

AIR FORCE & SPACE FORCE

HOPE LEADER'S GUIDE

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**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF CHAPLAINS
PLANS & PROGRAMS DIVISION**



Every Warfighter...Spiritually Fit and Ready!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO HOPE

Background

HOPE originated as the operationalization of the White Rope program. The White Rope program has long served training bases, equipping volunteers to invest in Airmen and Guardians and their units in ways that leave a lasting impact. As visible beacons of hope, White Ropes connect young Airmen or Guardians to Chapel ministry and programs while helping them flourish as they discover their value, purpose, and meaning.

The success of the White Rope Program in Air Education and Training Command (AETC), the growing demand for Chaplain Corps (HC) support in distributed, geographically separated and austere environments, and the emergence of Agile Combat Employment (ACE) and Deployable Combat Wings (DCWs), led operational bases to create their own versions of a White Rope program. Thus, HOPE was born out of operational necessity and the White Rope program concept.

The current iteration of the HOPE Spiritual Fitness Initiative is the product of years of vision, experimentation, and refinement. It reflects the hard work of HC teams and leaders from across the Department of the Air Force (DAF) who have invested their time, creativity, and expertise to build a capability that enhances total warfighter readiness by developing spiritual fitness to promote spiritual readiness (SF/SR) and revive the Warrior Ethos of Airmen and Guardians.

This initiative brings together lessons from generations of ministry, current academic research, and HC leadership, fusing them into a structured, mission-focused approach to cultivating hope, spirituality, volunteerism, peer leadership, connection, and community involvement across the DAF. It also provides units with embedded caregivers and trusted referral resources who strengthens connection, care, and resilience at the unit level.

As an HC spiritual fitness capability, it is not a requirement that Installation senior Religious Support Teams (sRSTs) implement a HOPE Program. However, to ensure requirements are met and standardization among HOPE Programs across the DAF, if a HOPE Program is stood up at an Installation it will adhere to the guidelines of this HOPE Spiritual Fitness Initiative Leader's Guide.

What is HOPE?

In accordance with (IAW) Department of the Air Force Instruction (DAFI) 52-101.5.3., HOPE is a HC volunteer spiritual fitness, connection, and spectrum of resilience initiative that functions in all DAF mission sets (e.g., training and operational missions). HOPE meets Title 10 Congressional, Department of War (DOW), DAF, and HC Senior Leader guidance and directives and aligns with HC Lines of Effort. Furthermore, HOPE is authorized as a core spiritual fitness capability for Religious Affairs Airmen IAW Department of the Air Force Enlisted Classification Directory (DAFECD), 30 April 2025, Religious Affairs, Section 2.2.1. In summary, HOPE is designed to operationalize LOE 1, Fortifying the Warfighter Spirit, while accomplishing LOE 2, Develop HC Leaders and Capabilities.

Operationalizing HC LOE 1: Fortifying the Warfighter Spirit

HOPE promotes and serves as a critical pathway to enhance Spiritual Fitness (SF). SF is deeply rooted in the need for and connection to the transcendent, the sacred and/or significant, others, meaning, service, and shared purpose. These elements are essential for flourishing and maintaining a lethal-ready force capable of facing the complexities of Large-Scale Combat Operations and daily operations.¹ Ultimately, HOPE provides commanders and supervisors with a proven capability to reduce the risk of mission failure.² It does so by challenging members to explore and expand their own SF and lead others, which positively impacts human flourishing.³

HOPE Specialists are organized, equipped, and trained to identify and connect hurting members to professional caregivers.

HOPE builds meaningful communities. Another way HOPE operationalizes LOE 1 is by uniting Airmen and Guardians of diverse backgrounds in communities to support a common cause. Meaningful collective action and self-less service is a proven strategy to develop spiritual fitness and imbue life with meaning.⁴ HOPE provides Airmen and Guardians a place to discover and exercise their purpose and find meaningful connection through collective action and self-sacrificial service. Moreover, loneliness in the U.S. has reached epidemic levels, with the highest rates among young adults.⁵ HOPE creates and sustains communities to reverse the downward trend of the American cultural proclivity toward social isolation. Toward this end, HOPE Specialists are trained and empowered to forge connections within the context of HC programs and ministry.

HOPE forges meaningful relationships. Finally, people who join together in meaningful communities with others often share a sense of purpose, meaning, identity, and mission that forges powerful relationships.⁶ These relationships promote individual resilience and provide life-sustaining support in times

of extreme stress.⁷ The most critical factor in overcoming stress is having a trusted, supportive person to turn to in times of distress.⁸ This is what HOPE does. It creates trusted caregivers in the unit and has proven effective regardless of whether one is religious, non-religious, theist and/or non-theist.

Accomplishing HC LOE 2: Develop Chaplain Corps Leaders and Capabilities

HOPE provides leadership experience. HOPE is not only a HC capability designed to enhance unit mission effectiveness and strengthen the SF of Airmen and Guardians, but also a developmental pathway for HC staff, Airmen, and Guardians. Running a HOPE program provides HC staff and base personnel with the opportunity to grow as leaders. It allows RSTs to hone critical program management skills such as volunteer coordination, planning, stakeholder engagement, and cross-functional collaboration. Most importantly, it offers a relatively low-risk environment to practice the often challenging, but essential skill of leading both up and down the chain of command, preparing HC personnel for greater responsibilities in future assignments.

Who Runs HOPE?

Oversight: *If* HOPE is implemented at a base, IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3.2, oversight (implementation and maintenance) is provided by the Wing, Delta, or Installation HC team. MAJCOM/FLDCOM/DRU HC teams will review HOPE Spiritual Fitness programs within their areas of responsibility once every two years.

Program Management/Leadership: IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3.2.2., the Wing, Delta, or Installation HC team will identify a HOPE RST to manage/lead the day-to-day operations of the program.

Supervision/Mentorship: IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3.2.7, the Wing, Delta, or Installation HC team will mentor and coach with the Superintendent/NCOIC, Religious Affairs, the managing HOPE RST on the planning and execution of the program.

Unit RST Integration: IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3.4. each respective unit RST will recruit and assist the managing of the HOPE RST in training and maintaining accountability of respective unit volunteers in accordance with local policy/Handbook.

Bottom Line: HOPE is an HC team effort.

Who can be a HOPE Specialist?

IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3. Prospective members must be at least 18 years old to participate. Moreover, potential HOPE volunteers serving in operational settings do not require prior experience as a technical training or United States Air Force Academy White Rope or similar initiative to participate. These are the minimum requirements.

IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3., in addition to the minimum requirements, “Who can be a HOPE Specialist,” is ultimately determined by the sRST and based on the unique needs and mission requirements of each respective location. There is nothing prohibiting you from running a HOPE Program for “just” first-term Airmen or Guardians, NCOs, Officers, active-duty members, or literally any other combination of personnel at your base both military and civilian. The scope, duration, and scale of the HOPE Program at your Installation is entirely up to you.

Selection Process

DAFI 52-101 does not mandate what a HOPE Program selection process will and/or should look like. However, as part of a selection process, DAFI 52-101.5.3.3.1. states that applicants will receive an application packet, which requires endorsement from their leadership and supervisor to become a HOPE Specialist. IAW DAFI 52-101.5.2., this application packet will, at minimum, include:

1. Statement of Understanding
2. Non-disclosure Agreement
3. DD Form 2793 – Volunteer Agreement for Appropriated Fund Activities & Non-Appropriated Fund Instrumentalities
4. HOPE Handbook

In addition to the volunteer documents, IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3.3.1., your application packet should include a Handbook that sets standards and volunteer requirements. HCX has created a standardized HOPE Handbook to meet this requirement. Relevant places are editable for you to customize it according to your installation and mission.

All these documents are available on the [HOPE Spiritual Fitness Initiative page](#) of the HC Resource Hub under the title “Application Packet.” These are the minimum application requirements for HOPE. If your team has additional requirements for chapel volunteers as per local policy, please include them as part of your package. The key point is that HOPE Specialists are chapel volunteers and as such must satisfy DAFI 52-101.5. volunteer requirements and any additional local policy requirements.

Who is a HOPE Specialist?

In summary, a HOPE Specialist is a chapel volunteer, 18 years or older, who has met the requirements outlined in DAFI 52-101.5.3, applicable/additional local policy, and the HOPE Handbook. **An individual is formally designated a “HOPE Specialist” once they have completed the minimum requirements for the Special Experience Identifier (SEI) and any additional local policy requirements if applicable.** This ensures that every HOPE Specialist receives the same, standardized core training and is fully prepared to carry out the responsibilities of the role. The SEI and program training requirements will be outlined in greater detail in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2: HOPE TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3. HOPE Specialists provide support through modeling and contributing to healthy relationships, participating in spiritual fitness activities and care networks, fostering peer-to-peer care, and referrals. Further, HOPE Specialists will develop their Air Force Foundational Competencies and their Airman Leadership Qualities to further broaden their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Training

To meet the requirements of DAFI 52-101, Department of the Air Force Enlisted Classification Directory (DAFECD), 30 Apr 25, Sub-Attachment Section III Enlisted SEIs, and the Department of the Air Force Officer Classification Directory (DAFOCD), 30 Apr 25, Sub-Attachment III, Officer Experience Sets, HOPE utilizes two separate training tracks: (1) Core Training & (2) Recurring Training.

(1) Core Training

If a HC team implements HOPE, the core training specified in this Leader’s Guide is required prior to any person being awarded the HOPE SEI and thus being designated a “HOPE Specialist.” To meet the requirements of DAFI 52-101 5.3.3.2., DAFECD, and DAFOCD, core training consists of twenty (20) credit hours of training and a four (4) month trial period. This is the minimum requirement for core training. If you wish to include additional training to supplement the core training, please feel free to do so.

The HOPE core training, which establishes the program’s core competencies, was developed by the Air Force Chaplain Corp College in collaboration with the AETC-approved “Airmanship 200” curriculum. Apart from SafeTALK and ASIST, the curriculum and training materials, including facilitator guides, instructional videos, and PowerPoints, for the required core training modules have been created and provided to you on the [HC Resource Hub](#).

HOPE Core Training (20 credit hours):

- HOPE Foundations + Onboarding - 2 credit hours
- HOPE Listening Skills- 1 credit hour
- HOPE Moral Reasoning- 1 credit hour
- HOPE Privileged Communication- 1 credit hour
- HOPE Relationship Building- 1 credit hour
- HOPE Religious Accommodation- 1 credit hour
- HOPE Spiritual Fitness- 1 credit hour
- SafeTalk/ASIST- 4 credit hours
- HOPE Warrior's Calling- 1 credit hour
- HOPE Ethical Warrior- 1 credit hour
- HOPE Character- 1 credit hour
- Helping Agency Integration- 1 credit hour
- HOPE Moral Injury- 1 credit hour
- Rolling with the RST- 2 credit hours
- HOPE Next Steps- 1 credit hour

(2) Recurring Training

IAW DAFECD, Sub-Attachment Section III Enlisted SEIs, and DAFOCD, Sub-Attachment III, Officer Experience Sets, HOPE Specialists who complete onboarding will continue to meet to receive recurring training. At a minimum, this should take place once per month, but teams are encouraged to gather more frequently as resources, availability, and mission requirements allow. Some teams may find value in weekly sessions or smaller touchpoints throughout the month, while others may choose to integrate training opportunities into existing rhythms of ministry and unit engagement. Additionally, the HOPE RST may determine if prospective members who have not yet completed onboarding are invited to attend recurring training.

The purpose of recurring training is twofold: to provide advanced skills training in the HOPE core competencies to meet SEI requirements and to introduce new or supplemental training opportunities. These may include sessions on emerging best practices, topics specifically requested by your team, or training courses you identify as particularly useful for the growth and development of your HOPE Specialists. The goal is to ensure that HOPE Specialists are not only maintaining proficiency but also continuing to expand their capacity to serve effectively.

In addition, these gatherings serve as a space for team building and “care for the caregiver.” Incorporating social connection, peer support, and occasional service opportunities fosters resilience, strengthens relationships, and helps sustain long-term engagement in the program.

Ultimately, recurring training is the lifeblood of the HOPE Program. While we encourage flexibility and creativity in designing your training rhythm, every effort should be made to develop a plan that supports mission requirements and invests meaningfully in people. If you need assistance in building or enhancing your training plan, reach out to your MAJCOM. Further recommendations, resources, best practices, training, and course options can also be found on the [HC Resource Hub](#).

When & How to Conduct Core & Recurring Training

Core Training

When: The intent of core training is to standardize HOPE training and expectations across the DAF and meet the SEI/ES requirements as outlined in DAFECD and DAFOCD. The timing and frequency of core training is determined by each HC team in accordance with local resources, personnel availability, battle rhythm, and mission requirements. Some HOPE Programs conduct training biannually, others quarterly, over a dedicated weekend, or on a rolling “as-needed” basis. For additional guidance or assistance in developing an onboarding schedule, please reach out through your chain of command.

How: HOPE RSTs are given the full curriculum, instructional guidance, and presentation materials needed to conduct the HOPE core training. While the content itself must be taught to ensure all participants gain the required knowledge and skills, RSTs have the flexibility to determine how the training is conducted. This includes choosing the format, pacing, and style that best align with their team’s personality, mission requirements, and local context. The goal is for prospective HOPE Specialists to master the core curriculum, while allowing trainers to adapt the delivery in a way that is engaging, effective, and reflective of their own leadership approach.

NOTE: IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3.3.2. If a base HC team implements a HOPE program, the training must be tracked. To meet this requirement, Helper Helper will be the standardized means to document, track, and confirm all HOPE training and participation. Helper Helper will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Recurring Training

When: The timing and frequency of HOPE Program monthly recurring training meetings are left to the discretion of each HOPE RST. Each team understands the unique schedule, mission requirements, and

battle rhythm of their respective base, and will be best positioned to determine what works for their personnel. It may take some experimentation, feedback, and minor trial and error to find the optimal meeting cadence. Ultimately, every HOPE Program will establish its own rhythm. What matters most is that meetings occur with intentional focus on training, development, and team building; the specific format, timing, and frequency are determined by the HOPE RST to best serve their team and mission.

How: Ongoing HOPE Program training offers HOPE RSTs and Specialists complete flexibility in how they conduct their sessions. These meetings provide opportunities for team members, including HOPE Specialists and HC staff, to lead, practice public speaking, and develop program management skills. While there are no strict requirements on format or frequency, many HOPE Programs choose to utilize the HOPE Leadership Council, discussed later in this Guide, to help plan and run these regular monthly meetings. Ultimately, the content, style, and structure of ongoing training are up to the HOPE RST, allowing each team to tailor sessions to best meet their mission, team dynamics, and local needs.

The beta test demonstrated that involving subject matter experts across your base (CC's, Shirts, SELs, etc) is a highly effective way of not only delivering quality training, but also naturally giving visibility of the program to these leaders. People tend to promote programs they have a level of involvement in. So, by lining up base leadership as presenters within HOPE, the Program naturally builds buy-in, support, and visibility. This also reduces the manpower cost to the HOPE RST.

NOTE: IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3.3.2. If a base HC team implements a HOPE program, the training must be tracked. To meet this requirement, Helper Helper will be the standardized means to document, track, and confirm all HOPE training and participation. Helper Helper will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Special Experience Identifier (SEI) or Experience Set (ES)

As discussed throughout this Guide, both officers and enlisted are eligible to be awarded the "CQ" ES or "5CQ" SEI, respectively. The HOPE SEI/ES facilitates deliberate connection by streamlining the transition of Airmen and Guardians from one installation to another and highlights members within their units with this skillset. This SEI/ES also establishes practices that capitalize on investment and experience.

As stated, once a prospective member has completed the 20 credit hours of core training and 4-month trial period, the HOPE RST can recommend the prospective member for an SEI/ES on an AF Form 2096. IAW DAFECD and DAFOCD, "The servicing Wing, Delta, or Installation Senior Religious Support

Team recommends exp set/SEI approval/removal.” Therefore, each respective HOPE Program sRST can execute the AF Form 2096 to grant SEI/ES to their prospective HOPE members who have met the requirements. A [guide](#) for how to approve the SEI/ES is provided on the [HC Resource Hub](#).

Removal Criteria: IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3.2.4. failure to meet recurring training requirements, missing meetings/events, failure to maintain conduct standards per installation’s HOPE Handbook guidance, and failure to meet on-the-job upgrade training requirements are all potential grounds for removal. The HOPE RST and/or unit leadership can remove the SEI/ES for failing to meet requirements and minimum standards using an AF Form 2096.

CHAPTER 3: ADDITIONAL STANDARDS, REQUIREMENTS, & EXPECTATIONS

Local Policy

IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3.2.3. Each Installation that chooses to stand up a HOPE Program is required to develop its own local policy in addition to the HOPE Handbook. This policy should address additional needs, requirements, and concerns that may not be fully covered in official guidance, while also reflecting the unique mission, culture, and priorities of the senior and HOPE RST. Local policy ensures that the program is tailored to the realities of the Installation, providing clarity for HOPE Specialists, leadership, and unit members alike. By grounding the policy in both the overarching intent of the HOPE Program and the specific values and mission of the local chapel, installations can ensure consistency, accountability, and effectiveness in meeting the spiritual needs of their Airmen and Guardians.

Expectations of HOPE Specialists

Expectations and accountability are what separates HOPE from other peer-to-peer programs. HOPE is not a “train and forget” program for the sake of merely boosting an EPB/OPB/1206. HOPE organizes, trains, equips, and then develops Airmen and Guardians with a unique and critical purpose to bolster the HC mission. This happens through accountability and routine participation.

HOPE Specialists must first ensure they perform their duties and maintain good standing in their primary AFSC or SFSC. At a minimum, active participation in the HOPE Program depends on meeting the expectations of their day-to-day job, completing core training, and participating in recurring training in ongoing, monthly meetings as determined by the HOPE RST. Each local HC HOPE Program may also establish additional expectations tailored to their unique mission and team needs.

HOPE Specialists are encouraged to develop their spiritual and leadership skills, pursue character development, engage in community service, and actively participate in spiritually uplifting activities and leadership opportunities. IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3.3.2. volunteer hours and meeting attendance must be tracked by using Helper Helper to ensure accountability and recognition of contributions. Respective HOPE Programs are free to customize these expectations to best fit their contexts.

Helper Helper

Helper Helper is the standardized method of tracking volunteer hours, training, and other events. It is a robust program that is user friendly and incredibly customizable. The point of contact for Helper Helper is Krista Clement. Her email is krista@helperhelper.us. When you are ready to purchase Helper Helper ([889 found here](#)), email Krista and she will walk you through the process and set up a time to personally train your team. We've also provided additional training on the [HC Resource Hub](#). Helper Helper will not only give you a tool to track and manager your volunteers, it will provide usable data that you can utilize in leadership advisement. Helper Helper is far more than just a tracking tool, it can be utilized for a litany of other functions. If you have further questions on Helper Helper and to learn more about this amazing capability, please reach out to Krista or TSgt Sean Grell.

Confidentiality

IAW DAFI 52-101.9.3.1; 9.3.2.; and 9.3.3. Confidentiality is an integral part of the AF/HC mission. Airmen and Guardians functioning in their role as a HOPE Specialist may be exposed to privileged or confidential communication. Per Military Rule of Evidence 503, Communications to Clergy, this privilege protects communications made as a formal act of religion or conscience. The privilege may be claimed by the individual making the confession and be intended to be confidential.

The key point is that **HOPE Specialists do not hold confidentiality privileges**. While they will respect and safeguard information that was shared under the mistaken belief of confidentiality, or that they may have inadvertently overheard, they are not authorized to receive privileged communication. At no time should HOPE Specialists provide counseling as part of their role, nor should they operate under the impression that they can offer or accept privileged communication. This guidance will be taught to each HOPE Specialist as per the core training curriculum.

Core Values

While every HOPE program will be adapted to the unique needs of your Wing or Delta, every program will involve these values that are fundamental to the HOPE Spiritual Fitness Initiative. How they are embodied will be up to your HC team in shaping the training, events, and community to best serve your location.

Spiritual Fitness. HOPE is an HC Spiritual Fitness program. DAFI 52-101.2.3.3. defines spirituality as “the means to find ultimate meaning and purpose in life.” And spiritual fitness as, “the ability to adhere to beliefs, virtues, or values needed to develop a fulfilling life with quality of service.” For more information and guidance on HC Spiritual Fitness, please see the [Spiritual Fitness Leader Guide](#) and [Warfighter Spiritual Fitness Development Guide](#).

Authentic Community & Connection. The need for community and connection has never been greater, especially for young, first-term Airmen and Guardians far away from home. For many spiritualities, community is a vital component for connectedness and encouragement. While individual spiritualities may differ, all HOPE Specialists are committed to authentic community.

Professional Development. The HOPE Spiritual Fitness Initiative delivers 20 credit-hours of core training to equip HOPE Specialist, focused on reviving the warrior ethos and enhancing readiness through spirituality.

Leadership Development. Every HOPE Specialist is a leader. As an embedded resource, HOPE Specialists must strive to be a leader of character and promoter of healthy culture. Most programs offer opportunities to lead major volunteer events and programs. Larger programs may have leadership positions designed to work with the HC team to lead HOPE. At its core, HOPE develops spiritually fit leaders.

Volunteerism. A warrior ethos requires the warfighter to possess beliefs or values that transcend themselves that motivate their service to enable them to face sacrifice. Volunteerism not only embodies the Air Force Core Value of “service before self,” it also provides the spiritual opportunity to connect to something outside and larger than yourself.

Peer-Resource. All other core values equip HOPE Specialists to embody this final, vitally important value: to be the frontline defense in their units. This program will provide HOPE Specialists with the training and development to identify and connect hurting members to professional caregivers.

Honor Code

The beta test revealed that the most successful programs held HOPE Specialists accountable to an Honor Code. Please see below the HOPE Honor Code:

As a HOPE Specialist, I represent my unit, Wing, Delta, Squadron, Chaplain Corps, and HOPE. I will strive to be a skilled and trusted resource for my peers, leadership, and base helping agencies. As such, my conduct will embody the Air Force or Space Force core values. I will dedicate myself to growth in Warrior Ethos. I will act honorably, honestly, and treat all people with respect on and off-duty. I will represent the Wing, Delta, Chaplain Corps, and HOPE community in the words I use and the image I project. If I receive paperwork for misconduct, I will notify my unit or HOPE RST and explain the circumstances.

Discipline

IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3.2.4, maintaining discipline within the HOPE Program is essential to preserving both the integrity of its mission and the trust of those it serves. HOPE Specialists are expected to uphold the highest standards of conduct, professionalism, and care as they serve as vital liaisons between Airmen, Guardians, and HC. This section provides disciplinary protocols to guide the program in addressing potential issues. Violations of HOPE Program standards, outlined in installation-specific local policy and the Handbook, may be identified by program leaders, observed by peers, or self-reported by the HOPE Specialist. All violations will be addressed promptly and fairly by the HOPE RST, using the graduated process detailed below.

- First Violation: The member enters a 6-month probationary period, retaining HOPE Specialist status while receiving mentorship from the HOPE RST.
- Second Violation: If another violation occurs within the probationary period, the member will cease functioning as a HOPE Specialist for 6 months. During this time, they will participate in monthly mentoring with the HOPE RST, continue professional development training, and remain eligible for community and volunteer events.
- Third Violation: A third violation within the second probationary period results in removal of the HOPE SEI. The member may reapply after one year, but must re-complete all program requirements.
- Fourth Violation: A fourth violation results in permanent removal from the HOPE Program with no eligibility to reapply.
- Criminal Activity: Conviction of a crime leads to automatic and permanent removal from the program and loss of the HOPE SEI.

Airmen may choose to leave the HOPE Program at any time through voluntary disenrollment. Leaving voluntarily does not reflect poorly on the member but will require the removal of the SEI/ES. HOPE Specialists who choose to disenroll must promptly notify the HOPE RST.

Further, IAW DAFI 52-101.5.3.2.4. the HOPE RST and/or HC leadership may remove a HOPE Specialist based on disqualifying factors outlined in local policy and specified in the HOPE Handbook. The HOPE Specialists chain of command also has the authority to remove the member from their role as a HOPE Specialist.

CHAPTER 4: BEST PRACTICES

The following chapter outlines a collection of key best practices identified through two years of beta testing the HOPE Program across the Department of the Air Force. These recommendations are not official policy requirements; rather, they reflect the shared lessons, innovations, and approaches of the most successful HOPE teams. Additional best practices will be collected on the HC Resource HUB on the [HOPE Spiritual Fitness page](#) and routinely updated to share lessons learned and earned from other HOPE Programs as they stand-up.

By adopting and tailoring these best practices, HOPE leaders can increase program effectiveness, strengthen community resilience, and ensure that Airmen and Guardians are connected to the care and support they need.

HOPE Leadership Development & Council

The long-term success of the HOPE Program depends on strong, intentional leadership. Experience from beta test sites has demonstrated that the most effective programs established a HOPE Leadership Council to guide and manage day-to-day operations. If you decide to utilize a leadership council, which is highly recommended, please feel free to customize the council as you see fit. What follows is a recommendation, your council, their respective job duties, and responsibilities might look different.

Standing up a HOPE Leadership Council requires an initial investment of time and energy, but once established, it allows the program to run with stability and effectiveness. At nearly every beta test site, HOPE teams discovered capable, motivated Airmen and Guardians who were gifted, equipped, and eager to lead. While not every volunteer will be a “rockstar,” every unit will have a core group of committed individuals who will make the program work when empowered with clear responsibilities and support.

The HOPE Leadership Council exists to:

- Provide Airmen and Guardians with leadership opportunities in a low-threat environment.
- Develop spiritual readiness and leadership skills that directly enhance unit health and cohesion.
- Relieve HOPE RSTs of administrative burdens, allowing them to focus on oversight and mentorship.
- Ensure continuity and consistency in program execution through structured leadership roles.

When explaining HOPE to unit leadership, it is important to emphasize this dual benefit: HOPE develops the leadership capacity of the HOPE RST, Airmen, and Guardians while simultaneously improving unit readiness by connecting hurting members to appropriate resources. This makes the program a true win-win for both the individual and the organization.

Leadership Positions & Selection Process

Sample leadership positions are outlined below. Each position has a defined set of responsibilities to ensure clarity and accountability. No two leadership councils are the same. Please feel free to customize the council in a way that makes sense for your team. You can include all these positions, some, or just one. It is up to you.

HOPE Wing/Delta Leader

The HOPE Wing/Delta Leader must have prior experience in another HOPE leadership role and serve as the senior volunteer leader for all base HOPE Specialists. In this capacity, the Wing/Delta Leader sets the tone and direction of the program while working closely with the HOPE RST and fellow HOPE leaders to ensure every Specialist is supported, cared for, and equipped to thrive. Core responsibilities include directing and supervising HOPE leaders, serving as a bridge between the HC staff and HOPE leaders, and disseminating essential program information. The Wing/Delta Leader also compiles records of HOPE Specialists joining or leaving the program, partners with HC staff to communicate written warnings when necessary, and ensures timely, consistent communication with all HOPE Specialists.

HOPE Vice Wing/Delta Leader

The HOPE Vice-Wing Leader supports the Wing Leader in all duties and is expected to step in as acting leader whenever the Wing Leader is deployed, TDY, or on leave. In this role, the Vice-Wing Leader helps set the tone and direction of the program while working closely with the HOPE RST, Wing Leader, and other HOPE leaders to ensure the well-being and care of all HOPE Specialists. Key responsibilities

include directing and supervising HOPE leaders, serving as a bridge between the Chaplain staff, Wing Leader, and HOPE leaders, and ensuring timely communication of program information. The Vice-Wing Leader also compiles records of Specialists joining or leaving the program, works with Chaplain staff to communicate written warnings when necessary, and disseminates information to HOPE Specialists to maintain clarity and cohesion across the program.

HOPE Communication Coordinator

The HOPE Communication Coordinator supports the success of the HOPE Spiritual Fitness Initiative by managing internal and external communication efforts. Responsibilities include promoting upcoming events and trainings, maintaining awareness through social media or approved platforms, and ensuring effective dissemination of HOPE program materials across the installation. The coordinator works closely with the HOPE Lead and Chaplain Corps team to develop communication strategies, create content, and foster engagement among HOPE Specialists, unit leaders, and the wider base community. Strong organization, creativity, and a passion for connection are essential.

HOPE Connection Coordinator

The connection coordinator will work with the HOPE RST team to ensure that all HOPE

Specialists are connected and cared for. They will help with onboarding new team members, and with off-boarding HOPE Specialists leaving the program or the base. Connection coordinators will work to make sure that all HOPE Specialists are on a team and feel cared for and sense of belonging.

HOPE Volunteer Coordinator

The Volunteer Coordinator partners with the HOPE RST to create meaningful opportunities for HOPE Specialists to serve both individually and as a team, on base and in the surrounding community. This role involves identifying a wide range of service opportunities and organizations to support, from HC initiatives and squadron events to local community partnerships, helping to strengthen the connection between the base and the broader community.

HOPE Training Coordinator

The Training Coordinator partners with the HOPE RST to ensure all HOPE Specialists receive proper onboarding and ongoing training, working closely with the Connection Coordinator to streamline the process. They are responsible for maintaining a training roster that tracks compliance with monthly

training requirements. In addition, the Training Coordinator leads a “Curriculum Team” that collaborates with the base HC to provide feedback, share ideas, and recommend improvements for all HOPE training offerings.

HOPE Leadership Council Terms & Selection

- Term Length – HOPE Specialists may serve in leadership roles for 6 or 12 months. While these lengths are recommended for the sake of continuity, programs retain the freedom to adjust term lengths to meet the unique mission requirements of their area of responsibility (AOR).
- Selection Process – The most effective method observed during beta tests involves interviewing candidates followed by peer selection. This process allows motivated HOPE Specialists to step into leadership roles with the trust and confidence of their peers. However, HC leadership teams retain the flexibility to adjust this process as necessary.
- Removal Process – Procedures for removing leaders from positions should be addressed in the local policy document created by the HOPE RST in collaboration with the installation sRST to ensure fairness and accountability.

Cost

The baseline cost to operate a HOPE Program is \$250 per year, which funds the Helper Helper platform. Additional costs may arise for SafeTalk or ASIST training, depending on local Installation resources. In many cases, SafeTalk or ASIST are provided at no cost through partnerships with base helping agencies or alternative funding streams. Beta test bases also reported strong success in securing support through unfunded requests (UFRs) and other funding sources to cover program events, activities, and unique needs.

The cost estimates below reflect the average manpower, man-hours, and expenses associated with operating a HOPE Program, based on data collected from beta test bases across the DAF. These averages are provided as a reference point; actual requirements will vary depending on mission priorities, personnel availability, and funding. There is no single “right” way to resource a HOPE Program, you may choose to operate with a minimal budget or dedicate more robust resources as needed.

During the Start-Up Phase, which is typically 6 months to 1 year long, programs averaged 73 man-hours, 2 personnel, and \$6,250 in expenses to establish operations. In the Sustainment Phase, which includes monthly training and team building, programs averaged 26 man-hours per month, 7 personnel, and approximately \$5,700 per year. These figures are intended as planning guidance while allowing flexibility for each program to tailor resources to local needs.

Permanent Change of Station

HOPE is an Air Force and Space Force–wide initiative, enabling HOPE Specialists to participate in the program at any base where it is established. When notified of a PCS, HOPE Specialists should coordinate with their HOPE RST to obtain a Letter of Appreciation (LOA) that documents their HOPE SEI. This LOA should be provided to the Specialist, forwarded to their gaining unit leadership, and shared with the gaining HC team. The purpose of the LOA is to inform the receiving unit and HC team that they are gaining a specially trained Airman or Guardian equipped to enhance spiritual fitness within their organization.

Conclusion

The purpose of this Leader’s Guide was to equip and empower you to establish a HOPE Program at your base and provide the content, education, and training needed to develop HOPE Specialists. Every base is unique, and each program will benefit from the different gifts, skills, and passions of its people. Success will look different in each context. It is your program at your base. While many aspects are standardized, the day-to-day operations will depend on the creativity, leadership, and commitment of your team, further developing them as Airmen and Guardians.

Ultimately, HOPE is what you make of it. Our goal is to provide structure and standardization so leaders, Airmen, Guardians, and RSTs across the Air Force and Space Force share a clear understanding of what “HOPE” means. As more programs stand up and lessons are learned, we will continue to refine and enhance these resources.

The Department of the Air Force is full of innovative, motivated, and spiritually ready leaders prepared to take this program and run with it. If you have questions along the way, please don’t hesitate to ask. HCX will continue to add updated and refined products to the [HOPE Spiritual Fitness Initiative page](#) on the [HC Resource Hub](#).

Endnotes

1 Harold G. Koenig, "Research on Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health: A Review," *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* (2009); 54(5): 283-291; Tyler J. VanderWeele, "On the Promotion of Human Flourishing," *PNAS* (2017) Vol. 114 No. 31:8148-8156.

2 Harold G. Koenig, "Spiritual Readiness" in the U.S. Military: A Neglected Component of Warrior Readiness," *Journal of Religion and Health* (2023) 62:1561-1577.

3 Ibid.

4 Vivek H. Murthy, *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World* (New York: Harper Wave, 2020), 163-165, 167.

5 Vivek H. Murthy, Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation, *The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*, 2023, 4.

6 Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, (New York: Viking, 2014), 81-82.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.