

ChalleNGe History

The National Guard

The National Guard has two roles – one as part of the nation’s military force, protecting our freedom and way of life, and the other to provide individual states with emergency response and community support missions.

Whether working to improve the natural environment, safeguarding our states from illegal drug traffic, educating America’s youth, or connecting with families and employers, the National Guard is involved and makes an impact.

Program Authorization

In the early 1990’s, Congress recognized the inherent community strengths of the Guard, as well as its ability to train, lead, and mentor young people in a caring yet disciplined environment. In 1993, Congress approved the Defense Authorization Bill, which introduced the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program as a pilot program.

The goal of the program was to determine whether life skills, education levels, and employment potential of youth who drop out of secondary school could be significantly improved through quasi-military assisted training. Administered and managed by the National Guard Bureau, and under the auspices of the Assistant Secretary of Defense Reserve Affairs, agreements to conduct the program were entered into between the National Guard Bureau and the state Governors and Adjutant Generals.

The original agreements allowed ten selected states to identify a targeted number of diverse at-risk youth and to conduct a seventeen-month ChalleNGe Program.

Program Design

The program was designed around a model identified by The Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) and consisted of three phases: a two-week Pre-ChalleNGe residential phase, a twenty-week Residential phase, and a twelve-month Post-Residential phase.

A quasi-military environment was defined for the 22-week residential phase. An intervention model of eight core components was designed to improve individual skills and enhance the holistic growth of the participants. The Post-Residential phase was structured for long-term follow-up with individual mentors being assigned to each student.

Beginning to Present

By 1995, fifteen states were participating in the Youth ChalleNGe Program with another twenty-three states on a waiting list for a program. In 1998, Congress permanently authorized the program at 75% Federal funding, 25% State funding. At this time there are 34 ChalleNGe programs in 29 states and Puerto Rico.