



# **Guide for New Squadron Public Affairs Officers**



**North Central Region  
Public Affairs**



**NORTH CENTRAL REGION, CIVIL AIR PATROL  
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Thank you for volunteering to serve as a Civil Air Patrol Public Affairs Officer.

You are about to start off on an exciting adventure that will let you see and tell your community about an outstanding group of American patriots as they serve their communities and the nation.

Namely the members of the Civil Air Patrol, America's Air Force Auxiliary

Wow! Now that's a tall order. 😊

Many times a new Public Affairs Officer (PAO) has no idea of what he or she has gotten himself into or what the work is really all about..

That's why we created this guide. It will help you to understand what a squadron PAO does at the and what resources are available to help you to succeed.

This guide is a part of the "New PAO's Orientation" and it has several parts that are designed to stand alone and complement each other.

1. **This guide** – serves as a "quick start" to let you know what the Civil Air Patrol expects of their PAO's. It also shares resources and information that you can immediately use to get started. It is not a "be all, end all" guide or the "how to do" manual. It is a starting point on a voyage.
2. **Video Presentations** – Which are designed to motivate you about your choice to serve as a PAO and share some of the information in this guide. **(Coming in May 2009)**
3. **Resource Downloads** – These are the tools that will allow you to get an immediate start in performing the duties of a PAO.

These resources are all available at the NCR's Public Affairs Resource Website at this link:  
<http://www.ncrpao.org/newpao>

Public Affairs is a key part of ensuring that Civil Air Patrol succeeds in serving our communities and the nation. CAP's Public Affairs program succeeds because we have a great story and great storytellers to tell it. Now we will be even better because of your efforts.

Thank you for your service to your squadron and the nation. Good luck as you begin your adventure as a Public Affairs Officer in the Civil Air Patrol.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "AL PABON". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

AL PABON, Major, CAP  
Director of Public Affairs



# What is a Public Affairs Officer?

A Public Affairs Officer (PAO) can be best described as a storyteller. As a PAO you go out and tell the CAP story to our friends, supporters, the general public, community leaders, influencers and of course to our own members.

Civil Air Patrol really has a great story to tell. Take a look at the CAP Volunteer Magazine, NCR News or some of our wing and unit websites. You will see our members serving in their communities, helping to develop tomorrow's leaders and saving lives.

As a squadron or a flight PAO, you are the backbone of the national public affairs program and the chief storyteller for your unit. In other words you make the Public Affairs Program happen.

Let's look at the 3 parts of the Public Affairs Program:



**Planning for Success:** Every important project and activity has a strategy or a plan that guides them to success. PA is no exception.

The governing regulation of our program, CAPR 190-1 requires Public Affairs Officer's to have a Public Affairs (PA) Plan of Action that involves using a standard planning method that is measurable and takes into account your local squadron's situation in setting your program's goals.

We have resources that will help you to formulate your PA Plan. These can be found at [www.ncrpao.org](http://www.ncrpao.org).

This is the NCR's PA Resources website. Click on the "Planning" link and you will see several resources including a template and a complete video presentation from the National Public Affairs Academy on this important process.



CAP National Commander, Maj Gen Amy Courter during a media interview at the 2008 Wreath's Across America in Washington DC.

**External Information** programs tell our story to the general public and the community.

As we discussed earlier the Civil Air Patrol has a great story to tell.

You can help to do this by as an example writing releases and stories about your members and what they are doing.

Some stories that could be told locally include:

- Member and squadron achievements
- A successful search and rescue mission
- A member or the unit doing something extraordinary
- Telling the community about recent training (so the community knows what we are capable of doing for them.)
- Squadron community outreach events
- Localizing a national or state level story about the work of Civil Air Patrol such as a search and rescue mission or disaster relief operations

Suggested target audiences for information about our programs include local military bases, government agencies, schools, business, industry, civic organizations, and media of all types.

There are numerous tools and resources to help you do this.

**Internal Information** programs tell our members about what we are doing and the impact of our efforts in the community.

Our own members need to know what is going on in their own units, their wing and nation wide. It helps us remember that we are part of a greater organization, full of outstanding civic minded citizens serving their communities and the nation.

It also contributes to the pride and spirit of members and of their membership in the squadron.

PAO's can help do this by

- Publishing regular Squadron, Wing and Regional newsletters
- Sending releases and stories to Higher HQ for their publications on a regular basis
- Maintaining informative websites that are updated on a regular basis
- Recognizing members and their achievements by telling their stories

**But now let's put some of this together for you.**



# The PAO's Flight Plan

"A path to success as a unit Public Affairs Officer"



All pilots know that they should file a flight plan every time they fly. This flight plan let's us know where he is coming from, where he is going and the route he will take to get there.

As a PAO you too have a Flight Plan because you need to know what is needed to have a successful Public Affairs Program for your squadron.

It is a basic 4-step strategy that a new or experienced squadron PAO can use to be successful in telling our story.

It is expected that PAO's at all levels will:

- Submit releases/stories to local and internal CAP media
- Develop and Maintain a Unit Website
- Publish a Unit Newsletter
- Conduct an Outreach Event each year

The PAO's Flight Plan breaks down the key tasks of a PAO into their most basic elements or tasks. Broken down into smaller pieces the basic functions of the PAO are much easier to grasp and work.

In North Central Region we use the PAO's Flight Plan as a basic measure of program effectiveness. It is integrated into all of our planning and strategy documents and we use it as the measures for the North Central Region's Public Affairs Recognition Program.

The PAO's Flight Plan comes from PA program objectives as outlined in CAP Regulation 190-1.

Please note that this plan does not take the place of the planning requirements of CAP Regulation 190-1. The PAO's Flight Plan complements and supports these requirements.

Let's look at each part of the PAO's Flight Plan:



# The PAO's Flight Plan

## Releases and stories to local and CAP media

Your community will not know about your squadron unless you tell them the story. A primary means to do this is the press/media release.

A Unit PAO should strive to get 1-2 releases out per month to your local newspapers and other interested media such as radio and television stations. Schools are also a great place to send releases on our cadets and their achievements.

Suggested stories that the media may be interested in are:

- Cadet Achievements and Promotions
- Member successes (in and out of CAP)
- Unit Events/Activities
- Actual and training missions (Emergency Services)
- Significant squadron news

This is not hard to do if you are working with an active squadron. Most squadrons have enough regular activity to generate 1-2 releases a month even if it's simply a "what's going on this month" type of release or a community calendar entry.

If possible include pictures of your members in action in your release. Nothing is more boring to an editor and the public than a Grip & Grin shot of a member getting an award. A shot of that member doing something has a better chance of being printed. Try to build a library of images of your members in action for this purpose.

Don't forget to send copies of your releases to your Wing and Region PAO's as well as the CAP Online News. Tell your story to our members as well as the public.

We want to know and help spread the word! ☺

Releases are easy to do once you have the tools and understand the basic concepts involved.

There are tools that can help you prepare effective press releases and some of these are available at [www.ncrpao.org](http://www.ncrpao.org) and [www.capchannel.com](http://www.capchannel.com) Also take a look at CAP Online News for other release ideas.



# The PAO's Flight Plan

## Develop and maintain a unit website



Let's face it most young people and many adults get their information online. People of all ages get their information from the internet. Online video, social networking, blogs, podcasts or static content on a web site is where people go for information about your squadron and Civil Air Patrol.

They will probably get the first impression of your squadron from your website.

So it is very important for a unit to have a website that:

- Is well designed
- Tells the squadron's story (remember to keep it local)
- Does not duplicate (or recreate) materials from higher headquarters
- Has original and local content (pictures and stories)
- Has news and pictures of unit members in action
- It is updated regularly
- Your squadron's press/news releases and newsletter are posted on it.
- Tries to utilize web 2.0 technologies

So how does the squadron get there? What are the obstacles?

The biggest reasons that a unit does not have a website are:

- The lack of software to design and maintain a website
- The lack of experts who can design and build a site
- The lack of server space. This is the place a website calls home.

There are some resources available to help your squadron to design and build a site. There are also software and hosting options available for units that want a website.



More info on these options is available at [www.ncrpa.org](http://www.ncrpa.org) including "Website in a Box." at <http://www.ncrpa.org/Resources/wsb/index.htm>

Website in a Box is a series of basic website templates that can be easily edited into a great squadron website. These templates were adapted from outstanding CAP websites from all over the nation and are ready for you to use.

It has all of the basic pages that are needed to set up a basic squadron website. All you have to do is fill in the details and unleash your creativity.

Websites can be very simple like a blog or really involved. It's up to what you can do and what your squadron leadership wants.



# The PAO's Flight Plan Unit Newsletters



Successful squadrons publish a regular newsletter. It tells the unit's story to all of its members, friends, supporters and partners of the squadron.

The squadron newsletter can take any form that you and your commander agree upon. Here are some general guidelines.

- It is suggested that the newsletter be published monthly. This way the news in it is fresh and current. Most successful squadron newsletters are a monthly product.
- Some units do a printed version that is handed out to members at commander's call; some do it as a plain text e-mail or an e-mailed PDF file or as a web page (or a blog) on the squadron website. You are only limited by your creativity, time and resources. **All members must receive a copy.**
- Make sure that your newsletter is posted on your squadron website. It's a great recruiting/marketing tool as it shows the activity of your squadron and its members.
- Send copies to higher level including your Wing and Region PAO's. There may be a story that can be featured at the wing or region level or even CAP Online News.
- Also send copies to local and higher level commanders including your Wing Commander.

More information on newsletter production can be found at [www.ncrpao.org](http://www.ncrpao.org) and the award winning Region Newsletter "NCR News" can be viewed at <http://www.ncrpao.org/ncrnews.htm> and an archive of past issues is maintained.

There are tools that can help you prepare effective newsletters and some of these are available at [www.ncrpao.org](http://www.ncrpao.org) and [www.capchannel.com](http://www.capchannel.com) Also take a look at the national Public Affairs website at [http://members.gocivilairpatrol.com/cap\\_national\\_hq/public\\_affairs/](http://members.gocivilairpatrol.com/cap_national_hq/public_affairs/) for additional samples of squadron newsletters.



# The PAO's Flight Plan

## Community Outreach Events

You can't get support for your unit unless the community knows about you. You will hear this often as a squadron PAO.

One way for the community to learn about your squadron is to showcase it in the community via a community outreach event.

Examples of outreach events that a squadron can do are:

- Squadron Open Houses
- Local SAREX's (especially when you are working with other local agencies)
- Presentations to Community Groups/Leaders (Speaker's Bureau Events)
- Parades and Color Guard Presentations by your cadets
- Proclamations about CAP by local governments
- Radio and TV appearances
- Participation in community service events

Many squadrons hold regular open houses to attract potential members as well as showcase your squadron to the community. Some squadrons also take time to recognize member accomplishments at these events.

These are just examples of what some units have done. You are only limited by your imagination and resources.

Outreach events can help squadrons to gain:

- New Members for your squadron
- New Friends for CAP and your squadron
- New Resources for your squadron
- New Missions for your squadron
- A positive image of your squadron in the community

There will be many opportunities over the year for a unit to do an outreach event. They take some effort to plan and execute but the results are usually worth it.

Seize the chance to showcase your squadron and grow.

A kit of resources to help your unit stage an open house can be found at the NCR PAO's Resource website at: <http://www.ncrpao.org/resources/openhouse.htm>

Running a successful outreach event requires coordination and cooperation with many of the members of your squadron. It is quite a bit of work but it is work that will deliver real results for your squadron.



# Resources and Tools for the New PAO

Now that you understand what a PAO does, you are probably wondering what tools are available to help you. Let's take a look.

**People:** People are the most important tool you have as a PAO.

**Your Fellow PAO:** Don't hesitate to reach out to neighboring PAO's (your peers) even if they are in another wing. They will have "been there and done that" and will be able to help you get going and serve as a sounding board as you develop your program.

**Your Group and Wing PAO:** These senior PAO's have one main job. To help you succeed. These officers should always be available to offer advice and guidance. They will help but not do your work for you. In NCR the Wing PAO's can be contacted via this web page: <http://www.ncrpao.org/pateam.htm>

**Your Region PAO:** Is the senior volunteer PAO in the organization. He works together with the other Region PAO's, the National Public Affairs Team Leader & Marketing Advisor and the paid National PA staff to ensure you have the tools and resources to succeed. The Region PAO is always available to advise and consult with squadron and wing PAO's. He can be reached at [pao@ncr.cap.gov](mailto:pao@ncr.cap.gov)

NCR Public Affairs has compiled some great resources to help squadron and Wing PAO's. These can be downloaded at the NCR PAO's website <http://www.ncrpao.org>

**National HQ** has a small staff of paid Public Affairs professionals. This team publishes the CAP Volunteer, CAP Online News and completes a wide variety of important projects that help promote the whole organization nationwide.

They maintain a website: [http://members.gocivilairpatrol.com/cap\\_national\\_hq/public\\_affairs/](http://members.gocivilairpatrol.com/cap_national_hq/public_affairs/) that has many resources for unit PAO's as well as [www.capchannel.com](http://www.capchannel.com), a multimedia resource site for PAO's and CAP members.

**Training:** Once you have completed the orientation your next step is to enroll in the Public Affairs Specialty Track as outlined in CAP Pamphlet 201. This is a guide that outlines the requirements for each step in the track.

Follow this guide, the guidance of your senior and master PAO's and of course the wishes of your commander, and you should go thru the track with ease.

There are additional training opportunities for PAO's. Please go to [www.ncrpao.org](http://www.ncrpao.org) or National HQ [http://members.gocivilairpatrol.com/cap\\_national\\_hq/public\\_affairs/](http://members.gocivilairpatrol.com/cap_national_hq/public_affairs/) for more information.