CIVIL AIR PATROL

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MEMBER RETENTION PROGRAM GUIDE

A practical guide for commanders and retention personnel

BY CIVIL AIR PATROL RETENTION

PREFACE

Civil Air Patrol retains members one experience at a time. That experience begins before an application is approved. It begins with the first contact between CAP and a prospective member and continues through every stage of service.

The Member Retention Program gives commanders a deliberate way to see and strengthen that experience. It connects first contact, expectations, onboarding, belonging, meaningful service, development, recognition, transitions, reengagement, renewal, and continued membership.

Retention is a commander's program. Commanders own the environment in which members serve and make the decisions that shape the local program. Retention Officers and Directors of Retention support that command responsibility. They provide a staff focal point, member perspective, coordination, analysis, and recommendations. They do not replace commanders, create a second chain of command, or take ownership of other functional programs.

This guide is intended to help both sides of that relationship. Commanders should be able to see how to employ retention personnel. Retention personnel should be able to see what the commander owns, what they support, where their authority stops, and how to add value at their echelon.

The program supports CAP's existing organization rather than creating another bureaucracy. Retention personnel work through the appropriate staff and offices of primary responsibility, help identify friction, connect member feedback to action, and support improvements through established command and staff channels.

> **The objective is not to keep every member at any cost. The objective is to make the CAP experience worth renewing.**

OVERVIEW

CAP Regulation 30-1, *Organization of Civil Air Patrol*, establishes the Member Retention Program. CAP Pamphlet 30-1, *CAP Sample Position Descriptions for Standard Duty Assignments*, provides the approved retention duty-position descriptions. This pamphlet explains how commanders and retention staff can put that framework into practice.

The guidance is intentionally adaptable. Units differ in size, mission, geography, staffing, and maturity. Commanders can tailor local execution to those circumstances while preserving the program's basic roles and relationships.

A pamphlet is guidance, not a regulation. Nothing in this publication is intended to create a new inspection item, reporting requirement, mandatory local form, or parallel command structure.

At the same time, appointment to a retention duty position should have substance. Once appointed, a retention staff member serves as the commander's principal staff focal point for retention. Other staff contribute to the member experience, but the retention portfolio should not be fragmented until the appointed retention member has only a title and no coherent function.

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CHAPTER 1 — MEMBER RETENTION PROGRAM FOUNDATIONS

1.1. Retention Begins at First Contact

> **Retention begins at first contact with a prospective member and continues throughout the member's entire CAP experience.**

That first interaction starts shaping expectations, trust, belonging, and the person's understanding of what CAP can realistically offer. Retention therefore begins before enrollment even though the Retention Officer does not own the recruiting function.

Recruiting and retention overlap at the beginning of the member experience. Recruiting attracts, informs, and helps a prospective member decide whether to join. Retention begins in the same interaction because what the person hears and experiences becomes the baseline against which later CAP service is judged.

1.2. Retention Is a Commander's Program

The commander owns the Retention Program at the echelon of command. The commander sets local priorities, organizes the staff, makes command decisions, assigns actions, removes barriers within command authority, and determines how retention support is used.

The presence of a Retention Officer or Director of Retention does not transfer that responsibility. Retention personnel extend the commander's capacity; they do not become the commander for member experience.

> **Commander owns. Retention staff advise and coordinate. Functional staff execute their functions. All approach the work with a customer-service mindset focused on the member experience.**

1.3. Retention Is an Enterprise Capability, Not a Stand-Alone Bureaucracy

Member experience crosses organizational boundaries. A single member can interact with recruiting, Personnel, Education and Training, Cadet Programs, Operations, Emergency Services, Aerospace Education, Communications, Logistics, Information Technology, and command leadership during one period of service.

Retention staff help the commander see across those boundaries. The function adds value by identifying gaps, connecting people, surfacing patterns, and helping existing programs work better for members.

Retention should not become a second version of other CAP programs. It should help those programs connect more effectively to the member experience.

1.4. Recruit. Train. Retain.

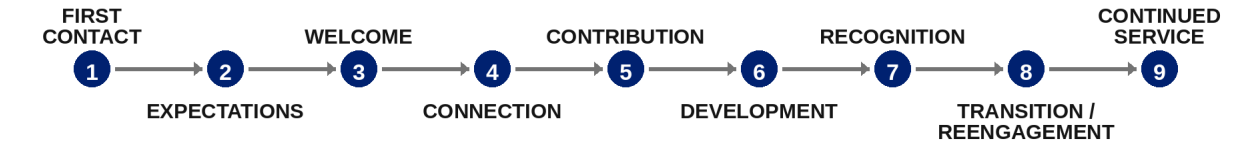
Recruit. Train. Retain. provides a simple way to describe CAP's continuing responsibility to bring people into the organization, prepare them to serve, and create an experience worth continuing.

These are not separate phases with hard boundaries. Retention begins during recruiting, when expectations are first established, and continues through training, meaningful service, development, recognition, transition, and continued membership.

Recruit. Train. Retain. Each reinforces the others.

1.5. The Member Retention Lifecycle

A useful model for the program is:



Renewal is a checkpoint inside this lifecycle. It is not the point at which retention begins.

1.6. Four Conditions to Keep in View

Across the lifecycle, four simple conditions help leaders understand the member experience:

- Purpose — I matter here.
- Progress — I am moving.
- Belonging — I am known.
- Respect — My time matters.

These are not a score or inspection standard. They are a practical way to ask whether the experience gives a member reasons to continue.

1.7. What Retention Can Influence

Some departures are largely outside CAP's control: relocation, family obligations, work, school, health, finances, or changing priorities.

Other departures may involve conditions CAP can influence, such as unrealistic expectations, weak onboarding, lack of meaningful work, poor communication, stalled development, avoidable administrative friction, unresolved conflict, insufficient recognition, or no visible next opportunity.

The program focuses attention on what CAP can reasonably improve without treating every departure as a failure.

1.8. What Retention Is Not

- Retention is not pressure to renew.
- Retention is not lowering standards to keep a member.
- Retention is not a substitute for command.
- Retention is not a complaint-investigation system.
- Retention is not a replacement for Recruiting, Education and Training, Personnel, Cadet Programs, Data and Analytics, Marketing and Communications, Information Technology, or other functional areas.
- Retention is not a second chain of command.
- Retention is not a reason to create new reporting requirements without appropriate authority.
- Retention is not measured only by a renewal percentage.

CHAPTER 2 — HOW COMMANDERS LEAD THE PROGRAM

2.1. Commander Responsibilities

At every echelon, the commander's role centers on six decisions:

- Set intent — Identify the member-experience and retention priorities that matter most at the command's level.
- Organize the staff — Establish a clear retention staff focal point and define how that function connects with the rest of the staff.
- See the experience — Use member feedback, observations, and available data to understand where members are connecting, progressing, or encountering friction.
- Act — Decide what can be addressed locally, assign action to the correct functional owner, and remove barriers within command authority.
- Escalate — Send issues that cannot be solved locally to the next echelon or appropriate functional authority.
- Learn and share — Recognize successful practices and help them move to other units.

2.2. How a Commander Uses Retention Personnel

When appointed, the Retention Officer or Director of Retention serves as the commander's principal staff advisor and focal point for the Member Retention Program.

A productive commander-retention relationship normally includes:

- direct access to the commander or designated command-team member;
- clear local priorities;
- authority to coordinate across staff functions without assuming command authority;
- access to appropriate information needed to understand the member experience;
- a recurring opportunity to brief trends, friction, transitions, and recommendations;
- commander decisions that identify the functional owner for follow-on action; and
- follow-through so the retention staff member can determine whether the member experience actually improved.

2.3. Preserve a Coherent Retention Portfolio

Commanders retain flexibility in how they organize their staffs. Other staff members can support retention work and may lead specific actions within their functional areas.

When a Retention Officer has been appointed, however, the position is most useful when it remains the clear focal point for the integrated retention picture. Dividing the retention portfolio among unrelated staff members until the appointed retention member becomes peripheral defeats the purpose of creating the duty position.

> **Many people influence retention. One staff function synthesizes those inputs into the commander's integrated retention picture**.

2.4. Commander Review: Keep It Light and Useful

The program does not require a new meeting or report. A commander can include retention in an existing command-and-staff rhythm, conduct a short periodic conversation with the retention staff member, or use another local method.

The useful discussion is simple:

- What are we hearing from prospective and current members?

- Who is new and still needs connection or momentum?
- Where are members getting stuck?
- Who has become less engaged or is approaching a transition?
- What pattern needs a commander's decision?
- What action belongs to another staff function?
- What needs help from the next echelon?
- What is working well enough to recognize or share?

2.5. Commander Decisions Versus Staff Recommendations

Retention staff identify, analyze, coordinate, and recommend. Commanders decide.

A retention staff member can recommend a change in onboarding, highlight an avoidable burden, identify a pattern across units, or propose an experiment. The appropriate commander and functional owner determine whether and how that action proceeds.

This distinction is especially important when the proposed change affects policy, another directorate's program, member access, training requirements, or technology.

2.6. When No Retention Staff Member Is Appointed

The commander still owns the Member Retention Program.

Where a Retention Officer has not yet been appointed, the commander remains responsible for ensuring the retention function is actively carried out. The absence of an appointed retention member does not eliminate the need for a clear focal point or coordinated program. Commanders are encouraged to identify and develop a qualified member for the position as soon as practical. Until then, the commander may temporarily retain closer oversight of the function and use available staff assistance as needed. Higher-echelon retention personnel can provide support, coaching, and resources, but they do not replace the need for an effective local retention function.

CHAPTER 3 — THE RETENTION STAFF FUNCTION

3.1. Principal Staff Focal Point

Retention personnel give the commander a designated person who watches the member experience across functional boundaries.

Their value is not in owning every action. Their value is in seeing the connections between actions, recognizing when a member is being lost between them, and helping the commander decide where attention is needed.

3.2. Core Staff Functions

Across echelons, retention personnel perform the same broad staff functions at different scales:

- Listen — bring direct member and commander experience into the program.
- Observe — notice where the lifecycle is working and where it breaks down.
- Analyze — use available information and data to identify patterns rather than isolated anecdotes.
- Coordinate — connect the correct staff functions, commanders, and resources.
- Recommend — give the commander practical options and identify the likely owner of action.
- Support — help subordinate retention personnel and commanders use the program effectively.
- Follow through — determine whether approved actions improved the member experience.
- Share — move successful practices across the organization.

3.3. What Retention Personnel Do Not Do

- Do not make command decisions for the commander.
- Do not issue policy independently.
- Do not direct subordinate commanders through the retention duty position.
- Do not create a second chain of command.
- Do not take over functional programs that belong to another office of primary responsibility.
- Do not independently impose local reporting requirements, checklists, or inspection criteria.
- Do not become an investigator, legal advisor, chaplain, counselor, or substitute for established complaint and support channels.
- Do not promise confidentiality that cannot be maintained.
- Do not collect or retain personal information that is unnecessary to the retention purpose.
- Do not promise members an outcome that another commander or functional area controls.

3.4. The Difference Between Coordination and Ownership

Retention begins at first contact, but retention staff do not own recruiting. Retention includes onboarding and mentoring, but retention staff do not own Education and Training. Retention includes recognition, but retention staff do not own Personnel. Cadet retention belongs inside the Member Retention Program, but retention staff do not own the Cadet Program.

The staff function is strongest when it identifies the member-experience need, brings the right owner into the problem, supports the handoff, and follows the outcome.

3.5. Selecting Retention Personnel

CAPP 30-1 provides the position descriptions and desired experience for retention duty positions.

At the flight/squadron level, prior command or senior enlisted leadership experience is highly desirable. A graduated squadron commander or an NCO who has served as a squadron Senior Enlisted Leader is particularly well suited for this assignment. The Retention Officer should have a broad understanding of CAP programs and the factors affecting the member experience.

Higher-echelon positions benefit from progressively broader command, senior enlisted leadership, and senior staff experience.

These are preferred backgrounds, not barriers to developing capable people. New and small units may not have the ideal candidate available. A trusted member with sound judgment, broad curiosity about CAP, an ability to work with people, and a willingness to learn can develop effectively with support from higher-echelon retention personnel.

3.6. Reach-Back Support

Retention personnel are not expected to know everything.

Squadron staff can reach out to group retention staff, if assigned, or to the Wing Director of Retention. Group staff can reach out to the wing. Wing staff can reach out to the region. Region staff can reach out to national retention support.

Seeking assistance is normal staff work. Higher-echelon retention personnel exist to provide perspective, resources, coaching, and connections in support of subordinate units seeking assistance.

> **Problems can move up. Resources can move down. Good ideas can move everywhere.**

3.7. Privacy and Discretion

Retention work often involves personal conversations. Retention personnel should collect and share only what is needed to understand the issue and support action.

The useful product for the commander is usually the pattern, friction point, or recommended action—not an informal case file on the member.

CHAPTER 4 — RETENTION AT EACH ECHELON

4.1. The Echelon Principle

The function changes as the echelon changes. The higher the echelon, the more the emphasis shifts from direct member engagement toward supporting subordinate commanders, building capability, seeing broader patterns, connecting resources, and addressing issues that exceed the level below.

Each echelon adds value rather than simply repeating the work of the echelon below it.

Echelon	Primary Retention Perspective	Typical Value Added
Flight / Squadron	Individual member experience	First contact, onboarding, connection, meaningful participation, transitions, reengagement, local friction.
Group — if assigned	Support to subordinate squadrons	Coaching, cross-squadron resources, shared practices, group-level trends, escalation to wing.
Wing	Wing-wide capability and patterns	Support to units, wing-level barriers, development, opportunities, data, training, and resource connection.
Region	Cross-wing support and patterns	Wing support, cross-wing learning, regional trends, resource connection, escalation of systemic issues.
National	Enterprise capability	Retention-specific analysis, member voice, tools, education, recommendations, coordination through established OPRs.

4.2. Flight and Squadron

Commander role

- Own the local Member Retention Program and the member experience from first contact forward.
- Connect recruiting and retention so the expectations created before joining follow the member into onboarding.
- Appoint and employ a Squadron or Flight Retention Officer (NCO) as the commander's principal staff focal point for the Member Retention Program whenever qualified personnel are available.
- Give retention personnel a clear portfolio and access to the command team.
- Ensure new members receive a welcome, a human point of contact, meaningful participation, and a visible next step.
- Use Cadet Programs leaders for cadet-program execution while including cadet retention and cadet-to-senior transition in the broader member-retention picture.
- Resolve local friction or assign the correct functional staff member to resolve it.
- Review significant disengagement, transition, and non-renewal themes without turning them into a quota.
- Refer issues beyond local authority to group, if assigned, or wing.

Retention staff role

- Serve as the commander's principal retention focal point.
- Coordinate with recruiting on first contact and expectation alignment.
- Watch the first-contact-to-first-year experience and identify members who are not connecting.
- Help connect members with mentors, education, specialty development, duty opportunities, activities, and mission pathways.
- Notice participation changes, stalled actions, role mismatch, and transition points.

- Conduct or support respectful stay, reengagement, transition, and non-renewal conversations as the commander desires.
- Coordinate with Cadet Programs on cadet retention and cadet-to-senior transition.
- Bring recurring friction and recommended actions to the commander.
- Share successful local practices upward.

Retention staff do not

- Do not command the unit or direct staff members outside normal staff relationships.
- Do not own recruiting campaigns, Education and Training, Personnel, Cadet Programs, or other functional programs.
- Do not promise duty assignments, promotions, awards, qualifications, or exceptions controlled elsewhere.
- Do not create a separate complaint or investigative process.

Commander takeaway

The squadron commander creates the conditions. The Retention Officer keeps the member-experience picture visible, connects gaps, and brings actionable recommendations.

4.3. Group — If Assigned

Commander role

- Use the group as an intermediate support layer for subordinate squadrons rather than another level of member case management.
- Appoint a qualified Group Retention Officer (NCO) and employ that member as the group commander's principal staff advisor for the Member Retention Program.
- Use the group to resolve issues that span multiple squadrons or require resources beyond one unit.
- Encourage squadron commanders to ask for help early.
- Elevate unresolved or broader issues to the wing.

Retention staff role

- Support squadron commanders and retention personnel.
- Help developing squadron retention staff understand the function and available resources.
- Connect squadrons with people, opportunities, and practices available elsewhere in the group.
- Identify patterns that appear in more than one subordinate unit.
- Facilitate sharing of successful practices.
- Provide additional support when a squadron has limited retention staffing.
- Bring broader issues and resource needs to the wing.

Retention staff do not

- Do not replace squadron commanders or squadron retention personnel.
- Do not bypass the squadron to manage individual member issues.
- Do not create group reporting burdens simply to prove the function is active.

Where groups are not assigned, these support functions remain appropriately addressed through the wing and subordinate units.

Commander takeaway

The group commander uses retention staff to strengthen squadrons, connect resources, and solve what is larger than one unit—not to duplicate squadron work.

4.4. Wing

Commander role

- Set wing retention priorities based on the member experience and the needs of subordinate units.
- Employ the Wing Director of Retention as a principal advisor on member retention.
- Ensure the Director can coordinate with wing functional directors and subordinate retention staff.
- Use available data and member feedback to identify wing-level patterns without reducing retention to a ranking exercise.
- Remove wing-level friction and assign wing functional owners when action is needed.
- Provide opportunities, resources, and developmental connections that individual units cannot create alone.
- Support groups, if assigned, and squadrons directly when needed.
- Elevate regional or enterprise issues beyond wing authority.

Retention staff role

- Support and mentor subordinate retention personnel.
- Identify patterns across units and distinguish isolated concerns from wing-wide friction.
- Connect units and members with wing-level opportunities and expertise.
- Coordinate retention education and field support.
- Bring member voice and retention analysis to the wing commander.
- Coordinate with wing functional directors rather than absorbing their programs.
- Support cadet-to-senior transition across the wing with Cadet Programs and Education and Training.
- Share successful practices across the wing and upward.
- Help units experiencing significant retention challenges build local capability.

Retention staff do not

- Do not become the routine retention officer for every squadron.
- Do not independently direct subordinate commanders.
- Do not establish wing policy without the wing commander and appropriate functional authority.
- Do not require local reports or processes unless separately authorized.
- Do not take ownership of functional programs because they affect retention.

Commander takeaway

The wing commander uses retention to see across units, assign action to wing owners, strengthen subordinate capability, and remove barriers that local units cannot solve alone.

4.5. Region

Commander role

- Use the Region Director of Retention to understand cross-wing patterns and support Wing Directors of Retention.
- Focus region attention on issues that span wings or need region-level coordination.
- Help wings share resources and practices rather than independently solve the same problem.
- Elevate enterprise issues to national leadership and the appropriate national functional area.

Retention staff role

- Support and mentor Wing Directors of Retention.
- Identify patterns that appear across multiple wings.
- Facilitate cross-wing sharing of successful practices, resources, and expertise.
- Support region-level retention education and staff development.
- Bring regional member-experience themes and recommendations to the region commander.
- Coordinate with region functional staff when issues involve their programs.

- Elevate systemic concerns that exceed region authority.

Retention staff do not

- Do not manage routine squadron-level retention work.
- Do not issue policy through the retention function.
- Do not require identical retention methods across wings when local approaches are effective.

Commander takeaway

The region commander uses retention staff to connect wings, see broader patterns, and address issues that cannot be solved effectively inside one wing.

4.6. National Retention Support

National retention support leads the retention functional area for CAP and supports commanders and field retention personnel. Its internal organization can change as CAP's needs change, so this pamphlet focuses on what the field should expect from national support; namely:

- retention-specific analysis and direct member feedback;
- tools, education, reference material, and commander-ready content;
- support to region and wing retention personnel;
- enterprise trend identification and member-experience recommendations;
- coordination across national functional areas;
- evaluation of approved retention initiatives; and
- sharing of effective practices across CAP.

CHAPTER 5 — THE MEMBER LIFECYCLE: FIRST CONTACT THROUGH CONTINUED SERVICE

5.1. The Lifecycle Is the Program

The lifecycle gives commanders and retention personnel a common way to ask where a person is in that experience and what connection may be missing.

5.2. First Contact and Expectations

The member experience starts when someone first reaches out, visits, attends an open house, talks with a member, or otherwise begins considering CAP.

Responsiveness matters. Accuracy matters. So does curiosity about why the person is interested.

A prospective member benefits from understanding what the local unit actually does, what opportunities exist, what training is required, what participation generally looks like, and what may take time.

Setting honest expectations is not a recruiting weakness. It is the first retention action.

Connect the interest to an opportunity. If a prospective pilot joins a unit without an aircraft, explain the local limitation and connect the member to nearby flying opportunities, SAREXs, or other appropriate activities. If a member wants mission work but is not being called for search missions, show other ways to serve through training, exercises, disaster relief, Operation Pulse Lift, American Red Cross support, or other mission opportunities when available. The goal is not to promise what the unit cannot provide; it is to show a realistic path toward the reason the person joined.

5.3. Welcome and Connection

Joining an organization does not automatically create belonging.

A new member needs to know who can help, how the unit communicates, what happens next, and how to start participating. Personal introductions and a reliable point of contact are often more useful than additional paperwork. Our core value of respect also matters. CAP units that thrive offer a welcoming environment.

5.4. Contribution and Meaningful Service

Members generally join because they want to do something meaningful. Early contribution does not need to be large, but it should be real.

A duty title is not the same as meaningful work. Leaders should help members understand why the task matters and how it connects to CAP’s missions or unit needs.

5.5. Development and Progress

Members stay engaged when they can see where they are going next. Progress can include training, specialty development, qualifications, promotions, leadership, mentoring, teaching, project responsibility, or a different mission area.

The form of progress can change over time. The need to see a next step does not.

5.6. Recognition

Recognition tells a member that effort was seen and mattered. Formal awards have a place, but recognition also includes timely thanks, public acknowledgment, a note from the commander, increased responsibility, or an explanation of the impact created.

Retention personnel can identify recognition gaps or opportunities. The appropriate commanders and Personnel processes remain responsible for formal recognition actions.

5.7. Transitions and Reengagement

A member can be fully engaged and become disconnected quickly when context changes. Examples include:

- cadet-to-senior transition;
- moving or transferring units;
- completion of a command tour or major duty assignment;
- new job, school, deployment, caregiving, or family demand;
- loss of a qualification or change in physical ability;
- change in mission interest; or
- return after an extended period of limited participation.

A transition often requires onboarding again: new relationships, new purpose, and a new contribution.

5.8. Continued Service and Renewal

Renewal is one visible result of the experience that came before it. A member who is connected, useful, progressing, respected, and able to see a next chapter usually reaches renewal with a very different perspective from a member who has been disconnected for months.

The first renewal should not be the first retention conversation.

CHAPTER 6 — FIRST CONTACT, ONBOARDING, AND THE FIRST 90 DAYS

6.1. Retention Begins Before Membership Approval

Retention staff do not own recruiting, but they should understand the expectations prospective members are bringing into the unit.

Recurring gaps between recruiting messages and actual member experience are retention issues worth bringing to the commander and recruiting staff.

6.2. Useful First-Contact Questions

- What brought you to CAP?
- What are you hoping to do, learn, or contribute?
- What kind of time can you realistically give?
- What local opportunities interest you most?
- What would make this service worthwhile to you?
- What questions do you have about training, cost, uniforms, activities, or qualifications?
- If the local unit cannot provide the opportunity the person wants, what nearby, wing, or mission opportunities could provide a realistic path?

The answers should inform onboarding rather than disappear after the application is processed.

6.3. A Human Point of Contact

New members often need a person more than another document. Units can use mentors, sponsors, experienced peers, senior enlisted leaders, functional mentors, cadet wingmen, or another local approach.

The title is less important than having someone who expects questions, notices progress, and can make introductions.

6.4. Keep Early Actions Moving

The first weeks can be filled with access requests, education, forms, approvals, uniforms, specialty choices, and unfamiliar systems. Delay is sometimes unavoidable; silence is usually avoidable.

Retention personnel help the commander see when members are stuck between processes. They do not take over those processes.

> **Retention identifies friction. The action owner clears it.**
>
> **When onboarding or required education can be completed effectively during a meeting, helping the member do it there may be faster and more engaging than sending the member home to navigate it alone.**

6.5. The First Meaningful Contribution

A new member should have a way to contribute as early as practical. The contribution can be modest: assist with an activity, help with equipment, support a short project, learn alongside an experienced staff member, teach a skill, or participate in training. Short, bounded tasks—sometimes called micro-volunteering—can ease a member into useful work without immediately assigning a standing duty position. Match early tasks to the member's interests, strengths, and available time whenever possible.

The key is that the member can see how the effort matters and has a voice in what comes next. A vacancy is not, by itself, a reason to place a new member in a duty position that does not fit the member's interests or availability.

6.6. Suggested 14/30/60/90 Connection Rhythm

Initial onboarding is designed to be completed in about four hours, normally within the first two meetings. A light 14/30/60/90-day rhythm can then help keep connection and momentum visible.

Approximate Point	Member Experience Question	Useful Focus
14 days	Do I know how to start?	Welcome, point of contact, onboarding complete, communication, immediate next step.
30 days	Do I have something useful to do?	Meaningful participation, mentor/peer connection, path toward interests.
60 days	Am I getting somewhere?	Human check-in, stalled actions, training, specialty path, role fit.
90 days	Do I see a future here?	Recognition, visible next opportunity, unresolved friction, continued momentum.

6.7. The First Year

A new member can complete onboarding and still lack connection, purpose, or a clear next step. Through the first year, commanders and retention personnel should keep watching whether the member has purpose, progress, belonging, and respect.

A member may need a different mentor, a new challenge, clarification of a specialty path, recognition, or help navigating an early frustration.

CHAPTER 7 — MEANINGFUL SERVICE, DEVELOPMENT, RECOGNITION, AND REENGAGEMENT

7.1. Meaningful Service

A title tells someone where they sit. A contribution tells them why they matter.

Retention personnel can help the commander identify members who hold positions but lack meaningful work, or members who contribute informally but have no clear developmental path.

The solution usually belongs with the commander and appropriate functional staff, not with retention personnel taking over the work.

7.2. Development

Progress gives members a reason to imagine continued service. Retention staff help identify when progress has stalled and connect members with Education and Training, specialty-track mentors, mission programs, leadership opportunities, or other resources.

Not every member is motivated by promotion. Development includes competence, responsibility, mastery, teaching, mentoring, service, and new challenges.

7.3. Recognition

Recognition can be formal or informal. What matters most is that it is specific and connected to impact.

“Thank you for fixing the issue that allowed six members to complete their qualification” carries more meaning than a generic “good job.”

7.4. Changes in Availability

Reduced participation does not automatically mean reduced commitment.

Work, school, family, transportation, caregiving, deployments, or other life circumstances can change what a member can contribute. A different role, project-based participation, transfer, remote support where appropriate, or a temporary reduction in responsibility may preserve connection.

Flexibility can mean scaling a role down, using a short project instead of a standing duty, sharing responsibility, or stepping away from a position for a period without stepping away from CAP. A smaller, sustainable contribution may preserve a member’s connection until circumstances change again.

7.5. Reengagement

Reengagement begins with respect. A simple message that the member has been missed and asking how things are going is often more useful than a renewal reminder.

If the member wants to reconnect, one or two realistic options are usually more useful than an overwhelming list.

7.6. Experienced Members

Retention is not only a new-member issue. Former commanders, long-serving staff members, senior cadets, instructors, aircrew, and other experienced members may disengage after a major chapter ends.

A useful question is: What does your next meaningful chapter in CAP look like?

7.7. When the Answer Is No

Not every member wants or is able to continue active participation at the same level. A temporary reduction in activity or a different membership status may preserve the connection when appropriate. When a member does leave, respecting that decision preserves dignity and the relationship.

A member who leaves feeling appreciated and treated well may return later, serve elsewhere, or remain a positive advocate for CAP.

CHAPTER 8 — CADET RETENTION AND CADET-TO-SENIOR TRANSITION

8.1. Cadet Retention Is Member Retention

Cadets are CAP members, so cadet retention is part of the Member Retention Program.

That does not create a parallel Cadet Programs staff. Cadet Programs remains responsible for the Cadet Program. Retention personnel bring member-experience perspective, feedback, trends, transition support, and coordination.

8.2. First Contact With Cadets and Families

For many prospective cadets, first contact includes a parent or guardian. The cadet may be evaluating challenge, aerospace, leadership, activities, friends, identity, and service. The family may be evaluating communication, transportation, schedule, cost, expectations, and safety.

A strong beginning helps both understand what the local cadet experience actually looks like.

8.3. What Keeps Cadets Engaged:

- belonging to a flight or peer group;
- visible progress and achievement, including a clear path toward the Curry Achievement within eight weeks and the next milestone;
- Orientation Flights;
- Encampment or Encampment explanation meeting;
- hands-on activities and challenges;
- genuine responsibility appropriate to development;
- cadet and adult leaders who notice them;
- opportunities beyond the local meeting, with early explanation of orientation flights, encampment, and other activities; and
- a clear sense of what comes next.

8.4. Working With Cadet Programs

Retention personnel can help Cadet Programs leaders identify attendance changes, recurring family friction, expectation gaps, or transition points. Cadet Programs leaders provide the program expertise and execute Cadet Program actions.

Retention support should make Cadet Programs stronger, not create a separate retention track for cadets.

8.5. Phase III and Phase IV Cadets

As cadets advance, the experiences that engaged them early may no longer be enough. Experienced cadets often benefit from genuine leadership, advanced challenges, mentoring roles, broader activities, and evidence that their development is still moving.

8.6. Cadet-to-Senior Transition

Cadet-to-senior transition is a change in identity, expectations, peer relationships, progression, and opportunity—not simply an administrative conversion.

The member may lose the structure that previously defined CAP service. A successful transition creates a legitimate senior-member future.

Education and Training is the primary functional owner for the transition framework and resources. Retention personnel coordinate with Education and Training and draw on Cadet Programs for cadet-program context to identify friction, help the member see senior-member opportunities, and strengthen the transition experience.

8.7. Have the Conversation Before the Transition Point

Transition conversations are most useful before the administrative deadline. Older cadets approaching the decision point benefit from an intentional conversation about whether they want to remain a cadet, transition to senior membership, and what they want their next chapter in CAP to look like. Use CAP Pamphlet 40-08, *Phase V: Moving Beyond the Cadet Program – A Guide for the Cadet to Senior Member Transition*, to support the Cadet-to-Senior Transition discussion. Topics can include senior-member education, specialty tracks, duty opportunities, Emergency Services or other qualifications, mentoring, continued support to Cadet Programs, and opportunities beyond the local unit.

Before transition, appropriate projects or duty experiences alongside senior members can help the cadet build a new network, become familiar with the senior side of CAP, and better understand what will be different after the transition.

8.8. Follow Up After Transition

A transition can look successful on the day the membership category changes and fail later. A follow-up helps determine whether the new senior member has found a role, mentor, development path, and sense of belonging.

CHAPTER 9 — MEMBER VOICE, DATA, AND THE FEEDBACK LOOP

9.1. Listen Directly to Members

Retention personnel need more than assumptions about why members stay or leave.

Useful member voice can come from ordinary conversation, new-member feedback, stay and reengagement conversations, non-renewal or exit interviews, cadet or family feedback where appropriate, climate surveys, pulse checks, town halls or Q&A sessions, and commander observations.

The method can vary. The principle is that CAP should hear directly from the people experiencing the program.

9.2. Use Data to Ask Better Questions

Useful measures can include first-year retention, cohort retention, renewal trends, cadet participation and progression, cadet-to-senior transition, unit transfers, duty assignments, development progress, and other current indicators available through approved systems.

Aggregate recurring themes from Town Hall and Q&A events, exit interviews, pulse checks, climate surveys, and similar methods so patterns can be distinguished from isolated anecdotes.

The number matters most when it leads to a useful question: Where should we look, and what are members experiencing there?

9.3. Avoid Quotas and Rankings

Retention percentages can be informative, but they can distort behavior if they become the objective by themselves.

A commander may make a legitimate decision that results in a member leaving. A healthy program does not reward retaining someone at any cost or draw negative conclusions from normal percentage swings in small units.

9.4. Aggregate Before Escalating Personal Detail

Higher echelons often need patterns, not personal stories with unnecessary identifying detail.

Squadron retention staff can surface a recurring delay. Wing staff can see that the same delay affects several units. Region or national staff can determine whether the issue is systemic. The information can become more useful while becoming less personal.

9.5. Close the Feedback Loop

Members are more likely to keep providing useful feedback when they can see that feedback leads somewhere.

A strong loop is simple:

WHAT MEMBERS SAID → WHAT CAP LEARNED → WHAT CAP DID → WHAT CHANGED

Not every recommendation becomes an action, and not every action works. Communicating what was considered, tried, changed, or learned demonstrates that a member's voice is taken seriously.

9.6. Use Current Data, Not Frozen Statistics

Retention conditions change. This pamphlet intentionally avoids hard-coding temporary retention rates or dated survey results as doctrine. Commanders and staff should use current official data and current member feedback for decisions.

CHAPTER 10 — WORKING THROUGH CAP'S EXISTING FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURE

10.1. Retention Coordinates Through Existing Owners

Many issues that affect retention are owned by another CAP functional area. The retention function should make the member-experience requirement visible, identify the friction or opportunity, and coordinate with the proper owner.

At the national level, this same principle means the National Retention Team provides retention-specific analysis, member feedback, requirements, and recommendations while established directorates retain authority for their programs.

Function	Primary Functional Owner	Retention Role
Recruiting	Recruiting / local command	Share first-contact and expectation insights; identify handoff gaps; do not take over recruiting campaigns.
Onboarding & mentoring framework	Education and Training / local command execution	Identify member-experience gaps, support connections, and recommend improvements through the functional owner.
Recognition	Commanders / Personnel processes	Identify recognition gaps and member impact; recommend or connect appropriate actions.
Cadet Programs	Cadet Programs	Bring cadet voice, retention themes, and family friction; coordinate transition concerns with Education and Training; do not run a parallel cadet program.
Cadet-to-senior transition	Education and Training	Identify friction, support the member experience, coordinate relevant Cadet Programs input, and recommend enhancements to existing transition resources.
Data & dashboards	Data and Analytics / authorized system owners	Define retention questions, conduct authorized retention-specific analysis, and interpret findings for commanders.
eServices / technology	Information Technology and applicable program owners	Identify member impact and functional requirements; do not administer systems or grant access.
Web / resource platform	Marketing and Communications (MAC)	Provide retention content and requirements; platform ownership remains with MAC.
Complaints / investigations / legal	Command, IG, Legal, or other applicable process	Listen for retention impact and connect the member to the proper process; do not investigate through retention.

10.2. OPR and Coordinating Relationships

Retention personnel frequently serve in a coordinating role. They bring a retention requirement or member-experience concern to the office that owns the underlying program.

The functional owner retains authority for the program. Retention remains engaged enough to understand whether the approved action addressed the member-experience issue.

10.3. Policy

Retention personnel do not make policy through the retention function.

At local echelons, commanders make command decisions and establish local procedures or policies within their authority. Retention personnel provide recommendations and member-impact perspectives.

At the national level, policy recommendations move through the appropriate national command and functional process. The National Retention Team can identify a policy issue, analyze member impact, recommend change, and help evaluate an approved change; it does not independently establish CAP policy.

10.4. Pilots and Tests

Retention personnel may identify an idea worth testing. When a test affects another functional program, it should proceed with the responsible functional owner and commander.

A useful pilot has a clear question, a limited scope, an identified owner, a way to hear member experience, and a decision point for whether to stop, adjust, or expand.

CHAPTER 11 — BUILDING A RETENTION CULTURE AND REDUCING VOLUNTEER BURDEN

11.1. Culture Is Experienced Locally

Members experience CAP through people, processes, and expectations around them. The decision to return next week is often shaped more by local leadership, communication, purpose, relationships, and progress than by a national statistic.

11.2. Respect Volunteer Time

Member time is finite. Necessary requirements still consume time, but avoidable delay, duplicated work, unclear processes, unnecessary local additions, fragmented communication, and repeated last-minute changes can gradually make service feel less worthwhile.

Retention personnel can help commanders see accumulated burden from the member's perspective and identify where simplification is possible.

11.3. Member-Impact Lens

Before adding a new local requirement or process, commanders and staff may find it useful to ask:

- What problem are we solving?
- Who has to do this and how often?
- How much volunteer time does it consume?
- Does CAP already collect or require the same information elsewhere?
- Can the same outcome be achieved more simply?
- How does the change affect a new or less-experienced member?
- Who owns the process if a member gets stuck?
- How do we know whether the change helped?

11.4. Leadership Habits

Retention is strengthened by ordinary leadership habits: honest expectations, timely follow-through, clear purpose, meaningful work, development, recognition, respectful correction, communication, and noticing when somebody disappears.

Retention personnel keep these conditions visible. They do not replace leadership throughout the organization.

11.5. Share and Celebrate What Works

Retention work should identify success as deliberately as problems.

Effective first-contact, new-member integration, flexible participation, cadet transition, or process simplification can help other units.

Good ideas do not need to become universal requirements to be worth sharing.

OPTIONAL TOOLS AND COMMANDER QUICK GUIDES

These optional resources are designed for use, adaptation, or discussion. They are not reporting requirements, inspection items, forms that need to be completed, or products that need to be submitted.

Tool 1 — Squadron Commander Quick Guide

Use this as a quick reference for leading the Member Retention Program at the squadron level.

- Own the program; do not delegate command responsibility to the Retention Officer.
- Make first contact part of retention by connecting recruiting expectations to onboarding.
- Give the Retention Officer a coherent portfolio and access to the command team.
- Know who is new, who is stuck, who is disengaging, and who is approaching a transition.
- Assign the correct functional owner when action is needed.
- Clear local friction where possible and elevate what cannot be solved locally.
- Use current member feedback and data as indicators, not quotas.
- Recognize what is working and share it.

Tool 2 — Group Commander Quick Guide — If Assigned

Use the group to add support, not another layer of duplication.

- Help squadrons build retention capability.
- Use group staff to connect resources and share practices.
- Look for issues affecting multiple squadrons.
- Resolve group-level barriers and elevate wing-level issues.
- Avoid turning group retention staff into direct member case managers for the squadrons.
- Keep the relationship supportive so squadron commanders ask for help early.

Tool 3 — Wing / Region Commander Quick Guide

Use this as a quick reference for leading the Member Retention Program at the wing or region level.

- Use the Director of Retention as a senior staff advisor on the member experience.
- Focus higher-echelon attention on patterns, capability, resources, and barriers—not routine squadron casework.
- Make functional owners part of the solution when an issue belongs to their program.
- Use member voice and current data to decide where to look.
- Support subordinate retention personnel through training, coaching, and reach-back.
- Reduce avoidable burden created at your echelon.
- Share successful practices across subordinate units.
- Elevate systemic issues that require action above your authority.

Tool 4 — First-Contact and Expectation Guide

Possible prompts for the first conversation with a prospective member.

- What brought you to CAP?
- What are you hoping to do, learn, or contribute?
- What kind of time can you realistically give?
- What opportunities interest you most?
- What would make this experience worthwhile for you?
- What questions do you have about training, cost, uniforms, activities, or qualifications?

Tool 5 — 14/30/60/90 New-Member Connection Guide

The intervals are reminders. The purpose is to preserve momentum and connection.

Around 14 Days — Welcome and Start

- The member knows who to ask for help.
- The immediate next step is clear.
- Initial onboarding is complete or substantially complete, normally within about four hours and the first two meetings.
- The member has been introduced to people connected to the member's interests.

Around 30 Days — Connection and Useful Work

- The member has a useful task, activity, or contribution.
- The member understands how the unit communicates.
- A mentor, sponsor, peer, wingman, or functional connection exists.
- The path toward the member's interests is visible.

Around 60 Days — Human Check-In

- Ask what is working and what is confusing.
- Look for stalled administrative or training actions.
- Adjust the role or connection if interests have changed.
- Connect the member to the next learning or participation opportunity.

Around 90 Days — Momentum

- Recognize contribution or progress.
- Confirm a visible next opportunity.
- Address unresolved friction.
- Help the member connect current work to CAP's mission.

Tool 6 — Member Experience Quick Check

Use these as conversation prompts, not a score.

- Purpose — Can the member explain why the work matters?
- Progress — Can the member see a meaningful next step?
- Belonging — Does someone know the member well enough to notice a change?
- Respect — Does the member feel CAP uses time responsibly?
- Connection — Does the member know who to ask for help?
- Momentum — Is something moving, or is the member waiting?
- Fit — Does the member's current work match interests, strengths, and available time?

Tool 7 — Stay Conversation Guide

A stay conversation learns what is keeping an engaged member involved and what may affect continued service.

- What keeps you involved in CAP right now?
- What part of your current role is most meaningful?
- What gets in the way of participation?
- What would you like to learn or do next?
- Is there something we make harder than it needs to be?
- What should the unit protect because it is working well?

Tool 8 — Reengagement Conversation Guide

Use a respectful check-in when participation changes.

- Acknowledge the change in participation without making assumptions about the reason: "We have missed you lately and wanted to check in."
- Ask what changed and listen before offering solutions.
- Determine whether the member wants help reconnecting.
- Offer one or two realistic options rather than a long menu.
- Connect the member with the correct person or opportunity.
- Respect the answer if the member is not ready or does not want to reengage.

Tool 9 — Cadet-to-Senior Transition Guide

Begin before the transition point so the cadet can imagine a meaningful senior-member future.

- Ask whether the cadet wants to remain a cadet, transition to senior membership, or is still deciding.
- Ask what parts of CAP the cadet wants to keep doing and what the cadet wants to change.
- Discuss senior-member education, specialty tracks, duty assignments, qualifications, and leadership opportunities.
- Use the current Cadet-to-Senior Transition Pamphlet to guide the discussion and identify practical next steps.
- Identify a senior-member mentor or point of contact.
- Create opportunities to work alongside senior members before transition so the cadet can build a new network and become familiar with the senior-member environment.
- Explore opportunities beyond the local unit when local options are limited.
- Create a real senior-member role rather than leaving the former cadet without a new identity.
- Follow up after transition.

Tool 10 — Commander / Retention Staff Review

A brief recurring conversation can be enough.

- Who has contacted us recently, and did we respond?
- Who is new and still needs connection or momentum?
- Who is waiting on an action?
- Who has become less engaged?
- Who is approaching a transition?
- What issue requires a commander decision?
- What belongs to another functional owner?
- What needs help from the next echelon?
- What success should we recognize or share?

Tool 11 — Member-Impact Review for a New Requirement

Use this before adding local process, training, recurring reporting, or administrative burden.

- What problem does this solve?
- Is the requirement already addressed elsewhere?
- Who is affected and how often?
- How much volunteer time does it add?
- Can the outcome be achieved with an existing system or process?
- What happens when a member gets stuck?
- How does the change affect a new member?
- How do we know whether the change helped?

Tool 12 — Sharing a Successful Practice

A useful local practice can be shared without turning it into a universal requirement.

- What need or problem did the unit notice?
- What did the unit try?
- Why did it fit that unit?
- What changed?
- What would the unit tell another commander who wants to try it?

Tool 13 — Retention Staff First 30 Days

A newly appointed retention member can use this to get oriented.

- Read the current CAPR 30-1 Member Retention Program language and the applicable approved CAPP 30-1 retention duty-position description.
- Ask the commander for local retention priorities and expectations.
- Meet the recruiting, Personnel, Education and Training, Cadet Programs, and other key staff members.
- Understand how first contact, onboarding, communication, duty assignment, development, and renewal currently work.
- Identify where members commonly wait or become confused.
- Connect with group retention staff, if assigned, or the Wing Director of Retention.
- Learn what current data or reports are appropriately available.
- Bring the commander one or two practical observations rather than trying to redesign the unit immediately.

RELATED CAP RESOURCES

Retention personnel should use the current versions of applicable CAP publications and official program resources. Publication numbers, systems, and program details can change.

- CAPR 30-1, *Organization of Civil Air Patrol*, including the Member Retention Program language.
- CAPP 30-1, *CAP Sample Position Descriptions for Standard Duty Assignments*, including current retention duty-position descriptions.
- Current CAPP 40-08, *Phase V: Moving Beyond the Cadet Program — A Guide for the Cadet to Senior Member Transition*, or its successor, and related Education and Training transition resources.
- Current membership and personnel regulations governing membership status, renewal, transfer, and termination.
- Current Education and Training resources and specialty-track guidance.
- Current Cadet Programs regulations, pamphlets, and Great Start resources.
- Current eServices, membership, and analytics tools authorized for commander and staff use.
- Member Retention Program education and resources provided through Volunteer University and the National Retention Team.

CLOSING THOUGHT

The Member Retention Program gives commanders a way to keep the human experience visible across the many programs and processes that make up CAP.

It begins when a prospective member first encounters CAP. It continues through joining, learning, serving, growing, being recognized, changing roles, facing life changes, transitioning, renewing, and sometimes leaving.

The commander owns the program. Retention personnel make the program visible, connected, and actionable. Functional staff remain responsible for their programs. Higher echelons add support, perspective, and resources rather than duplicating local work.

Retention begins at first contact and continues throughout the member's entire CAP experience.

Make the CAP experience worth renewing.