

Green Zone Initiative Overview

Overview: The Green Zone Initiative (GZI) is the State of Nevada's effort to marshal all available resources in the areas of wellness, education, and employment for Nevada's veterans. It is a statewide strategic planning initiative designed to improve services to Nevada's service members, veterans, and their families, to increase collaboration among service providers, and to provide a roadmap for ways to improve the current offering of services to policymakers, non-profit funders, and other members of the statewide community. It is augmented by a statewide infrastructure, including the Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs, local Veteran Community Councils, specific focus area efforts, an online social networking platform, and more.

Methodology: The GZI works through collaboration. In order to do so, the initiative surveyed the landscape of veterans services in Nevada and developed a strategy to attract veterans to Nevada, to mobilize the providers of the countless services for service members, veterans, and their families, and to provide a logical argument for ways to improve the current offering of services to policymakers, non-profit funders, and other relevant members of the statewide community. Within state government, it is intended to be an interagency approach to veterans education, employment, and wellness benefits. Beyond the state government, it is intended to marshal and align all available resources in order to reduce gaps in service, reduce duplication of services, and otherwise better serve the veterans of Nevada. The GZI plan is augmented by an online social networking community where information can be shared between the various silos of veteran service providers, organizations, and the veterans themselves. The architecture is designed to support the implementation of the statewide strategic planning efforts of the GZI.

Assumptions:

Our Initiative is based on three basic assumptions:

- 1)** There are innumerable services, resources, and opportunities currently available to Nevada's veterans. The Pentagon calls this unprecedented level of support offered our veterans the "Sea of Goodwill."
- 2)** Nevada's veterans should be seen as assets to our communities, and should be given every opportunity to thrive. Too often we have heard that veterans are victims, returning broken and incapable. We do not believe that people really believe this, nor do we believe that it is healthy for our veterans.
- 3)** The best way to match all of these innumerable resources with Nevada's veterans is through an evolving, grassroots approach coordinated at the statewide level. We do not believe that any combination of laws or regulations from the top will be effective if there are not people on the ground willing to get their hands dirty.

The vision, mission, and objectives for this effort will be continually refined. At this time, however, they are as follows:

Vision: To create a statewide community that maximizes support of services to Nevada's veterans.

Mission: To be a statewide coordinator between local, state, and federal agencies, service organizations, and the for-profit and non-profit communities in order to deliver the highest level of services to Nevada's veterans, service members, their families, and the families of the fallen.

Marshal all available resources in the areas of wellness, education, and employment to attract transitioning service members, veterans, and their families to live and prosper in the state of Nevada

Ensure the successful reintegration for Nevada's existing service members, veterans, and their family into communities by improving systems of access, services and service delivery through regional planning, coordination, and evaluation of strategies.

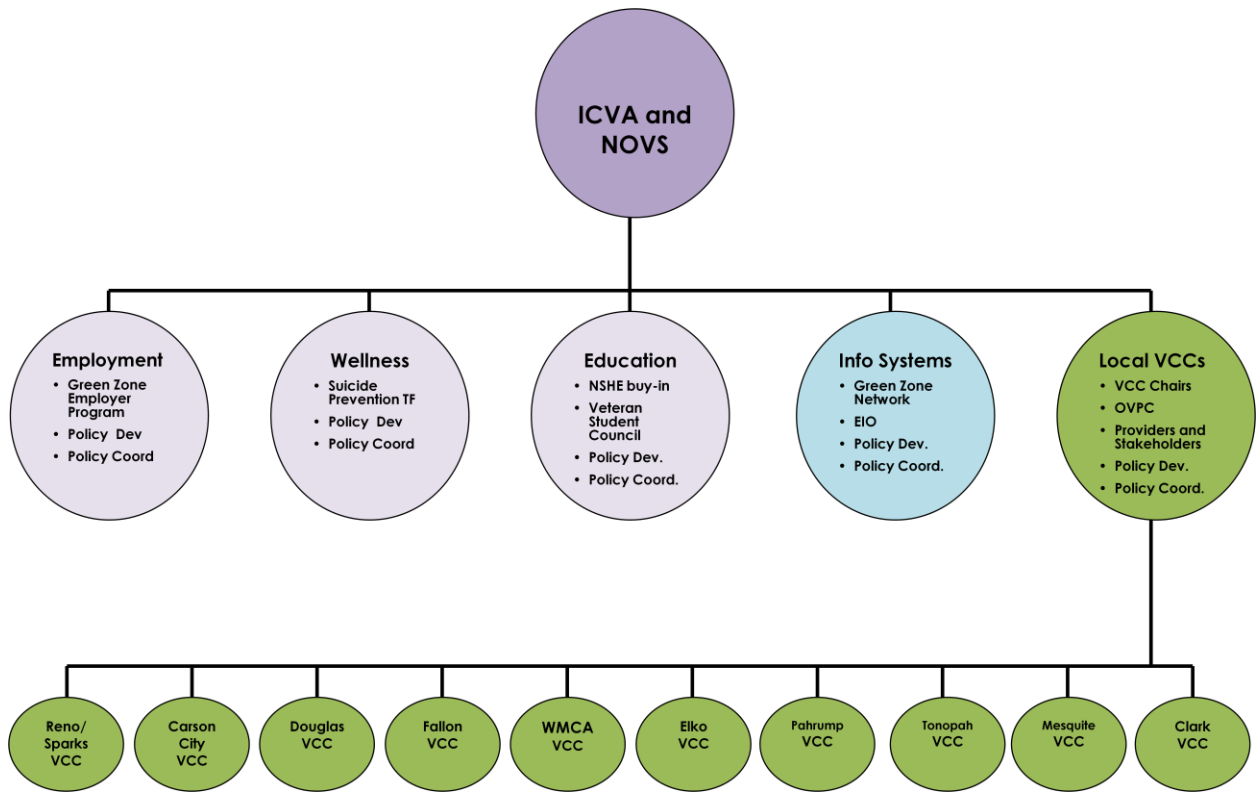
Goals: As derived from the Governor's strategic priorities of a sustainable and growing economy, an educated and healthy citizenry, safe and livable communities, and an efficient and responsive state government, the objectives of the Green Zone Initiative are:

- 1)** Service members, veterans, their families, and the families of the fallen have access to high quality higher education programs, and have the financial means to attend Nevada's colleges, universities, and other degree-producing institutions of higher learning.
- 2)** Service members, veterans, their families, and the families of the fallen are competitive for high quality jobs and stable employment after their transition out of service.
- 3)** Service members, veterans, their families, and the families of the fallen have access to healthcare, mental health services, prevention services, benefit information, wellness programs, and community support.

Objectives:

- 1)** Develop comprehensive policy recommendations for the Governor, Legislature, and other bodies to consider that will reduce barriers and increase opportunities for veterans within the focus areas.
- 2)** Develop formalized Veteran Community Councils to coordinate service providers at the local and statewide levels.
- 3)** Create local networks of veterans around leadership, service, and engagement activities.

The Green Zone Initiative Architecture



The Green Zone Initiative builds upon these assumptions by creating an architecture that coordinates between multiple layers of service providers, provides opportunities for all who wish to serve veterans, and forces policymakers and policy implementers to consider how they can best meet the needs of the veterans in our state. That architecture consists of the **Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs**, local **Veteran Community Councils**, our **Focus Area Efforts**, and perhaps most important, the **Green Zone Network**. Each is explained briefly below:

- **Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs:** a statewide task force that meets quarterly for policy development and execution.
- **Veteran Community Councils:** chaired by elected officials in communities across the state to match the efforts of the ICVA at the local level.
- **Focus Area efforts:** Individualized efforts within each focus area, such as the Green Zone Employer program, the Veterans Suicide Prevention Task Force, and the Student Veterans Advisory Council.
- **Social Networking Site:** A membership site for all services, benefits, and opportunities for veterans in our state.

Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs

Overview: The Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs (ICVA) is a statewide working group aimed at identifying statewide resources, creating efficiencies in local, state, and federal government services as well as the non-profit sector, and establishing an action plan for moving forward. The ICVA was created by Governor Sandoval through Executive Order 2012-15, and subsequently created in statute during the 77th Legislative Session. In order to achieve its objectives, the Governor has appointed thirteen people to his council. Ten appointees are members of his cabinet, generally directors of agencies like the Department of Health and Human Services, the Nevada Indian Commission, the Military Department, and others. One appointee is the Director of the federal Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office for Nevada, one is a representative from local government, and one is a representative of the non-profit community.

Methodology: At first, the ICVA met through the authority of the executive order that established it. Its focus was on developing and approving the report to the Governor on veterans issues in Nevada. This report consisted of an Environment Scan that determined the gaps and overlaps in existing services throughout the state. Once the needs were identified, the ICVA developed and prioritized recommendations for improving Nevada's services to veterans, and then worked to place these priorities within the context of a broader rationale for why Nevada should do more to coordinate services to Nevada's veterans, all of which were published in the GZI Business Case. The final portion of the ICVA's report was a Veterans Services Funding Analysis, which aimed to identify public funding streams that support veterans issues in Nevada and to also offer a comparison with several other neighboring states, including Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah.

Following the creation of the ICVA in statute through Assembly Bill 58 (77th Session), the ICVA has determined a need to sharpen and shift its focus in the following ways. First, ICVA members have agreed to develop strategic goals in line with each of the strategic priorities developed through Governor Sandoval's strategic planning framework, which will allow ICVA members to pursue tangible successes while looking for coordination opportunities. Second, ICVA members will form subcommittees around the three focus areas of the Green Zone Initiative—employment, wellness, and education—and develop policy recommendations for the Governor and the Legislature to consider ahead of the 78th legislative session. These efforts will combine with the natural coordination that will grow out of the relationships that have been developed and fostered so far through the development of this process.

Additionally, the ICVA will also:

- Identify grants in the focus areas of higher education, wellness, and employment to pursue
- Assist local Veteran Community Councils in identifying resources
- Developing policy objectives for the next legislative session
- Continue to seek ways to improve service delivery between local, state, federal, and non-profit agencies

The Green Zone Network

Overview: The Green Zone Network (GZN) is a major Nevada Office of Veterans Services outreach initiative. It aims to ensure that the State of Nevada can both attract new veterans and veteran resources as well as optimize support efforts for the current veteran population. The GZN is arguably the most important aspect of our overall architecture. As a social networking site it serves as a major coordination tool, allowing for interaction at various levels throughout the state. Through this platform, service providers can coordinate their services, fill gaps in services, and see what other organizations exist that might be doing similar things. Similarly, veterans from different backgrounds can communicate, share experiences, develop affinity communities, and more. Perhaps most important, through this platform, the gap between the service providers and organizations and the veterans who need their services, benefits, or opportunities can be bridged.

Methodology: Like the GZI, the GZN is focused on three primary areas—education, employment, and wellness. By either creating a profile, or simply searching the site as a non-member, veterans, service providers, and community members can do the following:

- Post or find messages on community bulletin boards
- Post or find services offered in different areas of the state
- Post or find upcoming veteran- and military-related events throughout the state
- Start or participate in conversations through this platform

This tool is such an important part of the architecture because of the ways that it meets the overall mission of the GZI and facilitates the missions of the various sub-initiatives of the effort. For example:

- Employers who choose to become Green Zone Employers (see below) will agree to create a GZE profile and list job opportunities for veterans under the “employment” tag on this site.
- Veteran Community Councils (see below) can engage with their local communities to advertise their activities, seek input, and more, through this site.
- Similarly, the Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs mentioned above can engage with the statewide community to advertise their activities, seek input, and more, through this site.
- Nevada’s colleges, universities, and post-secondary education institutions engaged in the Green Zone Initiative can coordinate activities for student veterans on their campuses through this site.
- A local veteran service organization can sponsor a barbecue, a fun run, a service opportunity, or any other relevant activity while coordinating with veterans and other service providers.
- Because this system is internet based, it can facilitate collaboration between all of these groups and more, while making itself available for service members stationed abroad who are coming home or considering making Nevada their home. The potential to increase collaboration through this site is almost limitless.

Employment Focus Area: Green Zone Employer Program

Overview: The Nevada Military Support Alliance (NMSA) has generously agreed to fund the creation of the position of Veterans Outreach Coordinator (VOC) in support of the Nevada Office of Veterans Services. This position will be necessary to implement many of the employment recommendations of the GZI, particularly with respect to developing and implementing the Green Zone Employer (GZE) Program, the main effort for the workforce focus area of the GZI.

The Green Zone Employer Program is based on the employment recommendations derived during the development stages of the GZI. It is intended to create a network of private and public sector employers that are interested in hiring veterans, to create a network of veterans who are seeking employment, and to connect the two groups. This “veteran friendly employer” program will be accomplished by the efforts of the VOC, who will develop this program, set the conditions for its success, and seek opportunities for programmatic improvement throughout its implementation.

Methodology: The VOC will accomplish these goals through these distinct tasks:

- Making presentations that addresses the value of hiring veterans to business, community, and public leaders at local Chambers of Commerce and other gatherings and events in order to gain initial interest from employers in becoming members of the Green Zone Employers program.
- Once interested businesses and agencies are identified, the VOC will provide a free and relatively brief training program for their respective human resources professionals.
- The employers will agree to implement the other elements of the program, which include:
 - establishing a Green Zone Network account;
 - announcing employment opportunities on the site; and,
 - consider the establishment of employee affinity group.
- Once complete, they will be recognized as GZE members.
- The VOC will give “Veteran Friendly Employer” awards on a regular basis in order to encourage employers to fully embrace the initiative.

This part of the initiative is to encourage the private sector workforce to be interested in hiring veterans and to do so in a supported and incentivized manner. The VOC will also need to work to connect veterans to the new opportunities that are created on the employer side. In order to do so, and in accordance with the additional GZI recommendations, the VOC will be responsible for developing “Veterans Chamber” events throughout the state. These are meetings of veterans and community members that are non-transactional in nature (no fee, no pressure for business leads, and no advertising) in an informal setting. They could take many forms, involve speakers, networking periods, or simply be opportunities to get together. These would also be open to GZEs who wish to meet prospective employees.

Wellness Focus Area: Veterans Suicide Prevention Task Force and Council

Overview: The Veterans Suicide Prevention Task Force was established to address data that showed Nevada had one of the highest rates of suicide among its veteran population in the country. Members of this committee consist of mental health professionals within the state of Nevada, the Nevada National Guard, and the federal VA, as well as representatives from the field of suicide prevention, veterans employment, veterans services, veterans homelessness, veterans court programs, the Nevada legislature, and others. The executive directors for the Office of Suicide Prevention and the Nevada Office of Veterans Services co-chair this statewide committee.

The members of the Veteran Suicide Prevention Task Force recognize that the entirety of the wellness focus area is not and should not be suicide prevention. However the group also realizes that for service members, veterans, and their families who are in crisis, all suicide prevention has to do with wellness. Because this is such an important issue for the state, we have decided to embrace the topic at the highest level possible, understanding that many other wellness activities can and should take place in addition to this specific effort.

Methodology: Through its vision is to “end suicide among veterans, service members, and their families in Nevada,” this committee has developed a statewide action plan and successfully implemented several of its priorities to date. These priorities include:

- **Priority One:** Integrate and coordinate suicide prevention activities across multiple sectors and settings to increase awareness among service members, veterans, and their families.
- **Priority Two:** Develop veterans, service members, and military families health and wellness (includes mental health) indicator tracking and reporting system.
- **Priority Three:** Identify services, resources, and partnerships.
- **Priority Four:** Bridge resources to service members, veterans, and their families, with a focus on follow up.

Each priority contains subordinate strategies, action steps, and measurable outcomes to ensure the overall task force’s success. Through these efforts and others, the Veterans Suicide Prevention Task Force has been able to accomplish numerous goals to date. For example:

- VSPTF worked with the Department of Health and Human Services to pass legislation creating a suicide review panel, which will include a member of the military or veteran community.
- Annual “Walk in Memory, Walk for Hope” event organized around the theme of military and veterans for 2013.
- Partnership with state agencies for staff training.
- Partnership with the Nevada National Guard’s resiliency program.
- Expanding veteran suicide prevention staff statewide.
- Veteran Suicide Prevention Council formally created.

Education Focus Area: Student Veterans Advisory Council and Veterans Task Force

Overview: For the higher education focus area, we have established two separate initiatives. The goal of both initiatives is to ensure that service members transitioning into the ranks of Nevada's veterans have every opportunity to succeed in Nevada System of Higher Education schools, as well as private and other post-secondary opportunity. The first part of the higher education effort was establishing the support of the Chancellor of the University System for the Green Zone Initiative as a concept, as well as the recommendations made through our business case. Based on this support, we have established a statewide leadership team that meets to drive progress towards the GZI recommendations, share ideas and best practices, and work towards making Nevada's campuses more veteran friendly. The second part of the higher education initiative is a Student Veterans Advisory Council created by an executive order signed by Governor Sandoval.

Methodology: First, for the system-wide effort to make Nevada's campuses more veteran friendly, our working group is working towards several goals. The group is working to make every college or university in Nevada veteran friendly through establishing veteran-only registration opportunities, veteran centers on campuses, creating peer-to-peer groups for veterans, educating faculty and staff on military and veteran culture, establishing institution-specific veteran advisory groups to help bring more resources to campuses, and more. Each school has approached these issues differently, some with increased funding from their institutions, others with grant money and volunteer efforts.

Governor Sandoval's Student Veterans Advisory Council will work to develop a set of recommendations for all schools and post-secondary institutions in Nevada to help ensure veterans success in Nevada's classrooms and training programs. The Council will consist of students who are veterans, Nevada residents, and are recommended the Chancellor. They will travel to the various institutions throughout the state, hold listening sessions, listen to experts, and discuss their recommendations as a group. During these activities they will compile a report that will become a part of the Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs' report to the legislature, the Governor, and to the Board of Regents.

While there has been tremendous effort to help transitioning veterans from an academic and administrative perspective, this group is established to ensure that Nevada's student veterans also have a voice when it comes to developing policies and practices that will affect them directly. Between this effort and the Chancellor's task statewide task force, Nevada's student veterans will be able to build upon many of the policy and legislative successes that have been achieved through the support of the Governor, the legislature, the Chancellor, and the Board of Regents to date.

Veteran Community Councils

Overview: Based on the belief that much of the truly important work in serving Nevada's veterans is at the community level, the Veteran Community Councils (VCCs) were created as a crucial aspect of the GZI's statewide strategy and architecture. Like the Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs at the statewide level, these local councils are intended to set local objectives and coordinate between organizations, service providers, and others at the community level. Once a community has agreed to support this effort local, the councils are established and chaired by a mayor, a county commissioner, or another local elected or appointed leader. The Chair of the VCC appoints key members from the local veteran service organizations, service providers, and stakeholders.

Methodology: Once they are fully established, the VCCs will meet on a regular basis as needed, and collectively, the chairs will meet via teleconference with the chair of the Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs to share best practices, to assist in developing policy recommendations, and to determine how best to resource local initiatives. This will increase collaboration at the local level but also throughout the state.

The VCCs agree to complete several objectives within their local community. These objectives, listed below, are considered to be minimum requirements, and many of them are already being executed by various groups. It is the intention of this initiative to support those activities that are already active, to develop activities where the needs arise, and to encourage momentum towards further engagement and collaboration within the local veteran community. The objectives are:

- Identify local resources for service members, veterans, and their families and convey that information to the Nevada Office of Veterans Services.
- Develop and deliver an educational program that will benefit veterans. (Example: have members develop a program explaining why companies should hire veterans, or a program on what benefits are available to veterans in your area, etc.)
- Hold an engagement event of some sort in your local community. (Ex.: Hold a benefits fair for veterans, a standdown, a job fair, or anything else that engages with the veteran who needs the services. Many of these are already taking place, and this community can likely simply support one that is in existence.)
- Encourage local companies to become "Green Zone Employers."
- Create and update a profile on the Green Zone Network Website.
- Develop policy recommendations from the community level and convey them to the Nevada Office of Veterans Services ahead of the next legislative session.

Beyond increasing collaboration, raising local awareness, and providing an avenue for local veterans groups to influence statewide policy from the grassroots level, it is the intention of this initiative to also seek funding sources to support future phases of the VCC effort.