

# Strengthening the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program Common Challenges and Policy Options to Assist Returning Reservists

A Study Conducted for  
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
BACKGROUND .....	5
PURPOSE OF THIS ANALYSIS .....	6
THE YELLOW RIBBON REINTEGRATION PROGRAM.....	7
METHODOLOGY .....	10
LIMITATIONS OF THE ANALYSIS .....	10
CURRENT NATIONAL GUARD IMPLEMENTATION.....	11
NATIONAL GUARD CASE STUDIES .....	13
1. MINNESOTA NATIONAL GUARD .....	13
2. MONTANA NATIONAL GUARD .....	18
3. OREGON NATIONAL GUARD.....	22
CURRENT RESERVE IMPLEMENTATION.....	27
AIR FORCE RESERVE .....	28
ARMY RESERVE.....	29
NAVY RESERVE .....	29
MARINE CORPS RESERVE.....	30
KEY FINDINGS.....	31
CRITERIA FOR RECOMMENDATIONS AND EXEMPLARY PRACTICES .....	34
EXEMPLARY PRACTICES .....	35
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM COORDINATORS.....	35
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEDERAL POLICY GUIDANCE .....	38
CONCLUSION.....	40
GLOSSARY.....	42
APPENDIX A: EXEMPLARY PRACTICES .....	44
APPENDIX B: RECOMMENDATIONS CHART .....	47
REFERENCES.....	48

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Throughout the duration of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), National Guard and Reserve units have been deployed in combat and support roles that are integral to the missions in each region. Utilized at an unprecedented rate, many Reservists have undergone multiple deployments, some lasting more than 18 months.<sup>1,2</sup>

As a result of their organizational structure, Reservists face challenges throughout the deployment cycle that are substantially different from those confronted in the Active Component. Living among civilian communities, Reservists do not have access to resources or networks at active duty bases and must draw on their families, communities and own initiative to seek the resources and care they need. Both Reservists and their families must readjust to civilian life upon redeployment, which can be grueling in the absence of transition resources such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) screening, career counseling, financial planning and marriage seminars. Often, military personnel do not access these resources or seek treatment for mental health problems due to the pervasive stigma around mental health issues in the military.<sup>3</sup>

Further, while many community and government organizations exist to assist servicemembers and their families through the strains of the deployment cycle, Reservists are often unaware of their existence or how to access these resources. This is particularly serious because Reservists are more likely to be affected by PTSD, anxiety and major depression, and have higher suicide rates than servicemembers in the Active Component.<sup>4,5</sup>

To address these issues, several State National Guard and Reserve organizations constructed reintegration programs for their servicemembers and families. The Minnesota National Guard's program was officially authorized in 2006 and became the basis for federal legislation that passed in 2008.<sup>6</sup> Today, every State National Guard organization and Reserve command is required by law to implement a Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP.) While this program was federally mandated, funding for the program was not made universally available in the federal budget.

The YRRP has received much attention and many accolades since its inception. While State National Guard organizations and Reserve commands are working to implement the program to

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense Defense Science Board Task Force. (2007). Deployment of members of the National Guard and Reserve in the Global War on Terror. Washington, DC: Defense Science Board.

<sup>2</sup> United States Government Accountability Office. (2006). Army National Guard and Army Reserve readiness for 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges. (GAO publication 06-1109T). Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health. (2007). An achievable vision: Report of the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health. Falls Church, VA: Defense Health Board.

<sup>4</sup> Tanielian, T. & Jaycox, L.H. (Eds.) (2008). Invisible wounds of war. Psychological and cognitive injuries, their consequences, and services to assist recovery. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

<sup>5</sup> Hefling, K. (2009, February 12.) Suicide by Guard, Reserve troops studied. *The Associated Press*. Retrieved May 1, 2009 from [http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/02/ap\\_reservesuicide\\_080212/](http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/02/ap_reservesuicide_080212/)

<sup>6</sup> Stinson, D. (n.d.) DoD Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. Supporting members, families and communities during the entire deployment cycle. Retrieved April 15, 2009 from <http://deploymentlink.osd.mil/>

meet the implementation requirements, the structure, substance, and quality of programs differs significantly across regions and Services, potentially affecting support available to servicemembers.

Significant concern has been raised about the sustainability of service providers' commitment to the program given funding constraints and coordination issues. To address this concern, many units and components have promoted the concept of joint, or "purple," YRRP events, but the full realization of this concept has been challenging due to lack of coordination among services and variations in deployments, resource needs and even language used within each Service.

Further guidance and exemplary practices for the YRRP are currently being compiled at the state, Service, and federal levels. Meanwhile, the absence of guidelines regarding coordination and program elements has created challenges in the implementation process of the YRRP across the nation. Many gaps remain in fully addressing the needs of servicemembers and their families throughout the deployment cycle. One barrier to closing this gap cited by several Reserve organizations is the lack of reliable baseline funding for the YRRP.

To identify coordination, sustainability and funding issues that affect the operation of the YRRP, this analysis provides an overview of every State National Guard organization's implementation status, including three case studies on fully developed programs that vary significantly in programmatic offerings: Minnesota, Montana, and Oregon. Additionally, this analysis summarizes the efforts of each of the Reserve components thus far.

Through interviews with YRRP coordinators, service providers and national administrators, a survey on implementation status in each National Guard state, and a review of the literature, five key findings were identified.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

1. The ad-hoc funding process hampers implementation.
2. Coordination is a significant challenge.
3. Data and metrics to evaluate success are inconsistent or nonexistent.
4. Sustainability of service providers is not an immediate problem.
5. Flexibility in programs can be valuable.

Based on these five findings are two sets of recommendations. The first set is targeted to program coordinators and the second is targeted to federal policymakers in the Department of Defense (DoD) or in Congress.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM COORDINATORS**

1. Continue joint event coordination efforts.
2. Meet regularly with service providers to understand needs and resources.
3. Convene a statewide coordinating body on reintegration issues.
4. Implement applicable exemplary practices in a systematic way.
5. Conduct outreach and media advocacy to increase YRRP awareness.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEDERAL POLICYMAKERS

1. Fully fund the YRRP in the federal budget.
2. Appoint liaisons in each State National Guard organization and Reserve command.
3. Establish a standardized data collection process to assist in development of evidence-based practices.
4. Provide centralized training in all Services based on exemplary practices.
5. Continue to allow for appropriate variation in YRRP operation.

## BACKGROUND

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The strain of deployments on servicemembers and their families throughout the Armed Forces has been well documented.<sup>7,8</sup> As readers of this report are well aware, this strain has disproportionately affected members of the National Guard and Reserve.<sup>9</sup> Mental health disorders on the whole are twice as prevalent in soldiers of the Army Reserve and Army National Guard as in Active Component soldiers, and 53% of veteran suicides between 2001 and 2005 were committed by Reservists.<sup>10,11</sup> The 2008 RAND Invisible Wounds of War study, which placed the probable service-wide Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) rate at 20%, named Reserve Component servicemembers as a group at a higher risk for PTSD and major depression.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the deployment cycle, Reservists face challenges that are quite different from their active duty counterparts. Living among civilians, National Guard and Reserve members lack the community structure of a base that can help create a net of reintegration support and resources. Further, families must adjust to the “new normal” when a loved one is deployed and then again when he or she returns home. Reservists readjusting to civilian life are often faced with a host of other challenges, including but not limited to finding new employment or returning to their previous career that may no longer be suited to their skill set.

The burden of identifying psychological health symptoms and accessing care for help often falls to the Reservist or Reservist’s family member. However, due to persistent stigma around mental health issues in the military, servicemembers may not seek out help not only for lack of information and support, but because they are afraid such treatment might jeopardize their careers.<sup>13</sup> Also, Reservists and family members are often unaware of the resources available to them in the community. As a result, National Guard personnel traditionally face a significant gap in care that prevents them from being properly screened for and equipped to address deployment-related mental health issues, including major depression and PTSD.<sup>14,15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Tanielian & Jaycox (2008).

<sup>8</sup> Department of Defense Mental Health Task Force (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Tanielian & Jaycox (2008).

<sup>10</sup> Young, R.S., Gillan, E., Dingmann, P., Casinelli, P. & Taylor, C. (2008). Army health care operations in Iraq. *Comm Med.* 72(1):13-7.

<sup>11</sup> Hefling (2009).

<sup>12</sup> Tanielian & Jaycox (2008).

<sup>13</sup> Department of Defense Mental Health Task Force (2007).

<sup>14</sup> Department of Defense Mental Health Task Force (2007).

<sup>15</sup> Tanielian & Jaycox (2008).

In recognition of these unique challenges and of the heavy utilization of Reservists in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the Services, Congress, and the veterans community at large have committed to reintegration programs to meet the needs of Reservist servicemembers and their families. Several of these programs have been established throughout the Reserve Component, many before the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) became a federal mandate. Broadly, these programs seek to address the following areas, which have been consistently identified as areas of need in the reintegration process.

1. Preparation for deployment
2. Family preparation for redeployment
3. Managing combat stress
4. Strengthening relationships
5. Addressing negative behaviors
6. Accessing benefits
7. Financial planning and counseling
8. Career transition assistance
9. Mental health screening and treatment
10. Accessing education benefits

After witnessing the success of reintegration programs run by certain State National Guard organizations and Reserve units, Congress established the national Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) in the FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).<sup>16</sup> The program is currently being implemented nationwide throughout the National Guard and Reserve, but the level of implementation and breadth of the program among Services, states and units varies significantly.

## PURPOSE OF THIS ANALYSIS

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The purpose of this analysis is to offer an overview of National Guard and Reserve YRRP implementation, explore cases of successful reintegration program operation, and put forth recommendations to both program coordinators and federal policymakers to strengthen and sustain the YRRP. Although some data have been collected on individual program operation, this is the first comprehensive study on the Services-wide implementation of the YRRP to be published.

While the National Guard and Reserve have made noteworthy strides in addressing reintegration needs of their servicemembers both before and after the 2008 NDAA authorizing language was enacted, there is too little guidance on the implementation, coordination, funding and sustainability of the YRRP nationwide. The Department of Defense (DoD) Office for Reintegration Programs (ORP) has convened an advisory group in part to address these guidance issues,<sup>17</sup> but many programs are seeking interim advice. The July 22, 2008 DoD Directive Type Memorandum (DTM) expands on the legislation to offer suggested services at each stage of the YRRP.<sup>18</sup> However it fails

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<sup>16</sup> National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-181, §532 (2008).

<sup>17</sup> Quigley, S. (2009, March 30). Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program reaches milestone. *American Forces Press Service*. Retrieved April 1, 2009 from <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=53708>

<sup>18</sup> Department of Defense Directive-Type Memorandum (DTM) 08-029 (2008, July 22). *Implementation of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program*.

to offer guidance on coordination and sustainability practices. Further explanation of the DTM follows in this analysis.

## SCOPE OF THIS ANALYSIS

This analysis is intended for a broad audience of federal policymakers, YRRP administrators, community and government partners, and advocacy organizations. The scope is deliberately broad so each state National Guard and Reserve organization can utilize the information presented.

This report is not an overview of all servicemember and family needs but rather an analysis of exemplary practices and problems in implementation of the YRRP, identification of criteria for assessing the success of the program, and recommendations for changes to federal legislation.

Finally, preliminary studies on lessons learned in the YRRP have shown that stigma around mental health care persists throughout the Services and that there are issues that emerge throughout most programs relating to the payment of travel expenses, child care expenses, and dealing with civilian employers.<sup>19</sup> Building on these findings rather than duplicating that work, this analysis focuses largely on the implementation of the YRRP, including funding mechanisms, sustainability of the program, and coordination among program coordinators, different Reserve organizations, and service providers.

## THE YELLOW RIBBON REINTEGRATION PROGRAM

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Although several State National Guard and Reserve organizations had substantial family and reintegration programs in place before the advent of the YRRP, the Minnesota National Guard was the basis of today's mandated program.<sup>20</sup> Originally authorized as a pilot program in the FY 2007 NDAA, the Minnesota National Guard's (MNNG) Beyond the Yellow Ribbon program later received federal funding and national attention for its efforts.<sup>21</sup> The MNNG's Beyond the Yellow Ribbon program was designed to familiarize servicemembers and their families with the realities of reintegration but also equip them with the knowledge, resources and support to access mental health care and other assistance for the various challenges faced by a redeployed servicemember. Minnesota's program will be further discussed in the case studies section.

Using the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon program as its foundation, the YRRP became federal law in January 2008 with the passage of the FY 2008 NDAA.<sup>22</sup> The legislation is broadly written but mandates that the YRRP be implemented in every state and Reserve command. Each program must consist of events throughout the four phases of the deployment cycle, and the post-deployment activities must take place at approximately 30-, 60-, and 90-day intervals following demobilization.

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<sup>19</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense. (n.d.) The Yellow Ribbon initiative. Supporting members, families and communities during the entire deployment cycle. Provided November 20, 2009 by P. Campbell.

<sup>20</sup> Stinson (n.d.)

<sup>21</sup> United States Office of Management and Budget. (2008.) Minnesota National Guard reintegration program. Retrieved May 2, 2009 from [http://earmarks.omb.gov/2008-earmarks/earmark\\_340671.html](http://earmarks.omb.gov/2008-earmarks/earmark_340671.html)

<sup>22</sup> National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-181, §532 (2008).

The legislation also provided for the establishment of an Office for Reintegration Programs (ORP). The office is tasked with administering all YRRPs in conjunction with each state's National Guard organization, and also coordinating with existing family support programs. The ORP is staffed with a liaison representing each Reserve organization. Under the ORP is the Center for Excellence in Reintegration, responsible for analyzing best practices and training materials for National Guard and Reserve organizations.

In addition to other activities, the ORP holds regular meetings among its liaisons and stakeholders to coordinate and discuss upcoming events and projects in support of the YRRP. The ORP hosts monthly conference calls for Service liaisons and YRRP vendors. These calls are a forum to discuss challenges, current implementation of the YRRP, and upcoming events. Currently, the ORP is creating a Web-based tool, searchable by ZIP code, so program coordinators can view upcoming YRRP events throughout the Services.<sup>23</sup> Pursuant to the 2008 NDAA legislation, the ORP established an advisory board composed of the directors of each of the Reserve organizations, a state National Guard Adjutant General on a rotating basis, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, and other stakeholders. This advisory board held its first meeting on March 30, 2009.<sup>24</sup>

The standard YRRP program today consists of four phases: pre-deployment, to prepare servicemembers and families for the rigors of combat and separation; deployment, to address stress associated with combat and removal from civilian life; demobilization, to educate and connect servicemembers on mental health and reintegration resources immediately upon redeployment; and finally post-deployment/reconstitution.<sup>25</sup> The post-deployment stage occurs at 30, 60, and 90 days post-deployment. YRRP participants in the post-deployment stage are connected with service providers, screened for combat stress-related psychological problems, offered seminars on reintegration problems like gambling abuse and anger management, and presented with information on education and employment assistance. Workshops on parenting and relationships are also offered.<sup>26</sup> In most states, the program officially concludes after the 90-day event.

## **DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE GUIDANCE**

On July 22, 2008, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, David S.C. Chu, issued a Directive-Type Memorandum (DTM) that established policies and procedures of YRRP implementation.<sup>27</sup> The DTM expanded the definition of "families" to include nontraditional members. This DTM also dictated that full implementation of joint YRRPs is required in FY 2009, and gave guidance on activities that could be included in a YRRP. While the guidance is fairly broad, it offers various menus of services and briefings that can be included throughout the YRRP stages. However, the DTM offers little explicit guidance on substance of the briefings, and no guidance on funding the program or coordination with other Services.

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<sup>23</sup> B. Barnes, personal communication, March 31, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Quigley (2009).

<sup>25</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense. (n.d.) The Yellow Ribbon initiative. Supporting members, families and communities during the entire deployment cycle. Provided November 20, 2009 by P. Campbell.

<sup>26</sup> Minnesota National Guard. (2008). 2007 Annual report. Retrieved March 20, 2008 from [www.dma.state.mn.us](http://www.dma.state.mn.us)

<sup>27</sup> Department of Defense Directive-Type Memorandum (DTM) 08-029. (2008, July 22). *Implementation of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program*.

## YELLOW RIBBON REINTEGRATION PROGRAM FUNDING

Although the passage of the YRRP legislation authorized the implementation of the program, it did not provide for funding of operating costs or staff members. However, it did make allowances for “appropriate pay for days spent attending” YRRP events in the post-deployment phase.<sup>28</sup>

Each State National Guard organization must request funding for every YRRP event they host.<sup>29</sup> Thus, funding largely depends on size of the unit attending the event. Minnesota has been operating for the last two years on funding from a federal earmark.<sup>30</sup> National Guard Bureau (NGB) also provides YRRP contractors to various offices nationwide to help administer the program. Otherwise, funding for the general operation of the program is not provided. To enhance their resources, some states, such as Maryland, have been able to rely on nonprofit funding, where others have used funding from their respective state legislatures.<sup>31</sup> The remainder, however, must fund their YRRP out of their existing funding.

Each Reserve component must request funding from its own Service. That Service then submits the request through the Department of Defense, who requests it through the President’s budget.<sup>32</sup> Each Reserve component’s funding totals are different, as are their programs. All of the funding for 2009 for reintegration programs was supplemental funding except for the Army National Guard, which received baseline funding.<sup>33</sup>

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The specific program components and vendors within each stage of the YRRP vary by Service, state and even unit, but there are community partners that have been widely utilized. A sample of organizations and individuals that are frequently partners to the YRRP are listed in the chart below. The chart is structured by organization/partner type.

Health	General Veterans Services	Financial	Employment	Education	Legislative	Military
VA, TRICARE, County Health Departments	Vet Centers, Military OneSource, Military Family Life Consultants, VSOs, State Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs	Red Cross	Law Enforcement, State Employment Offices, ESGR, U.S. Department of Labor	State and Local Colleges and Universities, VA, State Department of Education	Federal Representatives, State Representatives, Governor	Family Programs, Family Readiness Programs, Deployment Cycle Support, Chaplains, Family Assistance Centers

<sup>28</sup> National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-181, §532 (2008).

<sup>29</sup> A. Karlin, personal communication, March 5, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> C. Fleming, personal communication, February 27, 2009

<sup>31</sup> Davenport, C. (2009, April 12). Newly returned soldiers find help with transition. *The Washington Post*, p. C01.

<sup>32</sup> D. Stinson, personal communication, April 10, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> D. Stinson, personal communication, April 10, 2009.

## METHODOLOGY

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Information in this analysis was acquired from interviews with a variety of stakeholders throughout the National Guard, Reserve, DoD Office for Reintegration Programs, interviews with service providers, available YRRP presentations and briefing memoranda, a review of the literature, and supplemented with Internet-based reviews of organization Web sites and news sources. Case studies of State National Guard organizations were selected based on advanced level of implementation of the program, variation in program elements and partners, and availability of information and interviewees. Case studies of other developed programs with notable variation merit further research.

Methodology used in the assessments of State National Guard organizations is discussed in the National Guard assessment section below. Coast Guard Reserve activities were not surveyed as part of this analysis because their deployment experiences typically differ significantly from the rest of the Reserve Component, and merit an alternative needs analysis.

To determine recommendations and exemplary practices, I chose elements that maximize effectiveness; maximize coordination; promote sustainability; maximize the cost-benefit ratio; are operationally feasible; and allow for flexibility among program administrators. A further description of these criteria can be found in the Criteria section of this analysis.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE ANALYSIS

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As every State National Guard and Reserve organization is mandated to implement this program in FY 2009, some information may have changed by the publication of this analysis as components work to meet the deadline. Reserve organizations equipped with strong existing family programs and leadership on the YRRP might be able to launch the program within only a few months. Also, because the YRRP is young and still developing in most areas of the country, several exemplary practices are still evolving. For this reason, an annual update of this analysis would be desirable.

Most of the exemplary practices listed in this analysis are qualitatively assessed, because quantitative data is either unavailable or inconsistent due to the unit-specific nature in how it has been collected. Standardized quantitative data could be useful to assess problems and outcomes in the YRRP. However, as demonstrated in this analysis, qualitative impressions from servicemembers and their family members can prove to be highly useful as well and should continue to be collected.

Lastly, readers will notice that this analysis places an analytic emphasis on the National Guard's programs nationwide. This is due to availability of researchable materials, interview sources and the relatively advanced stages of implementation in many State National Guard organizations.

While the need for reintegration programs and certain services have been well documented, several reintegration programs currently utilized throughout the Reserve Component are not rigorously tested. There is significant need for evidence-based practices in the YRRP.

## CURRENT NATIONAL GUARD IMPLEMENTATION

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Overall, the National Guard has led the nation in YRRP implementation. Specifically, the Army National Guard's (ARNG) programs are the most developed in terms of program offerings and experience. While each of the Services is producing noteworthy and, increasingly, fully developed YRRPs, the ARNG has had the opportunity to establish their programs quickly due to a number of factors. Most significantly, ARNG units have had an easier time replicating the MNNG's program because of obvious structural and deployment similarities. Large ARNG units needing YRRP resources have allowed ARNG leadership to develop the programs to address reintegration issues on a unit level, and there has also been a high level of enthusiasm and commitment in the ARNG to implement this program.

Often, the Air National Guard (ANG) works with the ARNG to establish a YRRP, but Air National Guardsmen and women tend to deploy in small numbers to fill the needs of other deploying units. While the need for YRRP offerings is high among ANG servicemembers, they are often unable to offer large-scale events because their small deployments do not justify inviting dozens of service providers and renting a facility when they can be sent instead to a nearby ARNG event.

Due to the decentralized command structure of the National Guard, the implementation and components of the program vary significantly from state to state. Not only do states have different levels of commitment to servicemember reintegration, but National Guard membership and geographic distribution vary widely among states as well. Some states started with significant reintegration and family readiness resources; others are just learning the process. In some states, reintegration programs are housed in family programs, while in other states, these programs are standalone entities that work with family programs, JFSAP, and other existing National Guard organizations.

This review of National Guard YRRP implementation is not of all family, mental health, financial and job services offered by the National Guard, but specifically of the level of implementation of each YRRP in each state. Further, this review does not evaluate the quality of the program. In many cases, State National Guard organizations have significant programs devoted to veterans' benefits and family readiness even if they do not have a fully operational YRRP.

### METHODOLOGY FOR NATIONAL GUARD ASSESSMENTS

To determine the extent to which the YRRP or a similar program has been implemented in each state, I conducted interviews with program coordinators and searched news archives, official presentations on reintegration programs, and each state's National Guard and family programs Web sites. For case studies, I conducted additional interviews with program coordinators and service providers in those states. Understanding that several YRRP-type programs are named alternatively in various states, I searched for "Yellow Ribbon," "reintegration" "transition assistance" and "deployment cycle support" along with each state's main National Guard site and family programs site, if available.

As many states are currently working to establish and expand their YRRPs, this classification of states in the Full Implementation or Partial Implementation stages should be updated often. Figure 1 below is a chart detailing the percentage of states at each level of implementation. Figure 2, also below, is a map that indicates level of program implementation by state.

## FULL IMPLEMENTATION

States that have achieved Full Implementation are those where events have been held in each phase of the YRRP model and program coordinators and staff are in place. In some cases, these events were held prior to the YRRP legislation as part of a state's existing deployment cycle support program or family program, and have been converted into the YRRP. While the Web presence varies among the National Guard organizations, there is often documentation by media advisories, news articles, or Web pages dedicated to the YRRP indicating that the program is operational. State National Guard organizations in this category vary significantly in their breadth, experience, and dates of implementation. Case study states, to be discussed later in this analysis, are included in this categorization. Readers should note that the extent to which programs have been coordinated between the ARNG and the ANG varies significantly. In most cases, the events that have been offered have been for ARNG units but open to other Services.

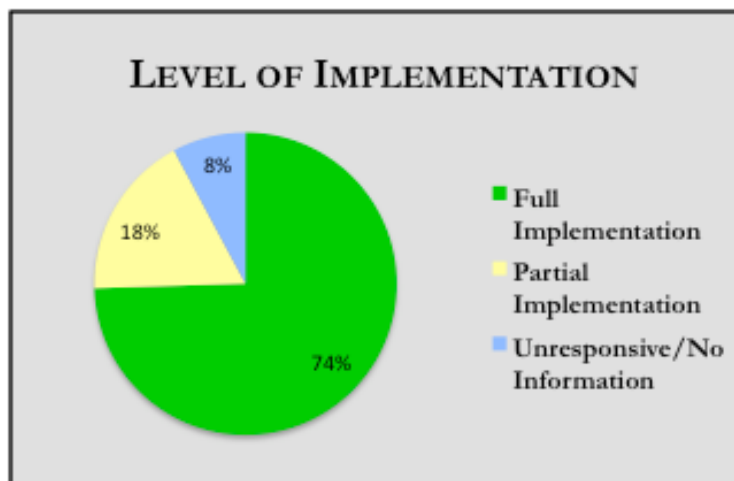
## PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

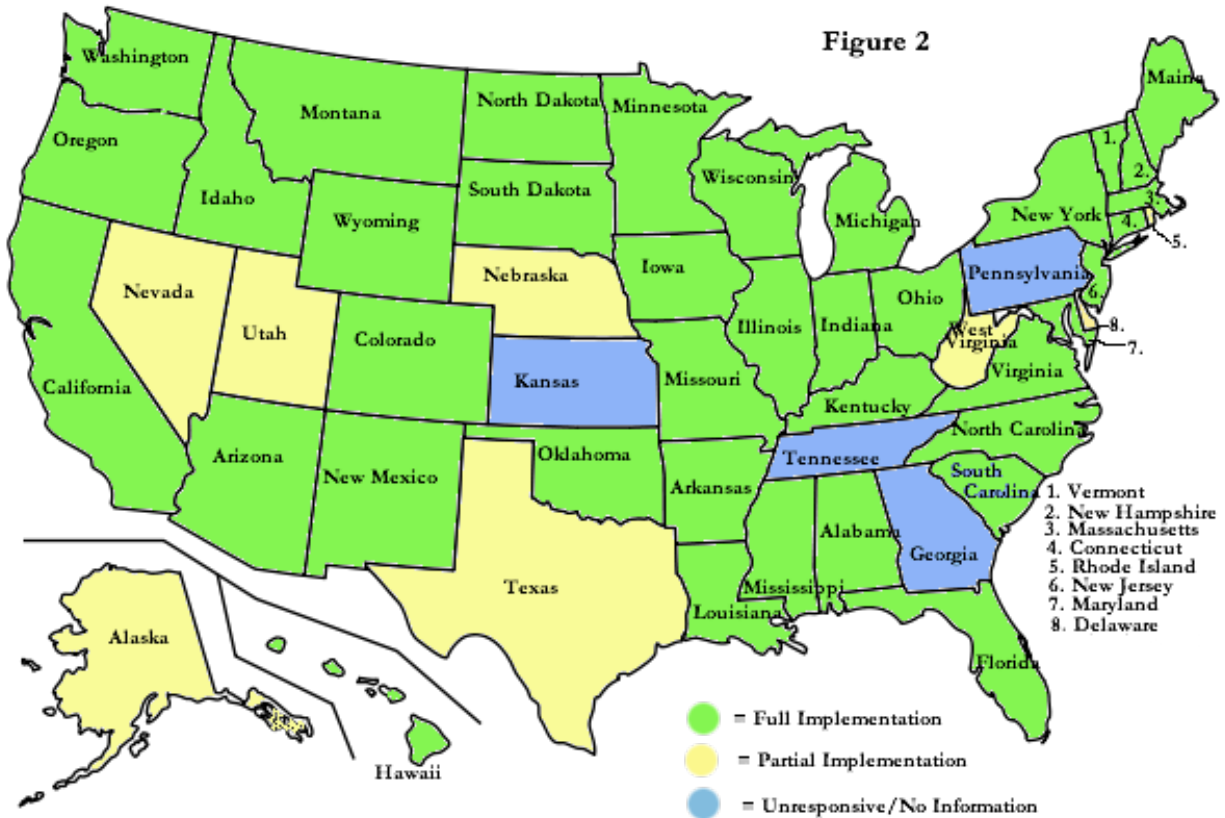
State National Guard organizations that have achieved Partial Implementation are largely developed and have hosted certain events but have not yet hosted events throughout all phases of the YRRP. Partial Implementation state organizations also have designated YRRP staff. These organizations may also have existing programs that could be reasonably integrated into a YRRP, such as marriage enrichment seminars, Family Readiness Groups (FRGs), or career counseling. In most cases, states that have achieved Partial Implementation do not yet have a Web site for the YRRP but do have plans to develop one in the near future. Almost every state in the Partial Implementation phase has not yet hosted events in every YRRP stage only because they are awaiting a pilot unit's deployment or return. Many of these states have future events scheduled that will move them into the Full Implementation stage.

## UNRESPONSIVE/NO INFORMATION

A small number of states were unresponsive to interview requests and had no conclusive information available about their YRRP available through a Web-based search for presentation materials, links to a YRRP site, or media advisories on a fully implemented program. Several of these states have references to a YRRP or complementary family programs but information regarding the level of implementation is unavailable.

Figure 1





\*Washington, DC: Partial Implementation

\* American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam had no significant Yellow Ribbon resources available.

## NATIONAL GUARD CASE STUDIES

The following case studies were conducted to illustrate the operation and experiences of different state National Guard organizations that have implemented the YRRP. Each state was purposely chosen to highlight varied program elements, structures, and relationships with other Services and vendors.

### 1. MINNESOTA NATIONAL GUARD

#### PROGRAM OPERATION

As described earlier, the Minnesota National Guard’s (MNNG) pilot was the model for the national program. The MNNG has made several changes to their YRRP since it began, providing insight into how a developed program continues to modify to accommodate the needs of its servicemembers and families.

In the first phase of the YRRP, pre-deployment, servicemembers are briefed on preparing for the stresses of deployment, and families receive information on casualty notification, VA, TRICARE, and other state resources, and information on maintaining healthy family relationships.

During phase two, deployment, servicemembers receive combat stress training in theatre, and families are gathered to provide information on Military OneSource, child care, Family Reintegration Academies, and community outreach. Families are also briefed on what to expect from a redeployed servicemember. Also during the deployment phase, the outreach team works with community leaders such as clergy, medical practitioners, mental health providers, law enforcement officials and educators to brief them on the experiences and needs of reintegrating servicemembers in advance of their return.

In the third, demobilization phase, servicemembers and families are provided access to support agencies for overviews of available services, and receive briefings on the challenges of reintegration. Servicemembers are then dismissed and required to return for the post-deployment phase.

The 30-day and 60-day post-deployment events are one day each and are geared toward both servicemembers and families. At the 60-day event, briefings and resources are geared toward what the MNNG calls “compulsive behaviors”—substance abuse and gambling problems, for example. The 90-day event is open to servicemembers only because this marks when units get their equipment back, and also when servicemembers complete the Post Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRA.)

Where events are held depends greatly on the availability of venues. Generally, events are held at state and local colleges close to where units are headquartered in order to limit the burden of travel on servicemembers and families. Very large events can only be held in metropolitan areas such as Minneapolis and St. Paul due to venue size.

The MNNG program has changed since its formal beginning in 2006. Over time, the program offerings have expanded on a mostly ad-hoc, trial-and-error basis, with classes and briefings added based upon what program staff thought might be helpful. Now, the MNNG is taking a step back to analyze their experiences with the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Combat Team (BCT), who recently completed their reintegration activities. The MNNG is trying to identify what their most effective programs and services are based on surveys, data from the state Family Assistance Centers (FACs), and general feedback from servicemembers and their families.

One change that has come from this feedback review is the addition of a finance class during the pre-deployment phase. Initially, servicemembers and their families learned about investing and planning for retirement, but the YRRP staff learned that this class was not meeting servicemembers’ needs because it did not address immediate financial concerns. The class was then restructured to teach families how to pay down bills and come out of deployment debt-free. The MNNG also added a course that teaches servicemembers how to set goals beyond deployment and how to verbalize their qualifications to obtain satisfying employment.

Currently, the MNNG is considering how to address servicemembers’ reintegration needs after the 90-day point. By tracking numbers of servicemember and family calls to FACs at the 180-day mark and one-year mark, the MNNG is able to recognize that there is still a need for resource availability at those times. Funding is a constraint in expanding the program at this point, but the MNNG is reviewing the Program of Instruction (POI) to see how it may be able to stretch resources adequately.

The MNNG is also shifting focus to the pre-deployment stage of the YRRP to emphasize stress management and ensure that servicemembers are aware of available resources before they need

them. As part of this proactive approach, the MNNG operates marriage retreats and Family Preparation Academies, which bring servicemembers and their families in for “a-la-carte” training, allowing participants to choose from a variety of seminars.

## **LEADERSHIP AND STAFFING**

The MNNG YRRP is overseen by the Deployment Cycle Support (DCS) office. Family programs, including Family Assistance Centers (FACs), Family Readiness and youth programs also fall under the DCS’s purview. When the MNNG program was initiated, the YRRP team was all on temporary active duty (TDY). Today, many of these positions are permanent. Additionally, several contractors have come from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), including Military Family Life consultants, a Military OneSource representative, and family assistance caregivers.

## **FUNDING**

While MNNG funding needs depend on operational tempo of their units, the current budget for reintegration-specific events is \$1.9 million. This covers events and activities throughout all four phases of the program. In 2007, the MNNG received over \$3 million in federal funding and \$1.5 million in state funding to conduct the YRRP. The MNNG has been fortunate in receiving federal earmarks to partially cover the cost of the program and has been able to be more flexible in their program operation. The funding allocated by the state can be used for ARNG or ANG servicemembers, but only ARNG members can use funds from the Army. The ANG has to utilize money specifically allocated to them by the Air Force.

## **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

The DCS Community Outreach team encompasses JFSAP, Family Programs, and Military Family Life Counselors. The purpose of bringing all these offices under one umbrella was to foster coordination, break down service “silos,” and increase face-to-face communication among the programs. Currently, all the aforementioned programs, as well as Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) and the assistant state chaplain, are housed in one building outside of the Twin Cities. The only element of DCS not located in that building are the FACs throughout Minnesota.

DCS’s outreach includes the Yellow Ribbon City Campaign. As part of this campaign, the MNNG meets with stakeholders from the city or county level to draft plans to support Reservists in their communities. Participants break into focus groups and create plans to maximize their support to servicemembers and their families. The focus group plans are consolidated into a community plan and presented to the MNNG. Once a plan is approved, the Governor’s Yellow Ribbon Task Force awards the community Yellow Ribbon City status. The goal of the program is to create locally supportive networks throughout the state and to close the gap between servicemembers and resources they can utilize that already exist in the general population. The MNNG sees this campaign as a long-term solution to caring for servicemembers that would remain intact even if the YRRP no longer existed.

## **COORDINATION**

One key coordinating aspect of the MNNG’s YRRP is the Governor’s Yellow Ribbon Task force, which includes 82 members and 56 state agencies. The Task Force has served as an advocate for several veterans’ initiatives in Minnesota, from successfully increasing the number of TRICARE providers in Minnesota to adding veterans’ assistance centers to college campuses around the state.

Governor Tim Pawlenty has also created a Director of Reintegration position for Minnesota. The MNNG names the cooperative relationships they have with Governor Pawlenty, the Adjutant General, Major General Larry W. Shellito, and federal elected officials as the key reasons their program has been able to obtain the support that they have.

The Minnesota ARNG is the primary user of the MNNG program, but the Minnesota ANG has also sent many of its servicemembers to their events. If ANG personnel attend ARNG events, then the ANG must pay for travel and lodging costs for that servicemember. However, this saves the ANG from having to plan and host a large-scale event with all necessary vendors for just a few of its airmen. The consolidation of ANG and ARNG presents some problems, including the cultural and language differences between the two Services and the different needs and challenges that accompany shorter but more frequent deployments. Airmen and women have less time to adjust to each stage of the deployment cycle, and this specific aspect of their reintegration challenge is not addressed in traditional ARNG-focused events.

Coordination with Reserve units in Minnesota has been growing, particularly with the Marine Corps Reserve (USMCR). Despite cultural and language differences, which exist less between the Army Reserve (USAR) and the ARNG, many reintegration issues and needs like career and financial counseling are broadly applicable to members of all Reserve components. Briefings and resources addressing these challenges can be provided fairly easily in a joint event. However, many of the Reserve components want to run their own programs to address issues specific to their personnel, so there is resistance to full consolidation of all events.

To ensure communication of YRRP events around the state to servicemembers and also leadership in other Reserve units, Minnesota formed an Inter-Service Family Assistance Committee (IFSAC). All the Services within Minnesota have a representative on the committee, which meets quarterly. Service providers and corporate partners are beginning to attend the meetings as well.

For Release from Active Duty (REFRAD) or medical hold (MED-HOLD) servicemembers, the MNNG holds Monthly Individual Reintegration Training (MIRTs), which are a consolidated version of the 30- and 60-day events. MIRT events are usually immediately followed by Wounded Warrior events. As in the traditional YRRP events, any Service may send a member to the MIRT events but are required to pay for the travel and lodging costs of that servicemember.

## **TRAINING OTHER STATES**

Previously, representatives of the MNNG would travel at the request of other State National Guard organizations to train program coordinators and staff, but the number of requests became too great for the MNNG to sustain. As a solution, the MNNG now hosts a yearly YRRP training seminar to give any state that wishes to attend an overview of how its program works.

## **SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

Through its strong outreach and commitment at senior levels of state and federal government, the MNNG has established an expansive network of community partners in support of YRRP. Some of the MNNG's key partners include Operation: Military Kids, which provides support to children of servicemembers; Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs; Military OneSource; Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), which provides facilities for YRRP events and helps servicemembers to enroll into classes; Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, which provides an array of mental health and financial counseling

services to veterans; and TriWest. Also, the MNNG works with the Department of Labor to translate skills and competencies gained during deployment into civilian language for resumes and job applications. Key partners in hiring redeployed servicemembers in Minnesota include corporations such as Target, Best Buy and Cub Foods.

According to the MNNG, none of their community partners has given them any indication that their level of support requested by the MNNG is unsustainable. The organizations overall are reportedly adapting well to the increased demand for services. This increased demand is not due simply to the YRRP but also to increased expansion in related programs. However, the MNNG is mindful of the demands it places on these service providers, and is trying to consolidate events out of consideration to the vendors and also to maximize its own resources.

## **SERVICE PROVIDERS' PERSPECTIVE**

### *Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU)*

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) primarily supports the YRRP by providing academic facilities and resources statewide for MNNG YRRP events. MnSCU attends various YRRP events to brief families about educational resources and to check in with each servicemember about educational needs and barriers to access. Indirectly supporting the YRRP, MnSCU hosts 11 VA representatives at no charge throughout their colleges and universities. MnSCU has also increased the number of veterans' assistance centers on campuses from 2 to 45. MnSCU reports strong interest in higher education among National Guardsmen and women. At one recent demobilization event, 79.8 percent of the 3,000 attending reported interest in higher education. Coordination with the Reserve units in the state is much less developed. MnSCU often does not learn of Reserve events until a few days before it is held, which places strain on the organization.

The financial cost of YRRP materials to MnSCU is around a few hundred dollars a year for printing and travel costs. Travel for events, including attending mobilization activities out of state, if necessary, is where the bulk of the costs occur. These costs amount to around \$10,000 per year to MnSCU. MnSCU spends hundreds of hours per year supporting veterans directly through the YRRP and otherwise. These hours are split among administrators and volunteers.

According to Steve Frantz, the System Director for Student Affairs at MnSCU, the long-term sustainability of service providers' commitments remains to be seen. Currently, there is a high level of excitement around the program among stakeholders. As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continue, it is possible that some of this excitement will wane. It is also possible that outreach will need to be done on an individual, rather than unit, level. One significant challenge is that demobilization schedules often do not go according to plan, so setting travel and hotel logistics can be challenging. The YRRP demands on MnSCU's time are significant, but because there is strong support from MnSCU leadership, the commitment is manageable.

## MINNESOTA NATIONAL GUARD TAKEAWAYS:

- Close relationships with service providers, Minnesota communities and state and federal legislators contribute significantly to the strength of the program.
- The creation of a state Yellow Ribbon Task Force increases coordination among all stakeholders and consolidates advocacy efforts.
- The ARNG and ANG have different schedules and demands, making coordination difficult.
- Analysis of feedback led program staff to adopt certain program elements, such as the basic finance and goal development seminars.
- Coordination between DCS offices is enhanced by frequent face-to-face contact.
- The MNNG sees the need for post-90 day expansion but lacks funding to implement it.
- Service providers do not report problems with sustaining their YRRP commitments.

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## 2. MONTANA NATIONAL GUARD

### PROGRAM OPERATION

In March of 2007, Specialist Christopher Dana, an OIF veteran and member of the Montana National Guard (MTNG) committed suicide. This incident spurred the MTNG Adjutant General, Major General Randall D. Mosley, to create a Post-Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRA) Task Force to review the DoD-mandated PDHRA process. The Task Force was composed of members representing a wide variety of servicemember interests, including the VA, mental health counselors, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), and the Montana state legislature. The Task Force concluded that the MTNG was supporting all standards set forth by DoD for the PDHRA, but that several significant deficiencies existed in caring for returned servicemembers. From June 2007 until the summer of 2008, the MTNG developed a campaign plan and strategies to implement the Task Force's recommendations, from expanding the PDHRA program to setting up a crisis response team.

The centerpiece of the MTNG's reintegration program is the Post Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRA) program. While this program bears the same acronym as the standard health screening assessment completed by all servicemembers, the program goes far beyond its namesake. The PDHRA program begins where the standard YRRP ends: at the 90-day mark. Beyond 90 days post-deployment, a behavioral health provider attends every MTNG drill weekend. Every servicemember deploying or redeployed has to talk to this health provider. At six-month intervals for two years following the conclusion of the YRRP, each servicemember must undergo a health screening with both a physician and a behavioral health specialist.

At the 18-month mark, each servicemember completes another, identical PDHRA online to identify if any reintegration issues have surfaced. A MTNG staff member will call any servicemember whose assessment is flagged, and if a condition is identified, they will be referred to counseling. At the two-year mark and on an annual basis thereafter, all servicemembers must again have a Periodic Health Assessment and talk to both a physician and behavioral health provider. Senator Max Baucus of Montana recently proposed S. 711, the Post Deployment Health Assessment Act of 2009, which would make the PDHRA a mandated national program.<sup>34</sup>

With the exception of the PDHRA program and its recent advancements in joint coordination, the structure of the MTNG YRRP largely follows Minnesota's program. Additionally, during the 30-day event, servicemembers have access to Montana Highway Patrol workshops to re-teach defensive driving, identified by the MTNG as one of the biggest challenges its redeployed servicemembers face. The Montana Highway Patrol emphasizes the dangers of drinking and driving.

The location of Family Reintegration Academies, conducted for family members during the Deployment phase, and of reintegration events depends on the unit. Generally the MTNG works to find a location that is within 100 miles of attending servicemembers and their families. To accommodate geographically dispersed families, many Family Readiness Group activities are available as Webinars. However, all YRRP events are conducted in-person. The MTNG is investigating community colleges as venue options, but has not yet had a unit leave from a town with a community college.

## **LEADERSHIP AND STAFFING**

The MTNG YRRP and the PDHRA program falls under the DCS umbrella. The YRRP employs a lead program manager, two additional federal technicians, and three NGB contract employees (two from the ARNG and one from the ANG.)

## **FUNDING**

The total yearly funding needs for the MTNG YRRP in 2008 was approximately \$50,000, all of which was per-deployment funding from NGB. Now that the program has expanded to fully cover the ANG, funding needs are expected to increase significantly and will vary based on the number of deploying servicemembers. Overall, the funding per servicemember, per event is roughly \$200. Because the resources allocated to the MTNG by NGB have been sufficient to support the program and no additional personnel costs have been necessary, the MTNG has not had to ask the Montana State Legislature for additional funds.

## **COORDINATION**

To communicate YRRP events to individually deploying or redeploying servicemembers, the MTNG calls, mails, emails, and even greets them off the plane. These individuals are then connected to a larger unit's YRRP activities. However, the MTNG cites communication with families about available resources and the importance of reintegration activities as a constant challenge. While servicemembers are required to attend YRRP events, families are not. This means that families can miss out on valuable resources or briefings about how to deal with the stresses of deployment.

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<sup>34</sup> The United States Library of Congress. (n.d.) Thomas. Retrieved April 27, 2009 from <http://thomas.loc.gov>

The ARNG has a larger presence in Montana than the ANG, but the program coordinators in each Service communicate on a daily basis. ARNG and ANG liaisons meet often to discuss challenges to coordination, including the different deployment schedules of each Service. As in other states, one of the bigger challenges of including personnel from other services in ARNG-hosted events is identifying which Service is responsible for which costs. As of April 2009, Montana established its first fully joint YRRP event, having conducted an event that was attended by Army, Air Force, and Navy Reservists.

The MTNG reports that even though many services and resources are available to all participants at the events, those events are largely geared toward the ARNG. To enhance coordination and communicate events throughout the Services in Montana, the ARNG frequently meets with ANG, Army Reserve (USAR), Navy Reserve (USNR), and other related liaisons.

### **SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

When the MTNG YRRP began, the MTNG asked service providers to be present for the entire day during an event. The MTNG realized that this was not a productive use of many vendors' time because servicemembers would only visit vendors in the morning, but be tied up in briefings and other activities for the rest of the day. In response, the MTNG now schedules only a 1.5-hour period that service providers need to attend. Servicemembers are required to have a checklist of vendors and see all that attend so each vendor's time is maximized.

According to the MTNG, the biggest challenge in YRRP program operation is ensuring communication between all the Services in order to publicize events and consolidate vendors' activities to reduce strain on their time and resources. To balance servicemembers' needs and vendor resources, the MTNG has rolled some individual and smaller unit's YRRP activities into a larger unit's events. This means that some servicemembers might fall out of the exact 30-60-90-day schedule, but this tradeoff gives them access to more community resources.

Some of the MTNG closest service partners have been the University of Montana, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, TRICARE, American Red Cross, the Montana Secretary of State, Wildlife and Parks, VA, Vet Centers, and Military OneSource. The MTNG reports a high level of support from Montana communities. Specifically, the MTNG credits older veterans, such as those from Vietnam, for engaging the new generation of veterans in reintegration issues.

### **SERVICE PROVIDERS' PERSPECTIVE**

#### *Missoula Vet Center*

The Missoula Vet Center has been a key partner to the Montana National Guard with the PHDRA program and now the YRRP. The outreach technician, Brian Becker, is tasked with outreach for readjustment counseling. For the YRRP, the Vet Center hosts a pre-deployment brief for families and servicemembers, and also a family briefing just prior to redeployment on what to expect when servicemembers return. After brief contact upon demobilization, the Vet Center also conducts readjustment briefs at 30, 60, and 90 days post-deployment to educate servicemembers on symptoms to look for and how to seek help. Soon, the Vet Center will have two mobile Vet Centers, retrofitted and equipped with a driver, counselor and outreach staff member so they can reach out to rural communities and attend every event possible.

Funding for Missoula Vet Center support of the YRRP is minimal. Salary and gas for traveling to events are all that the Vet Center requires in terms of YRRP funding. The Missoula Vet Center also reports that its staff has not been particularly strained by the YRRP in Montana. This is mostly due to the relatively low number of National Guard personnel in Montana—about 3500—so the number of events—one or two per month—is not high enough to demand each employee to be attending one every weekend. Even then, when deployments ramp up, Mr. Becker reports there will likely not be a strain from providing briefings to more servicemembers, because they would be providing briefings regardless, but just to a smaller number.

Coordination between the Missoula Vet Center and the MTNG has increased over time. When the YRRP first started, there were issues about duplication in briefings about readjustment counseling. The Vet Center proposed that they be the sole briefers on readjustment counseling since they were the ultimate provider that servicemembers would be sent to see in most cases. The MTNG adopted the suggestion. Also, the MTNG shares event information as early as possible with service providers, allowing them to plan ahead.

### *Military OneSource*

Military OneSource, a DoD-run, one-stop source for assistance to servicemembers and their families, has representatives attend pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment events. At these events, Military OneSource has three foci: to provide an overview of the organization; to staff an information table complete with packages aimed at demographic groups within the military; and to talk directly with servicemembers and families about needs.

William Carroll, the Montana JFSAP consultant, reports that the YRRP comprises 50% of his workload, significantly higher than 2007. However, sustainability is not a problem from this service provider's standpoint due to federal support. While Mr. Carroll says that the MTNG utilizes Military OneSource resources the most frequently, they have also worked with Reserve units, namely the USNR. In terms of communication, Mr. Carroll contends that coordination could improve. He points to the fact that the DCS team, YRRP administration, key vendors and Family Readiness Group (FRG) are not all in the same building, as they are in some other states. Despite frequent phone and email contact, an element of coordination can be lost without frequent face-to-face contact. According to Mr. Carroll, as the program becomes fully implemented there will be more events happening at the same time so scheduling and communication among all parties will be key.

### **MONTANA NATIONAL GUARD TAKEAWAYS:**

- Periodic PDHRAs allow the MTNG to follow up continually with their servicemembers.
- The MTNG is able to expand the reintegration phase with state funding.
- MTNG representatives are able to make contact with every individually deployed servicemember due to frequent communication among units about redeploying personnel.
- Communication of events and importance of YRRP activities to families is a key challenge.
- Joint events between ANG and ARNG require frequent communication between liaisons and significant efforts at revising program offerings and language.
- YRRP event participants are required to see all service providers during a set period of time so service providers' time is maximized.

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### **3. OREGON NATIONAL GUARD**

#### **PROGRAM OPERATION**

The Oregon National Guard (ORNG) Soldier Reintegration Program dates back to February 2005. Because of its extensive experience in serving ORNG members and their families, many aspects of their program are indoctrinated and deviate from the standard YRRP. Oregon's National Guardsmen and women have only been deployed at the company level, composed of servicemembers from all over the state. The reintegration team feels that the size of these deployments is better suited to the activities the ORNG has designed for them. However, resources and seminars at each of their program events are similar to those offered under Minnesota's model.

The ORNG has committed to adapting their reintegration events to what servicemembers need. For example, while the ORNG identified career assistance as the top request from servicemembers, they learned through experience that the 30-day interval was not the appropriate time for a job fair and career briefings. According to the ORNG, servicemembers attending reintegration events at the 90- and 120-day marks reported much greater interest in career assistance activities. Now, the ORNG sends out weekly employment vacancies to every unit in Oregon and gives away magnets with the employment department's phone number during the 30- and 60-day events, but does not commence formal briefings or job fairs until after 90 days post-deployment.

Reintegration program activities are often held at community colleges in proximity to where the participants' unit is headquartered. A chief reason why the ORNG prefers these facilities is because they have computer labs that allow servicemembers to fully utilize Career Transition Assistance Program (CTAP) resources like resume preparation during events. The CTAP is further described below.

#### **LEADERSHIP AND STAFFING**

The ORNG reintegration program is part of the Deployment Cycle Support (DCS) team under the G-1 personnel office. The DCS team loosely consists of a G-1 representative on the mobilization planning council, the reintegration team, family program, a TriWest service center representative, ESGR, and representative from CTAP. The entire DCS team works in the same office. DCS also meets weekly with their medical detachment.

In the reintegration office, there is a director and four contracted staffers. The ORNG transition assistance advisor, funded by NGB, is part of the reintegration office. The ability to add personnel to the reintegration office has come incrementally as the office has received more support from NGB and the state legislature. Most personnel are National Guard servicemembers or veterans.

## **FUNDING**

The ORNG's 2008 budget submission was \$600,000 for the entire state to conduct reintegration activities, including the CTAP program. Most of that funding, carved out of the ORNG budget, goes toward staff pay for travel and lodging. The ORNG claims that the generous resources committed by area service providers significantly reduce the amount of funding the ORNG needs to operate their program. However, the ORNG notes that funding is a function of how many servicemembers will be served by the program in a given year; in May 2010, the funding needed to support the 2500 deploying ORNG soldiers will likely be higher.

One of the ORNG's biggest challenges is reportedly locating funding for emergency situations for families experiencing a deployment. Unforeseen expenses during deployment, such as a car breaking down, are often prohibitively costly and demand resources beyond what the ORNG is able to provide.

## **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

The ORNG stresses that reintegration is ongoing and that there is no specific end date for their readjustment activities. A significant focus of the reintegration program is outreach around the state. Only three reintegration program staff members work out of Salem; everyone else is assigned to other parts of Oregon. These geographically dispersed staff members meet with ORNG units, community leaders, and Reserve unit liaisons in order to continually expand the network of providers and support for Oregon National Guardsmen and women. The ORNG considers this outreach as key to readiness, because it allows the reintegration team to reach all servicemembers regardless of whether individuals transfer between units. For example, as a result of this outreach, now every rural hospital in Oregon accepts TRICARE.

## **CAREER TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Career training is an aspect of readjustment that the ORNG has prioritized for its servicemembers. The CTAP team works side-by-side with the reintegration team under the G-1. According to the ORNG, CTAP and the reintegration team have directly helped over 500 servicemembers obtain jobs. This number does not include servicemembers that utilize the program's website or attend a job fair and later find employment through a contact they established there.

In remote areas of Oregon, the CTAP team coordinates with a local unit, invites employers and service providers in the area, and hosts a career and benefits fair for approximately 400-500 servicemembers of all local active and Reserve units. Similar to a YRRP reintegration event, the fair is typically attended by 30-60 employers and other briefers like TRICARE, VA, JFSAP, Military OneSource and colleges and universities. Usually held at community colleges on drill weekends, CTAP staff and other volunteers assist servicemembers in reworking their resumes to convert military language to civilian language and to highlight tasks that were achieved during deployment. Servicemembers then submit these resumes to a state employment database and take the resumes to employers represented at the fair. These fairs are part of the reintegration program but are not part of the 30-60-90-day events specifically. These events are considered part of continuing education and are held beyond the 90-day period.

One noteworthy partner in hiring veterans has been law enforcement agencies. For example, the Portland Police Bureau offers a special recruitment program that expedites the hiring process so

background checks are conducted during deployment. Servicemembers hired by the Portland Police Bureau can then start working sooner after deployment than if the checks were conducted after they returned home.

## **COORDINATION**

Serving National Guardsmen and women is the ORNG's first priority because they are funded by NGB. The ORNG reintegration team is geared toward soldiers, but also provides demobilization briefings for ANG servicemembers. The chief senior master sergeant on the reintegration team is a veteran of the ANG and current liaison to that component.

A year after the ORNG reintegration program was initiated, reintegration staff started reaching out to USAR, USNR and USMCR units in the state. Today, the ORNG maintains close ties with the Reserve components, from assisting the USAR with reintegration briefing and planning a joint family services event with the USNR. According to the ORNG, the vast majority of core service organizations accessed by Reserve and National Guard servicemembers are the same. Although Service-specific concerns arise, such as the differing needs associated with shorter deployment cycles, the ORNG and partner Reserve units emphasize coordination and mindfulness in placing demands on service providers. All components are invited to every ORNG reintegration event.

To facilitate further coordination, twice yearly the ORNG hosts a state Reintegration Summit, where anyone interested in supporting servicemembers and their families is invited to attend. Typically the 100-140 attendees include representatives from all the Reserve components in the state, the governor, legislators, VSOs, civic organizations, and colleges and universities. The Reintegration Summit provides participants information on upcoming events, veterans' initiatives and updates on deployments, and then divides up the group into issue-specific focus groups.

The ORNG has a supportive relationship with the state governor, Ted Kulongoski, who served in the Marine Corps. Not only has the ORNG won an award from the governor for being the state's best small government organization, but Governor Kulongoski also created the Task Force on Veterans Services in early 2008 to consolidate efforts on veteran's issues and provide focus for those organizations. The Task Force consists of 27 members in three subcommittees, including a reintegration task force. The Task Force conducted a series of community town hall meetings to validate lessons learned, and then completed a report that detailed 12 key findings. Among its other findings were that coordination among reintegration programming efforts are not sufficient and that mental health access in rural areas is inadequate.

Despite the ORNG's intentions and strength of program, the ORNG claims that a significant challenge is creating awareness around what services and resources are available to servicemembers and their families. Resources and willingness to help abound in Oregon, but closing the gap on ensuring that servicemembers access this aid can be a struggle if families do not attend events and if servicemembers do not ask for the help that they need.

## **TRAINING OTHER STATES**

The ORNG trains other State National Guard organizations, but in a more informal manner than Minnesota. States will call the ORNG to ask questions about how the program is operated, and these states are invited to attend their events to see the program in operation. NGB personnel have attended ORNG reintegration events as well.

## **SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

The ORNG has cultivated many partners on the local, state and federal levels for its reintegration program. Signatories to the Reintegration Memorandum of Understanding, which defines the relationship and efforts of the partner organizations, include the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs, VA, VBA, U.S. Department of Labor, and WorkSource Oregon. Additionally, the reintegration team works often with elected officials, Vet Centers, VSOs, county health departments, the Red Cross, ESGR, TRICARE, and several others.

The reintegration team and the Family Readiness Group (FRG) work closely together. Since both organizations utilize many of the same vendors (such as TRICARE), the benefit fairs are utilized by both organizations. Also, the reintegration team attends FRG briefing events, and volunteers from both organizations often participate in the same trainings.

## **SERVICE PROVIDERS' PERSPECTIVE**

### *Oregon State Veterans Program, Oregon Employment Department*

The Oregon State Veterans Program in the Oregon Employment Department helps veterans prepare for and connect to quality jobs in the state. While they focus primarily on employment, they also work to draw out existing barriers to employment and connect servicemembers to other resources that can help them overcome those barriers. Part of the Veterans Program's charge is to support the ORNG's CTAP program.

Jim Booker, who is the Veterans Program coordinator, or a trained representative tries to attend every reintegration event in Oregon. Since the Veterans Program has staff dispersed throughout the state, they are able to dispatch a staff member locally to any unit's event. About half of the Veterans Program coordinator's time is spent supporting the reintegration program, depending on the phase of the deployment cycle. According to Mr. Booker, the current service provider commitment seems sustainable because of the high level of local and government support, volunteerism, and number of organizations equipped to assist servicemembers.

The Veterans Program is in contact with the ORNG on a weekly basis and meets with them once or twice a month. Further, the Veterans Program coordinator has access and posting rights to the ORNG scheduling calendar. The Veterans Program also coordinates closely with other service providers, such as VA and community colleges. Although these service providers attend quarterly meetings, annual conferences, and the Reintegration Summit, the Veterans Program often coordinates with other service providers via telephone to cut down on travel costs.

From the service provider standpoint, coordination with the Reserves has been slow despite efforts to communicate. While part of this is due to the one-by-one deployment structure of the Reserves, some units in Oregon reportedly want to create a separate job board for Reserves, essentially duplicating resources that already exist in Oregon. Further, the Veterans Program has been approached individually by Reserve members that have not been connected on a unit or Service level to career opportunities, indicating that some area Reserve units are not providing their servicemembers with the reintegration resources they seek.

In general, the Veterans Employment office reports that they have not had to participate in back-to-back reintegration weekends. While they do feel strains in funding cuts—they have had to cut one quarter of their staff from five years ago—they have been fortunate in that they can share

the salary of certain full-time positions with other state and federal programs. These funding constraints limit the amount of outreach that the Veterans Program can provide.

Mr. Booker points out that beyond the resource connections and counseling offered through the reintegration program, a specific need voiced by servicemembers and their families is for direct service funds. Everyday expenses like work clothes, gas, and rent can be burdensome and can hinder a servicemember's ability to find quality employment. While the Veterans Program has been able to support some of these direct service funds, need for more is evident.

### *American Red Cross, Oregon Pacific Chapter*

The American Red Cross provides financial services and emergency messaging in case of a casualty or birth. They coordinate with Reserve components in Oregon on a regular basis, email frequently about upcoming events, and meet quarterly in person.

Brian Newton is the Emergency Services Director for the Oregon Pacific Chapter of the American Red Cross. About 25% of Mr. Newton's time is spent in support of military issues. The Red Cross aims to make contact with families at reintegration program and other events to familiarize servicemembers' families with the Red Cross mission and available resources. According to Mr. Newton, this commitment is sustainable largely due to the help of volunteers and grant funding they receive from the Red Cross. Since their staff covers just seven counties, they are able to dispatch staff to locations throughout their region easily. The other Red Cross chapters in Oregon are tasked with reintegration program support in their own regions, keeping travel costs down.

### **PROPOSAL FOR LEGISLATIVE CHANGES**

The ORNG hopes to see further changes in federal legislation on reintegration programs. Specifically, the ORNG contends that there should be federal law imposing a 21-30 day extended active duty post-deployment period at a unit's armory that each state governor could opt out of. The ORNG says that under the standard YRRP, the whole unit that deployed together does not come back together for events. According to ORNG estimations, 30% of servicemembers deployed in a unit are members of other units so they do not participate in reintegration activities with the unit they served with. In order to ensure the inclusion of every servicemember deployed with a certain unit, the ORNG envisions the following plan.

Upon demobilization, every servicemember would receive a four-day pass to be with their families. After that time, the servicemembers would report back to the armory (with their families, if they so choose) where they would be housed in a nearby motel for the next week if the servicemember lives far away. During that first week, family reintegration issues would be addressed, along with benefits, education, legal, and health care representatives.

During the second, servicemember-only week, the unit would complete organizational duties such as after-action reviews and inventory. Also during the second week and continuing into the third, the unit would undergo mandatory, one-on-one counseling to identify potential mental health issues. Finally, during the third and fourth weeks, servicemembers would participate in the job fair described earlier. Throughout the extended post-deployment period, activities would be conducted on a half-day schedule, allowing the servicemember to spend the other half of the day with his or her family.

## OREGON NATIONAL GUARD TAKEAWAYS:

- The Career Transition Assistance Program has helped hundreds of servicemembers find quality civilian employment.
- Flexibility in implementation allows the ORNG to conduct outreach events and frequent localized career and benefits fairs around the state.
- YRRP stakeholders coordinate, attract new partners and make future plans during the biannual Reintegration Summit.
- The state Task Force on Veterans Services fosters coordination among reintegration stakeholders and has identified several key areas for improvement.
- Outreach to families and unit commanders is an integral component of the ORNG program.
- The ORNG favors significant changes to the current YRRP reintegration phase.

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## CURRENT RESERVE IMPLEMENTATION

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The YRRP has been implemented differently in the Reserve components than in the National Guard. While Reserve commands have varying levels of implementation, the variation among programs within a particular Service is much smaller than in the National Guard for a number of reasons. First, Reserve components have a centralized command structure, so their guidelines are not segmented by state the way that National Guard programs are. Second, Reserve components are able to hold centralized training conferences where all commands are asked to attend. Third, some Reserve components already ran reintegration programs prior to the YRRP, and now are adjusting these previously standardized programs to meet the mandated guidelines.

Each Reserve headquarters must ensure that the YRRP is implemented according to the federal legislation and the DoD Directive-Type Memorandum (DTM), but beyond those broad guidelines, each Service can tailor their program. Due to the centralized command structure of the Reserves, standardization across a particular Service may be easier to achieve than in the National Guard. However, since Reservists are often deployed individually or in small numbers, structuring the YRRP to meet the exact specifications of the National Guard-oriented guidelines presents a challenge.

## AIR FORCE RESERVE

The Air Force Reserve (USAFR) has been working to implement the YRRP in all its wings over the last six months. In November 2008, the USAFR established the Office of Deployment Cycle Support (DCS) at Headquarters Air Force Reserve Command, Robins Air Force Base, Georgia. The DCS office was created to oversee the implementation and management of the YRRP throughout its units. Specifically, the DCS office is tasked with providing training, guidance and support throughout USAFR wings and collecting information to establish standards on policy and support requirements.

Based on the YRRP federal legislation, the USAFR has disseminated guidelines to all its commands for the implementation of the program. To date, the program remains in varying states of implementation but events in each phase of the YRRP have been held throughout the country. While traditionally tasked with more stationary operations, some USAFR units have been deployed as security forces or in support of Army missions. These deployments have necessitated more focused reintegration events to address the combat stressors affecting these servicemembers. For this reason, the USAFR has allowed for some variation in its commands' management of the YRRP. However, each wing's YRRP includes briefings, presentations, and breakout sessions with mental health counselors, alcohol abuse and anger management specialists, Military Family Life Consultants, chaplains, VSOs, and other organizations.

USAFR personnel are usually deployed at shorter intervals—between three and six months—but more frequently than other Reservists, such as soldiers in the USAR. This deployment structure means their entire deployment cycle is abbreviated, which creates unique servicemember needs. Air Force Reservists must adjust more quickly to the different phases of the deployment cycle and face different challenges in employment, maintaining relationships, and pursuing educational goals.

Similar to other Reserve components, the USAFR leadership and program coordinators report making increasing efforts at communication with other Services. Where there is no USAFR presence, Reservists attend a nearby National Guard reintegration event. To ensure that each servicemember has the same access to events and resources regardless of home location, the USAFR is seeking to standardize its events as much as possible with the ultimate goal of standardization of the YRRP throughout all the Services.

Challenges faced by the USAFR include developing a standard for who can be considered a family member and therefore be funded to attend the reintegration events, and ensuring that Reserve airmen's needs are fully addressed when attending events hosted by another Service.

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- Joyner, B. (2008, November 21). Yellow ribbon: New office established to oversee command's reintegration program. *Citizen Airman*. Retrieved March 28, 2009 from <http://www.citamn.afrc.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123125228>
- M. Hill, personal communication, April 10, 2009.

## **ARMY RESERVE**

The YRRP in the Army Reserve (USAR) follows the Minnesota National Guard model closely. The USAR has been active in implementing the YRRP throughout its Major Subordinate Commands (MSCs) and Operational and Functional (O&F) Commands. O&F Commands in the USAR are responsible for the operation of the alert, pre-deployment, and deployment activity for families. O&F Commands inform Regional Support Commands (RSCs) and Regional Readiness Commands (RRCs) of mobilizing or redeploying soldiers in need of YRRP events, and ensure that servicemembers and their families are aware of reintegration activities. The RSCs and RRCs have been tasked with main responsibility for implementation of the reintegration phases, and with providing quarterly reports on the YRRP.

To facilitate the standardized implementation of the program, the USAR held its inaugural YRRP training workshop at the 81<sup>st</sup> RSC's headquarters in Fort Jackson, South Carolina in November 2008. Over 100 Army and USAR personnel attended the workshop. The USAR has also formally attended National Guard events for training purposes.

The USAR's primary partners, similar to other Services, are Military OneSource, Military Family Life Consultants, Veterans' Affairs Outreach, the U.S. Public Health Service, and Vet Centers.

The USAR program offers some specific variations on the YRRP. For example, the USAR has a Geographically Dispersed Task Force (GDTF) that reviews administrative policies affecting soldier and family readiness to address the special challenges facing servicemembers in rural areas. Specifically, the GDTF is tasked with gathering and analyzing data, providing program and policy guidance, and coordinating with the USAR's Well-Being Team. The GDTF has already identified several potential policy issues that may serve to enhance the USAR Yellow Ribbon program.

The USAR makes available many of its YRRP resources online, including presentation materials from the training workshop, a calendar of upcoming events, a description of the YRRP, and reintegration-related resources and Web links.

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## **NAVY RESERVE**

The Navy Reserve (USNR) has implemented their program in a way that addresses both Reserve and Active Component needs. The USNR already operated a significant reintegration program, the Returning Warrior Workshop (RWW), prior to the YRRP legislation. Similar to the YRRP, Navy Reservists underwent one-on-one counseling, reintegration briefings and marriage workshops. In the RWW, Reservists were accompanied by family members and afforded weekend drill pay. USNR commands have been implementing the program according to the DoD DTM by enhancing their original RWW program. For example, while the original RWW program included pre-deployment

briefings for families regarding health benefits and wills, the USNR is updating its instructions to include guidelines regarding career and financial counseling, among other briefings. The USNR YRRP travels nationwide, coming to areas where Reservists live.

The program is in various states of implementation throughout the country, but due to the fact that Navy Reservists are often deployed individually to support other Services, the reintegration focus has been largely on the individual over the unit. Active duty Navy sailors face similar deployment structures because they are often deployed individually as well. In response to these challenges, the Navy has implemented a Total Force approach to the YRRP. Navy and USNR servicemembers often participate in the same reintegration events. This coordination between Reserve and active duty has presented additional coordination problems but overall is reportedly successful.

In areas where the Navy Reserve has insufficient resources to assist a reintegrating servicemember, they coordinate with YRRP managers from other Services to ensure that the servicemember has access to Yellow Ribbon events and briefings. Since USNR deployments generally last between six and 12 months, Navy Reservists' deployment cycle needs do not always match up with those of ARNG or USAR servicemembers.

Overall, the Navy's program is actively addressing its sailors needs, both Reserve and active duty, but the Navy Reserve has experienced frustration due to the nature of funding. Many commands are taking money out of hide until budgets are created for the program. Due to this funding constraint, the program has not been implemented fully across all commands.

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## **MARINE CORPS RESERVE**

As of February 2009, the Marines Corps Reserve (USMCR) issued detailed guidelines in the form of a Marine Administrative Message (MARADMIN) on the YRRP. These guidelines delegated responsibility for coordination and implementation and stated that the USMCR YRRP will be implemented through its Family Readiness programs. It also mandated the communication of YRRP events and timelines to servicemembers.

However, the YRRP is not the USMCR's first reintegration program. Due to frequent deployments in the USMC, leadership was aware of the linkage between psychological and family readiness, and mission readiness. Under the Marine Operational Stress Surveillance and Testing (MOSST) Program, all Marines participated in pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment Combat/Operational Stress Control activities. The goal of this program was to teach Marines how to deal with the stresses of operational deployment.

Currently, changes are being made nationwide to USMCR's existing program to meet the requirements of the YRRP. Since the USMCR held pre-deployment briefings and events for families and Marines during deployment, the major change that units need to make are adding post-deployment events at the 30-, 60-, and 90-day intervals. Previously, the USMCR held only one joint

family-servicemember event after redeployment. This change is currently being implemented nationwide.

The USMCR YRRP is operating in a mostly uniform manner, allowing slight variations where resources dictate. For example, the availability of and need for child care varies across MSCs, and some venues that may be available in a major metropolitan area are unavailable in a rural location.

To coordinate with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the USMCR (as in other Reserve components) sends Service-specific activity reports to the DoD Office for Reintegration Programs (ORP), which circulates the reports to the other Services so everyone is aware of current events and conditions around the Services.

The YRRP guidelines have enhanced the existing USMCR reintegration program in that it encourages the program administrators to add certain vendors to events and to expand its menu of seminars and briefings. Given that the USMCR already had been focusing on addressing the stresses and challenges of deployment, the YRRP has most noticeably added more accountability and scrutiny of the program to implement it according to the established guidelines.

As with other Reserve organizations, the USMCR struggles with the YRRP funding structure. Also, USMCR servicemembers have felt alienated when included in other Services' reintegration programs, because the language and resources are focused toward other personnel such as soldiers, not Marines. Some important information can be lost in acronyms or words not used by servicemembers attending the event, so a barrier to information may exist.

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## KEY FINDINGS

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Throughout my analysis of YRRP implementation in the National Guard and Reserve, I identified several recurring themes throughout the implementation process of the YRRP. These themes are reconstructed here as key findings.

### **KEY FINDING #1: THE AD-HOC FUNDING PROCESS HAMPERS YRRP IMPLEMENTATION.**

Overall, the most common complaint from YRRP stakeholders is lack of reliable funding. This inhibits planning, hiring full-time personnel, and outreach efforts. While funding for servicemembers' drill pay is readily available, this is just one aspect of funding in the YRRP. In

some areas, reintegration programs that otherwise would be extended beyond the 90-day post-deployment mark cannot be implemented due to funding constraints.

A few states have received nonprofit support, funding from their state legislature or a federal earmark, but the majority of states are forced to fund their YRRP out of their existing organizational budget. This forces tradeoffs and may negatively impact other programs that support servicemembers if organizations move funding from those budgets into the YRRP's budget.

The ad-hoc nature of YRRP funding prevents adoption of exemplary practices across and within Services and can create disparities in the care of servicemembers and their families from state to state and region to region. Several program coordinators cited lack of funding for their top reason why they have not been able to launch an informational Web site on the program in their region.

Further, the funding systems of the various Services present financial coordination problems. Program coordinators report that the different funding mechanisms for visiting Reserve personnel at YRRP events can contribute to the confusion and challenges that arise in covering travel expenses.

## **KEY FINDING #2: COORDINATION REMAINS A KEY CHALLENGE.**

Coordination issues among components are a significant barrier to successful implementation of the YRRP. Without proper coordination, YRRP events and reintegration efforts can be duplicated unnecessarily, eventually placing strain on service providers by requiring their attendance at more events than is feasible. When event information is not readily shared across regions, some servicemembers and families are prevented from accessing resources they need. Further, several organizations reported that poor coordination contributed to the alienation that some servicemembers feel when they attended events hosted by different Services than their own.

Transmission of information regarding events, resources, and expectations lags in some states, which leaves certain servicemembers, particularly those deployed individually, at a disadvantage in accessing YRRP resources. However, several YRRP staff members have been successful in this type of communication, as described earlier in this analysis. Examples of such success include weekly meetings, joint-use electronic calendars, and designated coordination liaisons in each component in a particular region.

While several organizations reported poor coordination between ANG and ARNG units, coordination among National Guard and area Reserve units is particularly problematic. As the YRRP becomes fully operational nationwide and as more units experience deployments after this implementation, service providers may face increasing strains on their personnel and resources if units do not coordinate their events and force providers to volunteer each weekend for a different Service's YRRP activity. Further challenges arise from the varied deployment structures of the ARNG, the ANG, and the Reserves. The YRRP legislation is geared toward ARNG programs, forcing other Reserve organizations to adapt to a structure that might not fit their needs and may inhibit coordination.

Even in regions where coordination among services is improving, program coordinators report that hosting successful purple events is challenging. It is allegedly difficult to find a balance between providing the target unit with the language and resources they need, and not alienating visiting servicemembers.

**KEY FINDING #3: DATA AND METRICS TO EVALUATE SUCCESS ARE UNRELIABLE OR NONEXISTENT.**

Many of the practices and activities employed throughout the various YRRPs nationwide are based upon staff opinion, general qualitative feedback, and raw numbers collected by program administrators. There is little known about evidence-based exemplary practices in the YRRP, and little available data by which organizations can evaluate the success of their programs. This is partially because in many units there is little data being collected in general, and partially because some of this data would be difficult to collect and study. For example, determining cases of PTSD prevented would be nearly impossible. A few programs administer surveys to servicemembers and families asking them to rate the usefulness of certain resources, seminars and briefings, but this method shows potential for self-selection bias. Servicemembers with the greatest problems might be less likely to respond to such surveys, thereby skewing the results.

Without established metrics and reliable data, the extent to which success can be determined is limited. Due to the diversity in how the YRRP is being implemented, organizations with less developed programs might struggle with choosing from too many options without evidence of effectiveness. Further, justification for timing of certain events is unclear.

The DoD's Office for Reintegration Programs (ORP) is reportedly working toward establishing and publishing exemplary practices. However, cost-benefit analyses of certain practices and guidelines on appropriate metrics by which to assess a program's utility do not yet exist.

**KEY FINDING #4: SUSTAINABILITY OF SERVICE PROVIDERS IS NOT A SHORT-TERM PROBLEM.**

Sustainability of service providers' commitments to supporting the YRRP does not seem to be a problem at present time in fully implemented programs. Service providers report strong communication with most Reserve components, reasonable financial burden, and commitment from organizational leadership, staff, and in some cases, government. Service providers do not report feeling over-utilized. In many cases, YRRP coordinators reportedly work to accommodate the needs and schedules of key service providers.

Additionally, several states have adopted some version of a periodic stakeholder meeting or conference. This helps to increase information sharing among the actors involved, usually YRRP coordinators, government actors, service providers, veterans' organizations, and military leadership. Service providers report that this type of coordination supports their ability to commit resources to the YRRP.

Longer-term sustainability, however, is difficult to predict. Enthusiasm may wane for reintegration programs, and as YRRPs nationwide ramp up and offer more events on more days, service providers may be asked to commit beyond their means. While efforts toward Service-coordinated programs may prove to alleviate this problem, sustainability in the long-term remains a significant unknown. This problem may be particularly salient to local organizations without a significant statewide or nationwide presence.

## KEY FINDING #5: FLEXIBILITY IN PROGRAMS CAN BE VALUABLE.

Based on the analysis of program elements and on the impressions of program coordinators, the preservation of flexibility in each program has significant benefits. Each Service has different deployment cycles, responsibilities when in theatre, institutional knowledge, and existing resources. Several of the Reserve components addressed reintegration issues long before the advent of the YRRP, and have put in place strong programs whose unique aspects complement the mandated YRRP.

Not only does each Service have unique needs and concerns, but also units within those Services often have issues and resources that differ from other units. Current flexibility under YRRP guidance allows program coordinators to tailor their programs specifically to include local service providers that only exist in their area; utilize resources unavailable to other units; and address specific servicemember needs that have been brought to a unit's attention.

At present, the YRRP legislation and DoD guidelines most directly address needs of ARNG servicemembers. Certain components with shorter deployments, such as the ANG and USAFR, are able to adapt the guidelines for their purposes, but challenges remain, particularly in trying to offer Service-focused programs to individually deployed members.

## CRITERIA FOR RECOMMENDATIONS AND EXEMPLARY PRACTICES

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Based on these key findings are two sets of recommendations and a chart of exemplary practices. These recommendations and exemplary practices were determined by evaluating alternatives against the following criteria. To what extent would the practice or recommendation:

- 1. MAXIMIZE COORDINATION.** Recommended practices should encourage coordination among components and with service providers to allow for more information sharing, less duplication, and create the groundwork for stronger partnerships to assist servicemembers and their families.
- 2. MAXIMIZE EFFECTIVENESS.** The goal of each recommended practice should be to maximize effectiveness, or the strength of the link between the practice and its intended goal. Ultimately, each practice should promote maximum benefit to servicemembers and their families, whether directly or indirectly. While this criterion may seem self-evident, it is important to implement practices that show significant benefit, rather than just those that program coordinators or service providers assume could be helpful.
- 3. PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY.** Given that the success of the YRRP depends on several stakeholders, recommended practices must be geared toward enhancing Services' and their partners' abilities to continue to support the program. If a practice places too much strain on service providers, YRRP personnel, or financial resources, it will not be sustainable. Exemplary practices will promote the sustainability of the YRRP by strengthening partnerships, building awareness of the YRRP and servicemember needs, and/or increasing stakeholders' commitment to assisting Reservists and their families.

4. **MAXIMIZE THE COST-BENEFIT RATIO.** While some top recommended practices will demand funding, the goal is to maximize the amount of benefit received per dollar spent. Even if the YRRP receives baseline funding in the federal budget, cost will be a factor in implementing certain practices at the unit and administrative levels. Some recommended practices will reap benefits at no cost at all.
5. **PROMOTE OPERATIONAL FEASIBILITY.** Each recommended practice should be feasible if plans are developed and resources are allocated efficiently. No recommendation should be beyond the financial and operations means of the administrator, whether on the unit or the federal level.
6. **ALLOW FOR FLEXIBILITY.** Since each unit, organization, and Service has varying deployment structures, needs, funding, and local resources available, recommended practices should allow for coordinators to have some flexibility in implementation. Program coordinators should be able to implement the practice in various ways that both satisfy the purpose of the recommendation and match the needs of their local servicemembers.

## EXEMPLARY PRACTICES

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From my analysis of various YRRPs in the National Guard and Reserve, I identified a variety of exemplary practices for programs to implement. These exemplary practices are organized into charts in the appendix. The practices are divided into three sections: program components, partnerships, and coordination. Each exemplary practice brings benefits but some may come with tradeoffs. These tradeoffs are identified in the far right column of each chart. For all practices listed in the chart below, the benefits outweigh the tradeoffs of implementing the exemplary practice.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM COORDINATORS

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The following recommendations are intended for the YRRP program coordinator, task force, or other local- or state-level audience that has influence in operation of the YRRP on the ground level.

### 1. CONTINUE JOINT EVENT COORDINATION EFFORTS.

Throughout the National Guard and the Reserves, poor coordination remains a barrier to full YRRP implementation. While some of this lack of coordination can be attributed to growing pains in the YRRP, it is preferable to address these issues throughout implementation rather than leaving them until later, lest they become institutionalized.

The communication of YRRP events to service providers, geographically dispersed servicemembers, families, and other components must improve to adequately serve Reservists and their families, and to ease the potential long-term strain on providers.

While efforts to establish purple YRRP events are notable, there are still significant gaps in achieving fully joint events that address the needs of all servicemembers. Program coordinators should liaise with other program coordinators from area Services to establish

guidelines for purple events. Program coordinators should work within their Services to determine what Service-specific resources are needed, and how those resources can be delivered without alienating servicemembers from other components who attend events.

Reserve organizations should try to combine events wherever possible to reduce burden on service providers and to minimize travel costs to those organizations. While this analysis discovered that short-term sustainability of provider resources is not an immediate concern, any reasonable efforts that can be made to reduce strain on service providers are recommended. Reducing duplication in events may allow some service providers to engage in more outreach outside of YRRP events.

## **2. MEET REGULARLY WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS TO UNDERSTAND NEEDS AND RESOURCES.**

In order to gauge the availability of service provider time and resources, and to identify areas of overuse or strain, program coordinators should establish a regular meeting or check-in schedule with each of their service providers. Communication of problems, constraints, and overutilization can help Reserve units not only understand the needs of service providers, but promote lasting and sustainable relationships. Program staff must be proactive in asking about the stresses of YRRP commitment as service providers could be unlikely to initiate the conversation.

Examples of such a formal dialogue process could be individual, monthly check-ins with each YRRP service provider, or quarterly conferences for all service providers to attend and share their experiences and concerns. Information procured from these dialogue processes should be shared among units that utilize similar providers.

## **3. CONVENE A STATEWIDE COORDINATING BODY ON REINTEGRATION ISSUES.**

To institutionalize coordination among YRRP stakeholders, each state should create a statewide committee for YRRP stakeholders. Members of this committee should include representatives from each component represented in the state, and also significant stakeholders in veterans issues, such as the Adjutant General, governor, U.S. Department of Labor, state agencies, VA, state colleges and universities, VSOs, and employers. This committee should meet periodically so stakeholders representing a variety of communities have opportunities to converse and work face-to-face with other partners.

Additionally, each statewide coordinating body should nominate a coordination leader from one of the Services on a rotating basis. Leadership in coordination is key to ensuring that processes remain in place. This leadership can provide oversight for coordination processes, plan committee meetings, and ensure that stakeholders share information and schedules in a timely manner.

#### **4. IMPLEMENT APPLICABLE EXEMPLARY PRACTICES IN A SYSTEMATIC WAY.**

As exemplary practices in the YRRP become documented, units and Services should begin to implement them as they are applicable. Units and Services should try to identify which exemplary practices are achievable in the short term and implement them quickly. They should also make plans to implement those that require longer-term strategies.

Exemplary practices should be widely disseminated and identified by a standardized set of criteria, as explained later in this analysis. These exemplary practices can be disseminated through analyses such as this one, by the DoD ORP, and finally through centralized training within each Service, as recommended in the next section.

#### **5. CONDUCT OUTREACH AND MEDIA ADVOCACY TO INCREASE YRRP AWARENESS.**

State National Guard organizations and Reserve commands should devote resources to outreach outside of the YRRP events and should work with the media to create awareness about the program. Outreach to unit commanders will educate them about the benefits and demands of the YRRP. Servicemember outreach will also create awareness for Reservists and their families and encourage them to access available resources and attend events.

Program coordinators can accomplish this outreach by working with units to hold localized events like job fairs, and by contacting servicemembers on an individual basis to follow up about reintegration issues. This type of outreach may be particularly useful in geographically dispersed areas. Also, outreach coordinators can engage community leaders and help them create plans to support servicemembers and families locally.

Program coordinators can also work with the state and local media to create awareness about the YRRP program and about servicemembers needs generally. Creating a public dialogue about the challenges of deployment might also serve to reduce stigma of seeking mental health care. Further, media presence might serve to attract new partners to the YRRP who previously were unaware of the program's existence and benefits. Media advocacy can happen at the unit, State organization, Reserve command, or national levels. This advocacy can be accomplished through press releases, editorials, calls to media outlets, and, as is common in some YRRPs, invitations for media members to attend certain YRRP events.

Finally, every State National Guard organization and Reserve command should have a Web site or access portal about the YRRP for servicemembers, families and the general public to access. Even if event information is unpublished due to security concerns, information about the program and contact information should be available.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEDERAL POLICY GUIDANCE

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The following recommendations are intended for the federal policymaking audience. All of these recommendations could be mandated and institutionalized at the Congressional level. Except for the first recommendation, all recommendations below can also be implemented by a Department of Defense directive.

### **1. FULLY FUND THE YRRP IN THE FEDERAL BUDGET.**

All YRRP operations should be provided adequate baseline funding in the federal budget. Event funding needs vary based on deployments, but outreach services, personnel, and other administration costs should be funded annually. Baseline funding would allow each Service, and therefore each unit, to more efficiently plan their budgets and allocate resources. Further, by eliminating the need for Reserve organizations to fund the YRRP out of their own budget, more outreach services and events beyond the 90-day mark could exist.

### **2. APPOINT LIAISONS IN EACH STATE NATIONAL GUARD ORGANIZATION AND RESERVE COMMAND.**

In order to facilitate coordination among Services, each State National Guard organization and Reserve command should have a designated YRRP staff member that communicates regularly with YRRP liaisons in other components. One point of contact will establish responsibility for informing other units of upcoming events, promote the development of purple events, and help ensure continuity of contact.

Liaisons should create tools like shared calendars for all YRRP coordinators to use, and should be active in sharing information on new resources, successful program components, and best practices. The liaison position should be required at the federal level to ensure that each organization establishes one, but the selection of that individual should be up to the State National Guard organization or Reserve command since the personnel and responsibilities of each program varies.

### **3. ESTABLISH A STANDARDIZED DATA COLLECTION PROCESS TO ASSIST IN DEVELOPMENT OF EVIDENCE-BASED EXEMPLARY PRACTICES.**

To establish evidence-based exemplary practices that can be promoted throughout the Services, DoD must establish standards for how data should be collected and what data are desired. Several YRRP components seek to affect readiness, health, career, relationship, and other outcomes. In order to validate these programs, quantitative and qualitative data must be collected in a standardized way to ensure that all data is reliable and externally valid.

Examples of sources of this data could be mandatory, confidential surveys administered to servicemembers and their families at various intervals throughout the deployment cycle and beyond. Specific data collection and statistical methods should be centrally established and verified. To ensure compliance and representative data, collection should be made

mandatory at the state and Reserve command level. Data can be used differently in each unit depending on resources and need, but availability of data and how it is collected must be standardized. The DoD ORP should be the clearinghouse for all data collected.

Further, the ORP, together with each Service, should establish goals and then metrics of success at both the unit and Service levels. To determine whether a program and/or its specific programmatic variations are meeting goals successfully, criteria should be established to assist in making that judgment. While unit and broader Service goals are not always identical, they may benefit from like criteria. Suggestions for these criteria, used to determine exemplary practices and recommendations, were described earlier in this analysis.

#### **4. PROVIDE CENTRALIZED TRAINING IN ALL SERVICES BASED ON EXEMPLARY PRACTICES.**

Each Service should provide annual centralized training for its YRRP coordinators. To ensure continuity across the Services, the ORP should help operate each of these trainings. Training should include how to address joint events, coordinate with other YRRP coordinators, reach out to individually deployed servicemembers, engage community stakeholders, and identify exemplary practices. These trainings should also include seminars on stigma reduction.

In addition to assisting YRRP coordinators in improving their programs and meeting the needs of servicemembers, these trainings would provide a forum for YRRP staff within each Service to establish relationships and foster greater coordination.

These trainings should address YRRP operation on a broad level and provide the framework for implementation, but should not train all attendees on the specifics of one particular unit's model that might not be widely applicable. In order to protect the individual integrity of each unit, the practices learned at centralized trainings should allow for modification by each unit.

#### **5. CONTINUE TO ALLOW FOR APPROPRIATE VARIATION IN YRRP OPERATION.**

While standardization of certain aspects of the YRRP are desirable, such as data collection and the administration of joint events, each Reserve organization should be allowed to preserve unique program characteristics that improve its relevance and efficiency. Standardizing every aspect of the program would render certain briefings, seminars or community partners ineffective or inapplicable to some units' servicemembers.

Also, requiring the implementation of some program components might prove to be significantly burdensome to certain units or Services depending on their deployment structure and available resources. For example, in the ARNG and the Air Force Reserve, servicemembers are deployed for shorter periods of time, but more frequently than in other Reserve units. This alternative operational tempo does not reduce the need for YRRP events, but does affect the issues that must be addressed.

Variation among programs has fostered the creation and evaluation of quality program offerings that respond to area servicemembers' needs and requests. Further, some program elements, like the Montana PDHRA program or Minnesota's emphasis on pre-deployment activities, may be replicable Service- or nationwide.

State National Guard organizations and Reserve commands should communicate to their Service headquarters the particular aspects of their YRRPs that are integral to their goals. Each variation that exists must comport with existing YRRP federal legislation and DoD guidance.

It is necessary, however, that this allowance for variation must be reasonable and well monitored to promote coordination with other units and Services and to ensure that in joint YRRP events, all attendees are engaged, included and receive the full reintegration resources and support they are due.

## CONCLUSION

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Since the YRRP legislation was enacted in January 2008, reintegration programs have grown significantly throughout the Reserve Component. Despite only broad guidance on implementation and virtually none on funding, coordination and sustainability practices, most organizations have implemented the YRRP by following other states' models, building on their own existing programs, or innovating their own practices. This lack of guidance has resulted in a wide variation of YRRPs, which, while sometimes allowing programs to meet the needs of personnel in their local units, has resulted in poor coordination among Services, gaps in access to the program, and inconsistent data collection. Several steps must be taken to ensure the goals of the YRRP are met and that the program can be sustained from Reserve Component and vendor standpoints.

The Air National Guard and the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and Navy Reserve components have all made noteworthy strides in implementing the YRRP. However, the Army National Guard has led the nation in program implementation. The other Reserve organizations show promise in modifying the YRRP to meet their needs, both by coordinating with area Army National Guard units and by hosting their own events.

Currently, there is movement and excitement around reintegration programs nationwide. In order to sustain this focus and commitment, program coordinators, government representatives and service providers must work to create a lasting network of stakeholders to support the concept of comprehensive deployment cycle support. Additionally, for the program to grow and fully address needs and provide continuity of care, baseline federal funding must be allocated to each Service to conduct the program.

Services provided by government and community vendors are integral to the operation of the YRRP. While these relationships do not show major signs of over-utilization at this time, program coordinators must be communicative with vendors and work to minimize the resources these service providers must commit to support the program.

As components look to the Department of Defense's Office for Reintegration Programs for further guidance on exemplary practices and lessons learned, they must be sure that the recommended practices are based upon thorough, evidence-based research and are weighed against vital criteria. Significantly, program coordinators must preserve a reasonable level of flexibility in program implementation to adequately meet the needs of their servicemembers and families.

The feedback and limited data available on the YRRP indicates early success in connecting servicemembers and their families to resources they need. However, a more rigorous and standardized collection of data is necessary to determine a full range of exemplary practices within the program. This data should be the basis of prescribed exemplary practices and should be systematically disseminated to all program coordinators by their respective Services.

Future legislative developments for the Yellow Ribbon program remain to be seen. The Department of Defense has significant ability to shape future guidance on the program, and should take care to follow the recommendations outlined in this analysis.

As a result of the YRRP, servicemembers and families are better able to connect to reintegration resources and access the deployment cycle support that they need. This analysis provides several strategies and policy options for program coordinators and federal policymakers to achieve an even stronger Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. In order to institutionalize these changes and ensure this program has the widest possible positive impact, stakeholders throughout the military, government, and service provider community must constantly work to identify and address areas of weakness in the program.

## GLOSSARY

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<b>ANG</b>	Air National Guard
<b>ARNG</b>	Army National Guard
<b>BCT</b>	Brigade Combat Team
<b>CTAP</b>	Career Transition Assistance Program
<b>DCS</b>	Deployment Cycle Support
<b>DoD</b>	Department of Defense
<b>DTM</b>	Directive Type Memorandum
<b>ESGR</b>	Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve
<b>FAC</b>	Family Assistance Center
<b>FRG</b>	Family Readiness Group
<b>FY</b>	Fiscal Year
<b>G-1</b>	Army Personnel
<b>GDTF</b>	Geographically Dispersed Task Force
<b>IFSAC</b>	Inter-Service Family Assistance Committee
<b>JFSAP</b>	Joint Family Support Assistance Program
<b>MARADMIN</b>	Marine Administrative Message
<b>MED-HOLD</b>	Medical Hold
<b>MIRT</b>	Monthly Individual Reintegration Training
<b>MNNG</b>	Minnesota National Guard
<b>MnSCU</b>	Minnesota State Colleges and Universities
<b>MSC</b>	Major Subordinate Command
<b>MTNG</b>	Montana National Guard
<b>NDAA</b>	National Defense Authorization Act
<b>NGB</b>	National Guard Bureau
<b>O&amp;F</b>	Operational and Functional
<b>OEF</b>	Operation Enduring Freedom
<b>OIF</b>	Operation Iraqi Freedom
<b>ORNG</b>	Oregon National Guard

<b>ORP</b>	Office for Reintegration Programs
<b>OSD</b>	Office of the Secretary of Defense
<b>PDHRA</b>	Post Deployment Health Reassessment
<b>POI</b>	Program of Instruction
<b>PTSD</b>	Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
<b>REFRAD</b>	Release from Active Duty
<b>RRC</b>	Regional Readiness Command
<b>RSC</b>	Regional Support Command
<b>RWW</b>	Returning Warrior Workshop
<b>TBI</b>	Traumatic Brain Injury
<b>TDY</b>	Temporary Active Duty
<b>USAFR</b>	Air Force Reserve
<b>USAR</b>	Army Reserve
<b>USMCR</b>	Marine Corps Reserve
<b>USNR</b>	Navy Reserve
<b>VBA</b>	Veterans Benefits Administration
<b>VSO</b>	Veterans Service Organization
<b>VTNG</b>	Vermont National Guard
<b>YRRP</b>	Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program

## APPENDIX A: EXEMPLARY PRACTICES

### Criteria for Exemplary Practices: Coordination

Criteria for Exemplary Practices: Coordination								
Exemplary Practices: Coordination		Maximize Coordination	Maximize Effectiveness	Promote Sustainability	Maximize Cost-Benefit Ratio	Promote Operational Feasibility	Allow for Flexibility	Major Tradeoffs
	Yellow Ribbon Cities Program	High	High	High	High	Medium	High	Staff time and possible coordination with governor needed.
	Combining Events with other Services	High	Medium	High	High	Medium	Low	Event/briefings might not be aimed at all participants.
	Purple Events	High	Medium-High	High	High	Low-Medium	Low	Standardizing events minimizes flexibility and personalization.
	Frequent Meetings with Vendors	High	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	Scheduling may be challenging.
	Programs Housed in Same Area	High	High	High	Medium-Low	Low	Low	Moving offices might be costly or impossible for some organizations.
	Shared Event Calendars among Services and Vendors	High	High	High	High	High	Medium	Services must agree on administration and format of calendar.
	State Coordinating Committees	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Coordination among several actors takes effort and requires group consensus.
	Outreach to Unit Commanders	High	High	High	High	Medium	High	Outreach demands personnel time.

Criteria for Exemplary Practices: Program Components								
	Maximize Coordination	Maximize Effectiveness	Promote Sustainability	Maximize Cost-Benefit Ratio	Promote Operational Feasibility	Allow for Flexibility	Major Tradeoffs	
Exemplary Practices: Program Components	Invest in Pre-deployment Phase	N/A	High	High	High	High	Medium-High	If pre-deployment focus forces resources to shift from reintegration, less support will exist in later stages.
	Finance Basics Classes	High	High	High	High	High	High	N/A
	Off-Site YRRP Events	High	High	Medium	Medium-Low	Medium	High	Finding affordable locations can be challenging without proper partnerships that provide venues.
	Civilian Employment Assistance	High	High	High	High	Medium	High	Adequate career training and resume editing requires informed service provider partnerships.
	Periodic Post-90 Day PDHRAs	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium-Low	Low	Most organizations lack the funding to conduct additional PDHRAs to every servicemember.
	Local Career and Benefit Fairs	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	More frequent events may place strains on providers and organization staff.
	Public YRRP Web Site for Each Unit	High	High	High	Medium-High	Medium-High	High	The cost of operating a Web site might be significant.
	State Highway Patrol Patrol Seminars	High	High	High	High	Medium-High	High	SHP personnel must devote time to conducting the seminars.
	Vet Centers as Sole PTSD Briefers	Medium-High	High	High	High	High	Medium	Other providers with PTSD expertise may be alienated.

## Criteria for Exemplary Practices: Partnerships

Exemplary Practices: Partnerships		Maximize Coordination	Maximize Effectiveness	Promote Sustainability	Maximize Cost-Benefit Ratio	Promote Operational Feasibility	Allow for Flexibility	Major Tradeoffs
	Colleges and Universities	High	High	High	High	Medium	High	Forging the relationship may be a challenge.
	Law Enforcement	High	High	High	High	Medium	High	Forging the relationship may be a challenge.
	State Employment Department	High	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	Organizations will have to match the employment department's needs and processes.
	Corporate Hiring Partners	High	High	High	High	Medium	High	Forging the relationship may be a challenge.

## APPENDIX B: RECOMMENDATIONS CHART

Recommendations	Entity with Responsibility for Implementation				
		Program Coordinators	State Government	Congress	Department of Defense
	Continue Joint Event Coordination Efforts	√	√		
	Meet Regularly with Service Providers to Understand Needs and Resources	√			
	Convene a Statewide Coordinating Body on Reintegration Issues	√	√		
	Implement Applicable Exemplary Practices in a Systematic Way	√			√
	Conduct Outreach and Media Advocacy to Increase YRRP Awareness	√	√		
	Fully Fund the YRRP in the Federal Budget			√	
	Appoint Liaisons in Each State National Guard Organization and Reserve Command			√	√
	Establish a Standardized Data Collection Process to Assist in Development of Evidence-Based Practices			√	√
	Provide Centralized Training in All Services Based on Exemplary Practices			√	√
	Continue to Allow for Appropriate Variation in YRRP Operation			√	√

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