

ON
CADET PROGRAMS: OUTCOME REVIEW

PURPOSE

This paper summarizes the results gathered during a recent, in-house evaluation of the Cadet Program's performance.

Key Question. Does the CAP Cadet Program attain the short- and mid-range outcomes CAP intends for cadets and America?

- A commitment to a personal code of honor
- Leadership skills for a diverse, democratic society
- Knowledge of and enthusiasm for STEM, aviation, or military careers

Approach. A formative evaluation, we undertook this project to make sense of what the Cadet Program actually achieves and used that learning to improve mission effectiveness.

OVERVIEW. Three instruments were central to the evaluation:

Cadet Logic Model. This depicts how we produce value for America. It shows the relationship between pressing social needs (e.g., aerospace workforce, youth character formation), CAP's resources, program activities, and the results we produce.

Cadet Key Performance Indicators. The KPIs are a set of measures encompassing safety, enrollment, cadet progression, adult leadership, flying, Core Values behavior, interest in STEM and military careers, and more. This paper does not report on Cadet KPIs.

Youth Experiences Survey (YES) 2.0. Scholars developed this formal tool to assess what teens obtain from extracurricular activities like CAP. It happens to map nicely to our intended program outcomes.

- YES 2.0 is widely used, creating benchmarking opportunities for CAP to compare its performance against other youth-serving organizations.
- Three groups of people were surveyed, giving us a near 360° perspective: cadets (N= 1,976 submissions) parents (N=1,635), and CAP adult volunteers (N=344).

OBSERVATIONS: YES 2.0. (See *Table 1*, next page). Some notable observations include:

Good clustering. Variance between cadet, parent, and leader responses is mostly < 0.25.

Strong results. Cadets out-perform the two benchmarked studies in nearly every instance.

Highest scoring item. Cadets say they learn about the challenges of being a leader. Most youth programs do not teach leadership as explicitly as we do, so a high score was expected.

Lowest scoring item: Cadets say they are not using their leadership skills to change their schools or communities. We should do more to help cadets transfer skills from CAP to daily life.

Strongest agreement. Cadets, parents, and adult leaders are in strongest agreement on the matter of cadets starting to think seriously about their futures. Because career exploration is a major aspect of cadet life, high scores here are a sign of success.

TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF YES 2.0 SURVEY RESULTS CATEGORY	CADETS	PARENTS	LEADERS	BENCHMARKS	
				Denault	Jones
Identity Work. Thinking about who I am, my future	3.28	3.42	3.44	2.71	2.65
Initiative Experiences. Setting goals, pushing myself, building self-discipline	3.26	3.08	3.39	2.91	3.07
Basic Skills. Controlling my temper, handling stress	3.03	2.76	3.14	2.67	2.28
Interpersonal Relationships. Making friends, helping others, standing up for what's right	3.19	3.13	3.25	na	2.78
Teamwork & Social Skills. Being patient, giving and receiving feedback, taking charge	3.34	3.08	3.23	2.9	3.12
Negative Experiences. Cliques, discrimination, inappropriate jokes (lower score is better)	1.38	1.22	1.25	na	na

*All figures are the means for the respective group's ratings on a Likert scale.
Minimum score 1.0, greatest disagreement. Maximum score 4.0, greatest agreement.*

OBSERVATIONS: CAP-SPECIFIC SURVEY ITEMS

Tomorrow's Aerospace Leaders. Our cadet corps is a target rich environment for the Air Force, aero industry, and STEM career fields overall.

Cadet Protection Program. An outside expert validated our CPP last year. This data shows that people see the CPP being implemented well, though we would like to see two-deep standards improve to 4.75 or higher.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF CAP-SPECIFIC SURVEY RESULTS CATEGORY	CADETS	PARENTS	LEADERS
Career Interests			
Aviation (military or civilian)	76%		
Military service	81%		
Cyber security	34%		
STEM in general	65%		
Cadet Protection (5.0 scale)			
At CAP activities, at least two adults are present, as required.	4.67	4.68	na
Leaders who are senior to me take cadet protection seriously	na	na	4.75
I have a wingman, a fellow cadet who supports me	4.01	na	na
I serve as a wingman, supporting a fellow cadet	4.16	na	na
Satisfaction			
Would you recommend CAP to a young person? (Yes)	94%	92%	96%
Active Participation			
If you could be as active in CAP as you wanted . . .			
I'd attend CAP about three times per month or more	92%	92%	96%
I'd quit CAP	2%		
<i>For cadets who are no longer active in CAP:</i>			
What's the biggest reason why you're not very active in CAP?			
COVID	45%	53%	
I like CAP but I'm too busy with other activities	26%	13%	
I can't find a ride to CAP or I can't afford it	1%	0%	
I liked being a cadet for a while, but my interests have changed	9%	9%	

Satisfaction. Cadets, parents, and leaders report high levels of satisfaction with the CAP Cadet Program. Our sampling techniques mitigated against halo effects, though it may be useful to follow-up with more sophisticated sampling methods, when able.

Active Participation. A huge majority of cadets (92%) say that if their family and school commitments allow, they would like to be very active in CAP, attending 3 or more weekly meetings each month, plus an occasional weekend event. We have earned the cadets' attention, but now must contend with the external forces that compete for their time.

TAKE-AWAYS: OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE THE CADET EXPERIENCE

Drive the learning home. Cadets report not receiving instruction on topics where we know instruction was delivered (e.g., resilience and coping skills). We should be more explicit in what we teach and at the conclusion of each activity, prompt cadets to reflect about their learning.

Make learning fun. In the wake of COVID, cadets feel pent-up demand for hands-on labs and adventure-based learning. We should identify and help units needing more hands-on activities.

Improve internal communications. Awareness of major opportunities like Cadet Wings was low. We will continue our webinars and use of *PROPS*. When CAP's social media position full time is filled, we'll create campaigns with that expert's help. A "Cadet Welcome Course" launching this fall via Cadet Interactive will be a big step forward.

Understand our role within the aerospace ecosystem. We need to investigate whether we "pass the baton" effectively to our partners, such as the aviation colleges, and USAF Recruiting and ROTC. We'll establish a Cadet Board of Visitors to help us keep cadet life relevant.

FUTURE PLAN

We'll continue to monitor the Cadet KPIs and encourage crosstalk within our community to share promising practices. Further, we'll continue with an Annual Cadet Survey to gather feedback about the cadet experience. However, an outcomes evaluation like this one is difficult without an evaluation office. We should revisit the outcomes evaluation every 3 or 4 years.

CONCLUSION

Survey data indicates that cadet learning is richer and deeper than what researchers found during two benchmark studies of other youth-serving organizations. The Cadet Program is strong in its fundamentals.

Dr. Jeff Montgomery (CAP/AE) made the Cadet Program's performance a major part of his dissertation in 2006. At that time, he found widespread dissatisfaction with the cadet training opportunities and support from local leaders. Today, activity quality is a strength, as is the volunteers' faith in their leaders. This is a story worth celebrating.

With good confidence, CAP can claim that the cadet experience contributes to our young people's prosocial development and that we are successfully fulfilling our cadet mission.