

How Village Public Officer Program (VPO & VPSO) Began

By John Angaiak

Foundation:

Under the Nixon-Ford Administration era at the Department of Labor, 1969 – 1977, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973 (known as CETA) became law. That law created "Prime Sponsors" across the country. Yupiktak Bista Manpower was solely created to be the prime sponsor of CETA programs within AVCP/Calista region shortly after 1973. Yupiktak Bista Manpower was made responsible for planning and providing a wide range of employment and training service tailored to local needs. At one time, it had plus or minus one thousand employees all throughout the fifty-six villages.

Most of its employees were youths of between 16 – 22 years of age, in response to the call by the Nixon-Ford Administration. The administration's major goal was to develop a new working partnership between the Federal Government and the States and localities—a partnership termed New Federalism. The distinctive feature of this approach was to remove the Federal presence as much as possible, and to substitute in its place local decision-making, flexibility, and accountability. The principal method chosen was block grants and revenue sharing, rather than categorical programs. CETA's purpose was to reduce structural and frictional unemployment resulting from labor market inefficiency and imbalance between supply and demand for particular skills; in other words, in a period of high unemployment and lack of skills particularly among youths.

VPO & VPSO:

The Yupiktak Bista Manpower was already underway and well established within the AVCP/Calista region. Early on, the staff, including this author, recognized the fact that it had to establish a permanent program that will outlast all other programs under its management. The region, like the rest of the rural Alaska, was null and void of the police protection. Early on it was heavily involved in research of the law and enforcement in the region by Criminal Justice Center at the University of Alaska Anchorage prior to 1979. This study was the foundation that helped to kick-start the Village Public Officer program in the summer of 1979. It had embarked on a program that would unite a native entity with State Department of Public Safety under the administration of Governor Hammond exclusively for AVCP/Calista region to create VPO program.

At first, John Angaiak, then the director of YBM had frequent informal meetings with local state troopers personnel here in Bethel, dreaming as to how we should start VPO program. It had to be kept under the lid for a while before plans were firm.

As it firmed up, it took on a life of its own. There was a strong unity between Yupiktak Bista Manpower and Alaska State Department of Public Safety. Within partnership, the strong players although I cannot name all, were Yupiktak Bista Manpower staff, then Trooper Glen Godfrey, Commissioner Nix and his deputy under Governor Hammond, the staff of Alaska State Troopers Academy in Sitka, and most important of all the villages that agreed to sent the original VPO trainees to Sitka in the summer of 1979. The Alaska State Troopers Academy in Sitka made a special provision to train the very first VPOs trainees in the summer of 1979... all this for AVCP/Calista region.

Another key feature of the VPO program was the selection of distinctive uniform color that contrasted with Alaska State Trooper's uniform. To establish uniform color, several VPOs were invited to come to Bethel and select the colors as they are now today.

Shortly after the VPO program was established, Yupiktak Bista Manpower Director, John Angaiak signed a first VPO contract with the State of Alaska in the presence of Governor Hammond and his staff.

Other prime sponsors in rural Alaska wanted to create their own similar public safety programs, but instead were encouraged to join our newly established VPO program. It quickly became a statewide program. Yupiktak Bista Manpower Program witnessed its pioneering work becoming a statewide program.

Finally, on behalf of the region's police protection, I was privileged to have served the people of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region and create VPO program.