

CIVIL AIR PATROL NCO CORPS STRUCTURE

April 2026



NATIONAL COMMAND CHIEF PERSPECTIVE

Fellow NCOs,

I am humbled and deeply grateful to each of you who has chosen to continue wearing stripes. By doing so, you affirm that the responsibilities of a Noncommissioned Officer extend far beyond military service. You carry forward the proud traditions of the U.S. Armed Services into a volunteer organization whose missions touch lives, inspire youth, and serve our nation.

To wear stripes in Civil Air Patrol is to accept a distinct and visible standard of professionalism, responsibility, and example. It is to embrace the charge of being role models—living examples of integrity, professionalism, and selfless service. Our chevrons remind us that others look to us for guidance, mentorship, and reassurance that standards matter. They represent trust earned and a promise kept.

In CAP, our influence is not enforced by law but is earned through credibility, humility, and example. Every time we guide a cadet, support a commander, or lend our experience in the field, we demonstrate that NCO leadership is as vital in the Auxiliary as it is in the Armed Forces.

I want you to know that I see you. I value the choice you have made to keep serving, to keep leading, and to keep wearing the stripes. Our collective commitment ensures that the CAP NCO Corps remains relevant and indispensable—bridging tradition and innovation, military heritage and volunteer service.

Thank you for standing with me. Thank you for standing for something greater than yourself. Together, we will continue to prove that the stripes we wear inspire excellence, demand accountability, and serve as a symbol of trust.



Luis E. Negrón
Chief Master Sergeant, CAP
6th National Command Chief

PURPOSE

The strength of Civil Air Patrol (CAP) rests in the character, professionalism, and commitment of its volunteers. As the official civilian auxiliary of the United States Air Force, CAP fulfills its congressionally chartered missions of Aerospace Education, Cadet Programs, and Emergency Services. This guide establishes a clear framework for a disciplined, mission-ready Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Corps, aligned with the U.S. Air Force Enlisted Force Structure's principles yet tailored to a volunteer organization's unique character.

This publication serves three primary purposes:

1. **Integrate military NCOs into Civil Air Patrol.** All CAP NCOs are current or former enlisted leaders of the U.S. Armed Forces who volunteer their service in CAP. This guide explains how CAP's structure, missions, and culture align with and differ from military service. It enables NCOs to adapt quickly and contribute their expertise as effective assets to their units.
2. **Define what it means to serve as a CAP NCO.** Once integrated, NCOs require clear expectations for their leadership qualities, responsibilities, and functions in a volunteer auxiliary. This framework ensures they succeed in their roles and strengthen the effectiveness of their units.
3. **Clarify the role of the NCO for CAP officers.** Many officers benefit from a defined understanding of the NCO's contribution in CAP. This guide strengthens the officer–NCO partnership by outlining the unique and complementary role of the enlisted corps within our organization.

Through education, operational experience, and continuous self-development, CAP NCOs uphold the highest standards of professionalism and reinforce the core values of integrity, volunteer service, excellence, and respect. As officers, NCOs, cadets, and volunteers, we are one team dedicated to serving our communities, supporting the U.S. Air Force, and advancing the legacy of citizen service to our nation.

THE CAP NCO CORPS STRUCTURE

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CHAPTER 1 – THE CALL TO SERVE

OVERVIEW

This handbook defines our Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Corps within Civil Air Patrol (CAP) and identifies the purpose, standards, and expectations for CAP NCOs. The foundation of our Corps is deeply rooted in the rich heritage of military service, strengthened by a commitment to volunteerism, and upheld through the highest standards of professionalism.

All CAP members answer a call to serve, with NCOs accepting distinct responsibilities to lead through example, professionalism, and mentorship. This means embracing a mission-ready mindset that demonstrates resilience, adaptability, and excellence in every aspect of volunteer life. The success of CAP's missions, whether in aerospace education, cadet development, or emergency services, depends on disciplined, prepared, and dependable volunteers who remain ready to respond to their communities and nation.

CAP NCOs bring the credibility of prior or current military service, discipline, teamwork, and a commitment to standards, but apply those traits within a civilian, nonprofit context. In CAP, effectiveness is measured not only by results, but also by how well we integrate volunteers of diverse backgrounds, communicate with respect, and cultivate a welcoming climate for learning and service. NCOs set the tone by pairing high standards with humility, patience, and mentorship, ensuring military professionalism enhances—rather than overwhelms—our volunteer culture.

Being a CAP NCO is not defined by combat identity, but by a commitment to serve with integrity, lead with professionalism, and translate the values of military heritage into meaningful contributions within America's all-volunteer Air Force Auxiliary.

A CALL TO SERVE

Civil Air Patrol is an all-volunteer organization, unified by the commitment to answer a call to serve our communities, our nation, and the U.S. Air Force. Unlike the Profession of Arms, which centers on combat readiness, CAP's foundation is this call—a call defined by selflessness, civic duty, and dedication to missions that protect and strengthen our country in times of need.

Since its establishment in 1941, CAP has relied on ordinary citizens choosing to step forward when called. From civil defense patrols in World War II to modern missions in Emergency Services, Aerospace Education, and Cadet Programs, our tradition of service continues today. NCOs embody this call by bringing the discipline, standards, and leadership learned in military service into a volunteer environment, where they mentor, lead, and strengthen their units.

Answering the call to serve in CAP is not simply about participation—it is about commitment. It means showing up when communities are in crisis, guiding the next generation of cadets, and sustaining readiness for missions at a moment's notice. It means aligning personal time and resources with a cause greater than oneself, rooted in the belief that every contribution helps safeguard lives and advance the organization's mission.

Through this call to serve, CAP NCOs help preserve the values of integrity, excellence, respect, and volunteerism, contributing to a culture of professionalism that ensures Civil Air Patrol remains a trusted auxiliary to the U.S. Air Force and a vital nonprofit organization dedicated to the nation's well-being. Military experience remains a cornerstone of the CAP NCO identity; however, its expression is deliberately adapted for a volunteer auxiliary. By balancing standards with empathy, discipline with patience, and mentorship with inclusion, NCOs sustain a culture in which members feel respected, prepared, and eager to contribute across CAP's missions.

THE OATH OF MEMBERSHIP

I do solemnly swear or affirm that:

- I understand membership in Civil Air Patrol is a privilege, not a right, and that membership is on a year-to-year basis subject to recurring renewal by CAP. I further understand that failure to meet membership eligibility criteria will result in automatic termination at any time.
- I voluntarily subscribe to the objectives and purposes of Civil Air Patrol and agree to be guided by CAP Core Values, Ethics Policies, Constitution & Bylaws, Regulations and all applicable Federal, State and Local Laws.
- I understand only Civil Air Patrol corporate officers are authorized to obligate funds, equipment or services.
- I understand Civil Air Patrol is not liable for loss or damage to my personal property when operated for or by Civil Air Patrol. I further understand that safety is critical for the protection

of all members and protection of CAP resources. I will at all times follow safe practices and take an active role in safety for myself and others.

- I agree to abide by the decisions of those in authority of Civil Air Patrol.
- I certify that all information on this application is presently correct and any false statement may be cause to deny membership.
- I understand I am obligated to notify Civil Air Patrol if there are any changes pertaining to the information on the front of this form and further understand that failure to report such changes may be grounds for membership termination.
- I fully understand that this Oath of Membership is an integral part of this application for senior membership in Civil Air Patrol and that my signature on the form constitutes evidence of that understanding and agreement to comply with all contents of this Oath of Membership

OUR CORE VALUES

Civil Air Patrol's identity as a professional volunteer organization is grounded in four Core Values: Integrity, Volunteer Service, Excellence, and Respect. These values guide our conduct, shape our culture, and sustain the American people's trust. They are the standard by which all members—cadets, senior members, officers, and NCOs—live and serve.

CAP NCO CREED

While the U.S. Air Force does not have an officially adopted NCO Creed, this version—adapted from the U.S. Army and widely used in CAP cadet leadership education—captures the enduring principles of enlisted leadership and serves as a guidepost for CAP NCOs in fulfilling their responsibilities.

The NCO Creed is not a directive, but an aspirational guide that complements the NCO Charge.

No one is more professional than I.

I am a Noncommissioned Officer, a leader of people. I am proud of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps and will at all times conduct myself so as to bring credit upon it.

I will not use my grade or position to attain profit or safety.

Competence is my watchword.

I will strive to remain tactically and technically proficient.

I will always be aware of my role as a Noncommissioned Officer.

I will fulfill my responsibilities and display professionalism at all times.

I will strive to know my people and use their skills to the maximum degree possible.

I will always place their needs above my own and will communicate with my supervisor and my people and never leave them uninformed.

I will exert every effort and risk any ridicule to successfully accomplish my assigned duties.

I will not look at a person and see any race, creed, color, religion, sex, age, or national origin, for I will only see the person; nor will I ever show prejudice or bias.

I will lead by example and will resort to disciplinary action only when necessary.

I will carry out the orders of my superiors to the best of my ability and will always obey the decisions of my superiors.

I will give all officers my maximum support to ensure mission accomplishment.

I will earn their respect, obey their orders, and establish a high degree of integrity with them.

I will exercise initiative in the absence of orders and will make decisive and accurate decisions.

I will never compromise my integrity, nor my moral courage.

I will not forget that I am a Professional, a Leader, but above all a Noncommissioned Officer.

CAP MISSION

Mission Statement

"Volunteers Serving America's Communities, Saving Lives, and Shaping Futures."

Expanding the Mission

This mission captures the essence of Civil Air Patrol's purpose as a volunteer, nonprofit auxiliary of the United States Air Force. Since 1941, CAP members have answered the call to serve in three enduring areas:

- **Emergency Services.** From search and rescue to disaster relief and humanitarian support, CAP volunteers respond when communities are in need. Our members bring skill, discipline, and readiness to protect lives and provide critical assistance nationwide.
- **Cadet Programs.** CAP develops the next generation of leaders through aviation, character development, and mentorship. NCOs are vital in instilling discipline, customs, courtesies, and leadership principles that shape cadets into tomorrow's leaders.
- **Aerospace Education.** CAP promotes air, space, and cyber power awareness for members and the public. CAP fosters STEM education and community outreach and strengthens America's future in aerospace innovation and national security.

Together, these missions embody the Profession of Service in Civil Air Patrol. They reflect our commitment to act with Integrity, Volunteer Service, Excellence, and Respect, ensuring that CAP remains a trusted partner to the Air Force and a vital resource to the nation.

PROFESSIONAL COURAGE IN VOLUNTEER SERVICE

Professional courage in CAP includes the judgment to apply military-honed standards with the tact and restraint appropriate to a civilian, volunteer organization.

CAP members are expected to demonstrate moral courage by standing up for what is right, even when it may be difficult, unpopular, or uncertain. They uphold the Core Values of Integrity, Volunteer Service, Excellence, and Respect in every setting.

As volunteers, CAP members hold themselves and their teams accountable to the highest standards of professionalism. They must be willing to make tough decisions that place mission success, safety, and ethical conduct above personal convenience or recognition.

Professional courage also requires candor and respect, as well as sharing sound judgment and honest perspectives with peers, fellow members, and leaders in a way that strengthens teamwork and trust. By speaking truth with professionalism, CAP members safeguard the organization's integrity and ensure its continued service to communities, the nation, and the U.S. Air Force.

CAP NCO

All members of Civil Air Patrol are volunteers who serve within a civilian, nonprofit corporation chartered by Congress. When performing Air Force-assigned missions as the official auxiliary of the United States Air Force, CAP is included in the Air Force Total Force, and its members are considered 'Airmen' only during those missions.

Being a CAP NCO means embodying our core identity as Wingman, Leader, and Volunteer. NCOs bring with them the traditions, professionalism, and standards of the U.S. Armed Forces, and adapt those qualities to strengthen a volunteer organization.

As CAP NCOs, our scope of responsibility is distinct from that of CAP officers. NCOs are the connective tissue between commanders and members, the guardians of standards, and the mentors who develop cadets and coach senior members.

Through their leadership, experience, and example, CAP NCOs help ensure the organization remains a trusted partner to the U.S. Air Force and a vital service to America's communities.

CAP NCOs also support a positive compliance climate by reinforcing awareness of CAP policies, ethical standards, and reporting responsibilities in accordance with CAPR 20-1. Through mentorship and engagement, NCOs help identify potential concerns early and encourage the use of established reporting pathways, including the Member Concern Reporting System (MCRS), Inspector General, Cadet Programs, Equal Opportunity, and Safety channels—ensuring issues are addressed through appropriate organizational processes.

WINGMAN

Civil Air Patrol NCOs uphold the legacy of trust, camaraderie, and accountability by serving as dependable Wingmen. Adapted from the United States Air Force, this concept means no

member stands alone. In CAP, Wingmen look after one another by building trust, sharing responsibility, and ensuring all members feel supported in their service.

As Wingmen, NCOs model reliability and selflessness; they are present when units face challenges, whether during emergency services missions, extended cadet activities, or demanding training events. Being a Wingman requires integrity, initiative, and respect—placing the welfare of fellow members above personal convenience and ensuring mission success through teamwork.

In the volunteer environment of CAP, the Wingman role also means being approachable, attentive, and proactive. It is about recognizing when a fellow member needs guidance, when a cadet requires encouragement, or when a commander benefits from candid feedback. By embodying the Wingman spirit, CAP NCOs reinforce trust, strengthen cohesion, and demonstrate that Civil Air Patrol is one family, united in service.

LEADER

CAP NCOs lead with professionalism, presence, and purpose, qualities that set the tone for cadets, officers, and fellow volunteers. Drawing on their military experience, they set the standard for discipline, accountability, and mission focus while adapting those qualities to a civilian, volunteer environment.

As leaders, CAP NCOs do more than coordinate and guide efforts, they inspire confidence, foster teamwork, and model the highest standards of conduct. They guide their units in executing Civil Air Patrol's three congressionally chartered missions: emergency services, cadet programs, and aerospace education.

In every setting, CAP NCOs lead from the front by demonstrating commitment to service, developing and enabling others, and ensuring the organization fulfills its role as a trusted auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force.

VOLUNTEER

Since its founding in 1941, Civil Air Patrol has been defined by the spirit of volunteer service. In its earliest days, CAP members—most volunteers without commissions—patrolled America's coasts, trained young cadets for military service, and sustained the home front in a time of war. NCOs were central to that structure, guiding squadrons, training new members, and ensuring that missions were carried out with professionalism and discipline.

As the organization evolved, the presence of NCOs declined and later reemerged, reflecting CAP's ability to adapt to changing needs. In 2013, with Air Force approval, the NCO Corps was formally reintroduced to CAP, restoring the recognition of those who had served as enlisted leaders in the Armed Forces and giving them a defined non-directive role as mentors, advisors, and examples within a volunteer structure.

Today, CAP NCOs embody this long legacy. They bring with them the discipline, maturity, and professional standards forged through military service, and they adapt those qualities to a civilian, volunteer auxiliary. Their presence strengthens the organization by mentoring cadets, advising officers, and guiding fellow volunteers.

In carrying forward this tradition, CAP NCOs demonstrate that volunteer service is not simply participation—it is a commitment to something greater than oneself. It is the legacy of those who patrolled America's skies in World War II, the continuity of those who kept the cadet program thriving for generations, and the enduring spirit that has sustained Civil Air Patrol for more than eight decades.

READINESS

Civil Air Patrol NCOs bring with them the heritage of military service across every branch of the Armed Forces. To remain effective within a youth development volunteer auxiliary, they must adapt, evolve, and continuously train in new technologies and systems to maintain proficiency and stay relevant to a younger generation. Readiness in CAP reflects the same professionalism expected in uniformed service, applied in a volunteer environment.

Professional Readiness. Professional readiness for CAP NCOs means sustaining and advancing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to serve effectively. It demands a commitment to lifelong learning, whether through professional development, mastering new technologies, or embracing innovative methods of mentoring and training. By maintaining professional proficiency, NCOs remain credible leaders and mentors, able to connect with cadets, advise officers, and strengthen their units in an evolving operational environment.

Physical Readiness. CAP NCOs are encouraged to maintain a level of physical readiness appropriate to the duties and mission qualifications they accept. While Civil Air Patrol does not engage in combat, some missions demand energy, endurance, and resilience, from extended hours in the field during emergency services operations to long days supporting cadet activities. By modeling healthy lifestyles and demonstrating reliability in demanding

circumstances, CAP NCOs positively influence the readiness and professionalism of the volunteer force.

Mental Readiness. Drawing from years of military service, CAP NCOs bring resilience and perspective to their volunteer roles. Many have endured stressful, uncertain, and challenging conditions while serving their country and are uniquely equipped to support others who encounter similar circumstances in CAP. Whether mentoring members after a demanding mission or leading teams during disaster response, NCOs exemplify composure and provide guidance that sustains team morale and mission effectiveness.

Family Readiness. Family readiness is essential to CAP's success. Volunteers often give their time at the expense of personal and family activities, and the support of families makes service possible. Shaped by their experiences balancing duty and family during military service, CAP NCOs are particularly attuned to this challenge. They foster a culture of empathy and support, ensuring members and their families feel valued, included, and understood. NCOs strengthen CAP's foundation as a resilient volunteer auxiliary by building this sense of family within the organization.

OWNERSHIP

The Ownership Mindset

Civil Air Patrol's National Commander, Maj. Gen. Regena M. Aye, introduced the "Year of Ownership" initiative to strengthen a culture rooted in responsibility, accountability, and proactive stewardship. Although launched as a focused campaign, the principles it highlighted are evergreen expectations for all CAP members, enduring well beyond a single year or moment in time.

The initiative reinforced a simple truth: every member, regardless of rank or position, plays a vital role in ensuring CAP remains effective, safe, and mission-ready. Its framework centers on four foundational pillars that continue to guide CAP today: Airworthiness, Safety, Stakeholder Experience, and Cadet Protection.

"Through self-leadership and a collective commitment to act with our core values, we can accomplish a culture of mutual understanding and lay the foundation for CAP's future," Maj. Gen. Aye emphasized when introducing the initiative. Her message remains a lasting reminder that ownership is not a temporary theme—it is a lasting part of how CAP operates.

Embodying Ownership as CAP NCOs

Civil Air Patrol NCOs are uniquely positioned to lead the organization in sustaining this ownership mindset. Rooted in their professional military expertise and grounded in the ethos of volunteer service, NCOs model accountability, discipline, and care for the mission and its people.

1. **Personal Accountability.** NCOs lead by example—demonstrating integrity in Airworthiness, Safety, Cadet Protection, and Stakeholder Experience. They understand that ownership starts at the individual level.
2. **Cultivating Organizational Stewardship.** NCOs mentor their teams to embrace proactive risk management, respectful interactions, and mission fidelity. They foster environments where ownership is both taught and lived.
3. **Alignment with Core Values.** Acting in service means taking ownership in a manner consistent with Integrity, Volunteer Service, Excellence, and Respect—the core values essential to CAP’s identity and trustworthiness.

Through the Ownership mindset, CAP NCOs reinforce their role as standard-bearers of accountability and stewardship, ensuring every member upholds the values that safeguard CAP’s mission and future.

CHAPTER 2 – LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

CAP NCO CORPS STRUCTURE

The CAP NCO Corps is structured in two tiers:

- Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Tier.
 - Staff Sergeant (E-5), Technical Sergeant (E-6).
- Senior Noncommissioned Officer (SNCO) Tier.
 - Master Sergeant (E-7), Senior Master Sergeant (E-8), Chief Master Sergeant (E-9).

THE ROLE OF THE CAP NCO

Civil Air Patrol NCOs bring the professionalism, experience, and service ethos of the enlisted force into a volunteer organization with a different structure and mission than the Armed Forces. While CAP NCOs hold military-derived grade, their role in the Auxiliary is shaped by the realities of a volunteer environment and the absence of a junior enlisted tier. As a result, CAP NCOs focus less on supervising enlisted personnel and more on mentoring, developing, and advising members of all grades.

Mentors Across the Organization

Unlike their counterparts in the Regular Air Force, Reserve, and Guard, CAP NCOs do not lead or supervise junior enlisted Airmen. Instead, they mentor members across the unit, cadets, new senior members, officers, and even commanders.

They use their experience to:

- Guide senior members in their progression through specialty tracks and overall professional development.
- Help senior members achieve proficiency in emergency services, operations, and leadership roles.
- Coach cadet programs staff on customs, courtesies, standards of conduct, and youth development principles.
- Strengthen squadron and group staffs by reinforcing standards and expectations.

Through this broad mentorship role, NCOs help members grow in professionalism, competence, and confidence.

Cadet Protection and Youth Oversight

All mentoring of cadets by CAP Noncommissioned Officers must be conducted in accordance with the Cadet Protection Program (CPP) and applicable Cadet Programs directives, including CAPR 60-2 and CAPR 60-3. NCO mentorship is professional and developmental in nature and does not include supervisory, corrective, or disciplinary authority over cadets. Oversight of cadet activities and discipline remains the responsibility of commanders and designated Cadet Programs officers.

Advisors to Commanders

As CAP NCOs advance to the senior NCO tier, their influence expands from mentoring individuals to advising commanders on organizational performance, culture, and standards. Senior NCOs assist commanders by:

- Interpreting and reinforcing the commander's intent.
- Identifying issues affecting morale, cohesion, and mission readiness.
- Providing perspective on standardization, evaluation, and compliance.
- Helping commanders implement change effectively within a volunteer environment.
- Serving as trusted, confidential advisors on people, teams, and organizational culture.

This role mirrors the function of senior enlisted leaders in the Armed Forces, adapted to CAP's corporate structure. It is non-directive and does not create an alternate or parallel chain of authority; senior NCOs advise and support commanders through established command and staff processes in accordance with CAP regulations.

Translating Military Professionalism Into Volunteer Service

CAP NCOs are responsible for helping members understand and adopt the customs, courtesies, and expectations that define service in the Air Force Auxiliary. They model professionalism and teach others how to uphold CAP's Core Values in a volunteer setting.

This includes:

- Encouraging accountability without relying on statutory authority.
- Shaping unit culture through consistent example.
- Reinforcing discipline, respect, and teamwork.

- Supporting a safe, respectful, and mission-focused environment.

NCOs help translate military professionalism into practices appropriate for a volunteer corporation, ensuring standards remain high while balancing empathy and respect.

Leaders Through Influence, Not Command

CAP NCOs do not exercise military command authority. Their impact comes from influence, credibility, and example. They build trust, provide expertise, and help members navigate CAP's missions, programs, and expectations. Their leadership is rooted in:

- Demonstrated competence
- Consistent professionalism
- Reliability and service
- Commitment to standards
- Clear communication
- Support for the commander's vision

In this environment, NCOs lead through persuasion, mentorship, and respect—not by the force of law or hierarchy. Their influence aligns with the commander's intent and does not override officer leadership or assume supervisory authority except when formally delegated in accordance with CAP regulations.

A Force Multiplier for CAP

CAP NCOs strengthen units by bridging the gap between the commander's vision and the daily activities of volunteers. They help ensure that CAP's missions—Emergency Services, Aerospace Education, and Cadet Programs—are carried out with discipline, safety, and professionalism. By mentoring members, advising leaders, and reinforcing standards, NCOs serve as essential partners in building effective, resilient units that embody the best of the Air Force Auxiliary.

LEADERSHIP LEVELS

Leadership in Civil Air Patrol is exercised at every echelon, from the local squadron to the National Headquarters. Like our parent service, the U.S. Air Force, we recognize three broad levels of leadership—Tactical, Operational, and Strategic. These levels provide a framework for understanding the scope of responsibilities entrusted to CAP NCOs as they serve in a volunteer environment.

While the terminology parallels military doctrine, in CAP, these levels are adapted to reflect our unique character as a volunteer, civilian auxiliary. NCOs bring the credibility and professionalism of military service, but apply it within a youth development nonprofit organization where members contribute as they can, when they can.

Tactical Level – Unit Leadership

At the tactical level, CAP NCOs serve primarily at the squadron and group levels. Here, leadership is personal and hands-on. NCOs:

- Mentor cadets in customs, courtesies, and leadership principles.
- Coach senior members who may lack prior military experience.
- Support and reinforce training, discipline, and standards are upheld at the unit level.
- Apply technical knowledge and mission skills to support emergency services, cadet programs, and aerospace education.

This level emphasizes direct leadership, instructing, guiding, and setting the example for members in daily operations.

Operational Level – Organizational Leadership

At the operational level, CAP NCOs serve at the wing and region levels, where the focus broadens beyond individual units. NCOs:

- Advise commanders on membership matters and organizational climate.
- Assist in developing and executing programs that span multiple units.
- Facilitate training and mentorship networks across squadrons.
- Represent members' interests to senior leaders and ensure alignment with CAP Core Values.

Operational-level leadership emphasizes integration and coordination, promoting effective collaboration among units and supporting members across the breadth of CAP's missions.

Strategic Level – National Leadership

At the strategic level, CAP NCOs contribute at the national echelon, shaping the direction of the entire organization. NCOs:

- Advise regional and national leadership on membership matters, culture, and professional development.
- Represent the CAP NCO Corps to the Air Force and external stakeholders.
- Contribute to policy, doctrine, and strategic initiatives that ensure CAP remains a trusted auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force.
- Strengthen the partnership between officers and NCOs across the organization.

Strategic-level leadership emphasizes enterprise stewardship—guiding the NCO Corps and the broader membership toward long-term mission success, organizational credibility, and Air Force Total Force alignment.

Summary

Civil Air Patrol NCOs exercise leadership across tactical, operational, and strategic levels. Their role evolves as they move upward in scope—from direct mentorship at the squadron, to organizational influence at wing and region, to shaping national policy and identity. At every level, CAP NCOs embody the Core Values of Integrity, Volunteer Service, Excellence, and Respect while carrying forward the legacy of service that has defined Civil Air Patrol since 1941.

RANK AND AUTHORITY

Overview

In the United States Air Force, enlisted ranks carry statutory authority under Title 10 of the U.S. Code and are supported by the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Civil Air Patrol, however, is a volunteer, civilian auxiliary operating under corporate governance. Authority in CAP is corporate in nature and is neither statutory nor punitive. CAP NCOs do not exercise military command authority; instead, they lead through professional and advisory influence derived from experience, assigned duties, and the responsibilities entrusted to them within CAP.

Source of Authority

Civil Air Patrol NCO grades are reserved for current and former enlisted members of the U.S. Armed Forces. Their CAP grade is granted in recognition of military service and through appointments by CAP commanders under CAPR 35-5. Authority within CAP is not statutory; it derives from:

- Appointment and promotion by commanders at squadron, group, wing, region, and national levels.
- Duty assignments that designate responsibility for advising commanders, mentoring members, and ensuring standards are upheld.
- Professional credibility is earned through prior military service and sustained through consistently demonstrating CAP's Core Values.

Role and Influence

The role of CAP NCOs is distinct from that of CAP officers. Officers are vested with corporate command responsibilities and decision-making authority. CAP NCOs do not exercise command or disciplinary authority; instead, they lead through professional influence grounded in experience, credibility, and example.

Through mentorship and advisory engagement, NCOs strengthen commanders, support members, and reinforce professional standards that enhance unit cohesion and mission effectiveness. Their role is complementary and supportive, contributing to a culture of professionalism within CAP's corporate framework.

Guardians of Standards

CAP NCOs serve as stewards of professional standards and military customs within the organization. They model appropriate conduct, reinforce expectations through mentorship and example, and help members understand the traditions and values of service.

NCOs do not enforce discipline or apply corrective authority. Instead, they elevate concerns through appropriate channels and support commanders by promoting consistent, professional behavior that reflects the standards expected of the U.S. Air Force Auxiliary.

Titles of Address and Professional Courtesies

Correct terms of address are an essential part of military customs and courtesies. In accordance with AFI 1-1, Department of the Air Force Standards, §1.8.5, members are

addressed by their grade or title—not by pay grade terms (e.g., “E-8,” “O-6”) and not by their duty titles (e.g., Superintendent, NCOIC, or Manager).

- Officers are addressed by grade (e.g., “Lieutenant,” “Captain,” “Major,” “Colonel,” “General”) or as “Sir” or “Ma’am.”
- Physicians and dental officers may be addressed as “Doctor.”
- Chaplains may be addressed as “Chaplain” or by their ecclesiastical title.
- NCOs are addressed as shown in **Figure 2.1**.

Civil Air Patrol follows these same standards. This ensures our NCO Corps mirrors Air Force practice, avoids regional variation, and reinforces professionalism across the Auxiliary.

Grade	Term(s) of Address
Chief Master Sergeant (CMSgt)	“Chief Master Sergeant” or “Chief”
Senior Master Sergeant (SMSgt)	“Senior Master Sergeant,” “Senior,” or “Sergeant”
Master Sergeant (MSgt)	“Master Sergeant” or “Sergeant”
Technical Sergeant (TSgt)	“Technical Sergeant,” “Tech Sergeant,” or “Sergeant”
Staff Sergeant (SSgt)	“Staff Sergeant” or “Sergeant”

Figure 2.1 — Civil Air Patrol Enlisted Terms of Address (Adapted from AFI 1-1, Fig. 1.1)

Note: Duty titles such as Superintendent, NCOIC, or Manager are not forms of address. The only exception in the Air Force is the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF), who may be addressed by that full title or as “Chief.”

Precedence and Delegated Authority

Within the CAP NCO Corps, precedence follows grade and date of rank, as in the Armed Forces. Commanders may assign NCOs to lead peers or teams based on mission needs and qualifications. Regardless of who leads, authority is exercised in accordance with CAP’s Constitution, Bylaws, and regulations, and always within a volunteer, nonprofit context.

Volunteer Context

Unlike their Regular Air Force, Reserve, and Guard counterparts, CAP NCOs operate within a force of volunteers who "serve as they can, when they can." Authority in this environment requires humility, tact, and adaptability. NCOs must translate military professionalism into a civilian auxiliary by balancing high standards with empathy and respect. Their influence lies not in statutory command, but in the trust they earn and the example they set.

Authority in Civil Air Patrol

Civil Air Patrol does not operate under Title 10 command authority or the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Instead, authority in CAP is corporate authority, derived from our Congressional Charter (36 U.S.C. §403), the CAP Constitution and Bylaws, and directives issued by the National Commander and authorized corporate officers. This authority resides with commanders and designated officials; it does not confer command or disciplinary authority on NCOs.

CAP commanders exercise this corporate authority through regulatory authority, delegated authority, and command responsibility as defined in CAP directives.

CAP NCOs lead through professional influence derived from experience, credibility, and assigned duties. They mentor members, reinforce standards, and advise commanders in support of mission execution. NCO influence is professional and advisory in nature and does not include command, disciplinary, or administrative authority.

Although CAP authority does not carry the force of military law, it establishes organizational expectations and responsibilities essential to good order, discipline, and mission effectiveness within a volunteer auxiliary.

For CAP NCOs, this distinction is critical: you do not exercise military command authority, but you do provide meaningful professional leadership that strengthens units, supports commanders, and elevates CAP's culture of professionalism.

GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES

When properly applied, duty titles provide a quick understanding of a Civil Air Patrol NCO's role and level of responsibility. In CAP, these titles communicate how prior military experience is applied within a volunteer auxiliary. While CAP NCOs do not hold statutory authority, their duty positions carry professional responsibility and influence. They set standards, mentor members, advise commanders, and manage resources in a way that strengthens CAP's three congressionally chartered missions.

The following duty titles are adapted from Air Force practice and tailored to CAP's unique, volunteer context. They are not military commands but represent trusted leadership positions, mentorship, and stewardship within the organization.

- **Supervisor.** NCOs may be assigned to oversee the execution of specific tasks, training activities, or mission functions involving cadets or senior members. This role is limited to task coordination and does not constitute formal supervision of personnel. Responsibility for personnel supervision, discipline, and administrative actions remains with commanders and designated leaders in accordance with CAP regulations.
- **Noncommissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC).** NCOs often manage a program, function, or specialty track without direct subordinates, providing continuity, expertise, and advice to commanders and staff.
- **Flight Chief.** SNCOs (occasionally experienced NCOs) serving as enlisted leaders for a squadron flight, ensuring consistency across training and member development.
- **Senior Enlisted Leader (SEL).** Commander-appointed advisors at squadron, group, or wing levels. Provide perspective on member development, climate, and mission execution.
- **Command Chief.** Chief Master Sergeants serving as senior enlisted leaders at the Region or National Headquarters. Provide a strategic-level perspective and represent the NCO Corps to commanders and CAP-USAF.
- **National Command Chief.** The most senior CAP NCO, who serves as an advisor to the National Commander and represents the NCO corps across CAP and to the U.S. Air Force.

CHAPTER 3 – NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER TIER (NCO)

GENERAL NCO RESPONSIBILITIES

As a CAP NCO, you:

- Grow from contributing to becoming a leader in Civil Air Patrol and set the example for others to follow.
- Attain and maintain knowledge and skills commensurate with your grade. Balance technical proficiency in CAP missions with leadership development.
- Know and understand your commander's goals and priorities, and how you and your fellow members contribute to those objectives.
- Create an environment free of behaviors that hinder performance and enable and support all members in achieving their full potential. Appropriately recognize and encourage members whose conduct, professionalism, and performance exceed established standards using CAP-approved recognition programs and commander-endorsed methods.
- Stay professionally engaged with members, mentoring both cadets and senior members.
- Understand the volunteer environment at the unit level by engaging with members in meetings, training events, missions, and community activities.
- Become familiar with the resources available within CAP and the local community to support members, and be able to refer them for assistance appropriately.
- Commit to continuous personal and professional growth, including participation in CAP's Education and Training Program and opportunities for leadership development.
- Develop broader organizational awareness and encourage others to do the same.
- At a minimum, have a general understanding of CAP's Constitution, Bylaws, regulations, operating procedures, and CAP's role as the U.S. Air Force Auxiliary.
- Develop operational expertise to prepare for the increased responsibilities and expectations.

- Successfully progress through CAP's education and training levels, ensuring you understand how NCOs contribute to CAP's Emergency Services, Aerospace Education, and Cadet Programs missions.

RANK-SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

Staff Sergeant (SSgt). Support the squadron commander and leadership team by mentoring cadets and senior members in customs, courtesies, and professional standards. Provide direct guidance to cadet NCOs, assist with training and drill instruction, and help ensure mission readiness at the unit level. Uphold CAP regulations and standards, reinforcing discipline and professionalism in all activities.

Technical Sergeant (TSgt). In addition to the responsibilities of a Staff Sergeant, act as a technical expert in CAP mission areas such as emergency services, aerospace education, or cadet programs. Lead training activities, develop junior NCOs, and mentor cadets and senior members. Advise commanders on member development and enforce standards contributing to unit effectiveness and cohesion.

NCO Charge

NCOs are the stewards of military tradition within Civil Air Patrol, entrusted with carrying forward the customs, courtesies, and standards that connect our organization to its Air Force heritage. The NCO ranks mark a transition into greater leadership responsibilities, where prior military experience and service are leveraged to strengthen CAP's missions. In addition to fulfilling the responsibilities of all senior members, as an NCO, you are charged with the following duties:

- **You are charged with increasing your knowledge, skills, and abilities** to be ready for whatever is required in CAP service. Become an expert in your specialty track and mission area and display the flexibility to support a wide range of CAP activities.
- **You are charged with leading by example** to promote professionalism, safety, and readiness within your teams. Demonstrate CAP's Core Values in all actions and foster a culture of respect and accountability.
- **You are charged with taking an active role in the professional development of those you are privileged to lead within authorized CAP activities.** Mentor cadets, coach senior members, and integrate the talents of your team to promote unity of purpose and mission success.

- **You are charged to serve as a blueprint of leadership** by exemplifying self-discipline, seeking continuous growth, and advancing the capabilities of the members around you.
- **You are charged with executing the intent and priorities of your commander**, while supporting and developing junior officers and cadet leaders. Seek guidance when needed and provide constructive solutions to challenges within your scope.
- **You are charged to embrace CAP's Core Values** and adhere to its standards and regulations, ensuring your actions—and those of your team—foster an environment of trust, mutual respect, and shared understanding.
- **You are charged with striving for excellence**, demonstrating the highest standards of character, competence, professionalism, and discipline. Continually assess and improve both your own performance and that of your team.

Your role as a Noncommissioned Officer is pivotal in mentoring members, strengthening unit cohesion, and enabling Civil Air Patrol to fulfill its congressionally mandated missions of Emergency Services, Cadet Programs, and Aerospace Education. In accepting these responsibilities, you pledge your dedication to Civil Air Patrol and its enduring service as the official Auxiliary of the United States Air Force.

NCO AUTHORITIES

You are expected to be confident as you exercise sound judgment, enforce standards, and lead with professionalism. You must understand that your leadership in Civil Air Patrol is both a privilege and a responsibility, entrusted to you because of your competence, integrity, and commitment to service.

Civil Air Patrol NCOs do not exercise command authority under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Instead, their authority is derived from:

- **Civil Air Patrol Constitution and Bylaws** establish CAP as the official Auxiliary of the United States Air Force and define its governance.
- **CAP regulations and directives** (such as CAPR 35-5 on appointments and promotions) assign duties, responsibilities, and standards of conduct.
- The **Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Air Force** formalizes CAP's role in supporting Air Force noncombat programs and missions.

- The **duty positions** you hold within CAP empower you to train, mentor, and advise members at your assigned level of responsibility.

As a CAP NCO, you are accountable to execute these authorities by:

- Enforcing compliance with CAP standards, regulations, and customs.
- Providing clear, professional guidance to members.
- Offering mentorship that develops both cadets and senior members.
- Supporting commanders in mission execution, member development, and organizational effectiveness.

Unlike military orders under the UCMJ, CAP directives rely on mutual respect, professionalism, and adherence to regulations. Your guidance must be clear and concise, and you should allow members to seek clarification or additional direction when required.

CHAPTER 4 – SENIOR NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER (SNCO) TIER

GENERAL SNCO RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to fulfilling all NCO authorities and responsibilities, **Senior NCOs (MSgt, SMSgt, CMSgt)** are expected to:

- **Transform into leaders of leaders.** At this tier, your leadership is paramount in shaping decisions, guiding implementation, and developing the next generation of CAP leaders.
- **Preserve legacy while shaping the future.** Honor CAP's 80+ years of history while steering its missions into the future with innovation and adaptability.
- **Enforce and embody standards.** Hold yourself and your members accountable to CAP regulations, customs, courtesies, and the Core Values of Integrity, Volunteer Service, Excellence, and Respect.
- **Maintain readiness.** Ensure you and your teams are trained, proficient, and ready to respond to CAP's emergency services, cadet development, and aerospace education missions.
- **Serve as a critical component of mission success.** Use your operational experience and credibility to connect the commander's intent with field execution.
- **Mentor broadly.** Develop NCOs, officers, and cadets alike—translating intent into purpose, fostering esprit de corps, and helping each member understand their vital role in achieving CAP's objectives.
- **Adapt to complexity.** Anticipate challenges, encourage prudent risk-taking, and create an environment where mistakes are used as opportunities for growth.
- **Be a trusted advisor.** Provide commanders with candid feedback and perspective, even on complex issues, through appropriate advisory channels and within CAP's corporate authorities, ensuring policies and decisions are informed by the voice of the NCO corps.
- **Model professional courage.** Possess the moral courage to respectfully challenge when necessary to protect people, mission, and standards.

- **Promote teamwork across domains.** Operate effectively at unit, wing, region, and national levels—collaborating seamlessly with officers, cadets, mission partners, and the community.
- **Champion lifelong learning.** Seek continuous growth through CAP education and training, outside professional development, and broader service opportunities. Encourage cross-training and broadening assignments that make members more versatile and resilient.
- **Shape organizational culture.** Set the tone for your unit through actions and example. Foster a climate of dignity, respect, and motivation where volunteers feel valued and connected to the mission.
- **Support junior officers.** Guide new leaders in learning to care for teams and accept greater responsibilities within CAP.
- **Live the Core Values.** Integrity, Volunteer Service, Excellence, and Respect must be visible in every decision, every action, and every interaction.

As SNCOs in CAP, your influence does not stem from statutory authority like the UCMJ, but from **credibility, competence, and trust**. You are standard-bearers for the NCO Corps and serve as guardians of tradition and catalysts for growth.

RANK SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

Master Sergeant (MSgt). At the Master Sergeant level, members transition from primarily tactical leadership within a squadron to responsibilities that reach into the group or wing. They support the execution of Civil Air Patrol's three congressionally chartered missions—emergency services, cadet programs, and aerospace education—by ensuring teams are trained, organized, and prepared. Master Sergeants mentor cadet NCOs and senior members, reinforcing CAP standards, customs, and courtesies. They also advise unit commanders, helping bridge perspectives between cadets, senior members, and staff officers to strengthen cohesion and mission success.

Senior Master Sergeant (SMSgt). Senior Master Sergeants provide advanced guidance on member development, organizational culture, and leadership practices across wings and regions. Their leadership extends beyond individual units, as they often oversee larger or multi-unit efforts, ensuring that readiness and standards are consistently applied. They play a critical role as mentors, providing advisory coaching to cadet officers under appropriate Cadet Programs staff oversight, as well as mentoring senior member officers

and fellow NCOs to prepare them for higher levels of responsibility. In addition, they serve as trusted advisors who translate a commander's strategic intent into action at the operational level, balancing mission requirements with member welfare.

Chief Master Sergeant (CMSgt). Chief Master Sergeants represent the pinnacle of the CAP NCO Corps, serving as senior enlisted leaders (SELs) at the wing, region, or national levels. In this role, they act as principal enlisted advisors to commanders, ensuring members' perspectives are represented in decision-making, policy development, and strategic planning. Chiefs guide Civil Air Patrol's culture by modeling professionalism, integrity, respect, and discipline across the organization. They connect national-level strategy with local mission execution, offering informed perspectives rooted in field experience. At the enterprise level, they represent the NCO Corps in national forums, advocating for education, standards, and the continued development of members across all CAP programs.

SNCO Charge

The senior NCO ranks of Master Sergeant, Senior Master Sergeant, and Chief Master Sergeant mark the highest levels of leadership within the Civil Air Patrol NCO Corps. As a CAP SNCO, you are entrusted with significant responsibility, expertise, and influence. In addition to fulfilling the duties of the NCO tier, you are charged with the following:

- **You are charged with integrating the talents, skills, and abilities of CAP members into cohesive teams** that accomplish our missions with excellence, while maintaining flexibility and adaptability in execution. You are the bridge that connects commanders, officers, NCOs, and cadets—ensuring unity in purpose and action.
- **You are charged with communicating effectively** across every level of CAP, translating the commander's intent into actionable tasks, and advocating for the needs and perspectives of members.
- **You are charged with developing yourself and others**—mentoring cadets, coaching senior members, and shaping organizations. This includes capitalizing on opportunities to partner with communities, agencies, and organizations to advance CAP's emergency services, cadet programs, and aerospace education missions.
- **You are charged with demonstrating self-discipline and initiative** through continued education, training, and broadening experiences. In all settings, you must be willing to serve where needed and do what the mission demands.

- **You are charged with fulfilling a unique role in officer development** at the squadron, group, wing, region, and national levels. Your experience and judgment must support and advise commanders as they lead diverse teams of volunteers nationwide.
- **You are charged with honoring CAP's heritage** while leading the next generation of members. You must embrace and live our Core Values of Integrity, Volunteer Service, Excellence, and Respect, while modeling professionalism and competence at the highest levels.
- **You are charged with cultivating a professional climate and culture** within your teams, enforcing high standards, and focusing on mission execution. You must clarify leadership expectations, reinforce standards, and swiftly address behaviors that detract from Civil Air Patrol's good order, discipline, and reputation.

CONCLUSION

Our members are the strength behind Civil Air Patrol's success. Their dedication, professionalism, and willingness to serve as volunteers ensure our missions in emergency services, cadet programs, and aerospace education remain unmatched. This guide sets the standard and provides the foundation our NCO Corps needs to lead with integrity, develop others, communicate effectively, and support commanders at every level.

We are a team of highly skilled, service-minded professionals—committed to the Core Values of Integrity, Volunteer Service, Excellence, and Respect. To maximize our collective strength, we uphold shared expectations and create opportunities for mentorship, development, and professional growth across all grades and positions.

Wherever we serve and whatever mission we are called to, the NCO Corps is indispensable to Civil Air Patrol's ability to serve communities, save lives, and shape futures.

REFERENCES

Federal Statute and Authority

- 10 U.S.C. Chapter 9492–9497, Civil Air Patrol as the Civilian Auxiliary of the Air Force
- 36 U.S.C. §403, Civil Air Patrol Congressional Charter

Governing Documents

- Constitution and Bylaws of Civil Air Patrol, 21 May 2025
- Cooperative Agreement between the Department of the Air Force and Civil Air Patrol
- AFPD 10-27, Civil Air Patrol
- DAFI 10-2701, Organization and Function of Civil Air Patrol
- DAFI 10-2702, Board of Governors of Civil Air Patrol

Regulations and Manuals

- CAPR 20-1, *Inspector General Program*
- CAPR 20-2, *Complaint Resolution*
- CAPR 60-2, *Cadet Protection Program*
- CAPR 35-5, *CAP Officer and NCO Appointments and Promotions*
- CAPR 40-1, *Civil Air Patrol Senior Member Education and Training Program*
- CAPR 30-1, *Civil Air Patrol Organizational Structure*

Doctrine and Guidance

- AFH 36-2618, Enlisted Force Structure – The Brown Book (USAF, September 2025)
- AFI 1-1, Department of the Air Force Standards. Section 1.8.5 and Figure 1.1 (adapted for Civil Air Patrol use).
- AFI 36-2109, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Senior Enlisted Leadership Management, and Air Force Enlisted Council
- AFI 36-2113, The First Sergeant