**ONR Program Expands Professional Opportunities for At-Risk, Underrepresented Youth**

ARLINGTON, Va. — An innovative program sponsored by the Office of Naval Research (ONR) will open the door to professional career opportunities for at-risk and historically underrepresented youth through training in the fields of science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM).

The program, dubbed the “Animate My Action Plan,” is a partnership between the National Guard Youth Foundation (NGYF) and Royer Studios, which has been developing and implementing media-based educational programs since 1989. During the program, youth participating in the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Academies (NGYCA) receive specialized, technology-based vocational arts training.

This is followed by apprenticeships focused on web content development-writing, video, photography, graphics, animation and data management-with an emphasis on developing interest in STEAM-related careers.

“This program is truly a creative, unique path to professional careers for youth who may never have the opportunity to realize their creative talents otherwise,” said Dr. Richard Carlin, head of ONR’s Sea Warfare and Weapons Department. “The Navy has been extremely supportive of efforts to find the best and brightest minds to maintain our nation’s technological edge, including the ever-growing need for computer-skilled professionals.”

The ONR-supported STEAM effort is slated for an initial three-year period, and may serve as a model vocational training program to be replicated and administered in other sites, including veteran and other military centers.

Academy youth participants-called cadets-have 5 a.m. wakeup calls, followed by physical training and barracks maintenance as part of NGYCA’s congressional mandate to educate, train and mentor at-risk youth, fostering self-esteem, integrity and character.

NGYF is a nonprofit organization that works with the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program — located at 35 sites in 27 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia — to provide young people faced with limited career or academic prospects a pathway back to graduation day.

It equips them with the job skills and life skills necessary to succeed as adults. NGYF also works with public and private partners to provide cadets with unique learning opportunities and higher education grants.

Studies have found the program significantly improves the likelihood of earning a high school diploma or GED for youth who had previously dropped out of school — and that participants were 86 percent more likely to attend college and ultimately earn 20 percent more in income than their peers.

“One of the challenges for any science and technology-focused organization is to recognize and nurture the talents in our youth across every community,” said Carlin. “Statistics are not in our favor to produce a consistent talent pipeline unless we reach out to communities that have been underrepresented until now.”

To cite just one example: Bureau of Labor Statistics data suggest that the U.S. economy will annually create 120,000 new jobs requiring a bachelor’s degree in computer science by the end of the decade. However, only 51,000 degrees in that field are awarded each year.