

# Village Public Safety Officer Program

# VPSO

Strategic Plan

2018

# Abstract

## *Bush Guardians*

*Wait, take time and listen,  
I have a story to share.  
Of brave men and women,  
"Bush Guardians", people who care.*

*We call them "VPSOs",  
a strange name to some.  
For people of Rural Alaska, a  
name most people welcome.*

*They serve and protect,  
their people, their land.  
In spirit and body,  
alone often they stand.*

*Against all the odds,  
they struggle to fight  
the wrongs and injustice,  
during day, during night.*

*A job often thankless,  
without praise or reward.  
They march into battle,  
without shield, without sword.*

*Understand now these letters,  
"VPSO", proud letters indeed.  
Our brave men and women,  
"Bush Guardians", that we need.*

*Found in the Kwethluk Public Safety Building*

This document outlines the strategic plan for the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) Program, a program that is under the State of Alaska Department of Public Safety and under the administration of the Alaska State Troopers. The VPSO Program began in 1979 and provides grants to ten tribal entities (eight tribal consortiums, one Tribe, and one borough) in Alaska to support the public safety function throughout Alaska's rural areas and villages.

# The program

*The VPSO Program was created out of the critical need to provide public safety services at the local level in villages across Alaska. This program has been training and providing first responder services through ten tribal entities since the early 1970s. Over time it has grown through increased training, improved standards and the commitment of the Department of Public Safety - Alaska State Troopers and the ten tribal partner organizations that administer the program. Today the program provides full time service to 38 communities statewide, as well as roving services throughout the State. These officers are often the first to respond in their communities and have made a significant impact to the quality of life in their communities. The ten partner organizations are:*

Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association

Association of Village Council Presidents

Bristol Bay Native Association

Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

Chugachmiut

Copper River Native Association

Kawerak

Kodiak Area Native Association

Northwest Arctic Borough

Tanana Chiefs Conference

# Program Purpose & Principles

*The VPSO Program's vision is that every community that needs and wants VPSO coverage can have that service provided without hindrance or worry.*

*We believe that the VPSO program is vital to providing public safety in Alaska: many villages today are asking for this service as their number one community need.*

*We also know that the VPSO Program works well when it is locally supported, has strong community connected officers, and services are delivered with excellence.*

*To meet the vision the Program will need to continue to work well with stakeholders to both increase funding and infrastructure, as well as to innovate as the overall public safety landscape is changing.*



## Principal Strengths

- Its long history of serving rural Alaska
- The support of the ten tribal organizations, its villages and communities, and the State of Alaska
- Its dedicated officers
- Tribal Government structure and flexibility
- The tenured coordinators that administer the program
- Its ability to persevere and adapt through changing funding and legislative cycles

The core value of this organization stems from its commitment to seeing all rural Alaskan communities achieve their aspirations of safety, health, and unity. The commitment to that common goal is what drives this organization. At its core are the people who sacrifice their time and resources every day to ensure that they are serving the public to the best of their abilities. Our simply stated vision, mission and values follow below.

## VISION

Public safety through public service

## Mission

VPSOs partnering with Rural Alaskans to improve safety and quality of life.

## Values

### Professionalism

Our conduct and demeanor display the highest standard of professional and organizational excellence. We are guided by the law enforcement code of conduct.

### Loyalty

Strive and commit to serve the public faithfully through our mission.

### Integrity

We are committed to being honest, fair, and ethical.

### Self-Discipline

We are committed to being prepared, on time, and participating so we are able to properly support our employees, communities and the Program.

### Sense of Urgency

The sense of urgency will guide prioritization of duties to ensure that tasks are completed before deadlines.

### Officer Safety

We support officer safety through training, equipment and adhering to safe practices through accountability.

### Attention to Detail

We dedicate ourselves to clearly communicate and know our mission while being conscientious in our everyday duties by putting equal effort into all tasks.

### Courage

Courage will empower us to share our thoughts and ideas to pursue positive change while taking appropriate risks to enhance public safety services.

### Commitment to Public Safety

We are dedicated to improving safety and quality of life to communities we serve by providing qualified, highly trained VPSOs.

# Our Strategy

*The VPSO Program has worked to develop a robust strategy in 2018. Understanding the history and challenges the program has faced and overcome and taking into account the current environment, this strategy was developed with the intention of carrying the Program into the future to shore itself up against historic patterns and the continually changing funding and support landscape it finds itself in. The below priorities and high level objectives are the focus for improving and building the best program we can to support rural Alaska and its need for quality public safety support. They are in no particular order.*

## Communication

- Branding/Identity
- Building and strengthening partnerships/relationships at all levels
- Community engagement

Under this priority the VPSO Program will work to further develop its brand and identity to support recruiting efforts as well as to further build an emotional connection with its stakeholders and the communities it serves. Additionally, it will seek to create new partnerships, shore up all relationships that are critical to developing the program, as well as work to increase its connection and engagement with its communities. These communication efforts will intentionally work to improve program perceptions as well as support funding and infrastructure development needs.

## A VPSO Available in Every Community

- Funding
- Strong talent recruiting strategy

This priority is strongly linked with other priorities as it requires an ability to fund all positions required, provide the proper support infrastructure, and develop a long-term talent strategy that brings us the best officers for each community over time. The critical objective we will immediately be working on is in the area of recruiting and pipeline development. We know that finding officers that have a strong commitment and connection to the communities is a best practice so we will work to build that pipeline that reflects that need.

## Program Governance

This priority has one main objective and that is to look at innovative and flexible ways to accomplish the VPSO Program vision of a safe public in rural Alaska. The most critical work in this priority is to look specifically at compacting, moving the program directly under the Commissioner's office, and finding other options that allow each region and entity to best meet the needs of their villages and communities.

## Adequate Funding & Policy Influence through Key Stakeholder Outreach

Under this priority the Program will work to build strong relationships and partnerships with the legislature as well as other critically identified stakeholders in order to gain mutual understanding of both the importance of the program and the need for increased funding and infrastructure support. As all of rural Alaska faces housing and infrastructure challenges today, the VPSO Program is heavily impacted by its current ability to fund positions as well as to provide adequate housing, office, and other infrastructure needs. A key objective of this priority is to get support from the legislature and other potential stakeholders that can support the VPSO Program in funding both the critical personnel needs as well as meeting the infrastructure needs.

## Define VPSO Roles & Responsibilities

This priority has one clear objective and that is to clearly define the role of the VPSO to create boundaries and expectations for what our officers do to support communities. Currently, each community has different expectations and with varying needs and levels of understanding an officer can quickly become overwhelmed, which leads to burnout and retention issues. The intention of this work is to define the critical work the VPSOs do, as well as to take into account the amount of flexibility there should be in the work officers do to support public safety in their respective communities. This priority helps us to curb officer burnout and retention, create a common voice and standard for recruitment, as well as clearly tell the story of the work the VPSO does to our key stakeholders.

# Village Public Safety Officer Program

# VPSO

Alaska  
Village Public Safety Officer Program