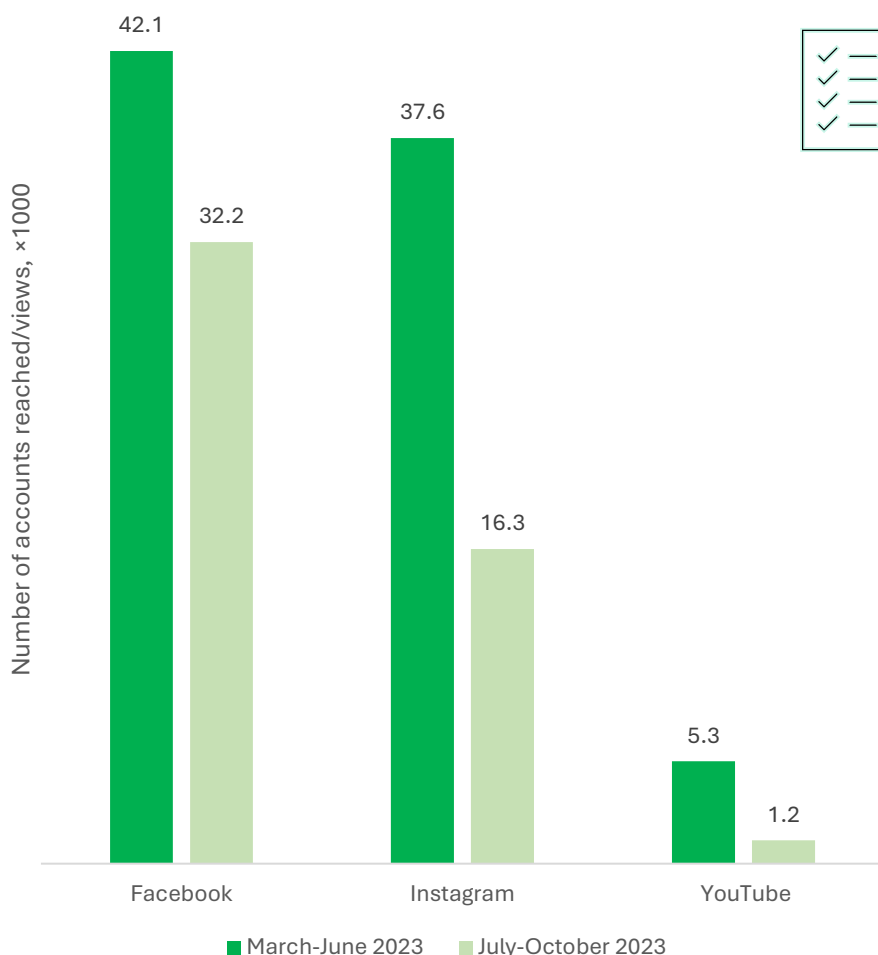| NEP Activity	Key Metrics			Program Assumption
Attract	# of advertising and marketing campaigns in place	**n=9+**	**1,416** NEP applicants since April 2023	Campaigns lead to increased public awareness of the RCN and greater interest in joining due to the streamlined recruitment process and no-commitment trade experience.
	# of modern/innovative promotional materials developed	**n=87+**		
	# of recruiting website visits	**>180K accounts**		

Marketing Campaign Trends and Results

- Overall, the NEP campaign produced multiple advertising campaigns and materials in both traditional and online marketing platforms, reaching 180 thousand accounts across five social media platforms. Engagement on Facebook remains the highest compared to other platforms (as indicated in the following graph); however, the program's 18–24 target demographic is the lowest reached on Facebook.

- The majority of interviewees noted that the awareness campaign (in social and traditional media) went well and was effective.

- Following the anticipated decline of interest since March 2023, NEP content is levelling off to the average performance of other Navy content.

Engagement in social media marketing has declined since pilot inception.

Number of accounts reached/views, ×1000

42.1 (Facebook March-June 2023)
32.2 (Facebook July-October 2023)
37.6 (Instagram March-June 2023)
16.3 (Instagram July-October 2023)
5.3 (YouTube March-June 2023)
1.2 (YouTube July-October 2023)

■ March-June 2023   ■ July-October 2023

Challenges and Metric Caveats

- Navy Public Affairs and NEP collaborate in marketing efforts, while Navy Public Affairs tracks NEP marketing data. The Navy Public Affairs Social and Traditional Media Reports recommended incorporating more tangible results/program success in the digital NEP content, as well as tailoring future NEP content to the target demographic group identified as 18–24.

- Interviewees cited limited resourcing as impacting NEP's ability to appropriately target and track success for its ideal recruits from the start of the campaign.

- As well, NEP has yet to determine targets for its attraction/marketing indicators.

- Note that the 101-day timeline to for file enrolment (Key Takeaway 4) is not currently an indicator of NEP or recruitment intake capacity and, therefore, should not influence the marketing campaign.

> *"Family/public exposure would indicate that [NEP] is better than many [RCN] initiatives in terms of public understanding."*
>
> *Interviewee*

Ongoing Work

- The Director of Navy Personnel (Personnel, Psychology and Attraction) team is developing a more mature approach to recruitment process guidance, as well as more effective attraction methods and performance metrics to better and discreetly target Canadian populations. These include the following activities and focus areas:
  - More tangible results/program success are being incorporated in NEP's digital content.
  - The Director of Navy Personnel Attractions ran working groups in December 2023 to plan events promoting NEP and has already begun planning the 2024 Great Canadian Marine Careers Expo. They also continue to seek new partnerships with educational institutions to inform potential high school, college and university leads about the program and have begun offering a "concierge" service, whereby members of the team reach out directly to leads generated at events to provide one-on-one recruitment guidance in an effort to generate new recruiting prospects.

- Surveys are being designed by NEP to inform attraction plans and program performance and will be reported as trends surface.

Key Takeaways

Key Takeaway 2: The Naval Experience Program has achieved its initially established target of 144 recruits in Year 1; however, identifying the program's intermediary goals and targets will require close collaboration with the Chief of Military Personnel.

NEP Activity	Key Metrics		Program Assumptions
Enrol	**Target** **144** enrollees for Year 1 RCN applicant to occupation ratio: **8:1**	**Actual** **160** enrollees NEP applicant to enrollee ratio: **9:1**	Internal enabling factor: CMP and CFRG were heavily included in the design and implementation phase of the program, including the development of recruitment-related targets.

Initial Target Met and the Strategic Intake Plan

- Based on March 1 NEP candidate statistics, with 160 candidates currently enrolled (including 7 applicants transferred from the Raven program), NEP surpassed its initial target of 144 recruits in December 2023 (as indicated in the following graph). Thereafter, the Strategic Intake Plan (SIP) cap was moved to 150 recruits and subsequently to 160 to accommodate the increasing number of recruits.

- NEP will run continual intake to the program, with variance based on the Navy's capacity to absorb. With the RCN's current recruitment needs, it is unlikely that its capacity to absorb will cap during the pilot's duration.

- SIP for NEP will therefore fluctuate based on the natural flow of intake and enrolment to the program, not based on the target. Note that since the Navy is not meeting its SIPs in other occupations, there is currently flexibility for NEP in this area.

> **SIP**, issued by Military Personnel Command, outlines the recruitment targets by individual occupations within each CAF organization. SIP also identifies priority occupations and threshold occupations, which are differentiated by their percentages of vacant positions.
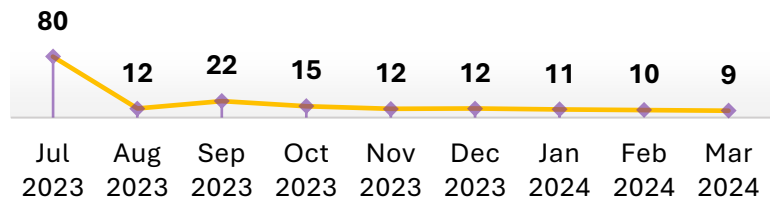
Pre-existing Files and Enrolment Ratio

- Despite successes in reaching the enrollee target for Year 1, nearly half of the NEP files were of individuals who had pre-existing files with CFRG and switched to NEP when it became available.

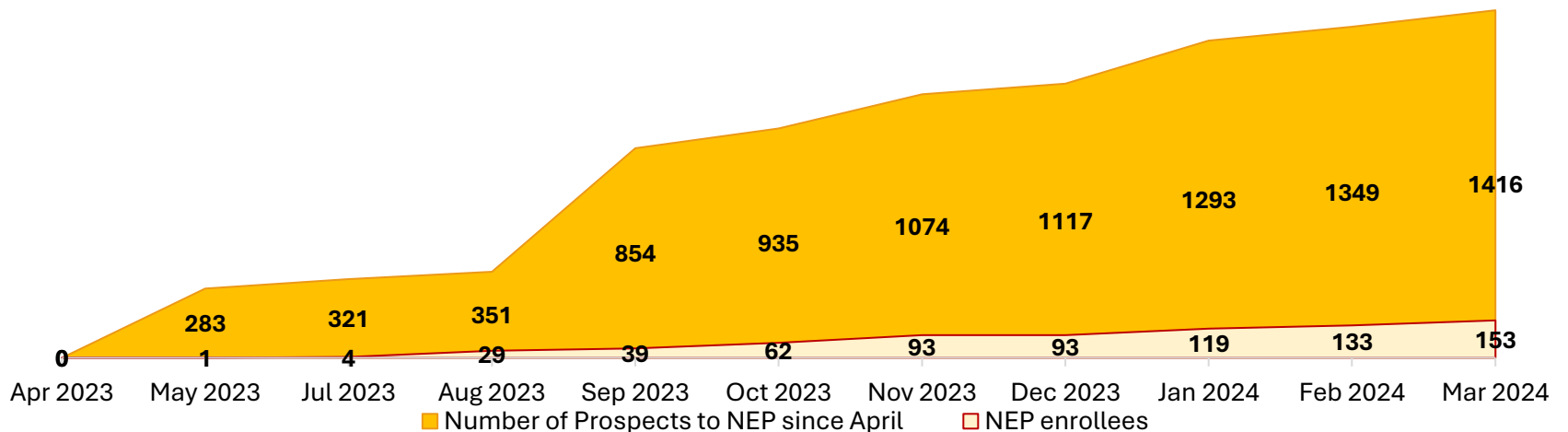> **Forty-six percent** of NEP files were of individuals who had pre-existing files at CFRG.

- Historically, the Navy has had an applicant to enrollee (occupation) ratio of 8:1. Current NEP data indicates that the NEP applicant to enrollee ratio is 9:1; however, it is trending down, as indicated in the following graph.

The NEP enrollees to number of applicants ratio is currently higher than the RCN average but trending down.

Jul 2023	Aug 2023	Sep 2023	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024
80	12	22	15	12	12	11	10	9

- These metrics suggest that **a similar target may not be feasible in coming years**. These challenges may be due to the absence of internal enabling factors such as a truncated program design phase.

NEP surpassed its initial target of 144 recruits.

	Apr 2023	May 2023	Jul 2023	Aug 2023	Sep 2023	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024
Number of Prospects to NEP since April	0	283	321	351	854	935	1074	1117	1293	1349	1416
NEP enrollees		1	4	29	39	62	93	93	119	133	153

Next Steps – Recruitment Targets

The value of NEP in terms of recruitment is perceived as the conversion of NEP participants into CAF occupations (trained effective strength), which will be measured several years into the pilot; however, determination of intermediary targets falls under the purview of recruitment, and intake targets will require revision with close collaboration with CMP for Year 2 of the pilot.

Key Takeaways

Key Takeaway 3: Over 50 percent of Naval Experience Program files do not reach enrolment, and reasons for file closures remain largely unknown.
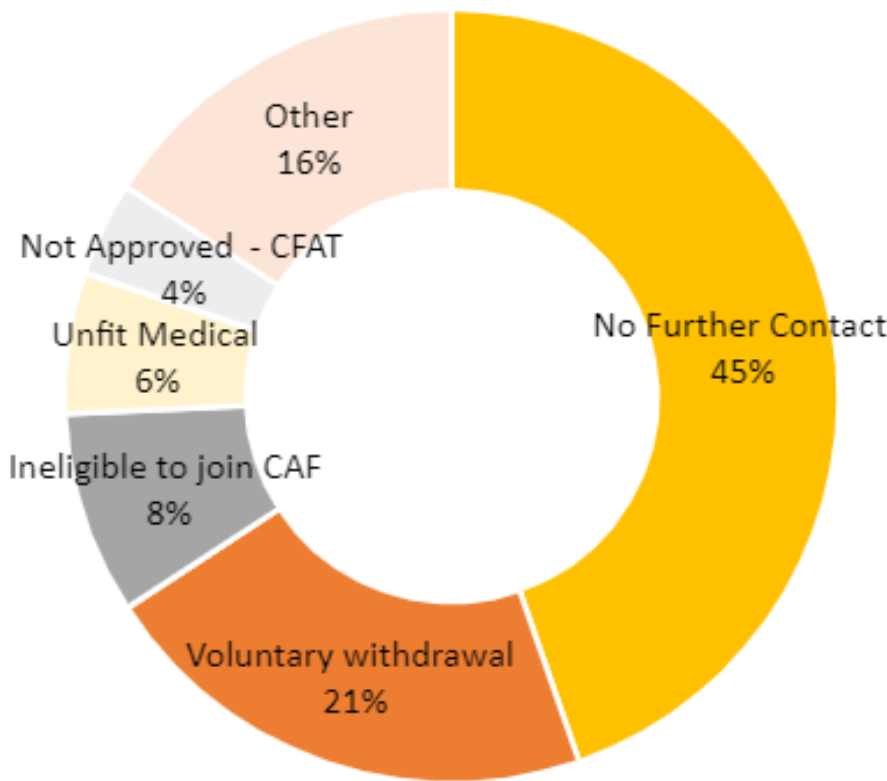
NEP Activity	Key Metrics		Program Assumptions	
Enrol	**Target** Decline in Drop-Out Rate at BMQ (baseline to be established)	**Actual** NEP Drop-Out Rate at BMQ: **8%**	Participants drop out (file closures) due to CFAT-related barriers.	Participants drop out (file closures) due to long processing times.

File Closures

During Enrolment

- As of March 1, 2024, 35 percent of NEP files are currently open with CFRG and are at different stages in the enrolment process.
- Fifty-four percent of files were closed. The majority of files (66 percent) were closed at the request of the applicant or due to inactivity (i.e., the recruiters were not able to re-establish contact with the applicant for 30 days or longer). This is depicted in the following graph.

Sixty-six percent of files are closed during enrolment due to no further contact or voluntary withdrawal.

- Other 16%
- Not Approved - CFAT 4%
- Unfit Medical 6%
- Ineligible to join CAF 8%
- No Further Contact 45%
- Voluntary withdrawal 21%

At BMQ

- According to NEP, the drop-out rate for NEP voluntary release at Basic Military Qualifications (BMQ) is currently 8 percent. Further data collected over the pilot's next year will help establish a baseline, with the goal of a decline in drop-out rates.

- Interviewees from CFRG and Naval Reserve recruitment centres and headquarters were asked about their experiences with file closures. All noted that the NEP file closure reasons and rates were aligned with general recruitment; however, there has been a slight increase in NEP file closures recently.

- External environmental factors that may influence this increase in dropout rates, according to Navy Public Affairs seasonal attraction/marketing data reports, include public perception of CAF culture change efforts related to sexual misconduct.

- Insights into file closures and validating related assumptions through the collection of key metrics during the enrolment process may validate program assumptions related to participants. As part of DE, continued collaboration between NEP and Director General Evaluation is planned in this area for Spring 2024.

Canadian Forces Aptitude Test

Although the Canadian Forces Aptitude Test (CFAT) is one of the most commonly cited reasons (from interviews) for participant drop out, according to recruitment data, it accounts for only 4 percent of the known reasons for file closures.

CFAT Ongoing Work:

- CMP is collaborating with the Digital Transformation Office and working on introducing an online, unproctored CFAT to reduce barriers for applicants and expedite suitability screening.

- As of December 2023, certain occupations now have CFAT delayed until BMQ, including NEP recruits.

Next Steps: CMP Ongoing Work

- CFRG is currently implementing broadened metrics for capturing reasons why candidates may leave the recruitment process, which will help inform how the department can increase applicant retention in the future.
- CMP's research personnel directorate (Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis) is also developing data collection tools for candidates who dropped out of the recruitment process (does not include NEP candidates specifically).
- CMP's upcoming new digital transformation of recruiting, including updates to the online applicant portal, may positively impact NEP by enhancing the applicant experience and increasing the conversion rate of applicants to enrollees.

Key Takeaways

Key Takeaway 4: The number of days required for the enrolment process has seen a decline due to an effort made by the Canadian Forces Recruitment Group to clear file backlog, and Naval Experience Program timelines overall have decreased due to green file prioritization; however, sustainability is unclear.

NEP Activity	Key Metrics		Program Assumptions	
Enrol	**Target** **21 days** to enrol applicants	**Actual** Time required to enrol applicants: **101 days**	The medical and security processes will be streamlined.	NRDs will reduce processing workload from recruitment (CFRG).

Changes in the Recruitment Process Timeline

- Despite the key program element of streamlining the enrolment process, all interviewees confirmed that there has been no change in the NEP enrolment process when compared to other recruitment programs, save for the prioritization of green files (files with minimal security implications). NEP is one of several priority files, which makes prioritization a challenge. The interviewees stated that this prioritization comes with trade-offs for other files.

- The average time to process a NEP file is 104 days for CFRG and 97 days for Naval Reserve Divisions (NRD). This is an improvement compared to the average 200 days quoted in the 2016 Auditor General Report; however, this improvement was due to a recent file backlog reduction exercise led by CFRG that was unrelated to the NEP pilot.

- Note that the timeline for the security clearance process is not currently being tracked by NEP as the focus is on green files.

- Almost all interviewees stated that the 21-day target was a challenge to meet, with suggestions for realistic timelines ranging from three to nine months.
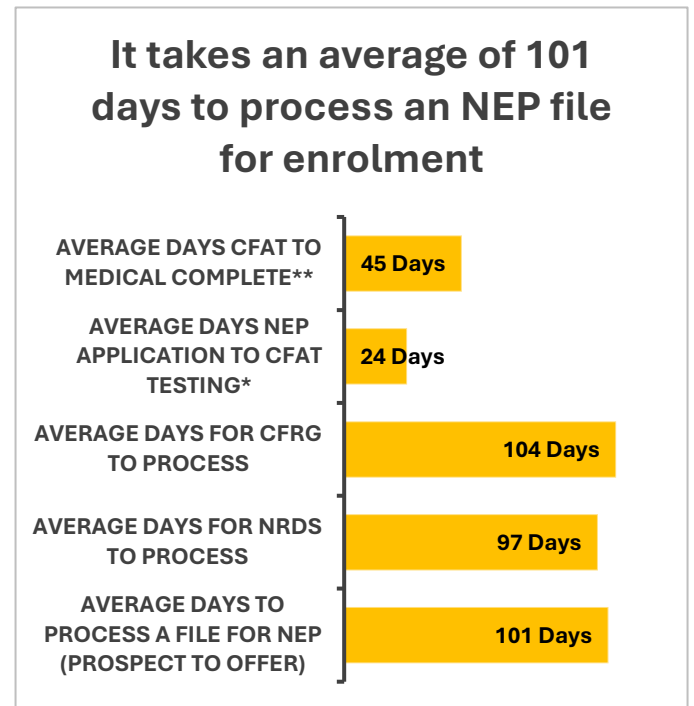
Medical and Security Processes

- Based on NEP data from March 2024, the average amount of days for files to move from CFAT to completing the medical process is 40. Although most of the processing time remains in the processing of medical files, note that this is a significant decrease (39 percent) based on NEP's January 2024 data, where the average was noted as 66 days.

- With regards to security processes, files with foreign implications currently take 18–24 months. NEP has implemented some efficiencies for the security process, such as allowing Director General of Defence Security to sign off on security (as opposed to CFRG having sole sign-off authority). NEP has also ensured participants awaiting clearance can still observe all trades, with Commanding Officers assuming the associated risk in this situation.

Ongoing Work

- CFRG is actively collaborating with Canadian Forces Health Services on health aspects, while CMP is currently providing support to conduct trials and adjustments for the Common Enrolment Medical Standards.
- Positive progress continues to be observed in the Recruit Medical Office's response time, which has significantly decreased.
- CFRG is actively collaborating with Director General of Defence Security as well as Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada on security aspects. This partnership aims to develop innovative solutions and streamline processes.
- NEP is developing a system to measure the time in the entry process that is within the control of NEP/CFRG. The clock will be paused whenever the process is in the applicant's hands, providing a more accurate timeline of the enrolment process.

It takes an average of 101 days to process an NEP file for enrolment

AVERAGE DAYS CFAT TO MEDICAL COMPLETE**	45 Days
AVERAGE DAYS NEP APPLICATION TO CFAT TESTING*	24 Days
AVERAGE DAYS FOR CFRG TO PROCESS	104 Days
AVERAGE DAYS FOR NRDS TO PROCESS	97 Days
AVERAGE DAYS TO PROCESS A FILE FOR NEP (PROSPECT TO OFFER)	101 Days

Naval Reserve Detachment Support

NRDs' ability to support NEP is an influencing factor in the streamlined enrolment process; however, many interviewees were unaware of this recruitment support for NEP and noted that NRDs are short-staffed, with files often rerouted to CFRG. One interviewee occupying a senior leadership position noted that the resources and time taken to have CFRG recruitment teams train NRDs led to trade-offs and underperformance in many other areas of CFRG recruitment.

Pilot Sustainability

The sustainability of NEP is currently affected by the prioritization of green files (as opposed to changes to the enrolment process itself), availability of resources and supports such as NRD, and enrolment processes outside of NEP's purview. Note that the 101-day timeline to process file enrolment is not currently an indicator of NEP or recruitment capacity.

Security processes fall under the authority of the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, and medical processes fall under the authority of the Surgeon General's Office. Departmental support would be required to drive interdepartmental change for those processes to be adjusted or to absorb increased risk tolerance, if required and justified by NEP.

Executive Report for the Naval Experience Program

Annex A: Program Logic and Key Metrics

The following diagram illustrates NEP activities; key metrics as of March 1, 2024; and the underlying program assumptions, barriers and enablers influencing program success.

NEP Activities

1 - Attract	2 - Enrol	3 - Train & Trade Experience

Key Metrics

1,416
NEP applicants since April 2023

503 (35%)
NEP files currently open at CFRG at different stages

153 (11%)
NEP enrollees
Target: 21 days to enrol applicants
Current metrics: 93 days

+

7
Raven applicants

=

160
enrollees
Target: 144 recruits for Year 1

148 (92%)
Continue the NEP experience

760 (54%)
Closed files
NEP applicant to enrollee ratio 9:1
Target: Below average RCN ratio (8:1)

67%
At the request of the applicant or due to inactivity (i.e., the recruiters were not able to re-establish contact with the applicant for 30 days or longer).

33%
Applicants were ineligible for some reason (e.g., medical, legal, entry standards, etc.).

12 (8%)
Voluntarily released during BMQ
Target: Decline in drop-out rate at BMQ (baseline to be established)

Program Assumptions

Campaigns lead to increased public awareness of the RCN and greater interest in joining due to the streamlined recruitment process and no-commitment trade experience.

The medical and security processes will be streamlined.

NRDs will reduce processing workload from recruitment (CFRG).

Participants drop out (file closures) due to CFAT-related barriers.

Participants drop out (file closures) due to long processing times.

Internal enabling factor: CMP and CFRG were heavily included in the design and implementation phase of the program, including the development of recruitment-related targets.