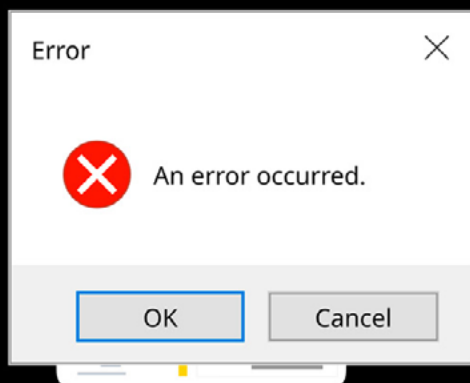> ★ NEW **E-EFMP**
> U.S. ARMY
> **Enterprise – Exceptional Family Member Program System**
>
> Allows:
> • Pre-move research   • Automated enrollment   • Coordinated online support
> ✓ Enrollment tracking over an entire career

While the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) is essential to the quality of life for Soldiers and their families, the Army must improve the website and reduce processing times to meet regulatory guidelines. (U.S. Army courtesy graphic by Office of the Chief of Public Affairs Visual Design Department and NCO Journal)

The Case for EFMP Reform

A Soldier's Perspective and Solutions

By Sgt. Maj. Ashley Beasley

NCO Leadership Center of Excellence

Soldiers face many challenges, especially those raising families. One occasional source of burden is the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). According to its website, the Army designed the EFMP to be "a comprehensive, coordinated, multi-agency program that provides community support, housing, medical, educational, and personnel services to military families with an [Exceptional Family Member] (EFM)" (U.S. Army Medical Department Exceptional Family Member Program, n.d.). Such programs are necessary to validate available services for families at current and future installations and to confirm continuity of care.

While EFMP is essential to the quality of life for Soldiers and their families, the Army must improve its management and process execution.

Digital Platform

In 2021, the Army initiated a pilot program consisting of approximately 1,000 Soldiers for the Enterprise-Exceptional Family Member Program System (E-EFMP). This approach allowed for software testing and provided feedback for improvement (U.S. Army Public Affairs, 2022).

In 2022, the E-EFMP website was launched. According to the U.S. Army Public Affairs (2022), the site boasted

the ability to make "enrollment, assignment coordination and family support access easier and synchronizes all aspects of care for families with special needs" (para 1).

As someone who used the legacy and current E-EFMP processes, this statement doesn't reflect my experience.

A Cumbersome Process

Nothing is more disheartening than a system meant to simplify issues that instead complicates them. The E-EFMP website is a frustrating example.

I navigated the website for three months for an overseas screening due to an upcoming Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move. The experience brought many emotions, none positive. This PCS is my family's second Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS), and the E-EFMP process made it more stressful than our earlier experience with the legacy system.

Processing Requirements

Per Army Regulation (AR) 608-75, garrison commanders ensure reassignment processing completion (to include OCONUS Family member deployment screening) within 30 days of the Enlisted Distribution Assignment System cycle and officer request for orders date (Department of the Army, 2017).

Our OCONUS screening timeline met the regulation requirement during the legacy processing system, ending in approximately 30 days. The current E-EFMP family travel process took about 100 days from start to finish at Fort Bliss, Texas.

The processing timeline creates undue stress for families because their PCS is in limbo while they await approval for command sponsorship at the gaining duty station. Meanwhile, they must coordinate gaining installation requirements with long wait times (like housing and day care). Otherwise, they may lack critical resources if the Army approves the family to PCS.

The current processing timelines could also create readiness issues, leaving Soldiers with no choice but to defer their assignment while they await family travel concurrence.

System Issues

E-EFMP is an automated process that allows you to follow an enrollment, disenrollment, or overseas screening package from start to finish. The complexity and time it takes to process the package varies if family members require enrollment in the EFMP.

While the ability to track your package's progress is convenient, it doesn't indicate processing times nor alert you with changes to its status. Soldiers put on a short-notice PCS must constantly hit refresh to track their package and check for updates to their submitted paperwork to avoid further processing delays.

The E-EFMP site should send automated messages to Soldiers notifying them when their package requires

A woman visits an EFMP information booth at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland, Aug. 18, 2022. If senior leaders with a helpful network consistently struggle with EFMP issues, junior Soldiers will need those leaders' support and advocacy as they navigate the same process. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Iinuma)

action. Furthermore, as a relatively new system, most Soldiers navigate it for the first time and have little knowledge about how to use it.

Local EFMP offices must be more helpful in aiding Soldiers in packet completion to avoid back-and-forth corrections of time-sensitive actions.

Human Error

While E-EFMP is an automated system, it still allows human error. As part of the process, the staff transcribes the Department of Defense (DD) Form 2792 (the family member medical summary completed by the servicing provider) into the system. If the information is input incorrectly, it causes further processing delays for the Soldier and their family. In my case, the Fort Bliss office committed two transcription errors before finally getting it right.

Additionally, once the provider determines enrollment, employees must select "yes" or "no" and input an enrollment expiration date. EFMP enrollments require updates every three years.

I currently have two children who need to be enrolled in the EFMP. One child shows medically disenrolled with an expiration date versus enrolled. The Fort Bliss regional office didn't enroll the other child as required by regulation and is working to determine if that was in error.

The EFMP office took an additional week to resolve this issue, and there was no feedback identifying what caused the problem. This type of mistake costs individuals valuable time, delaying approval of time-sensitive actions and requiring repeated steps. The EFMP office must conduct thorough training to prevent such oversights from occurring.

Other Recommendations

The E-EFMP website must improve. If it is an automated system, it should notify Soldiers when they need to make required updates to their packet to keep the process moving.

In March, the Secretary of the Army announced the creation of a central office to assist families with EFMP enrollments (U.S. Army Public Affairs, 2024). The email provided for the office in the article is not valid. The Army should publish an update with an accurate email address for families to use for vital support.

Additionally, this office should provide quality feedback. When I sought assistance after encountering issues, I received a formulaic response covering information available from the E-EFMP website. Telling Soldiers the number of family members enrolled and the status of their packet isn't the feedback expected from the G9 level.

Additionally, senior leaders must actively advocate for their Soldiers and ask what they need help with. If senior leaders with a network of individuals to aid them consistently struggle, junior Soldiers will need support and leaders to advocate for them during the process. Fixing the EFMP is imperative to alleviate the undue burden on Soldiers and their families.

So What?

Many may look at the EFMP program and think, "So what? Why is it important?"

More than 40,000 families are enrolled in the EFMP (U.S. Army Public Affairs, 2024). Failure to provide adequate support causes excessive stress on family units and could cause readiness issues.

Installations with insufficient staffing fail to meet the regulatory processing timelines, causing Soldiers to defer their orders while waiting for approval to PCS. I've met multiple senior leaders struggling through the EFMP process who shared their negative experiences. I know the stress I experienced through this process, and I only hope it will improve.

Conclusion

The EFMP is a crucial program for Soldiers and families, and the Army must fix the website and reduce processing times to meet regulatory guidelines.

It needs to revamp the website to allow for automated updates, so families know when changes to their packets are necessary. In addition, the Army needs to add systems to reduce the processing timeline.

The last thing families need during PCS season is an unnecessary burden added to an already stressful process. ∎

References

Department of the Army. (2017). *Exceptional Family Member Program.* (AR 608-75). https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/AR608-75_Web_FINAL.pdf

U.S. Army Public Affairs. (2022). *New E-EFMP system supports Army families with special needs members*. https://www.army.mil/article/260448/new_e_efmp_system_supports_army_families_with_special_needs_members

U.S. Army Public Affairs. (2024). Army Exceptional Family Member Program Central Office Will Better Support Soldiers and Families. https://www.army.mil/article/274845/army_exceptional_family_member_program_central_office_will_better_support_soldiers_and_families

U.S. Army Medical Department Exceptional Family Member Program. (n.d.). https://efmp.amedd.army.mil/

Sgt. Maj. Ashley Beasley serves as the executive officer to the commandant, NCO Leadership Center of Excellence, Fort Bliss, Texas. She has served more than 20 years in the Army in various leadership positions. She holds a master's degree in exercise science from California University of Pennsylvania, now PennWest California.

NCO JOURNAL

https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/
https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal
https://twitter.com/NCOJournal