NATIONAL CADET SPECIAL ACTIVITIES
2008

POINT OF CONTACT:
Curt LaFond
Chief, Cadet Programs
clafond@cap.gov
877.227.9142 x 401

What is the fairest way to slot 3,000 applicants for National Cadet Special Activities when only 1,200 cadets can be accommodated?

PROBLEMS WITH THE EXISTING SYSTEM

A. It is difficult to slot cadets from different wings fairly. California submits 50 names; Rhode Island submits 5. Who takes priority, the California #6 cadet or the Rhode Island #3?

B. Cadets have been slotted for multiple activities while other deserving cadets were not slotted for anything.

CRITERIA

A. Need an objective way to rack and stack cadets, nation-wide, across regions and wings.

B. Need to allow wings some subjectivity and flexibility so that they help CAP identify the most deserving cadets and ensure those cadets are slotted for one of their favorite activities.

C. Need to consider variables that are important in cadet's eyes, such as their rank and time in CAP – a simple lottery with the luck of the draw picking winners would be unlikely to win support.

D. IACE and CLA will continue to be somewhat exempt from the system due to their special needs. Hawk will continue to be slotted by PAWG.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

What is the fairest way around this problem? The Cadet Team at National Headquarters believes the solution described below is the best way forward. We're sharing this idea with the cadet community to obtain feedback and get buy-in. Tell us what you think.

1. Adopt a Scoring System

Each applicant would receive a point score based on how they perform against objective criteria. Call this total their "*NCSA point score*." Possible criteria include:

Age: Preference would be awarded to older cadets over younger cadets. A 19 year old might earn 10 points, while a 14 year old might earn just 2 points. A college-aged applicant may have only one summer remaining as a cadet, while a middle-schooler has several cadet summers before him.

Prior Activities: Preference would be awarded to cadets who have attended few, if any NCSAs, over cadets who have already attended several NCSAs. A cadet who is yet to attend an NCSA might earn 10 points, while a cadet who has attended four NCSAs might earn zero. This helps the NCSA program reach as many cadets as possible.

Rank: Preference would be awarded to higher-ranking cadets over lower-ranking cadets. An Earhart cadet might earn 8 points, while an airman might earn zero points. In this way, NCSAs reward cadets for working hard and achieving in the overall Cadet Program progression system.

Service: Preference would be awarded for long-time cadet members over newcomers. A cadet with a clasp on their Red Service might earn 10 points, while a cadet who just joined might earn zero points. Cadets who have participated actively for many years should find a place toward the head of the line, in front of cadets who just arrived.

Note Regarding Encampment: Further, because demand for NCSAs is high, and the supply of slots is scarce, NHQ is changing the NCSA eligibility criteria. Beginning this year, cadets must have completed an encampment *at the time of application*. Previously, we allowed cadets to attend encampment in say, June, and then attend an NCSA in July. It would be great if we could accommodate every highly-motivated new cadet, but because demand overpowers supply, CAP needs to make this change to the eligibility criteria.

2. Grant Wings "Green Light" and "Red Light" Privileges

Each wing would "green light" 10% of their NCSA applicants (at least one green light per wing). This allows the wing to ensure the most deserving cadets are slotted before all others.

A. Wings would use their green light power in whatever way they think is best. There is no set criteria. Green-lighting is a judgment call for the wing to make.

B. Wings would continue to exercise their "red light" power, whereby they disapprove a cadet's NCSA application because of that cadet's attitude, performance, or some other meaningful factor observed at the local level. Likewise, wings would continue to stamp "approved" on the applications of the vast majority of cadets applying for NCSAs.

C. However, wings would no longer need to rank order their cadets, as they have done for the past few years. The objective scoring system outlined above accomplishes that task.

Put another way, wings retain the option of holding or not holding NCSA selection boards. If a board is held, the board's main tasks become identifying (1) who to green light, (2) who to approve and (3) who to red light.

3. Racking and Stacking at National Headquarters

National Headquarters would place all cadet applications into one of three "buckets" (metaphorically speaking – software accomplishes this task.)

Bucket #1 would contain all green-lighted cadets, racked and stacked by their NCSA point scores.

Bucket #2 would contain all approved cadets – applicants who were not green-lighted and were not red-lighted. These cadets comprise the bulk of all NCSA applicants and would be racked and stacked by their NCSA point scores.

Bucket #3 would contain all red-lighted cadets. National Headquarters would ensure these cadets would not be slotted for a NCSA.

4. Slotting at National Headquarters

National Headquarters would then use software to slot cadets according to their (1) bucket and (2) place in line within that bucket.

A. For example, the first cadet to slotted would be the green-lighted cadet who earned the highest NCSA point score. This cadet is guaranteed to go to her first choice activity. Next comes the green-lighted cadet who earned the second highest NCSA point score among the green-light cadets. This process continues until all green-lighted cadets are slotted to go somewhere.

But, there is no guarantee that a green-light cadet will be slotted for their first choice activity – after all, what if lots of green-light cadets want to go to E-Tech, which can accommodate just 20 cadets? Therefore, NHQ will ask every cadet to name at least three activities they want to attend, so it's fair to say that every green-light cadet will get to go to one of their favorite activities.

B. Second, having slotted all green-light cadets, NHQ would then slot the great bulk of NCSA applicants, the "approved" cadets of bucket #2. The cadet with the highest NCSA point score would be slotted first, followed by the cadet with the second highest score, etc. It is possible for high scoring cadets in this group to be placed on an alternate's list and not earn a slot as a primary for an NCSA – again, this is a function of what activities the cadet applied for and how popular those activities were among the green-lighted cadets and the other cadets who scored higher than him. Not to belabor the point but to be clear: what activities a cadet applies for will always be a big factor in their slotting. It would be conceivable for the highest ranked cadet in bucket #2 to not attend *any* NCSAs, while the lowest ranked cadet in bucket #2 lucks-out and goes to three NCSAs.

C. Most cadets will apply for multiple activities. Unless they are red-lighted, they would be placed on the alternate's list for every activity they want to attend and were not slotted for.

This alternate's list would itself be racked and stacked. Preference would be given to cadets who were not primaries at any other activities. These alternates who are thus far attending zero activities would be racked and stacked according to their NCSA point score. NHQ would

instruct activity directors to offer slots to these cadets, in rank order, should one of the primary cadets drop out. The second tier of the alternate's list would be comprised of cadets who are already slotted to go to some other NCSA. These cadets would be rank-ordered by their NCSA score, with green-light cadets at the front of the line. In other words, the alternate list can be managed such that we try to give each cadet one slot before any cadet receives two slots.

5. Manipulating the NCSA Point Score System

A. Exactly how many points should a cadet earn if they have an Earhart, versus a Wright Brothers Award? How many points for having 3.4 years of service in CAP, versus 2.6 years of service? Reasonable people can disagree on the scoring system's finer points. From a national perspective, what is important is that (a) the scoring system be applied consistently to all cadets and (b) the cadets' scores be distributed in a bell curve.

B. It is conceivable that NHQ's first attempt at generating NCSA point scores will not produce a bell curve. That distribution may be left-skewed or right-skewed in such a way that the racking and stacking is unworkable. In other words, we can't have a system where all 3,000 applicants each receive say, 68 points. Therefore, NHQ needs to reserve the prerogative of tinkering with the scoring criteria – 9 points for a Mitchell, 7 for a Wright Brothers . . . wait, make that 5 for a Wright Brothers – to produce a distribution that resembles a bell curve. If this becomes necessary, NHQ will manipulate the scoring system in the fairest way possible, but of course we need cadets and their leaders to trust that we'll be acting in good faith.

6. Conclusion: The Allocation of Scare Resources

Economists call their trade, "the dismal science." They define economics as "the allocation of scarce resources." That is the task facing CAP as we try to slot 3,000 deserving cadets who want to attend a NCSA when there are only 1,200 slots for those fabulous summer programs. By adopting an objective scoring system, coupled with some flexibility through a "green light" privilege at the wing level, CAP can allocate NCSA slots in a manner that might not be perfect, but at least would be fair.