

The Curry Uniform Program

Moving from Curry Blues to Curry Uniform

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The current Strategic Plan set a goal to reach new and underserved markets by reducing financial barriers that affect cadets who qualify for free and reduced lunch support. The associated task with this objective included waiving the first-year membership dues for cadets with financial need, as the budget would allow. I am proposing that we alter the strategic plan from free cadet dues to a more robust uniform assistance program and this paper will explain why this is best and how that will work.

Annual cadet membership dues vary nationwide and range from \$25 in West Virginia Wing to \$47 in Florida Wing. Waiving dues does provide a financial relief for new members, however after further research we have learned that our annual cadet dues are in line with other youth organizations. For example, Boy Scouts of America charges initial dues of \$25 with annual dues of \$66. Girls Scout of America have annual dues that vary by council with a sampling that includes \$35 (Michigan) and \$50 (Wisconsin). All the youth organizations studied do not provide financial assistance at the national level. Financial support is handled at their local or regional levels through corporate sponsors and fundraising efforts.

When starting out in a new youth program or sport, all parents want to understand what the start-up and annual costs look like to decide on feasibility for their family. The most expensive part of becoming a cadet is in obtaining uniforms and not in the initial registration. Cadets are expected to obtain both an ABU and Blues uniform, plus boots and dress shoes within the first months of membership. If the cadet is also attending an encampment, as we encourage, then they need a second ABU uniform and extra basic uniform items for a week. All these costs are happening at a time during their life when their body and feet are growing at a rapid rate, and they are exploring other youth activities and sports which also have gear and costs. Additionally, we expect males to keep their hair in regulation meaning that families are making the once or twice a month trip to the barber. Teenagers in general, and especially cadets, are expensive.

The Curry Blues program currently provides a \$100 Curry Blues Voucher from Vanguard to all cadets within a week of earning their first stripe. The Curry Blues Voucher includes discounted access for new families to a select menu of Blues items that a new cadet might need to order. This program began in summer 2015 and included a Cadet Programs self-imposed rule of only helping cadets with the costs of USAF Blues uniform.

Here are three problems and proposed solutions with the current program:

1. Limited Selection.

Problem. The Curry Blues Voucher only helps with Blues. Cadets need assistance with obtaining ABUs as well. The USAF has decommissioned ABUs as a uniform therefore ABUs are now only available via Vanguard, unit supply or through thrift/resale channels. Units often have mismatched styles of ABUs (winter versus rip-stop) that do not accommodate smaller child sizes, also known as youth sizes, that young cadets need. Unit stock varies with available supply resources depending on location and connections.

Proposal. Change the Curry Blues Program to be the Curry *Uniform* Program. Provide an expanded menu that includes both Blues and ABUs that will get cadets in a proper uniform regardless of unit supply. The Cadet Encampment Assistance Program (CEAP) already provides a discounted expanded menu of ABUs and Blues items to help cadets with financial need obtain needed uniform items for encampment, which means that Vanguard already has some infrastructure in place to support this shift.

Extra. Provide a leisure wear “merch” t-shirt in the available expanded Curry Uniform menu to help cadets have a marketed discounted way to show CAP pride at family reunions, extracurriculars, school and out in their community. Cadets crave identity. The uniform provides a strong sense of identity, but cadets also want to show their involvement in CAP in their everyday lives. Encouraging “merch” will help us work towards our strategic goal of reaching new and underserved markets by allowing our best recruiters – cadets – the opportunity to show off their involvement in CAP in their everyday lives.

2. **Expensive.**

Problem. A complete uniform is expensive. Below are the complete uniform costs at the Curry Blues Voucher and CEAP ABU reduced rates (does not include white v-neck t-shirt for Blues or socks for either uniform):

	Male Cadet Uniform (Adult Size)	Female Cadet Uniform (Adult Size)
Blues	\$202.40	\$188.98
ABUs	\$183.80	\$183.80
Total	\$386.20	\$372.78

** Youth Size ABUs are \$14 less

Proposal. Identify financial need at membership. Utilize this information in a CEAP-style voucher program that assigns voucher amount to a financial need category when the cadet reaches the first promotion. The current program is a one size fits all model that provides \$100 to all cadets regardless of need. In reality, cadets come from all walks of life and have different access to used uniforms depending on unit supply, resources and location. We can help by adding a step for families to self-identify into one of 4 financial need categories as a necessary first step. The proposed categories are below and include similarities to the current Cadet Encampment Assistance Program (CEAP) financial categories but have been updated.

I have conducted research to provide information on projected need. Approximately 52.3%¹ of students nationwide are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Families with 4 members making \$49,025 ²in the continental US for 2021-2022 qualify for reduced lunch. The national median family income for FY 2021 is \$79,900³. Low income is defined to be 80% of the area median income, which would set a national low-income target to \$63,920. This is imperfect since states have significant differences in median income, for example, the median income in Arkansas is \$48,550 and the median income in Connecticut is \$79,900. The CEAP program currently sets the 2nd Priority financial need category with an annual income cap of \$60K. I propose we increase the family income cap for 2nd Priority financial need to now be \$80,000, representing the national median family income.

¹ National Center for Education Statistics data from 2018-2019, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_204.10.asp

² USDA Food and Nutrition Services website, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-03-04/pdf/2021-04452.pdf>

³ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il21/HUD-sec236-2021.pdf>

Proposal for Financial Need Categories.

1st Priority Cadets (\$175). My family has a real need for assistance because we meet at least one of the below criteria.

- a) Our family has received assistance from the SNAP, WIC, TANF, or HUD public housing program in the past 12 months.
- b) I qualify to receive Free or Reduced School Lunch.
- c) My parent or guardian has received unemployment benefits during the past 12 months.
- d) A parent, guardian, or sibling receives Social Security disability benefits.

2nd Priority Cadets (\$125). My family has limited resources. Financial support would help because we meet one of the criteria below.

- a) Our family has two or more cadets enrolled in CAP.
- b) Our family has a combined income of < \$80,000.

3rd Priority Cadets (\$75). Although none of the above criteria apply, our family has experienced financial challenges recently.

Opt-Out (\$0). We will utilize squadron supply and purchase all other needed uniforms items. We do not need uniform financial support and by handling these expenses on our own we are freeing up funding to help others in need.

Financial Impact of this Proposal. We need to understand the financial impact that changing this model will have on CAP. If we look at the cadets that applied for CEAP this summer compared to the number of cadets that have attended encampment we have the following percentages (encampment participation report data - 7/23/2021):

- 1st Priority Financial Need (meets one of the above 1st Priority criteria): 16%
- 2nd Priority Financial Need (Income < 60K or multiple cadets in family): 21%
- 3rd Priority Financial Need (doesn't meet above criteria, but still requests help): 8%

If we scale these percentages to the approximately 12,000 new cadets expected annually, minus the approximately 20% that do not redeem their Curry Voucher:

Option A: Increased voucher amount for Priority 1 and 2, decreased for Priority 3

Financial Need Declaration	Voucher	Cadet Count (- 20%)	Projected Cost
1 st Priority	\$175 (45% cost)	1920 Cadets – 20% = 1536	\$268,800
2 nd Priority	\$125 (32% cost)	2520 Cadets – 20% = 2016	\$252,000
3 rd Priority	\$75 (19% cost)	6360 Cadets– 20% = 5088	\$381,600
4 th Priority (projecting 10%)	\$0	1200	\$0
Total		12,000 Cadets	\$902,400

Current Curry Voucher Budget: \$750,000

Projected Curry Uniform Cost: \$902,000, a potential 20% increase

Option B: Similar organizational cost as Option A. Increased uniform support for Priority 1 to ~50% of uniform cost

Financial Need Declaration	Voucher	Cadet Count (- 20%)	Projected Cost
1 st Priority	\$200 (52% cost)	1920 Cadets – 20% = 1536	\$307,200
2 nd Priority	\$100 (25% cost)	2520 Cadets – 20% = 2016	\$201,600
3 rd Priority	\$75 (19% cost)	6360 Cadets– 20% = 5088	\$381,600
4 th Priority (projecting 10%)	\$0	1200	\$0
Total		12,000 Cadets	\$890,400

Current Curry Voucher Budget: \$750,000

Total Curry Uniform Projected Cost: \$890,400, a potential 19% increase

Option C: Lighter organizational cost impact. Increased amount for Priority 1, decreased for Priority 3

Financial Need Declaration	Voucher	Cadet Count (- 20%)	Projected Cost
1 st Priority	\$150 (39% cost)	1920 Cadets – 20% = 1536	\$230,400
2 nd Priority	\$100 (25% cost)	2520 Cadets – 20% = 2016	\$201,600
3 rd Priority	\$75 (19% cost)	6360 Cadets– 20% = 5088	\$381,600
4 th Priority (projecting 10%)	\$0	1200	\$0
Total		12,000 Cadets	\$813,600

Current Curry Voucher Budget: \$750,000

Total Curry Uniform Projected Cost: \$813,600, a potential 8.5% increase

3. Under-utilized.

Problem. The current program has about a 73% redemption rate. Approximately 1/3 of Hispanic cadets do not use their vouchers. Emails are sent to the cadet, parent and commander from Vanguard, however this email and the 10-day reminders do not always reach the Cadet Programs personnel at the unit who know the families best. Additionally, these vouchers almost always feed directly to junk/spam/other folders.

Proposal. Expand the uniform voucher emails to also include the Deputy Commander for Cadets. This would require Vanguard to change their established voucher email system that currently only accepts 3 emails (cadet, parent, and commander).

Necessary Steps for Change

Getting Started:

1. Remove Uniform Requirement for Achievement 1 (Learn then Wear) -> Already in Oct 2021 CAPR 60-1
2. Rename Curry Blues Voucher to Curry Uniform Voucher
3. Expand Curry Voucher Menu to match the CEAP Voucher Menu (both Blues and ABUs)
4. Establish 4 Financial Need Categories that determine Curry Uniform Voucher Amounts
5. Incorporate Financial Need Self-Identification into Membership Application. Modify Cadet Invest to match.
6. Alter Curry Voucher Reports to Vanguard to include new Voucher Amounts
7. Coordinate with Vanguard on voucher menu changes and email text changes

Enhancements:

1. Incorporate a Leisure-Wear “Merch” T-shirt into the Voucher Menu for Teen Outreach
2. Coordinate with Vanguard to incorporate CDCs in the Curry Uniform Voucher emails

Impacted Regulations/Pamphlets/Websites

1. Website (including Spanish equivalents):
 - a. Curry Blues Voucher page
 - b. What uniforms do cadets wear page
 - c. Cadet Great Start page
 - d. Wearing the Uniform
 - e. Help for New Cadets
 - f. Cadet KPIs & Annual Survey
 - g. NHQ Contacts
2. CAPR 60-1, 3.1.6.2, 3.1.6.3, 8.13
3. CAPP 60-11, Pages 10, 53, 60, 64, Technician Checklist
4. Parent Guide, Page 6
5. New Cadet Guide, Page 4

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, this paper advocates for several changes to remedy the above identified problems. These changes will help bring CAP in line with other youth organizations that identify financial need at the point of membership to best resource our funding. These proposed changes also provide a needs-based approach to ensure that uniform help is provided based on financial need, so all cadets have the opportunity to look their best.

Action Recommended

CAP/CC approve a change to the strategic plan to abandon the free cadet dues task and instead work towards this Curry Uniform model that includes a needs-based approach to help cadets with uniform cost. CAP/CP will work through tasks listed in this proposal through standard staff processes. The field should anticipate launch in October 2022.