



6/20/2024

TALKING PAPER ON

AIR & SPACE FORCES ASSOCIATION

ADVOCATES TO INSPIRE MILITARY SERVICE (AFA AIMS)

This Talking Paper is intended to familiarize AFA leaders at all levels with the AFA AIMS program so that they can help implement it and will be able to discuss it with members, particularly at the Chapter level. It may be helpful to use it in conjunction with the AIMS Orientation Powerpoint briefing

Update 6/15/24: The AIMS web site is now operational at <https://www.afa.org/aims/> or under the ADVOCATE menu on <https://www.afa.org/>

Background: In FY23 the Air Force missed recruiting goals by about 10% (2,877 vs 27,944 goal). Following a discussion at the March 2023 Warfare Symposium, AFA Chairman Bernie Skoch chartered a Recruiting Task Force (RTF) to develop a strategy to help AFA members and Chapters assist the recruiting effort. While there are many environmental factors (e.g. low unemployment) which affect recruiting, the RTF determined there are two main societal factors:

- **Eligibility:** Only 23% of youth of service age (17-25) are qualified to serve due to things like physical fitness, medical problems, academic issues and legal problems
- **Propensity:** Only 9% of youth say they have any interest in serving or any knowledge of the military. Most have never met anyone who served and, in many cases, neither have those who influence them: parents, coaches, teachers, neighbors, pastors, etc.

The RTF concluded there is little AFA members and chapters can do to influence Eligibility (although there may be some things corporate AFA can do); however, there are things we can do to influence Propensity because we are active as individuals and chapters in our communities and have opportunities to tell our stories and inspire service.

AFA and Air Force Recruiting Service: AFRS has professional recruiters who work tirelessly to meet our recruiting goals. AFA wants to assist our recruiters by establishing relationships between chapters and Recruiting Squadrons and sharing ideas on how we can best assist their efforts. To be clear, we are not asking our members to be recruiters, but to be advocates and “influencers” who work to reach that 91% of our young men and women—and their parents, teachers, and neighbors-- who have no knowledge of what we do or why it’s important.

What is AFA AIMS? AIMS is an AFA program to encourage chapters and members to become active in support of the recruiting effort. A few key points:

- AFRS predicts that in FY24 they will make goal; however, the factors which produced the FY23 problem are still active and the trends are unfavorable. This is not a short-term problem, and we believe AFA needs to see this as a long-term part of its core mission, much like the Educate-Advocate-Support mission elements.
- As in everything we do, Chapters will have different capabilities and resources to devote to the AIMS effort. There is no pass-fail grade. We encourage chapters and individuals to



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participate as time and energy allow. In many cases this can be as simple as talking to friends and neighbors about service. In fact, the AIMS “bumper sticker is *“Tell Your Story”*

- Cooperation between Chapters and Recruiting Squadrons may be helpful. At the suggestion of AFRS, AFA and AFRS developed a Letter of Intent which establishes a partnership between the organizations and provides some guidelines and suggests some lines of effort. AFRS leadership is highly supportive of this effort and has cited the partnership in testimony to Congress. It’s important for both sides to have realistic expectations: recruiters and busy people and Chapters may not have the resources to assist, so this will be an evolving relationship.
- **The Chapter Map and OIDB.** AFRS asked for a Chapter locator so that recruiters can contact chapters in their vicinity. On the AIMS web page, you’ll see an interactive map showing AFA Chapters, AFA members and AFRS squadrons with pins the show contact information when clicked. This map does not show all chapters, only those (and members) who have specifically volunteered to assist recruiters by registering through the **Opt-In/Out Database (OIDB)**. The OIDB has three functions.
 - It allows chapters (and individuals) interested in working with recruiters to so indicate. This will help prevent recruiters from wasting their time trying to contact inactive chapters.
 - It allows chapters to specify what information will be displayed. At a minimum, chapter names/numbers and Presidents’ AFA email will be displayed. We also encourage provision of names and phone numbers of the chapter President or POC as a phone call is usually faster than an email.
 - It allows chapters and individuals no longer willing or able to work with recruiters to Opt-Out of the data base.
- **The AIMS Tool Box:** The last part of the AIMS web page is the AIMS Tool Box (ATB). Most of us can deliver a speech on the Air Force at a Rotary Club, but to do it effectively, with current and correct information, would likely require some research and preparation, especially where the Space Force is concerned. The AIMS Tool Box is designed to provide a set of resources to help members be effective advocates for our Air & Space Forces, whether it’s a Rotary Club speech, or a conversation with neighbors, or career day at a school. The initial AIMS Tool Box will be pretty basic at start-up but it will grow and evolve over time. Our hope is that members will contribute to the Tool Box so that with time, we’ll have a growing archive of tools to help us inspire service.

How Do We Know If We’re Being Effective. This is a long-term problem, and results will be hard to measure; however, every Airman or Guardian is important and often it’s just one contact or conversation that makes a difference in a young person’s life. **Inspiration** is just as important to our Services as are the other AFA mission elements: **Educate, Advocate and Support.**

How Do we Encourage Participation and Recognize Effort? AIMS competes with all the other things we do in AFA and members and chapters are only going to support it if AFA demonstrates it’s a priority; the field leadership supports it; members are convinced it’s important; and hard work is recognized and rewarded. Consequently, we plan to

- Brief the AFA leadership and Board of Directors



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- Provide AIMS information briefings for the Field Leaders, Regional Presidents and State Presidents
- Provide regular updates in the AF Magazine and AFA in Action
- Include AIMS on Activity Plans and Reports in 2025, probably as a component of Advocacy
- Establish an AIMS Exceptional Service Award starting in 2025

What You Can Do:

- **First, give the AIMS material an honest look** and consider what you and your Chapter can do. Consider registering your chapter on the **Opt-In/Out Data Base (OIDB)** so recruiters will know you're willing to assist if they need help. Your chapter program doesn't have to be big or formal, but helping recruit a quality force is one of the most important things that we as AFA members can do. See if the AIMS Tool Box can help you be a better advocate. You don't need to be an expert on every issue, but the more familiar you are with the questions that might come up, the more credible you'll be.
- **Seek opportunities to tell your story.** One of the reasons why so few young men and women are interested in military service today is that many of them have never met anyone who served and have no reference for what military service is about and why it's important. And the same may hold true for those who influence them--their moms and dads, coaches, teachers and neighbors—who are a generation removed from the days when everyone knew someone who served. We can help because we are active in our communities, in many cases are veterans or know veterans, and are supporters of our Air & Space Forces. We can help fill that knowledge gap by reaching out in our communities, telling our stories and being ***advocates who help inspire military service***.
- **Reach out and meet your local recruiters** and look for opportunities to involve them in the community and make introductions. We're in the process of developing a template for Chapter-Squadron cooperation, but it all starts with communication, so get to know your recruiters.
- **Provide feedback.** If you have something that would make our Tool Box better, let us know. If you have a great Chapter outreach program, good ideas, suggestions, or just a speech you like, [contact](#) us and we'll get it in the Tool Box.