New York Wing Squadron of Merit (SOM) Selection Procedure and Metrics

OVERVIEW:

The Squadron of Merit award is intended to recognize excellence in the execution of the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program. It is important that the criteria utilized for the SOM selection be transparent and accurately assess key performance indicators, which are related to excellence. Because the NY Wing Squadron of Merit becomes the Wing's nominee for the Region, and potentially a National Squadron of Distinction Award, it is essential that the NY Wing SOM meet the Squadron of Distinction criteria, which are spelled out in CAPR 39-3, so that it may be highly competitive for that award.

This document provides information on how Cadet units become candidates for the SOM, how they are pre-screened for eligibility, the mandatory checklist items that they must satisfy, how their performance over the prior calendar year is evaluated, and how the final three to five candidates are selected for recommendation to the Wing Commander for the final selection. Each of the performance indicators used in the evaluation process is described below, and their rationale is provided.

Overall, this process must be fair, transparent, comprehensive, and focused on recognizing the outstanding Cadet or Composite Squadron in NY Wing for selection as the Squadron of Merit, and for nomination as a competitive candidate for the Region Squadron of Distinction award.

PRE-SCREENING THE SQUADRONS:

Quality Cadet Unit Award (QCUA)- Since it is understood that all candidates for the Squadron of Merit award should meet the very basic requirements of the QCUA as a prerequisite, the 10 QCUA criteria are utilized to pre-screen SOM candidates. The QCUA is a valid and holistic measure of unit quality and performance. NY Wing usually has 20-30 QCUA recipients that have successfully met 6-10 of the 10 QCUA criteria over the prior Fiscal Year. This initial candidate pool is known in October of each year. Since the SOM is a Calendar Year award, the final SOM selection is usually made in late January after the final calendar year data is available in eServices. Both FY and CY data is used in scoring SOM candidates.

The pre-screening process assures that all squadrons considered for the SOM award, meet, or exceed, the basic cadet program criteria for success, which are represented by the QCUA. Typically, the top scoring 8-10 NY Wing QCUA recipients become the initial candidate pool for the SOM.

Checklist Items - Each of these 8-10 candidate units passes through a number of mandatory checklist items, each of which could be disqualifying. Examples of these checklist items are:

1. **Minimum Unit Size**- CAPR 39-3 sets a minimum size of 12 at the beginning of the prior calendar year, as the cutoff for the award. Units with fewer than 12 members are disqualified from consideration.

2. **Cadet Protection Program Training (CPPT)**- Cadet units are required to assure that every adult member, and Cadet over 18 in the Squadron, has completed CPPT requirements.

3. **Training Leaders of Cadets (TLC) Status**- All Cadet Units must, as a minimum, have two Senior Members trained in the TLC course, which focuses on the conduct of the Cadet Program.

These checklist items are disqualifying for SOM candidate units because no unit that fails to meet basic regulatory CAP requirements, should be considered for the SOM award, which is the highest recognition for excellence in Cadet Program execution.

SCORING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE CANDIDATE UNITS:

Once any units that fail to meet the checklist items are removed, the remaining 8-10 units go on to be scored on 20 key performance indicators. The resulting scores are ranked and the top scoring 3-5 units are presented (with all of their detailed scores) to the Wing Commander for final selection of the Wing SOM. The following table lists the 20 key performance indicators, their authoritative data sources, and rationale. The categories of the key performance indicators come directly from CAPR 39-3 paragraph 38.

#	Key Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Rationale
	SQUADRON STRENGTH		
1.1	Squadron Strength	SOM	There is a direct relationship between unit size and program quality, The strength and resiliency of a unit is therefore directly related to the size of that unit.
1.2	Attrition	SOM MSR	Annual attrition should be less than 40%. Normal attrition is 40% or less and results from high school seniors going away to college, cadets moving out of town, and a small number of cadets who may lose interest. Attrition greater than 40% is an indicator of problems, which create lack of morale, and poor quality in a cadet program.
1.3	First Year Retention %	QCUA	Retention may be the most important net quality indicator of all of the twenty SOM selection criteria. It is a percentage from the QCUA data based on the number of new prior year cadets who remain members after their first year of service, divided by the prior year new member count on the unit membership rolls.
1.4	Cadet Renewals %	SOM MRR	The average renewals in the country are around 50% which means that half the units in the country have renewal rates below 50%. 60% was set as the selection criteria threshold because higher renewal rates indicate high program quality.
1.5	New Cadets %	SOM MSR	The rationale for this selection criterion is that there is a critical mass of cadets needed to successfully conduct the full cadet program. Units with fewer than 35 members find it difficult to sustain, operate, and manage the full cadet program. Only units with more than 35 cadets score points in this selection criteria. This membership criterion represents the key importance of membership strength to program quality.
	SQUADRON GROWTH		
2.1	New Cadet Members	SOM	n/a
2.2	Initial Growth Rate %	QCUA	n/a
2.3	Full Growth Rate %	SOM MSR	n/a
	CADET ACHIEVEMENT		
3.1	Milestone Achievement Index (calculated)	SOM MRR	The resulting index will range from 25 to more than 100 for the most highly successful units, and it provides a powerful way, together with growth, retention, and QCUA criteria, to evaluate the best candidate units for the SOM award.
3.2	Wright Brothers Award %	QCUA	This criterion is excellent for beginning to paint a picture of how well a unit works. If a unit recruits many new members but few achieve the Wright Brothers Award, then we know that its Leadership, Aerospace Education, Physical Fitness, Character Development, and Activities are not working as well as they should. In successful squadrons, it should take new cadets between 6 and 12 months to achieve their Wright Brothers awards. 100% of cadets that stay in the program for a year or more should have earned the Wright Brothers Award.
	ENCAMPMENT ATTENDANCE		
4.1	First Encampment Attendance %	SOM	n/a
4.2	Total Encampment Attendance %	QCUA	n/a
	ORIENTATION FLYING		
5.1	New Orientation Flights %	COR COBR	This category measures the percentage of new cadets in a unit that have completed powered or glider Orientation Flight in CAP. We know that cadets that fly early and often tend to remain in the CAP program and are more highly motivated.
5.2	Total Orientation Flights %	SOM	This quality selection criterion requires 70% of all cadets to have at least one flight. We know that cadets that fly early and often tend to remain in the CAP program and are more highly motivated.
5.3	Back Seat O Rides Index (calculated)	SOM	This category measures the ratio of back seat Orientation Flights to the total number of Orientation flights during the current year. We know that cadets that units that "market" the benefits of back seat rides can deliver significantly more and better O-flight experiences at negligible additional cost. Back seat O-rides have a multiplier effect on O-ride costs.

	ACTIVITIES AND MISSIONS		
6.1	Adult Leadership Training Ratio	QCUA TLC	The principal reason cadets from across the country give for leaving CAP is poor adult leadership. CAP Regulations require every cadet unit to have at least 2 adults with TLC. The more TLC qualified adults in a unit, the better the unit performs.
6.2.	Aerospace Education Activities (AEX)	QCUA	This selection criterion measures use of CAP Aerospace Education curricular materials. It gives credit for conducting one or more AEX programs in the unit during the year, and credit for ordering a STEM Kit and curriculum and using it with cadets.
6.3	Competitive Outside Activities	QCUA CE	This selection criterion measures participation in outside activities and competitions by cadets. It gives credit for competing in RRLA program, credit for participation in the AFA CyberPatriot competition, Color Guard competition, other cadet competitions, and credit for participation in the AFA StellarXplorers competition.
6.4	General Emergency Services %	QCUA	Another key indicator for success is that cadets who participate in ES activities during their first year are 2x more likely to retain their membership than cadets who don't. This selection criterion measures the number of cadets who earn their General Emergency Services (GES) qualification.
6.5	Annual Cadet Testing Index (calculated)	COTT	The Annual Test Index measures the average number of achievement tests taken per cadet during the year. It is an excellent measure of cadet program productivity and quality.

SOM - Squadron of Merit Report Jan 21 - **MSR** - Membership Statistical Report - **MRR** - Membership Roster Report - **TLC** - TLC Report

COTT - Cadet Organization Tests Taken - **COR** - Cadet Orientation Report - **COBR** - Cadet Orientation Backseat Report - **CE** - Team Evidence

2020 ADJUSTMENTS TO KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

From year-to-year special conditions may require the modification of specific performance criteria. In 2020, the effects of the pandemic on Cadet unit operations resulted in National Headquarters removing certain QCUA criteria. This fact, and questions about some of the QCUA data, resulted in dropping a few key performance indicators from consideration. These excluded performance indicators are depicted with a gray background, above. A separate new indicator for membership growth based on the annual SOM report was added.

Command Preferences - In addition to these changes, just for 2020 (and revisited every year from here forward), the Wing Commander had a set of additional criteria he wanted to be taken into consideration. These included the following command preference items:

- Participation in COVID-19 missions- performance indicator added for 2020 SOM.
- Participation in Wing Color Guard Competition - added to existing performance indicator 6.3.
- Virtual Meetings to replace face-to-face meetings- performance indicator added for 2020 SOM.
- Additional performance items to be determined (2021 and beyond): other Wing-wide activities to be considered include participation in the NYW AE Competition, active participation in Cadet Advisory Council (CAC), and other future NYW activities.

SELECTION OF SQUADRON OF MERIT:

Presented with the top 3-5 high scoring candidate units, with their full scores, the Wing Commander makes a final selection for the NY Wing Squadron of Merit. The selected unit is presented the SOM award elements at an appropriate time. By 15 February, the Wing must forward its SOM selection, accompanied by a recommendation for the Squadron of Distinction Award to Northeast Region, with a copy to National Headquarters.