



LEADERSHIP PROFILE



Chief Development Officer
Air Force Association
Arlington, VA

“AFA at 75: Revitalizing for a New Era”

--theme of AFA’s strategic plan, 2021-2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For 75 years, the [Air Force Association](#) has been the nation’s premier independent civilian organization championing the world’s finest Air Force. Incorporated in February 1946 and initially led by noted aviation pioneer and Medal of Honor recipient General Jimmy Doolittle, AFA quickly became a leading voice and critical resource for an extensive array of stakeholders.

Over the years, individual programs have evolved, but the mission has not wavered: “To promote dominant U.S. Air and Space Forces as the foundation of a strong National Defense; to honor and support our Airmen, Guardians, and their Families; and to remember and



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respect our enduring Heritage.”¹ As noted in AFA’s five-year strategic plan adopted by the Board of Directors earlier this year, “For 75 years the Air Force Association has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the U.S. Air Force to educate, advocate, and support every aspect of dominant air, space, and cyberspace power.”

The need for AFA’s capabilities, voice and influence has never been greater, nor has the need for the resources to support those capabilities been more pressing. Accordingly, AFA’s President, with the full support of the Board, has authorized the present search for a Chief Development Officer who can help realize the bold aspirations summarized in the strategic plan, [“AFA at 75: Revitalizing for a New Era.”](#)

THE ORGANIZATION

The Air Force Association is a volunteer-led, professionally managed nonprofit with over 97,000 members and some 200 local and regional chapters across the country. Its annual revenues of about \$20 million are derived from a mix of member dues, program fees, sponsorships and contributions.

Programmatically, AFA is highly regarded for numerous world-class programs and initiatives. For example:

- The [Annual Air, Space & Cyber Conference](#), held each September, typically draws some 20,000 attendees in non-pandemic years. Recent conferences have featured such luminaries as Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson, Elon Musk, Sir Richard Branson, Jeff Bezos, Mark Cuban and the Vice President of the United States.
- The [2021 Virtual Aerospace Warfare Symposium](#), held this past February, drew over 5000 registrants with 130 speakers and 39 panels and presentations, 21 of them live.
- [Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies](#), a nonpartisan research organization, provides fact-based policy options for the nation’s leaders. The Mitchell Institute has enjoyed especially robust growth in recent years.



¹ The newest branch of the U.S. Armed Services, the Space Force was established within the Department of the Air Force in 2019.

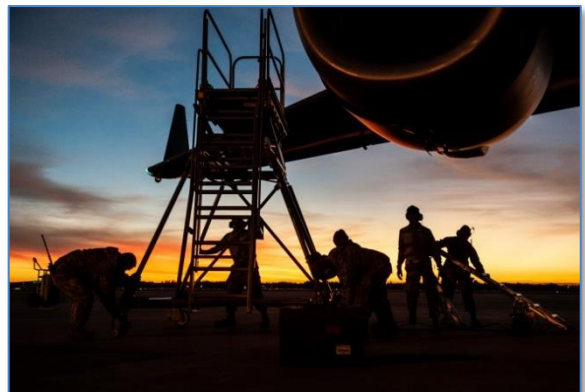
- [CyberPatriot](#), AFA’s Youth Cyber Education program, inspires K-12 students’ interest in careers in cybersecurity and other STEM disciplines. To date, CyberPatriot and its sister program, [StellarXplorers](#), have reached some 80,000 students.
- [Wounded Airman Program](#), “Airmen taking care of Airmen,” supports the 11,000 Airmen enrolled in the Air Force Wounded Warrior program and their families.
- The [General James Doolittle Leadership Center](#), one of AFA’s newest leadership initiatives, provides focused outreach and opportunities for collaboration between rising Air Force leaders, AFA volunteers, and AFA industry partners. Proposed in late 2019, the launch of the Doolittle Center slipped because of the pandemic. Its potential is therefore yet to be realized, but interest in this aspirational program is solid.



Enveloping and amplifying all these programs and more is a rich array of publications and newsletters, such as the [Daily Report](#), the monthly [Air Force Magazine](#), and the annual [USAF Almanac](#). Together, these publications and the messages they convey reflect the professionalism and reach of an organization many times the size of AFA.

In pre-pandemic 2019, AFA’s revenues were just under \$21 million, per IRS filings, of which contributions of all kinds totaled nearly \$8 million and program service revenues were just over \$10 million. Event revenue was off substantially in 2020 because of the pandemic, but other revenue held steady; combined with aggressive expense management (but no salary cuts), AFA showed a gratifying surplus at the end of the year.

AFA’s staff of 66 is led by President [Bruce “Orville” Wright](#) and Executive Vice President [Doug Raaberg](#). Both Wright, a retired three-star Air Force general, and Raaberg, a retired two-star, spent about a decade in leadership roles in the private sector before joining AFA in early 2019, and both are central to the revitalization efforts currently underway.



Rounding out the executive team are the CFO; the VP, Member & Field Relations (who also serves as Interim Chief Development Officer), the Chief of Staff and the Senior Director, Human Resources/Administration.

The Air Force Association is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, nine members of which are elected by chapter-based delegates and up to three of which are appointed by the Chair of the Board. The current chair, Gerald Murray, a former Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, has focused considerable attention during his term on ensuring that board members have the tools and the resources to leverage their passion for the mission as productively as possible.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The Air Force Association is blessed with passionate volunteers, a committed staff, a history of first-class programs and events, and aspirations for greater impact on behalf of its mission and constituents. The missing component: A comprehensive development function—and a Chief Development Officer—capable of supporting AFA’s ambitious strategy with the resources and relationships that strategy requires.

For example:

- Corporate support is central to AFA’s success, and the organization is blessed with a number of major long-term investors. Even so, much of the outreach is transactional rather than strategic, the product of requests to fund this event or that exhibit rather than the result of true strategic alignment. With the right leadership and discipline, there is a real opportunity to bring cohesion to what is now a rather fragmented approach while also helping AFA and key supporters shift from a funding-based strategy to strategy-based funding.
- AFA’s historic emphasis on large annual events has yielded significant benefits, but the pandemic showed the downside of such dependence even as it highlighted opportunities for different kinds of engagement.
- In part because AFA has enjoyed significant, long-term support from a handful of core sponsors, the organization has never undertaken a comprehensive assessment of potential revenue streams. As AFA graduates from a reactive focus on revenues that is largely transaction-



Air Force Memorial outside Washington, DC, an effort led by AFA

based, a careful assessment of potential revenue streams will be integral to a more proactive strategy.

- Like many associations, AFA has experienced a decline in membership in recent years. How to motivate young men and women—active duty and veterans alike—to share enthusiasm for AFA’s work is an ongoing challenge. And with just one in three of its 97,000 members supporting AFA with a contribution beyond their dues, the opportunity to leverage a group already engaged seems very real.

What AFA deserves, and what its leadership wants, is a pervasive culture of philanthropy in which resource development is understood to be a shared responsibility, not just the purview of one executive or one department. Reinforcing such a culture will take a special leader, a player/coach who knows when to step up and when to step back, balancing long-term goals while managing short-term priorities.

AFA’s core leadership, both paid and volunteer, is ready to embrace a relational approach to development. The commitment to “educate, advocate and support” is pervasive and unquestioned, but very few individuals in current staff or board leadership roles have direct experience in developing or leading a comprehensive development strategy. A Chief Development Officer with the tenacity, creativity and patience to navigate such an environment will have an opportunity for lasting impact with consequences far beyond the walls of the Air Force Association.



For further information, visit AFA’s extensive [website](#), emblematic of the range of services offered to its various constituencies. We invite a careful reading of the [2021-2026 strategic plan](#), wherein the links between development and strategy are explicit and mutually reinforcing.

THE LOCATION

The Air Force Association is headquartered in its own building in Arlington, VA. Future plans include the prospect of a major capital campaign to support acquisition or development of headquarters more aligned with AFA’s mission and needs.

THE RELATIONSHIPS

<i>The CDO reports to</i>	AFA’s President and Executive Vice President
<i>And works closely with</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair and members of the AFA Board’s Development Committee • Other volunteer leaders
<i>Senior peers include</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Financial Officer • Chief of Staff • Dean, Mitchell Institute • Director, Human Resources/Administration • Editor-in-Chief, Air Force Magazine • Vice President, Member & Field Relations
<i>Current development staff (an evolving team):</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director, Media Solutions • Senior Manager, Exhibits & Event Sponsorship • Manager, Individual Giving • Coordinator, Individual Giving
<i>Other key relationships:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AFA Board of Directors • AFA program heads and staff • Corporate partners, current and potential • Staff and leaders within the Department of the Air Force • Outside development counsel and vendors

THE MANDATE

The AFA’s Chief Development Officer will inherit a mandate with several overlapping priorities:

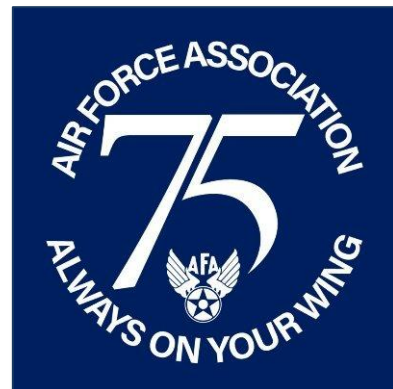
- **Relationships.** “Relationships are king” at AFA, and it is critical that the CDO be adept at building or strengthening relationships with core constituencies, including Department of Air Force leadership, corporate and industry partners, volunteer leadership, AFA chapters, members themselves—not to mention one’s own colleagues within the AFA itself. Such efforts will benefit from implementation of basic disciplines common to well-run development offices, augmented by the development of comprehensive customer strategies.



- **Assessment.** A careful assessment of AFA’s revenue potential could have enormous potential, as it would undergird the push for more strategic relationships with partners and investors.
- **Consolidation and cohesion.** Similarly, AFA will benefit from a cohesive development strategy that honors existing relationships and histories without promoting a natural tendency to silos. There is understandable pride of authorship in existing practices and expectations; channeling that pride in new ways will take a deft hand.
- **People development.** AFA has not invested in its development team in some time. The current team of subordinates is eager to perform, but they are also hungry for leadership. Taking the long view, the CDO will be expected to model a pattern of professional development in which the team balances long-term goals with short-term needs, letting neither take precedence at the expense of the other.

Beyond the development department, the opportunity to model a culture of philanthropy is huge, as will be the payoffs from success.

Balancing the strategic imperative of a comprehensive development plan with solid implementation tactics will be essential to long-term success.



To succeed in this hands-on, can-do environment, the CDO must be both strategist and project manager, proactively aligning AFA’s needs with the needs of donors and program partners.

Accordingly, the Chief Development Officer must be prepared to

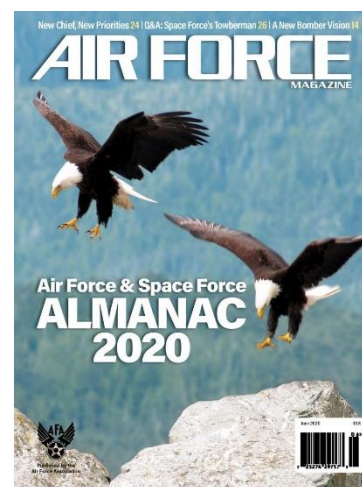
- *Partner* with other members of the senior team and the board in collaborative pursuit of strategic goals, especially those requiring outside financial support.

- *Intuit* AFA's story, finding creative and compelling ways to make that story tangible for individual and institutional stakeholders.
- *Ensure* the processes and activities of the development office support achievement of long-term development goals while meeting short-term priorities.
- *Reinforce* a philanthropic culture across the organization and its supporters to ensure the sustainability of AFA's special brand of education and advocacy.
- *Develop* a network of relationships that complement and support those already in place. the capability, capacity and credibility to initiate and sustain many
- *Guide and strengthen* AFA's development department so that it becomes consistently respected for impact and effectiveness.

THE CANDIDATE

Expertise: The ideal candidate will offer...

- A record of clear success in strengthening and leading a comprehensive development strategy in an aspirational context, ideally with the level of complexity inherent at AFA
- A facility for balancing projects and priorities within a strategic framework
- Demonstrated respect for the difference an energized development function can make in an otherwise mature institution
- Experience working with boards, especially with boards relatively new to fundraising
- The discipline of an experienced development leader and the willingness to get one's hands dirty; a player/coach mentality
- Experience with both ongoing fundraising initiatives and significant capital campaigns
- Experience cultivating industry partnerships, sponsorships and exhibitor sales, all critical components of AFA's revenue streams with significant untapped potential.



Culture: AFA seeks a CDO who exhibits...

- Change-agent leadership
- A collegial operating style informed by passion for the mission and respect for the culture; not necessarily a military veteran, but someone at one with AFA's core purpose
- A nose for strategy and a gift for execution
- Flexibility, creativity and tenacity in pursuit of agreed-upon goals
- The ability to work with lots of different people and constituencies; someone who meets people where they are as the first step in achieving overall goals
- An understanding of both the art and science of development
- An infectious personal commitment to philanthropic engagement.

The leadership of AFA will be receptive to a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Appealing career paths could include service in other small-but-mighty nonprofits, associations, academic environments or the corporate sector, especially aerospace and related fields.

**For potential consideration or to recommend a prospect,
please email appropriate materials to
AFA@BoardWalkConsulting.com
or call
Sam Pettway or Diane Westmore at
(404) BoardWalk (404-262-7392).**
