

EVALUATING ADULT TRAINING PROGRAMS

for Leaders Who Work with Cadets



Adult leadership is the biggest factor affecting success in the cadet mission. Adult training programs such as Training Leaders of Cadet (TLC), Cadet Protection Program (CPP) and the Cadet Programs Specialty Track are the main resources for Cadet Programs Officers to gain professional development. As we endeavor to strategically position CAP for the future to *Shape lives, build character, and ready young people for futures in aerospace and beyond*, a goal in the strategic plan is to *broaden adult leaders' capabilities as youth development professionals, equipping them to be champions of positive youth development practices proven effective in other youth organizations*. With this in mind, we wanted to know how our CP adult training programs stacked up against other youth development organizations, while also determining if the programs meet the unique needs of our members.

THE RESEARCH

External Investigations

We embarked on a journey to gather insights. After some investigation we determined that the [National Afterschool Association's Core Knowledge, Skills, And Competencies for Afterschool and Youth Development Professionals](#) was the best resource with which to align our adult training programs.

The [National Afterschool Association \(NAA\)](#) is the professional association for those who work with youth outside of school time (National Afterschool Association, 2021). In 2011, [the National Institute on Out-of-School Time \(NIOST\)](#) and research from other industry leaders resulted in the original NAA core knowledge and competencies document (National Afterschool Association, 2021). In 2021, NAA embarked on an update, conducted in partnership with [Change Impact](#), which resulted in a highly relevant youth development “framework that describes the dispositions, knowledge, skills, and competencies individuals need to provide high-quality [out of school time] programming, support the learning and development of children and youth, and advance equity, particularly for those who have been historically excluded” (National Afterschool Association, 2021, pp. 4).

This set of core competencies is utilized by many high-profile youth development organizations in their advancement of adult training. We felt CAP would only benefit by aligning our training standards with these ten content areas.

Internal Inquiries

Not only did we want to know what other organizations are doing, we also wanted to hear from our members about the challenges with, and gaps in, our current training programs. We wanted to

hear about the ways we could improve the programs to make them more accessible and effective for our volunteers.

The process:

First, we conducted a small initial brainstorming group with CPOs to gather initial insights. Using the [Design Thinking](#) method, we determined our six main user groups and set out to chat with folks in each of these groups.

We reached out and had one-on-one conversations with members from across the organization: volunteers of various duty positions, ages and wings; brand new members, seasoned leaders; wing administrators, local unit leaders, cadets who recently transitioned seniors, activity directors. We wanted to gain a well-rounded picture of where improvements need to be made, and we were not disappointed. You really came though and honestly communicated the challenges while also suggesting innovative ways to improve.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

NAA Core Competencies

We've mapped the current programs to the NAA benchmarks and done a gap analysis to see where CAP currently aligns with the NAA and where we do not. We've learned that our training is heavy on CAP-specific guidance and what we're lacking is an overview about teens' growth and development, practical soft skills on coaching and mentoring adolescents, and training on how to create learning environments conducive to afterschool activities.

CPO Insights

In speaking with many Cadet Programs Officers, we have gained quite a few insights about the practical implementation of our current adult training programs. The following are the ones that were the most predominant.

- I like the idea of a TLC course that is more focused on group discussion, where I can exchange ideas and challenges with colleagues, problem solve and network.
 - In order to gain that time in the 'classroom' I would be happy to take more online modules ahead of time, at my own pace, freeing up classroom time for related discussions.
- I didn't get to take TLC for more than a year after I joined. By then some of the information was repetitive. I wish I had access to some of the lessons sooner.
- I would like a TLC Refresher course that I can take on my own schedule that is relevant to my particular needs.
- I would like some choice in what courses I take; I'd love multiple pathways to get to the same destination.
- I would like National to centralize TLC.
- I like having TLC at the local level.
- There should be a baseline training for each CP duty position.

- I don't know where to find resources, or even if a training resource exists. Things are spread out in many areas. A centralized hub would be useful.
- We need better communication about updates and changes.
- Becoming a CAP senior member is disjointed. What I really need is some guidance (a checklist, pamphlet, orientation) so I know how to take action.
- We need more training on youth development topics such as: connecting with today's cadets, how to facilitate group discussions, how to deliver content in an engaging way, how to manage cadets in crisis, how to be a mentor, managing 18+ cadets, behavior management

THE NEXT STEPS

We are in the process of reviewing the insights from members and from the NAA Gap Analysis and deciding on how best to solve the problems that were presented during the interviews, as well as evaluating what parts of the NAA core knowledge and competencies should be integrated into CAP's adult training programs.

There were Many, MANY innovative ideas presented by members during the discussions on how to move forward. We are exploring which ones would be the most beneficial and which ones are possible given the organization's capabilities.

Your Input

Moving forward we will still be needing your input and support.

At this stage we are still soliciting feedback on some particular areas of interest. Attached is a questionnaire to help us gather insights into what areas need improvement. If you feel inclined, please complete the questionnaire. Feel free to answer as many or as few of the questions as you like.

Once we work through the research and come up with an action plan, we will send out a large-scale survey to all CPOs to gain feedback on the plan of action and the direction of adult training (planned for the fall). We encourage every CP Officer to complete the survey. Please help us gain as many responses as possible.

REFERENCES

National Afterschool Association. (2021). *Core Knowledge, Skills, and Competencies for Afterschool and Youth Development Professionals*. Retrieved August 17, 2022, from <https://naaweb.org/all-documents/40-naa-core-knowledge-skills-competencies-for-ost-professionals-rev2021-1/file>.