

## **Marketing and Communications**

# **Marksmanship & Shooting Sports Activities Brand Guidance and Marketing Best-Practices**

**CAP Pamphlet 150-15**

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS CIVIL AIR PATROL  
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## **Table of Contents**

<b>SECTION 1: Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>SECTION 2: Background</b>	<b>3</b>
Benefits of Formalizing a Communications Plan	3
Risks of Maintaining the Status Quo	4
<b>SECTION 3: Brand Management</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>SECTION 4: Photography Guidance</b>	<b>5</b>
Always Do These Things	5
Examples of Positive Images	5
Never Do These Things	6
Examples of Negative Images	6
<b>SECTION 5: Communications Guidance</b>	<b>6</b>
Words to use (Dos)	6
Words to avoid (Don'ts)	6
<b>SECTION 6: Prepared Statement</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>SECTION 7: Misc. Items</b>	<b>7</b>

## **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of marketing and communications in Civil Air Patrol is to connect with internal and external audiences to promote the organization's national value, manage the brand, and strengthen relationships with key audiences like members, donors, partners, customers, parents/guardians, and many other stakeholders.

The goal of this marketing pamphlet is to provide high-level direction to help advise members about the best way to approach the marketing and promotion of activities involving firearms to help avoid any negative perception that could tarnish the brand image and potentially drive people away from Civil Air Patrol.

The program's core competencies described below are the primary contributions to overall mission accomplishment in accordance with other marketing and strategic communications efforts, organizational objectives, and core values.

**Trusted Counsel to Leaders.** Deliver candid communication counsel and guidance to the activity commander and leaders at the appropriate levels.

**Member Morale and Readiness.** Contribute to member morale and readiness by providing members and their families with the activity experience in a brand-appropriate structure in the digital age.

**Public Trust and Support.** Strengthen the bonds between CAP and the public through open and honest dialogue and engagement that communicates with communities, opinion leaders, decision-makers, donors, and the media.

**Brand Persuasion.** Directly affect operational and service environments at all levels by engaging the public and members with information that supports and builds a positive CAP narrative.

**Organizational Growth.** Contribute to growing the organization's membership and donor base through appropriate content.

## **SECTION 2: BACKGROUND**

As the OPR charged with managing the organization's brand reputation, internal and external communications, and crisis communications, MAC is responsible for shaping the optics of how using firearms reflects on Civil Air Patrol to the public. Recommendations herein will largely focus on thoughtful use of imagery and word choice in public communications (e.g., websites, social media, independent news coverage).

In collaboration with various directorates (Cadet Programs, Safety, Recruiting, Membership, and others), MAC is facilitating the best way to publicly promote sanctioned marksmanship activities and firearms safety training while attempting to eliminate the aspects of firearms activities that can be polarizing and even reflect negatively on Civil Air Patrol.

### **Benefits of Formalizing a Communications Plan**

**Managing the brand and safeguarding the reputation:** Formalizing best practices for CAP to properly position and promote marksmanship activities and safety training can be the catalyst for enterprise-wide training that may help eliminate the polarizing issues that tarnish the CAP brand.

**Eliminating subjective opinion for a uniform response:** Documenting CAP's best practices for promoting marksmanship activities and safety training to the public eliminates internal debate over what one person believes is a harmless image to post versus what another person may see as a disturbing activity for cadets to be engaged in.



Images of unusual activities with cadets carrying assault-style dummy weapons in tactical simulations/training that seemingly have no relevance to the cadet experience can be damaging to the brand.

### **Risks of Maintaining the Status Quo**

**Unsustainability:** When images like the ones shown above are posted, a significant workload is generated for the MAC team which must review hundreds of comments on social media sites. Many posts and email messages require a response, all of which takes time and pulls the MAC team away from other projects.

**Irreparably damaging the brand:** If at some point, a current or former member commits a violent act, it would be best for CAP if the alleged offender did not appear in a damning image like the ones shown above and below. Images of assault weapons in classrooms and or outside of controlled range environments must be carefully curated in today's climate.



If the image requires a highly detailed caption to describe the situation depicted, it may not be the best image of the activity.

### **SECTION 3: BRAND MANAGEMENT**

The greatest challenge for managing CAP's brand reputation surrounding marksmanship activities is how activities are promoted to internal and external audiences without any standardized guidance. As the imagery shown in this document illustrates, differing perspectives on what imagery is deemed harmful versus harmless in the eye of the beholder (as is brand perception).

Some members and nonmembers alike believe that CAP should not be engaged in firearms activities for any reason including safety, target shooting, etc. Consequently, each time a unit posts images on social media or a website of cadets engaged in such activities, the issue flares

up and plays out in public since most unit-level social media channels are not private. This public discourse often includes subsequent posts, comments, images, etc. that are defamatory and tarnish the brand's reputation. The solutions follow in the form of photography and communications guidance.

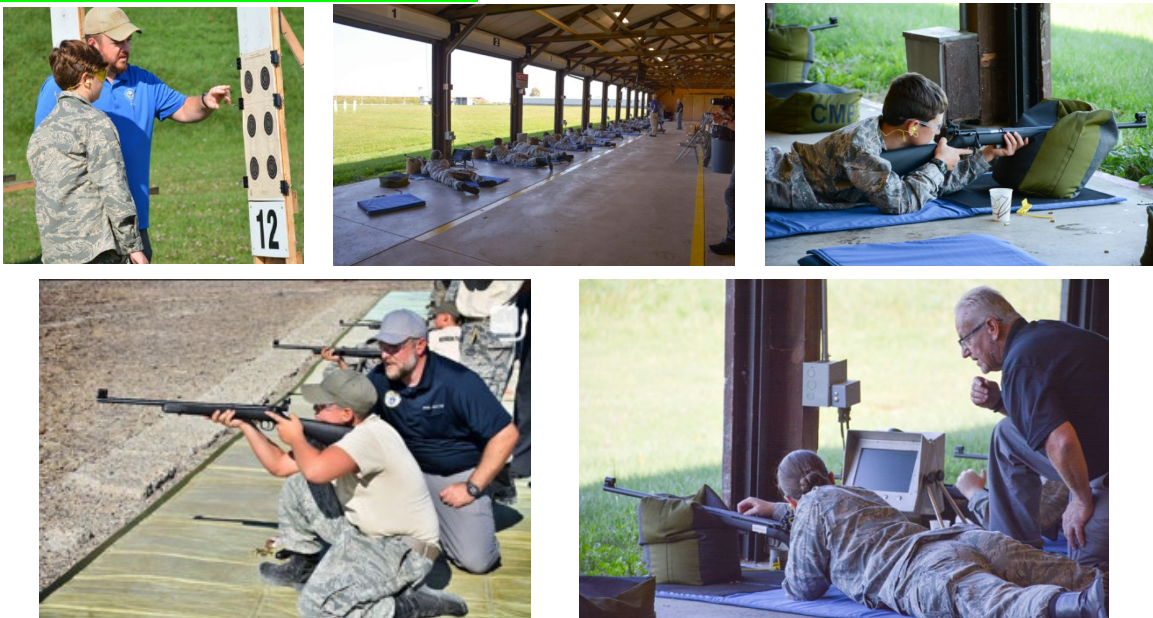
#### **SECTION 4: PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDANCE**

Photography guidance is provided to help PAOs and activity directors capture positive visuals to display to the public via social media and websites as opposed to the alternative – imagery that tarnishes the brand and may negatively impact membership, philanthropy, partnerships, and more.

##### **ALWAYS DO THESE THINGS**

- Always keep safety in mind from a viewer's perspective so images are not misinterpreted
- Always show a range safety officer (it may not be possible/practical to have a safety officer in every photo so post multiple images to make the point)
- Always show adult supervision (range officer, activity director, etc.)
- Always remain sensitive and attuned to current events (e.g., mass shootings in the area)
- Always ask for a second opinion regarding verbiage and images before posting (preferably someone like a wing PAO who may not be directly associated with the activity)
- Always show images of firearms pointed downrange
- Always show eye/ear protection when firing is in progress
- Always only use bullseye targets (not human silhouettes)
- Always show people enjoying the activity (smiling, not posing to look "tough")

##### **EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE IMAGES**



The common thread in these images is safety, supervision, and precision target shooting – not tactical training with high-powered assault-style weapons.

### **NEVER DO THESE THINGS**

- Never show assault-style weapons (unless it is described as an inert/dummy firearm, a light beam emitting gun, or fired under specific supervision described in the post)
- Never pose with firearms that are not pointed at a target (or make hand gestures that can be perceived as gang signs when holding a firearm)
- Never look mean, angry, or nervous while holding a firearm
- Never use human silhouette targets
- Never show images of firearms loose/unattended/unsecured, etc.
- Never show classroom instruction imagery with one person isolated holding a gun (like an active shooter)
- Never create memes using firearms

### **EXAMPLES OF NEGATIVE IMAGES**



This image seemingly shows a cadet firing an assault-weapon from a defensive position with a back-up weapon and surplus ammunition. This does not show a cadet engaged in precision target practice in a controlled and supervised environment.



This image could be showing a hostage situation in a school with other cadets crowded in the back.

## **SECTION 5: COMMUNICATIONS GUIDANCE**

Communications guidance is provided because word choice matters. Using some words and avoiding others can either escalate or defuse perception of any activity.

### **DO use words like:**

- marksmanship, proficiency, and precision
- target practice, target shooting, and shooting sports
- target rifle, firearm, small-bore, bolt-action, small caliber, and rimfire
- safety training, safety officer, range officer, and firearms safety training
- controlled environment, shooting range, and supervised

### **DON'T use words like:**

- weapons training, military training, and tactical training
- semi-automatic, assault rifle, AR-15 style, rapid-fire
- gun culture
- shooter

## **SECTION 6: PREPARED STATEMENT**

CAP needs to be prepared with other resources like FAQs, PAO training, crisis communications, etc. that are in progress.

Geographically, “gun culture” may either be seen as a positive thing or a negative thing. Since CAP is a national organization, we need to be able to answer/defend the “Why?” question. This activity, perhaps more than any other, has the potential to be polarizing and may not elevate CAP’s stature as a brand if not managed thoughtfully.

CAP’s position on marksmanship activities and firearm safety training.

A specific position/response should be crafted. For example:

Civil Air Patrol’s cadet program and associated activities are designed to help develop well-rounded, conscientious individuals with strong character. Regardless of the activity, there is tremendous value in allowing cadets to be trained by skilled professionals in a supervised environment. Safety is always our top priority.

## **SECTION 7: MISC ITEMS**

For more information about marketing best-practices on this or any marketing and communications topic, contact Marketing and Strategic Communications via email at [MAC@capnhq.gov](mailto:MAC@capnhq.gov)