

Testimony
NATIONAL GUARD YOUTH CHALLENGE PROGRAM
Hearing to the
Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee
November 19, 2015

Pennsylvania Army National Guard
Colonel Robert Langol
Director, Service Member and Family Support (G9)

Introduction

Chairman Vulakovich, Chairman Costa and members of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the National Guard Youth Challenge Program.

My name is Colonel Bob Langol. I serve as the Director of Service Member and Family Support for the Pennsylvania National Guard. My directorate is responsible for a broad range of Service member and Family programs ranging from Sexual Assault and Suicide Prevention, to Family Readiness and Youth Services. My comments will focus on program implementation within the Commonwealth, the process steps and timeline that the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs would follow. I will then describe the number and type of jobs that would be created by starting a Youth Challenge program. Next, I will summarize a few of the key decisions we'll need to make as we work through the start-up process. Finally, I will conclude by answering why the Youth Challenge program is run by the National Guard.

Doctrine for Youth Challenge Program Implementation

At a national level, the National Guard Bureau Office of Athletics and Youth Development oversee the Youth Challenge program. That office has published detail policy and instructions which govern new program start-up. Start-up guidance provides considerations for effective planning and disciplined execution, which are cornerstones of a successful program. Based on the guidance, we expect that program implementation would take approximately 24 months.

The process begins with the preparation and submission of a Site Suitability and Readiness Assessment that grades applicant states in five key areas: Demand, Funding, Facilities, Personnel, and Political Support. Pennsylvania can meet all of the approval requirements. I will summarize our self-assessment in each evaluated area separately.

1. Demand. Pennsylvania Department of Education statistics for the 2013-14 school years reflect the Commonwealth had 13,945 high school dropouts. In both raw

numbers and percentages, the Commonwealth meets the threshold defined by DoD, which demonstrates that a need exists to consider a new program start-up application.

2. Funding. The program funding is through a cooperative agreement between the federal and state governments, with the federal government contributing up to 75% of the operating costs, and the state contributing the other 25%. We estimate State matching funds for start-up operations at appropriately \$1,000,000 in FY 16-17 for an initial graduation target of 100 Cadets per class, holding two classes each year. The program can increase the graduation target to a desired steady-state graduation target. We estimate a state match cost factor of \$5,000 per graduate to sustain the determined steady-state program level.

3. Facilities. Providing proper accommodations for housing, dining, and academics are essential to validating the site location. Site locations that may be considered include Federal civilian installations, State/Federal military installations, state non-military installations, and non-governmental (civilian) locations. The DMVA has identified existing structures on Fort Indiantown Gap for consideration and approval by the National Guard Bureau. Necessary upgrades to facilities on Fort Indiantown Gap would be completed during the current federal fiscal year, by rescheduling and reprioritizing previously scheduled facility maintenance projects. However, DMVA would conduct a final review of potential sites prior to submitting an application for a new program.

4. Personnel. Ability to provide quality personnel to start a program is based on the population within a 1-hour drive of the site. The Commonwealth has a large population of citizens with experience in all three aspects of the program, education, military and youth development. We anticipate a start-up program will enroll 100 graduates per class, and would be funded for 64 staff positions based on the staff model. I will describe the staffing requirements in more detail in a few moments.

5. Political Support. This is measured through support letters from key state and local elected officials. We do not anticipate any difficulty in securing the required expressions of support.

In summary, the Commonwealth meets the Readiness assessment that upon approval the state will be well positioned to secure a new program. The DMVA would prepare the request, to be routed through the National Guard Bureau to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, who is the approval authority for new programs.

Program Implementation Strategic Considerations

Beyond the formal requirements I just outlined, there are two key decisions that would have to be made prior to implementing a Youth ChalleNGe program in Pennsylvania.

First, we would need to determine the target steady-state program size. As I mentioned above, our planning assumptions are based on 100 target graduates per class. This will require an enrollment of approximately 135-150 applicants per class. We could expand the program, or even seek to add additional sites. Larger classes would require additional funding. The demand exists; we just need to determine what level of sustained budgetary support is feasible.

Second, we would have to determine the educational model we would follow. The education model could include one or more of the following options: a General Educational Development (GED) program; a High School Diploma program linked to one or more specific districts; a High School Credit Recovery model that allows students to return to High School; as well as a program incorporating the Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma 30 College Credit Option by partnering with Community Colleges. This decision will be based on the best fit and specific goals of the program, the needs of the potential Cadets in the Commonwealth, and the level of collaboration and integration that is possible with the education community.

We project that state cost share contributions will begin approximately 12-14 months prior to the first cadet cycle. This is when the Program Director and key staff members are hired, equipment and materials are purchased, and facilities are renovated to include IT requirements. We project the earliest an initial cadet cycle can start is January 2018. State matching funds would be required by approximately January 2017 using this timeline. Disruptions in the Federal budget process, such as operations under a Continuing Resolution which prohibit new program start-ups, could impact our

start-up plan. Overall, though, we are confident that we can complete the required analysis, including determining the desired steady-state program size and the educational model we would follow, within the prescribed 24-month timeline.

The Youth ChalleNGe Staffing Model

The program staff model represents educators, specialists trained in social behavior, and the military all working together. The Program Director develops the organizational structure and is responsible for the hiring of all staff members. The Program Director is responsible to ensure staff members are hired in accordance within the start-up timeline. As a new program, we would align staff positions to meet all Federal and Commonwealth licenses, certifications, and statutory requirements.

New program staff are immediately assigned to job shadow at a mentor program site. Observing and learning from another ChalleNGe program is critical to developing strong staff members. The best programs have Cadre staff with significant military experience and desire to work with high school dropouts. Cadre may vary from retirees, to Veterans, to Guard or Reserve members.

Why the National Guard?

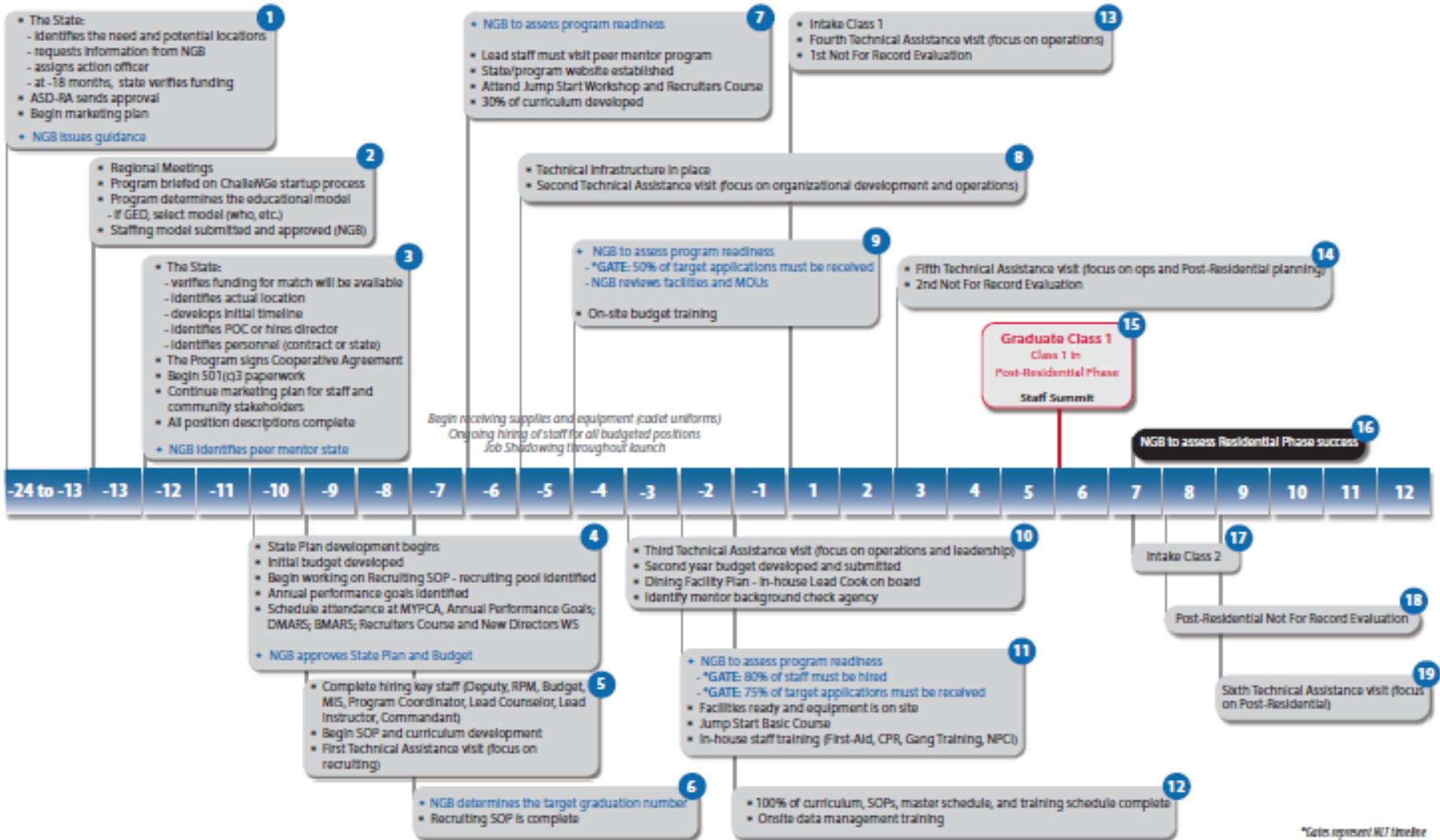
The U.S. military enjoys a well-deserved reputation for its ability to reach, teach, and develop people who lost their direction early in their youth. The military has proven competencies in training, team building, shaping small units, managing diversity, and converting sometimes aimless recruits into focused and productive individuals.

The program is not tailored or intended to recruit into the military. Historically, 7%-9% of graduates do join the military; however that is not the program focus. Job Skills orientation and awareness is a Core Component. Cadets will explore and investigate future career paths, career assessment and interest inventories, and some programs include actual training in area vocational centers. Cadets learn how to leverage their growth, understand their value to potential employers. Cadets are equipped to get a job or continue their education upon graduation.

We know that the National Guard could not do this alone. Yes, the National Guard administers the program, but this is not a military program. However, the National Guard is the most visible representation of the military in our communities. We are part of our communities and we live, work and contribute to our communities. As a part of the community, the National Guard is capable and well suited to partner with education, youth and social service, program mentors as well as private industry and the community at large. The National Guard is proud to serve our nation as well as our Commonwealth, but we also proudly serve our communities.

I want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. I also want to thank you for your commitment to our Veterans and current members of the military.

New Program Startup Timeline National Guard Youth Challenge Program



*Gates represent NET Utilizer

Source: *Doctrine for the National Guard Youth Challenge Program, Challenge Publication 1, 23 December 2009*