

## **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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## **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 leader 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 that manages 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 weapons, including tactical simulations or training that seemingly has no relevance to the cadet experience can be damaging to the brand.*

## **RISK OF MAINTAINING STATUS QUO**

**Unsustainability:** When images like the ones shown above are posted, a significant workload is generated for the MAC team who, in some instances, 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:** Brands are built or are crushed by perception because perception is reality. The Civil Air Patrol brand is not what we say it is, the brand is whatever an individual believes it is. That said, images that show uniformed Civil Air Patrol members participating in events without proper context, doing something contrary to brand position, disregarding core values, and more, can have a lasting negative impact on the brand. Images of assault weapons (military grade automatic weapons) or assault-style weapons (civilian semi-automatic weapons) in classrooms and or outside of controlled range environments must be carefully curated in today's climate regardless of where the image appears.



*Inappropriate images (examples above) without appropriate context can be confusing or misleading. A picture tells 1,000 words but use a caption to ensure that they are the best words to describe the visual. Never pose with firearms that are not pointed at a target.*

### **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 training, 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 public not private.

This public discourse often includes subsequent posts, comments, images, etc. that are defamatory and tarnish the brand's reputation.

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

Photography guidance is provided to help PAOs and activity leaders 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 described with a very detailed description about the activity, supervision, purpose, etc.)
- Never pose with firearms that are not pointed at a target (and never 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**



### **SECTION 5: COMMUNICATIONS GUIDANCE**

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

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

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

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

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

### **SECTION 6: PREPARED STATEMENT**

Because of diversity of thought, personal perception, life experience, localized culture/customs/norms, and more, attitudes about “gun culture” may be perceived differently. Even geographically, sentiment toward guns varies widely.

Since CAP is a national organization, images posted locally may be seen nationally. Consequently, CAP as a national organization, needs to be able to answer/defend the “Why are cadets training with guns?” question around shooting activities. Marksmanship, perhaps more than any other activity, has the potential to be polarizing and may not elevate CAP’s stature as a respected brand if not managed thoughtfully.

Civil Air Patrol also needs to be prepared with other resources like FAQs, PAO and activity leader training, crisis communications, and more that are in progress.

**CAP's position on marksmanship activities and firearms safety training.**

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)