

Executive Summary of Comments

The need to reestablish the Rural National Guard is of great importance to the State of Alaska and the rural communities. The state of Alaska has over 54,000 miles of coastline to be monitored and needs supplement support in the area of search and rescue in our rural communities. Previously the Guard had employed 1,800 rural Alaskans in 3 battalions and supported the communities with training, structure and a career path for many before the closing of the Rural National Guard. The practical training of the Guard provided skills that directly benefited the sustainability and prosperity of the rural communities.

The committee feels that the revitalization of the Rural National Guard is an opportunity for the new administration to acquire a large return on their investment that would directly impact many rural communities. Though the return may not be in the form of direct revenue to the state, benefits will be apparent in member wages along with direct savings and improvement in social issues.

The summaries are intended to supply commentary that supports each respective issue.

Priority Issues

1. Leadership
2. Eligibility/Recruitment
3. TAG (The Adjutant General)
4. Organizational Structure
5. Community Partnerships
6. Ethical Focus/Code of Conduct

Other Issues Considered

- Personnel
 - Budget – Federal and state mission compatibility
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1. Leadership

Develop a leadership philosophy in the Alaska National Guard will that instill rural confidence and provide focus in the Alaska National Guard on important contributions made by the rural guard.

Stakeholders

- Governor
- Congressional delegation (liaison)
- Rural Communities
- DMVA (Department of Military and Veterans Affairs)
- Guard senior leadership
- Department of Law
- Former/retired rural guard
- Advisory rural leadership group
- Native Veterans Associations

Success Elements Considered to be Agreeable to Most Alaskans

- Increase of OCS (Officer Candidate School) /ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) enlistments from rural Alaska
- Develop leadership preparation program in rural Alaska

Possible Actions to Success on Agreed Success Elements

- Develop professional military education with rural component taught by rural leadership
 - Alaska National Guard history, ethics and conduct expectations
- Fitness reports regularly released that demonstrate planned increase in rural involvement
- Create organization model that supports Alaska's demographics and increases senior leadership in rural Alaska
- Leadership development in communities
- Identify potential leaders/mentor

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The discussion regarding leadership by the committee had two distinct components. The first component involved a developed and clearly communicated leadership philosophy with a rural focus established by the Executive Office. The communication to the public should involve strong messaging regarding contributions by the Rural National Guard with emphasis on its positive attributes.

The second component (which is clearly detailed out in the elements above) is the need to grow rural leadership. This component is vital to the success of revitalizing the Rural National Guard as it will hasten and ease community buy-in. Rural grown leadership will allow leadership to be more effective as they will have a shared reality with those that they are leading.

This structure will help to also promote understanding between rural communities and the new administration by naturally creating an additional liaison. The leadership will be a bridge between the cultures of the rural communities and that of the Alaska National Guard. Without experience and understanding of the rural communities the committee feels the leader would be less effective.

The effect of the National Guard in rural communities is amplified due to their size and remoteness. This is where the return on investment will be evident in positive social change (drug and alcohol abuse) while being able to maintain the many positive attributes of rural heritage and culture. The committee feels the collaboration between Rural National Guard and local leadership has the potential to be the catalyst to sustainable and productive rural communities.

2. Eligibility/Recruitment/Retention

Success will be when Rural Alaska National Guard attrition has been reversed and has promoted positive growth in select rural communities to foster future expansion of units in Alaska

Stakeholders

- DOE (Department of Education)
- Regional nonprofit corporations
- University of Alaska
- Alaska Native Veteran Associations
- Rural school associations
- Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve
- Tribal associations
- Judicial liaison

Success Elements Considered to be Agreeable to Most Alaskans

- Initiated 1000 recruits from Alaska rural Zip Codes through current federal administration
 - 200 recruits per year for five years
- Increase in number of eligible rural Alaskan recruits
- Reduction of drug/alcohol abuse and increase in high school graduation
- Relationship established between Alaska National Guard and Native Veterans Association
- Waiver for standards for Alaska developed for those who may have previously lost eligibility

Possible Actions to Success on Agreed Success Elements

- Pilot program for recruitment/partnership created for Mount Edgecumbe High School
 - Presence of National Guard in schools
 - Create JROTC-like (Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps) program
- Each Alaska National Guard unit adopts a rural school with local tribes
- Alaska National Guard summer camp for potential recruits
- Create a process to connect youth in rural communities to recruiters
- Promote physical activity
- Create incentives for recruits to be drug-free to meet eligibility requirements
- Create program to regain eligibility give potential good recruits a second chance (courts)
- Investigate best practices of strong community based groups such as Aniak Dragon Slayers and replicate the success of these programs when revitalizing Rural National Guard
- Partnerships with DOE (Department of Education) and University of Alaska with opportunity to Rural National Guard Track

Barriers to Further Success

- Substance abuse is a major barrier to eligibility in the National Guard
- Federal funding for substance abuse programs has been reduced
- Stakeholder buy-in
- Judicial system
- Lack of access to rehabilitation in rural Alaska
- Very limited National Guard program for rehabilitation of soldiers
- No pathway back to regain eligibility for membership (2nd chance)
- Rural Alaskans adapting to military code of conduct

Actions to Address Barriers

- Substance abuse education programs in schools involving the National Guard
- Sponsored community initiatives for sobriety (alcohol and drug free) with an Alaskan National Guard Component
- Establish rehabilitation program for traditional soldiers
- Recognize and utilize tribal courts
- Develop a pathway to enter or regain eligibility for National Guard membership (2nd chance)
- Partnerships, governmental and private organizations that deal with substance abuse
- Establish programs like military youth corps/Dragon Slayer model
- RSP (Recruitment Sustainment Program) – Make exportable to rural Alaska

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The committee feels that we must clearly communicate eligibility requirements to the stakeholders including potential rural recruits. The initial step to this could be completed by the review and redirection of recruiting marketing funds to rural areas utilizing methods that take into account both the recruit's rural and generational status.

The second area that must be analyzed involves the loss of eligibility due to alcohol and substance abuse. The committee feels that we should investigate ways to allow potential recruits to regain eligibility. We need to recognize the importance of redirecting federal funds to substance abuse in rural areas. There should be efforts by all to collaborate and create opportunities for rural Alaskans to make positive change and allow the Rural National Guard to be a catalyst for this. It will involve establishing of a waiver program that will be discussed in the Organizational Structure Priority.

The need for a strong presence within the rural school systems is important in creating a sustainable recruiting system. We will need to develop strong relationships with University of Alaska, Department of Education and Alaska National Guard to create opportunity for rural youth to be exposed to Alaska National Guard structure and opportunity. This exposure and direction will translate into reduction of substance abuse in youth and an increase in high school completion.

The committee felt that the lack of outreach and aftercare for returning veterans was a deterrent to recruitment in rural communities. This is focused on in the Ethical Focus priority but the committee thought important to connect to the issue of recruiting.

3. TAG (The Adjutant General) Selection

The selected TAG (the Adjutant General) supports rural growth and promotes understanding of rural guard presence throughout organization.

Stakeholders

- Governor
- AFN (Alaska Federation of Natives)
- Former/retired guard members
- Legislature (Military affairs)

Success Elements Considered to be Agreeable to Most Alaskans

- Negative perception of National Guard in rural Alaska is addressed
- Succession program established (Advisory committee of current and former guard members)
- TAG (The Adjutant General) outreach to rural Alaska

Possible Actions to Success on Agreed Success Elements

- Ensure criteria for selection of TAG (The Adjutant General) with focus on rural understanding
- Have ability to plan and oversee large project

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The selection of TAG (The Adjutant General) will be important, as this will need to be an extension of the Executive Office and their intentions for the Rural National Guard. The TAG (The Adjutant General) selection must have an understanding of rural guard units and support the growth of the rural guard. The committee feels this personnel decision is vital to the success of reestablishing the Rural National Guard and encourages the Governor to get input from the various stakeholders for this priority.

The selection of the TAG (The Adjutant General) with a rural understanding should also have knowledge around implementing change (preferably large scale) within the military structure. There are many suggestions that will need to be addressed in the Organizational Structure priority such as waivers, change of force structure and mission statement of the Alaska National Guard that will need to be supported and implemented. The candidate should have demonstrated efficacy in this area.

The selection of the TAG (The Adjutant General) must then be followed up with a detailed plan as to the TAG (The Adjutant General) outreach to rural Alaska. There must also be an established plan for accountability involving Rural National Guard Initiatives. The TAG (The Adjutant General) must be invested not just in the success of the Rural Guard but have an understanding of how his/her success will impact the community where the units are located.

4. Community Partnerships

The establishment of a mutually beneficial relationship between rural communities, state organizations, and the Alaska National Guard to ensure the revitalization of the Rural National Guard.

Stakeholders

- Rural Leadership
- TAG (The Adjutant General)
- State Emergency Coordination Center
- AFN (Alaska Federation of Natives)

Success Elements Considered to be Agreeable to Most Alaskans

- Facilitation of Guard Advisory Committees in villages to assess and recommend solutions.
- Multiple use facilities restored/updated/created
- Opportunities provided for males and females
- Involvement in State Emergency Coordination Drills

Possible Actions to Success on Agreed Success Elements

- Create culturally relevant structure and partnership to support a unit
- Reach out to elders
- Expand statewide drills for emergencies

Barriers to Further Success

- Lack of understanding – cultural values, etc.
- Linguistic/cultural barriers
- Rural Alaskans adapting to military code of conduct

Actions to Address Barriers

- Liaison (Native)
- Rural National Guard Leadership to navigate linguistic/cultural barriers
- Teaching English

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There are varied opinions from the committee regarding the support from rural communities in revitalizing the Rural Guard. We first must survey these community leaders and identify the champions of the Rural National Guard in the rural communities. This priority will need to be supported by TAG (The Adjutant General).

The survey will help to identify assumptions made by both Alaska National Guard and rural Alaska and vice versa. A culturally competent presence by the Alaska National Guard will create resiliency in the relationship between rural communities and the Guard. As the rebirth of the Rural National Guard begins it will be essential that the local guard leadership is able to foster these relationships and will need support of TAG (The Adjutant General).

The investment in multiple use facilities due to the revitalization of the Alaska National Guard will demonstrate investment in the community and provide a venue for positive community activities. Further investment will be demonstrated by consideration of their communities and involvement with State Emergency Management Offices through the National Guard. Demonstrating that the relationship between the Alaska National Guard and rural communities is mutually beneficial will be key in revitalizing the Rural National Guard.

5. Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of Alaska National Guard is adaptable to recruiting, training and retaining rural communities and supporting state and federal missions.

Stakeholders

- DOD (Department of Defense) /Attorney General
- National Guard Bureau
- TAG (The Adjutant General)
- Federal delegation
- AFN (Alaska Federation of Natives)

Success Elements Considered to be Agreeable to Most Alaskans

- Organization and stationing plan created and approved by National Guard
- Waiver of standards for Alaska recruits and members
 - For regaining eligibility if lost
 - Culturally relevant testing and training for rural communities
- Force Structure developed to address unique needs in Alaska and maximize benefit to all parties involved, National, State and local rural communities.

Possible Actions to Success on Agreed Success Elements

- Mission analysis
- Develop strategic plan for managed growth of units
- Create culturally relevant structure and partnership to support a unit
- Identify prototype (pilot) unit for expansion in rural Alaska and implement
- Utilize State Active Duty Funds for pilots

Barriers to Further Success

- National Guard information flow
- Linguistic/cultural barriers
- Testing and training methods that lack cultural competency or consideration for rural communities
- DOD (Department of Defense) regarding change of force structure
- NGB (National Guard Bureau) support for changing Alaska National Guard force structure
- Training school seats/slots – (Basic, PME (Professional Military Education), AIT (Advanced Individual Training))
- Recruiting/enlistment standards – CAT IV (Category 4) ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) Waivers
 - English 2nd language
 - Bottom 3rd scores on traditional test
- Demographics of Rural Alaska
- RSP (Recruitment Sustainment Program) – exportable to rural Alaska
- Limited federal and state money

Actions to Address Barriers

- Local National Guard Leadership Buy-in
- Hands on demonstrations
- Recognizing verbal testing
- Testing via competency vs. written tests
- Focus on return demonstration model (tell, show, do)
- Governor, TAG (The Adjutant General), Congressional Delegation to meet with DOD (Department of Defense) to discuss Alaska specific force structure
- Governor dedicate state resources to address minor issues
- Governor, TAG (The Adjutant General), Congressional Delegation to meet with the National Guard Bureau (1st) to obtain support/solution/workable mission to change force structure

- Governor, TAG (The Adjutant General), Congressional Delegation to contact current federal administration to request an executive order to establish a change in mission for Alaska National Guard to address current homeland security issues
- Create a pilot project to increase rural manning
- Appointed person to plan, communicate and execute change

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The committee recognizes that this priority may be the most difficult due to the fact that it involves the most federal interfacing with the National Guard being a federal program. The establishing of waivers, policy change, and money may be problematic in the current political climate.

AFN (Alaska Federation of Natives) has a vested interest in the rural communities and the committee feels it would be to the benefit of the TAG (The Adjutant General) and Executive Office to keep them informed and involved. This will be of specific benefit with the request for 1,000 rural recruits initiative.

The creation of certain waivers for Alaskan National Guard members will also need to include ongoing active program to interface cultural, language, and learning differences. This has been included in the Organizational Structure priority because it will need to be established to create accountability of the waiver system.

5. Ethical Focus/Code of Conduct

Integrity, ethics and credibility has been restored throughout the Alaska National Guard command structure

Stakeholders

- Governor
- Attorney General
- TAG (The Adjutant General)

Success Elements Considered to be Agreeable to Most Alaskans

- Shown improvement through survey process

Possible Actions to Success on Agreed Success Elements

- Create an evaluation of current culture of Alaska National Guard

- Evaluate current culture/climate through surveys using an external source to analyze results
- Investigate and use 360° survey
- Merge cultural values with Army values
- Review reporting/chain of command
- Create plan for correction, reassess in 12 months

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The Executive Office along with TAG will need to be committed to the ethical environment in rural Alaska. There will need to be a strong focus on transparency as this initiative was included as a priority for not only the benefit of the Alaska National Guard internally but as a method to regain the confidence of the communities of Alaska.

The committee recommends beyond the proposed surveying process that there is a creation of an advisory committee of retired/former guard members to form existing groups to help review ethics.

As a component of the ethical focus the committee believes that there needs to be better access for veterans returning from active duty service. Lack of support decreases the likelihood that new recruits will join. The Rural National Guard is a form of support to veterans returning from active duty and will blend well with increased outreach efforts to assist rural veterans. It is acknowledged that this is not a state but a federal program but as noted previously the two programs intertwine. People in the community and potential recruits are often not able to differentiate between the programs.
