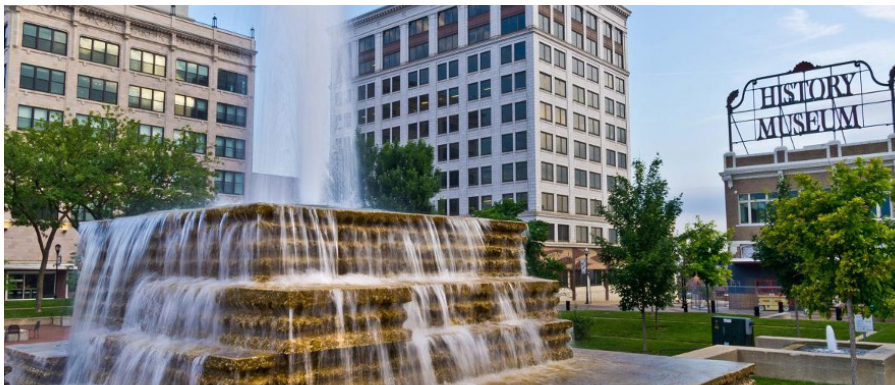




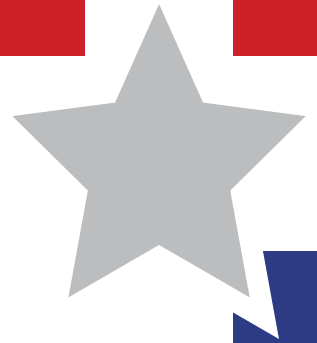
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National Security Crossroads Action Plan: **Building the Defense Ecosystem**



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Executive Summary





In the current United States economy, defense industry businesses, production chains and workforces from both public and private sectors are intrinsically linked. The Department of Defense (DoD) drives significant private defense industry priorities through procurement contracts while many defense-centric Research, Development, Testing, and Evaluation (RTD&E) processes occur through partnerships between government organizations, publicly funded academia and private defense contractors. This situation has led to the rise of regional and localized defense ecosystems, where individual public and private entities collaborate to enhance the overall capabilities, economic value, and status of their locality while contributing to our nation's defense.

The National Security Crossroads (NSC), encompassing the States of Kansas and Missouri, contains a distinct defense ecosystem which has a variety of opportunities for both economic growth and growth in national influence and prestige. Recognizing this, the NSC commissioned a study of the region's military assets, defense communities, and defense workforce. This study analyzed the current state of Kansas and Missouri's defense industry and developed an Action Plan to grow respective talent and seize opportunities for defense investment. Because of these multiple lines of effort, this report is made up of four distinct parts:

Action Plan

This document consists of an Action Plan for the NSC to develop and grow the defense ecosystem, primarily the region's defense industry and its workforce. Recommendations are focused on specific ways the NSC can apply itself to increase defense industry asset value and resilience, thereby setting the stage for increased Department of Defense (DoD) investment and presence, and on ways the NSC can increase its attractiveness to workers in defense industries. Multiple subordinate areas were examined within the scope of this study that provided input and contextualization to this action plan. These additional inputs include:



Asset Map

An online interactive tool comprised of six GIS applications identifying and detailing Kansas and Missouri assets that contribute to the NSC's defense ecosystem. These include military installations, federal agencies, industry partners and other designated assets. The tool also includes applications for exploring defense contract data and defense supply chains in the NSC region. This asset map also provides the data required to fully contextualize the region's defense industry which will enable the NSC to make educated decisions and develop realistic priorities for growth and expansion.

Stakeholder Engagement Summaries

A high-level summary of the entire stakeholder engagement process is included in this report. The stakeholder engagement process was the most significant contributor to the Action Plan.

Workforce and Industry Analysis

This analysis details the existing economic conditions of the NSC's defense industry and skilled workforce. Like the defense industry Asset Map, it provides key data points on the region's current defense contractors and their workforce. It also examines how the region's workforce contributes to the NSC's defense ecosystem in support of Action Plan recommendations.

Regional Resiliency Assessment Report

This section consists of a cursory assessment of the resiliency of military and defense assets throughout the NSC and was developed to support and inform the overall Action Plan. As resiliency is key to continued Department of Defense investment, understanding the region's resiliency successes and challenges will provide the NSC with the ability to prioritize and promote strategic defense-related resiliency projects.

This Action Plan provides key takeaways from each of these additional inputs, however, access to the complete versions is restricted. Requests for access can be made to the National Security Crossroads.



Key Takeaways

As this report is a collection of multiple efforts, the key findings of each effort are presented individually.

Key takeaways from the Action Plan include:

- The NSC must develop itself as an organization to promote comprehensive advocacy, raise resources, promote collaboration including a common brand, and foster communication for defense ecosystem priorities between local and state-level stakeholders in Kansas and Missouri. To do so, the NSC should adopt a structure similar to peer organizations and obtain dedicated funding sources to finance independent operations.
- The NSC should pursue three strategic directions to build its defense ecosystem. These strategic directions are designed to increase the ecosystem's defense industry, develop and retain defense industry workforce, and attract more federal investment:
 - Increase the NSC's military-friendly position through active coordination with local military installations and with state-level policies.
 - Develop coordinated regional advocacy to fund priority projects and protect existing and grow new missions.
 - Support targeted areas of strength for defense industry workforce development and attraction, particularly in aerospace and aerospace-related defense technologies.

Key takeaways from the stakeholder engagement process include:

- **Unique Regional Missions:** The military installations within the NSC defense ecosystem have a variety of unique active-duty, National Guard, and Reserve missions that form a solid bedrock from which to expand defense collaboration, investments, mission expansion, and innovation across the region.
- **Local Advocacy Potential:** There are multiple organizations throughout the NSC defense ecosystem that are well-positioned to advocate for their local military installations and local defense industry priorities. Harnessing the collective potential of these organizations will assist the NSC in building a strong regional advocacy network.
- **Strong Education Institutions:** Both Kansas and Missouri have strong private academic research institutions and state university systems and are ideally positioned to help grow the defense industry workforce, provide high-quality education and training to service members, and contribute scientific and engineering research and development to attract Department of Defense (DoD) and national security innovation. Regular and continuous dialogue between academia and defense industry partners will contribute to filling both existing and emerging workforce needs.



- **Workforce Retention Challenges:** A significant number of stakeholders cited workforce retention issues as a hindrance to their operations. Defense industry workforce shortages were also consistent in the findings of the workforce analysis.
- **Military Quality-of-Life Improvement Opportunities:** Shortages of affordable housing and childcare are prevalent across several Kansas and Missouri military communities. These quality-of-life issues hinder the ability of installations to complete their missions effectively, dampen enthusiasm for continued federal defense investments, and leave negative impressions of the region on veterans and service members.
- **Infrastructure Challenges:** Multiple installations in both Kansas and Missouri indicated gaps in funding for infrastructure modernization, repair, and other investments. In some cases, poor infrastructure creates barriers to the success of installation missions.

Key takeaways from the workforce and industry analysis include:

- **Variable Composition of the DoD Workforce:** Kansas and Missouri have similar sized DoD workforces, but these populations differ in composition. In Missouri, National Guardsmen and Reserve service members heavily outnumber active-duty service members while nearly half of Kansas's DoD workers are active-duty Army Soldiers.
- **Declining DoD workforce:** Overall, the DoD workforce in both Kansas and Missouri has declined over the past 10 years.
- **Slow National Defense Workforce Growth:** The NSC region has seen slower growth in key national defense industry workforces such as the Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services industry and the Manufacturing industry workforces when compared to the rest of the nation.
- **Key National Defense Workforce Strengths:** The NSC region employs a larger percentage of national security manufacturing workforce than the rest of the nation, underpinning a robust, manufacturing-centric defense industry. Additionally, wages for Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services workers are high in the NSC region when compared to the national average for similar industries, which provides strong incentive for workers such as engineers and defense contractors to relocate to the NSC.
- **Mixed Results in Replacement Rate Projections:** Based on current academic programs and graduations, the NSC region is and will continue to struggle in domestically replacing certain defense industry workers such as Machinists, Fabricators, and Inspectors / Testers. However, the region is projected to provide Industrial and Mechanical Engineers at well over replacement rates and Computer and Information analysts at over 25% beyond replacement rate.
- **Strong Academics and Workforce Training Potential:** Data on replacement rates for key national defense workforces and a large number of high-quality research institutions in both Kansas and Missouri offer a variety of opportunities for the NSC to continue to grow and attract a talented workforce.



Key takeaways from the resiliency review include:

- **Strong Overall Resiliency:** Within the NSC, no single community appears in dire need of intervention to prevent a negative environmental, economic, or infrastructure-related event. These circumstances provide a strong foundation for continued federal defense investments.
- **Identified Improvement Opportunities:** Although the NSC is a strong overall resilient region, there are multiple opportunities to improve. Some common resiliency challenges include lack of funding for infrastructure improvements, drought and severe weather impacts to supply chains, and utility infrastructure modernization. There are numerous opportunities to decrease risk associated with resiliency concerns such as utilizing the Defense Community Infrastructure Program (DCIP) or other federal grant programs to improve critical infrastructure. Additional opportunities are listed throughout the action plan and stakeholder engagement reports.

Methodology



Photo Credit: Union Station in Kansas City Missouri © Matthew - stock.adobe.com



To undertake this study, a team of experts and advocates with extensive experience in defense industry analytics conducted a series of in-person and virtual engagements with military and civilian leaders representing National Security Crossroads (NSC) military installations, local communities, federal agencies, academic institutions, and defense industries. These engagements allowed the team to gather facts on the ground and hear from subject matter experts to determine the best strategies to grow the NSC defense ecosystem and protect and enhance regional defense assets.

For the purposes of this report, the NSC defense ecosystem is defined as the defense assets within the States of Missouri and Kansas. These assets include military installations; entities administered by the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, and federal defense agencies; private defense industries; academia; and communities with strong ties and interdependencies with military installations and defense industries.

The main body of this report details the recommendations that the team found to be the most impactful and achievable to build a robust NSC defense ecosystem, primarily through enhancing or protecting the NSC's existing military and defense assets. The recommendations are organized into strategic priorities and presented as an Action Plan for the use of the NSC. These recommendations were compiled from the information gathered during the engagement process and informed by additional research conducted by the team. This research produced two additional products that are included as appendices to this report:

- **Workforce and Industry Analysis Report:** This details the existing economic conditions of the NSC's defense industry and workforce. The report utilized the economic impact modeling program IMPLAN, an industry-standard input-output modeling program that allows decision-makers to understand the impact to gross domestic product (GDP), employment, and other metrics of various industry actions or policy initiatives.
- **Regional Resiliency Assessment Report:** This is a cursory assessment of the resiliency of military and defense assets throughout the NSC defense ecosystem. The report presents an overview of resiliency characteristics and challenges to NSC assets by geographic area and provides general recommendations to increase resiliency across the area of study.

Analysis





The NSC's defense ecosystem is anchored by significant strengths including unique military mission sets at local Department of Defense installations, sizable defense manufacturers, strong educational partnerships, emerging hubs of technology and innovation, and veteran integration. However, persistent workforce shortages in key technical fields, aging infrastructure, and challenges in retaining young professionals threaten long-term growth. Addressing these gaps through enhanced education and training programs, branding current mission protection, new mission attraction, expanded partnerships, infrastructure investment and incentives will be essential to ensuring the NSC defense ecosystem remains competitive with other regional defense ecosystems within the greater framework of the national defense economy for years to come.





Strengths

- 1. Unique Defense and Military Missions:** Across installations such as Fort Leonard Wood, Whiteman Air Force Base (AFB), Lake City Army Ammunition Plant, Fort Riley, McConnell AFB, and the Kansas City National Security Campus, the NSC defense ecosystem supports a range of unique defense missions. These missions, such as the B-2 bomber at Whiteman AFB and advanced small-caliber munitions production at Lake City Army Ammunition Plant, are highly specialized, making the region critical to national defense.
- 2. Educational and Research Partnerships:** State public institutions like Kansas State University, the University of Kansas, Wichita State University, University of Missouri - Kansas City, Missouri University of Science and Technology, and the University of Central Missouri along with private institutions like Washington University and St. Louis University maintain strong partnerships with defense contractors and military installations. These partnerships provide research, workforce development pipelines, and internships, especially in engineering, cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing.
- 3. Veteran-Friendly Initiatives:** The NSC defense ecosystem has robust programs to support transitioning veterans, such as DoD SkillBridge partnerships at Boeing, Kansas City National Security Campus, and National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA) – St. Louis. Veterans are often integrated into the civilian workforce, offering a skilled labor pool for defense-related industries. This strength could be applied to additional areas by connecting other higher education institutions, and their partners, with existing SkillBridge and similar programs to share knowledge and benefits.
- 4. Strong Regional Collaboration:** Many defense support organizations, such as the Leonard Wood Institute, the Sustainable Ozarks Partnership, Whiteman Area Leadership Council, and Flint Hills Regional Council benefit from strong regional cooperation with local communities and government agencies. These collaborations advocate for mission growth and workforce support. Military Enhancement Committees (MECs)/Military Affairs Committees (MACs) are also utilized in locations such as Junction City and Manhattan and could be used as a model in other areas.



Weaknesses

- 1. Workforce Recruitment and Retention Issues:** A recurring challenge for the NSC defense ecosystem is the difficulty in attracting and retaining technical talent, particularly in engineering, cybersecurity, and skilled manufacturing trades. This is particularly notable at Boeing, the Kansas City National Security Campus, and the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA) – St. Louis, where specialized skill shortages are common.
- 2. Aging Infrastructure:** Many military installations in the NSC defense ecosystem, including Fort Leonard Wood, Fort Leavenworth, and Whiteman AFB, struggle with aging infrastructure. The need for investment in housing, training facilities, and basic infrastructure hampers operational effectiveness and quality of life. These infrastructure issues include both facilities that are nearing the end of their useful life and the need for modernization to meet 21st century technology and security standards.
- 3. Housing and Childcare Shortages:** A lack of adequate housing and childcare options is a significant issue across several NSC communities and military installations, notably McConnell AFB, Fort Riley, and Whiteman AFB. Housing challenges include insufficient space for on-installation beds in installation-managed facilities, as well as private housing within the community. This shortfall negatively impacts the retention of military families and local workforce talent, and may have an impact on the ability of communities to attract other defense industry partners. Similarly, high-quality dorms and enlisted servicemember housing are key elements of recruiting and retaining DoD military workforce.
- 4. Security Clearance Backlogs:** The slow adjudication of security clearances at Boeing is a persistent issue that delays workforce onboarding, exacerbating staffing shortages in technical roles. As other agencies attempt to alleviate workforce issues in positions requiring a security clearance, they will likely meet similar barriers, which could create additional impediments to growth.



Opportunities

- 1. Expansion of Defense Missions:** The NSC defense ecosystem has significant opportunities to attract new defense missions. Whiteman AFB was recently selected for the B-21 bomber mission, and Fort Leonard Wood has opportunities to better utilize its training capacity across various services. This would bring new jobs and infrastructure investment to the region. Other groups with additional capacity or unique facilities have similar opportunities for mission expansion.
- 2. Workforce Development Programs:** There is significant potential to expand existing partnerships with universities and technical schools to meet labor demands. Programs that integrate apprenticeships, internships, and early clearance investigations can help bridge workforce gaps in cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing, and engineering. These programs could also be targeted for attraction of specific missions and industry subsectors. There may also be an opportunity for an organization such as the NSC to fill specific data gaps through the use of online dashboards or data-based websites that capture workforce requirements from across the range of defense ecosystem partners.
- 3. Veteran Retention Initiatives:** Programs like DoD SkillBridge, Hiring Our Heroes, Welcome Home Missouri, Missouri Heroes Connect, and the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) present an opportunity to keep skilled veterans in the region. Further coordination between defense contractors, military installations, and state policy makers can help retain more veterans post-service. Communities that improve the underlying quality of life and affordability of their region (i.e., building housing and providing childcare) will be uniquely positioned to take advantage of these opportunities.
- 4. Technology Hubs and Innovation:** Kansas City is especially well-positioned to continue their growth as a defense technology hub, particularly in cybersecurity. St. Louis is becoming a major geospatial innovation hub by building on existing relationships with NSA, private contractors, and local universities. Additionally, both Kansas and Missouri possess mines and production capabilities for various critical minerals which contribute to battery production and other growing technologies. Because Kansas City and St. Louis are both bi-state metropolitan areas, they have the opportunity to take advantage of benefits from multiple state-level partners.



Threats

- 1. Defense Budget Cuts and Force Downsizing:** Future cuts to the defense budget or retirement of key defense platforms like the A-10 at Whiteman AFB, threaten to reduce missions and job opportunities in the NSC defense ecosystem. Economic dependence on military installations means any reduction in mission scope could have significant negative ripple effects on local economies. Focusing on mission diversity will limit long-term dependence on missions that could become obsolete and are outside the control of local stakeholders.
- 2. Recruitment Challenges in Rural Areas:** The rural location of many NSC military installations, including Fort Leonard Wood and Fort Leavenworth, makes it difficult to attract young professionals and retain talent in the long term. Local amenities, housing shortages, and geographic isolation are ongoing challenges. Partnerships with nearby metropolitan areas such as Springfield and Kansas City may alleviate some of these concerns for rural bases.
- 3. Crime and Safety Concerns:** Crime rates, particularly in the St. Louis region surrounding NGA-St. Louis, are a significant deterrent to attracting top-tier talent and new businesses. Local perceptions of safety and community infrastructure will need to improve to remain competitive.
- 4. Aging Workforce:** Many organizations, including the National Guard and Fort Leonard Wood, are facing an aging Federal technician workforce and may struggle to replace highly experienced employees as they retire. Without aggressive talent development and recruitment, there could be long-term operational impacts. This challenge may be exacerbated by the increasing need for health waivers, which slows the recruitment process.



Summary of Talent Elements

1. **Shortages in Technical Fields:** Projections for the NSC region indicate a growing potential for workforce gaps in fields like engineering, cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing. Organizations like Boeing, KCNSC, and NGA encounter a shrinking pool of technical talent, which factors into delays in defense-related production and research efforts.
2. **Veteran Integration:** The region's defense sector is highly dependent on veteran recruitment programs, which provide a skilled, disciplined labor force. Programs like SkillBridge and partnerships with local universities are helping address workforce gaps, but there is significant room for growth in retaining transitioning service members in technical roles.
3. **Workforce Pipeline Expansion:** There is a strong focus on expanding educational and workforce development programs, especially at universities like Kansas State and Wichita State. These initiatives target students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines to address long-term workforce shortages in the defense sector.
4. **Internships and Apprenticeships:** Increasing the availability of internships and apprenticeships — particularly those tied to security clearance processes — will help attract younger talent and create a smoother transition into defense careers. Including preliminary security clearance in internship roles will ease the burden of obtaining higher-level clearances as new talent progress into their future careers.
5. **Childcare and Family Services:** A significant workforce challenge across the NSC defense ecosystem is the lack of childcare and family services, which affects military family retention and local workforce participation. Expanding affordable, high-quality childcare options will be essential to maintaining a stable and engaged workforce. Opportunities for improvement exist both within military installations and in their neighboring communities. Shared efforts with community initiatives may be possible considering this concern affects more than just the defense industry.

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Action Plan





The following Action Plan is designed to provide recommendations, both long- and short-term, for the NSC to build and expand its defense industry ecosystem. These recommendations will enable the NSC to harness its strengths, minimize challenges, and correct weaknesses to remain competitive against other regional defense ecosystems. Additional information is included on gaps observed that may limit the NSC's effectiveness in accomplishing these recommendations.

The NSC's first priority must be to develop itself as a sustainable organization capable of coordinating the efforts and resources of partner organizations across Kansas and Missouri and unifying the regional defense assets in pursuit of common objectives. ***The first section of this action plan is dedicated to a review of comparative organizations and recommendations the NSC should consider to structure itself for its future goals.***

After the NSC develops the internal structure to best accomplish its mission, the organization should take proactive action to pursue opportunities for defense industry growth in the region. This report identifies three distinct strategic directions the NSC should take to drive this growth based on the results of the stakeholder engagement process and the information identified during the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis process. These three strategic directions, explored in the second section of this action plan, are:

1

Increase the NSC's military-friendly position through active coordination with local military installations and with state-level policies.

2

Develop coordinated regional advocacy to promote priority projects and win new missions.

3

Support targeted areas of strength for defense industry, economic development, and skilled workforce attraction, particularly in aerospace and aerospace-related defense technologies.



Section 1:

Structuring the National Security Crossroads for Long-Term Engagement

As discussed during the stakeholder engagement process, Kansas and Missouri do not lack in defense support organizations. Many are currently advocating for priorities of their local military installations and defense industries. Because of this, the NSC has an opportunity to reinvent itself as an entity for broad, bi-state coordination of efforts beyond the capabilities of existing defense support organizations. Doing so will allow the NSC to shape the narrative of the region's defense ecosystem and build connective tissue between invested Kansas and Missouri stakeholders.

Developing the NSC's structures, funding, and leadership to fill this coordinating role will be challenging and require a dedication of resources. However, models for success exist throughout the nation. The following portion of this report provides considerations and recommendations for the NSC based upon defense advocacy organizations which have proven to be effective in similar roles. The Action Plan following this section illustrates both short term and long-term recommendations which the NSC should consider pursuing after it has assumed its stakeholder-defined role in the regional defense ecosystem.

Key Decision Points

There are a multitude of Governing Structures and Funding Sources that have been adopted by the many organizations which successfully advocate and contribute to a local defense industry or defense community. For the purpose of this analysis, we define Governing Structure as the body which sets policy and determines strategic priorities for the organization. Funding Source is defined as the primary method that the organization receives capital to conduct operations. Deciding upon the most optimal Governing Structure and Funding Source are the two key decisions which the NSC must make in order to become a viable, sustainable organization which can contribute to the region's defense ecosystem and coordinate the activities of existing stakeholders in Kansas and Missouri.

Review of Existing Organizations

The following section of this report describes numerous non-governmental or quasi-governmental organizations which share many of the same goals and objectives as the NSC does for their particular regions. These organizations are presented with the intent of contextualizing possible options the NSC could adopt for itself. Of note, local defense support organizations such as the Leonard Wood Institute are purposefully not included in this analysis. While these local organizations, in many cases, have successful structures and records of achievement, the purpose of this section is to provide a review of outside organizations to promote further innovative methods and explain known success stories at the same regional level where the NSC will be conducting its operations.



Hampton Roads Military and Federal Facilities Alliance (HRMFFA)

Established: 2006

Purpose: To attract, retain, and grow military and federal facilities across the region for the common good and welfare of the residents of Hampton Roads

Represents: Sixteen localities throughout the Hampton Roads and Norfolk region of Virginia which collectively encompass eighteen military installations and benefit from \$40 million of economic impact related to defense spending.

Governing Structure: A 23-person board of governors consisting of public sector and private sector members. Public sector members are designated representatives of thirteen of the participating municipalities. The organization also has a full-time executive director, two additional full-time employees, and retains professional lobbyists.

Primary Funding Sources: Contributions from each of the sixteen participating localities (\$0.50 per capita)

West Florida Defense Alliance (WFDA)

Established: 2018

Purpose: To actively facilitate community and government support to sustain and enhance current military missions, pursue, future missions, and promote the region's contributions to national defense.

Represents: The western panhandle region of Florida encompassing four military installations

Governing Structure: The organization is housed under the Greater Pensacola Chamber of Commerce and consists of a board of volunteer representatives. WFDA maintains one full-time staff member and utilizes consultants to conduct administrative and organizational processes as an extension of the Chamber staff.

Primary Funding Sources: Grant funding and costs of membership which vary from \$100 to \$25,000 annually depending on membership tier and type of membership (public entity vs. private business, etc.).

The Army Alliance

Established: 1999

Purpose: Engage elected officials and government leadership at the federal, state and local levels on issues, challenges opportunities facing Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG) and the surrounding region.

Represents: Northeastern Maryland, primarily the Aberdeen Proving Ground installation.

Governing Structure: 17 volunteer directors from local businesses, defense industries, and the local community. The organization has a full-time executive director retains professional lobbyists.

Primary Funding Sources: A mixture of state and local grant funding and annual contributions from both corporate sponsors and local municipalities.



Forward Fairchild

Established: 2003

Purpose: Defend and advance the mission of Fairchild Air Force Base and advocate for its commanders, airmen, and their families.

Represents: Fairchild Air Force Base and its surrounding communities in the vicinity of Spokane, Washington.

Governing Structure: A committee comprised of business, community, and political leaders housed within the Greater Spokane Incorporated, which is a business development organization within the Spokane Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Primary Funding Sources: A mixture of state and private industry funding provided through the Greater Spokane, Inc.

Mississippi Defense Initiative (MDI)

Established: 2016

Purpose: Promote innovation, diversification, and cooperation in the Mississippi defense community.

Represents: Mississippi's state-wide defense industry interests.

Governing Structure: MDI is a conglomerate of partner organizations led by the University of Southern Mississippi and composed of entities from both public and private defense industry and economic development organizations across Mississippi.

Primary Funding Sources: Grant funding from the Department of Defense's (DoD) Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation (OLDCC) Industry Resilience grant.





Community, Military & Federal Facility Partnership of Northern Virginia

Established: 2005

Purpose: To protect, preserve, and enhance Northern Virginia military installations and community partnerships. Was created in direct response to the creation of the state-level Northern Virginia Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Committee.

Represents: Northern Virginia's defense industry and military installations including Fort Belvoir, Marine Corps Base Quantico, Joint Base Myer Henderson Hall, Fort Walker, and administers certain support agreements with Hampton Roads-area installations.

Governing Structure: This organization is a subsidiary of the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) which is a regional council of thirteen-member local governments in the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C. To manage the Community, Military, and Federal Facility Partnership, the NVRC employs an Executive Director and a Project Manager.

Primary Funding Sources: The NVRC and its Community, Military, and Federal Facility Partnership are funded primarily by annual contributions from member local governments, by appropriations from the Virginia General Assembly, and by a variety of grants, contracts, and fees from both government and private sector sources.

California Defense Community Alliance (CDCA)

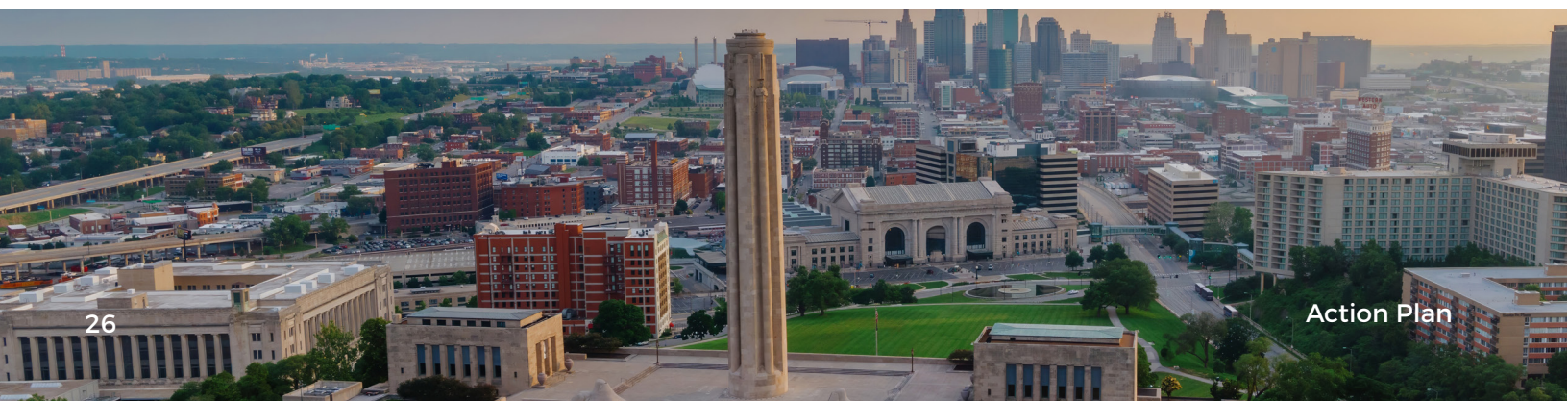
Established: 2019

Purpose: Support, promote, and represent the interests of Defense Organizations throughout California while advocating on behalf of those that serve or have served in these organizations. Intended to be the premier California nonprofit working on behalf of the state's defense installation.

Represents: Eight-member defense support organizations that make up the majority of California's defense and military installation support organizations.

Governing Structure: The governing structure of CDCA consists of a board of directors with two co-chairs of equal status nominated from different member organizations.

Primary Funding Sources: CDCA can seek funding from the non-profits that comprise its membership, state and local governments, and various non-corporate-aligned foundations interested in furthering CDCA goals.





Recommendations

The NSC is best suited as a facilitator of existing defense support organizations across multiple communities within the Kansas and Missouri defense ecosystem. Because of this, the NSC should align its administrative structure and primary funding to build connections with the various organizations and communities it wishes to coordinate and influence. The following are recommendations for structure and funding that should allow the NSC to best pursue these goals:

Recommended Structure:

Board of Directors with full-time executive director and full-time staff as necessary

Since the NSC will be coordinating across state lines and with high-level officials in state and local governments, a full-time executive director is ideal to act as the face and common point of contact for the organization. Additionally, a full-time executive can represent the NSC outside of the region. Organizations described in the previous section of this report regularly provide their directors or other paid staff as participants in industry events and panels which allow them to promote the defense industries they represent and gain greater knowledge on what can be applied to their localities. In a rarer case, HRMFFA's current director has testified before Congressional inquiries on military family quality of life issues.

The NSC's board of directors could take many forms but should endeavor to represent the widest range of defense industry stakeholders. These include representatives from government (both state local level), academia, community defense support organizations, and private industry. Representatives from military installations within the NSC's area of interest could also be included and should be engaged in the NSC's actions, but they would not be permitted to hold any official or voting position.

Recommended Funding Sources:

Grant funds and, eventually, appropriations from participating localities

It will naturally take time for the NSC to establish itself as a credible, effective organization in the eyes of defense communities and defense industry stakeholders in Kansas and Missouri. During this time, the organization should seek grant funding directly from Kansas and Missouri state-level sources if possible or look at federal-level grant opportunities in the example of organizations such as the Mississippi Defense Initiative (MDI) discussed in the previous section. If grant-based funding can provide the capital for the NSC to conduct 1-2 years of operations, then the NSC should have enough time to gather invested communities and other stakeholders to transition to an appropriations-based, or 'pay-to-play' model.

It is strongly recommended that the NSC adopt a 'pay-to-play' model because doing so will incentivize regular participation and engagement from member organizations. This incentive is especially critical with the NSC's need to build connective tissues across state borders and between communities representing a wide variety of defense industry interests and military services. A pay-to-play model will also provide the NSC with a dedicated funding stream that will be consistent as opposed to individual project funding based on individual decisions or action plans.



There are many ways a pay-to-play model can be successful. The NSC should determine aspects such as funding, membership tiers, organizational structure, and strategic direction when determining a pay-to-play model. Multiple examples of successful pay-to-play or appropriations funded models are enumerated in the previous Review of Existing Organizations.





Section 2:

Strategic Directions for the NSC

Strategic Direction 1:

Increase the Military Friendliness of the NSC Defense Ecosystem

A state or region's ability to grow its defense ecosystem is influenced by the perceptions of its "military friendliness". Military friendliness is a broad topic to precisely define, but is generally understood as state-level policies and quality of life provisions which provide unique benefits to service members, veterans, retirees, and their families. Because service members transitioning from active-duty service can take advantage of relocation assistance, they are frequently able to move wherever they wish at the end of their service. This situation creates the need for a military-friendly area to provide tailored policies, particularly at the state level, to attract this specific population. Common examples of these policies include tax exemptions for military retiree pay, childcare subsidies for service members, tuition assistance or workforce training programs for transitioning veterans, and a variety of other aspects which incentivize veterans and service members to live and work in a state. If a state or region does not focus resources on specifically attracting and branding itself to these veterans and retirees, then it is at a distinct disadvantage in growing and retaining this population of skilled workers who are especially able to contribute to the growth of a local defense ecosystem.

As will be discussed further in the second Strategic Direction, coordination on shared priorities between local, state, and regional policymakers, their advocacy organizations, and local military installations are also extremely important creating an environment of military friendliness. Because this coordination on civilian-military priorities often improves the life of average service members and their families and because coordination with a willing community generates cost savings for a military installation, the Department of Defense is increasingly using military-friendly metrics in decisions for military mission assignments and other investments.

A state's ability to offer veterans and service members a combination of financial, workforce, education, and quality-of-life benefits that is competitive with the offers of its competitor states across the nation is essential to winning the zero-sum game of veteran retention. Equally important is a state's ability to publicize and promote its military friendliness and communicate the need to continuously develop its military-friendly policies through state and local legislation. With these aspects in mind, the following are short-term and long-term actions for the NSC to increase its military friendliness:



Shorter-Term Actions

- ***Commission a Gap Analysis of Kansas and Missouri military-friendly legislation vs. competitor states:*** Anecdotally, Kansas and Missouri are not top desirable locations for veterans or transitioning service members to relocate to after their time in service. However, the scope of this problem is not fully understood, and there are no specific, verified metrics to judge current state policies against those of competitor states. Conducting a specific analysis designed to understand the gaps between Kansas and Missouri military-friendly policies and those of neighboring states and states that compete in the same defense industries as Kansas and Missouri would provide a roadmap for policy, advocacy, and marketing considerations. When applied and enacted, this roadmap would build the NSC defense ecosystem's reputation as a desirable location for both skilled veteran workers and federal defense investments.
- ***Explore feasibility of additional regional and state-level Intergovernmental Support Agreements (IGSAs):*** A key tool to directly increase cooperation and generate cost savings between military installations and their surrounding communities is the IGSA. IGSAs are predominantly enacted between a single installation and a local government or similar organization such as an educational institute. They are designed to help provide contracted installation support services in a more economical fashion than standard Department of Defense contracting requirements. IGSAs have been used to provide assistance to military families in high-impact areas such as childcare. A recent example of this impact can be seen at Eglin AFB, Florida where an IGSA was utilized to temporarily increase access to childcare facilities for military families while a new installation facility was being constructed. Similar models for this level of cooperation also exist locally in the case of the current childcare pilot IGSA between West Liberty, Iowa; Clay County, Missouri; and the childcare provider Upwards which are jointly working to provide a new model of childcare options for Army National Guardsmen and Reservists.





These agreements are frequently cost savers for the DoD and also profitable for the partnering local government. Texas has taken this model further and recently enacted a state-level IGSA between three military services and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). This agreement allows TxDOT to provide support and maintenance to roads and other transportation infrastructure on Texas military installations, providing immense cost savings to DoD installations in Texas while also generating profitable contract work for TxDOT. The secondary benefit is an increase in the military readiness of Texas installations which will surely factor into future Federal mission basing decisions. Since Texas's state-level IGSA is the first of its kind, Kansas and Missouri have an opportunity to explore similar agreements which could also provide best-in-class support and coordination between their military installations and communities.

Longer-Term Actions

- ***Develop a military-friendly-centric marketing campaign and associated strategic products:*** Much dialogue around the concept of military friendliness focuses on common anecdotes. Examples include the idea that southern states are more patriotic and therefore more military-friendly or that Texas and Florida are the best places for service members to declare residency due to their lack of state income taxes. To compete for veteran attraction and retention, and, by extension, attract federal and private investment in NSC defense industries, the NSC should develop a marketing strategy to showcase the region's military-friendly policies and draw attention to the area's actions in incentivizing a veteran workforce and increasing defense industry investment. Additionally, this effort could include outward-facing products for political use to showcase the economic impact of the area's defense industry and the current competitive advantages the NSC defense ecosystem has in defense and defense-related industries such as aerospace, national bio and agro defense, electronics, artificial intelligence, engineering and design, geospatial, energy storage, and energetic devices. Particularly useful strategic products in this area could be:
 - A military friendly gap analysis to research where Kansas and Missouri policies stand in relation to competitor states.
 - An outward-facing study of the economic impact of the defense industry and defense spending in Kansas and Missouri.
- ***Coordinate military-friendly legislation:*** The NSC's position as a regional organization between two neighboring, highly interconnected states, gives it a rare opportunity to coordinate military-friendly legislation on a regional scale. The NSC should develop targeted opportunities for military-friendly policy, based on findings from an analysis of Kansas and Missouri's current policies compared to competitors, and promote those policies that can be enacted in both states to increase the overall military-friendly environment of the region.



Gaps to Success

- ***Lack of knowledge on military-friendly metrics:*** The NSC should study current trends of military-friendly policy and fully understand how the NSC defense ecosystem compares to other competitor states and regions in this area. The NSC should also expressly identify its competitors for veterans and military investments, both locally and across the nation. Once this is understood, the NSC can develop targeted ways for both Kansas and Missouri to close the gaps between themselves and identified competitors.
- ***Coordination of DoD and local/state-level entities:*** Coordination “across the fence” between military and civilian authorities is always challenging, particularly in the development of complex agreements such as IGSA. The NSC, as a regional organization, can work to integrate itself into state and local military support organizations and become a trusted partner of value in local civilian–military partnerships. This will assist in bridging communication gaps and help local communities and installations enact agreements that can be reflected and supported by broader, state-level policies.
- ***Current perceptions:*** Although, as stated, the metrics are undefined, Kansas and Missouri are anecdotally not viewed as military-friendly states when compared to a variety of others such as Texas, Florida, and Virginia. The NSC, through actions discussed in this plan, will need to aggressively combat this perception and invest time and resources in promoting its various defense ecosystem strengths and military-friendly policies to rehabilitate its outward-facing image and close the perception gap between it and competitor states.



Strategic Direction 2: Align and Coordinate Regional Advocacy

As discussed throughout this report, the NSC has great potential to grow its defense ecosystem and add value to its existing military and defense assets. However, to realize this potential, the NSC must aggressively increase its competitive advantages over its neighboring states and competitor defense ecosystems. Acquiring defense industry investment, especially investments directly from the federal government, is a zero-sum process where one state or defense ecosystem loss is another's gain. Non-financial factors which also drive defense industry growth are very often similarly competitive.

Because primary data sources provide federal defense data by state, the following discussion focuses on defense spending by state as opposed to region or defense ecosystem. However, because most defense ecosystems are within a single state and form due to favorable state-level policy, comparing Kansas and Missouri to neighboring and competitor state still provides a good comparison of the NSC defense ecosystem as a whole.

When compared to neighboring states, Kansas and Missouri remain competitive in key defense spending metrics that are indicative of overall defense investment and the outlook of future defense investment growth. However, when compared to states that lead the nation in defense spending metrics, Kansas (KS) and Missouri (MO) as a region fall well behind. The below table charts key defense spending metrics for fiscal year 2023 for both KS and MO, their neighboring direct competitor states and, for comparison, two of the top five states in the nation by federal defense investment - Texas and Florida. This data was taken directly from the DoD's Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation (OLDCC) annual state-by-state report on Federal defense spending. All data is from fiscal year 2023 (published in October, 2024), the most recent data set available as of the date of this report.

State	Total Defense Spending in State (US Rank)	Defense Spending % of State GDP (US Rank)	State's Total Defense Personnel (US Rank)	Total Defense Grant Spending in State (US Rank)	Total Defense Contract Spending in State (US Rank)
MO	\$13.3B (15)	3.2% (13)	39,379 (20)	\$61.7M (42)	\$11.6B (11)
KS	\$3.9B (35)	1.7% (27)	36,650 (21)	\$121.6M (28)	\$1.6B (38)
AR	\$1.7B (43)	1.0% (44)	17,770 (35)	\$84.5M (36)	\$0.9B (43)
TX	\$71.6B (1)	2.8% (16)	211,504 (3)	\$393.2M (7)	\$58.7B (1)
FL	\$32.3B (4)	2.0% (22)	131,476 (5)	\$373.5M (8)	\$22.9B (5)
OK	\$7.3B (26)	2.9% (15)	58,941 (12)	\$84.9M (35)	\$3.7B (27)
NE	\$2.5B (39)	1.4% (31)	16,514 (36)	\$61.1M (43)	\$1.4B (40)
IA	\$3.4B (36)	1.4% (34)	12,946 (41)	\$90M (34)	\$2.9B (32)
IL	\$10.5B (19)	1.0% (45)	56,675 (15)	\$182.7M (17)	\$7.8B (15)
CO	\$12.6B (16)	2.4% (17)	57,998 (14)	\$206.6M (16)	\$8.4B (14)



Overall, the defense spending data suggests the NSC region, while not insignificant, faces challenges in fully capitalizing on its defense assets and may struggle to keep pace with states that have more dominant defense hubs. Strengthening grant procurement, workforce development, and strategic partnerships to grow defense contract awards could be key focus areas for Kansas and Missouri to enhance their national security standing, build resilience in defense assets and attract additional defense spending.

To most effectively organize itself and increase competitiveness for defense industry investments at all levels, the NSC should consider the following actions:

Shorter-Term Actions

- **Identify priorities for targeted investments:** Military installations throughout the NSC defense ecosystem have a variety of priorities which will require military construction (MILCON) and/or other federal spending to accomplish. The NSC should coordinate with these military installations and their local support organizations to determine the funding priorities which hold the greatest future value and have the best potential to grow the NSC's defense industry workforce. The NSC should then consider which priorities to support through advocacy efforts. Many such opportunities were identified during stakeholder engagements, and the following are listed as possible priority actions. Each opportunity discussed in this section includes a reference in parenthesis to the stakeholder engagement report where the opportunity originated. These reports are included in Appendix C and can be referenced for additional information on the listed opportunities.
 - **MILCON funding for Lake City Army Ammunition Plant (LCAAP) to repair and upgrade installation security infrastructure:** Obtaining funding for this priority would ensure LCAAP is able to continue to meet projected future demands for 6.8 mm ammunition. (*LCAAP SWOT Analysis*)
 - **MILCON or state funding for National Guard facilities:** The Missouri National Guard is constrained in its ability to upgrade and modernize facilities due to lack of funding. Investing or acquiring additional funds for the Missouri National Guard would enable it to increase its operational capacity and possibly attract additional unique missions similar to the 7th Civil Support Team. (*Missouri Army National Guard SWOT Analysis*)



- **DCIP for Salina Airport runway development:** The favorable length and width of the primary runway at Salina Regional Airport attracts much of the airport's DoD and commercial traffic. However, the airport's runway surface has recently received its final mill and overlay possible before the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires a full-depth replacement. New FAA requirements on runway sizing prevent the FAA from funding this full depth replacement due to the type of traffic primarily serviced by the airport. There is a need to develop other funding streams to fund the runway's full depth replacement so that the mission of the airport is not lost.

Additionally, The Kansas National Guard has indicated plans to develop an aviation support facility at the Salina Airport. This development could catalyze federal support from programs such as the Defense Community Infrastructure Program (DCIP) to offset costs of the full depth replacement and benefit both civilian and military use of the airport. *(Salina Regional Airport SWOT Analysis)*

- **MILCON funding for dormitory and/or other housing expansion at McConnell AFB:** McConnell AFB has indicated that it has a shortage of unaccompanied housing which will continue even after current housing renovation work is complete and the base returns to full housing capability. While additional privatized housing options should be explored, MILCON programming for another dormitory should be considered to ensure McConnell AFB has its required housing capacity for both its present and future populations. *(McConnell AFB SWOT Analysis)*
- **DCIP or Defense Access Road (DAR) funding to improve Rosecrans Memorial Airport access:** Access to Rosecrans Memorial Airport and the adjoining Rosecrans Air National Guard (ANG) Base is restricted to a single causeway that spans the old Missouri River channel. This access should be expanded and improved to facilitate ingress and egress plans for the installation. Better access routes will also positively affect the surrounding area's economic development. Depending on the specifics of the infrastructure, a project to increase base and/or airport access may qualify for funding from the DCIP or DAR program. *(Kansas City Area Development Council SWOT Analysis)*
- **Additional Operations and Maintenance Funding for runway support at McConnell AFB:** McConnell AFB currently operates two runways which provide the installation with ideal capacity to conduct its assigned missions. Lack of funding or a drawdown to one runway would severely degrade operational flexibility during times of runway or pavement construction projects or emergency procedures. Funding should be secured to allow McConnell AFB to continue the operations of its second runway to preserve and expand its military missions. *(McConnell AFB SWOT Analysis)*
- **MILCON for modernization efforts at Fort Leonard Wood:** Fort Leonard Wood has underutilized space and capacity for new military missions but also has aging facilities which require modernization to compete for additional missions. MILCON for prioritized projects on the installation such as a new range complex could increase Fort Leonard Wood's attraction for additional missions and federal investment. *(Leonard Wood Institute SWOT Analysis)*



■ **Align and help grow regional advocacy frameworks to pursue identified**

targeted investments: Effective advocacy will play a leading role in the NSC's efforts to support the priorities listed in this Action Plan and further invigorate the Crossroads defense ecosystem. Effective advocacy to achieve desirable outcomes is a multi-pronged effort where objectives are clearly defined, stakeholders are willing partners, communication is robust, and expectations are sober-minded. The NSC should make conscious efforts to build partnerships, relationships, and capabilities to grow and coordinate these levels of advocates to advance its strategic directions on as wide a front as possible. If resourced properly, the NSC could also act as a funding entity for its partners for initiatives that would benefit the overall Kansas-Missouri defense ecosystem. The various levels at which the NSC should advocate include:

- **Federal Level:** Both Kansas and Missouri enjoy federal congressional delegations that are placed in key positions of influence on national security policy. These include, but are not limited to, Congressmen Sam Graves and Wesley Bell of Missouri and Derek Schmidt of Kansas who sit on the House Armed Services Committee along with Congressman Mark Alford of Missouri who is a member of the House Appropriations Committee. Across the aisle are Senators Erik Schmitt of Missouri, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Jerry Moran of Kansas who is a member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense. Accordingly, the states' delegations are well positioned to drive defense policy changes, mission expansion, and funding via both the annual National Defense Authorization Act and defense appropriations. On Capitol Hill, this is analogous to being the one who is writing and cashing the checks. The ability to leverage these delegations' positions on critical committees provides valuable options in advocating for NSC priorities.
- **State Level:** State-level advocacy occurs primarily through state general assemblies. Both Kansas and Missouri have military executives or advocates acting on behalf of their respective governors and appointed councils or commissions. These entities and individuals are especially effective at coordinating advocacy between local and regional economic organizations, military installations, defense communities, state legislators, and other defense assets.
- **Local Level:** Ideally, local advocacy begins with a local MEC/MAC. These committees act as forums for private- and public-sector leaders to coordinate directly with their local military installations and determine mutually beneficial solutions to issues or pursue mutual goals. MECs are especially effective in resolving compatibility or resiliency problems between installations and their local communities such as zoning policy or noise corridors. Additionally, MECs can spearhead the process of applying for federal grants and other funding that can be used for infrastructure projects in support of both installation and community priorities. Most importantly, the outcomes that arise out of discussions held during MEC meetings are the basis for eventual state-level advocacy priorities. Without a MEC-type organization to establish these local discussions among stakeholders, installation and defense community priorities are seldom able to be heard at an appropriate level and solutions are not coordinated at an appropriate level.



While effective advocacy at the state and federal levels is immensely important, the need for an organized system of local engagement at the county and community levels, particularly through a MEC/MAC structure, is equally critical to support coordinated advocacy efforts.

Longer-Term Actions

- **Pursue additional military missions for NSC military installations and additional opportunities in the region's defense industries:** The NSC should engage and align the efforts of its advocacy networks behind large-scale opportunities that will take significant time to accomplish but that have the potential to add the greatest value to the region's defense ecosystem. The stakeholder engagement process identified a number of these opportunities which are listed below in order of recommended priority. Each opportunity discussed in this section includes a reference in parenthesis to the stakeholder engagement report where the opportunity originated. These reports are included in Appendix C and can be referenced for additional information on the listed opportunities.
- **Continue to pursue next-generation aircraft missions for Whiteman AFB:** Whiteman AFB has two significant tenant units that currently operate aircraft which are being phased out of the Air Force inventory. While efforts, including programed MILCON projects, are underway to adjust and modernize these missions, the NSC should continue to monitor this process and ensure Whiteman AFB continues to remain on track for its replacement missions. Establishing these new, lasting, and relevant missions is essential to maintaining the overall operational relevance of Whiteman AFB and will position the installation for further investments in the future. (*Boeing–St. Louis, Whiteman AFB, and Whiteman Area Leadership Council SWOT Analyses*)
- **Attract additional training missions for Fort Leonard Wood:** Fort Leonard Wood is reportedly at only 70% capacity and has plenty of land and facilities to support additional training missions. The installation already trains service members from all branches of the military. There is an opportunity to explore expansion or additional training missions for the installation. (*Leonard Wood Institute and Sustainable Ozarks Partnership SWOT Analysis*)
- **Explore development of Rosecrans AFB and Salina Airport to host unmanned aircraft systems:** With the Kansas National Guard already seeking an aviation support facility at Salina Airport West, an opportunity exists to expand the military mission profile of Rosecrans AFB and further develop Salina Airport to host unmanned aircraft systems such as the MQ-9 Gray Eagle. (*Kansas City Area Development Council SWOT Analysis*)
- **Seek new tenant missions for the expanded National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA)–St. Louis facility:** NGA–St. Louis is expanding operations with a new facility and already has support for its unique operations from significant politicians such as Senator Eric Schmitt. This situation, combined with the fact that NGA–St. Louis' geospatial focus area is well-suited for both civilian and military applications, provides a wide range of possible mission expansion opportunities if the federal defense sector and civilian industry can be coordinated. (*NGA–St. Louis SWOT Analysis*)



- **Attract additional National Guard training to Smoky Hill Weapons Range and Fort Riley:** The Smoky Hill Weapons Range is the largest Air National Guard air-to-ground bombing and gunnery range in the nation and is already the training area of choice for multiple National Guard units. Given the size and strengths of the range, further efforts should be made to attract additional Air National Guard or foreign military training to the area, perhaps in the form of an annual exercise similar to other large-scale National Guard training events such as Northern Strike and Southern Strike joint combat exercises, which are hosted in Michigan and Mississippi respectively. Showcasing the Smoky Hill Weapons Range would also further promote the training capabilities of Fort Riley and other NSC military installations. (*Fort Riley SWOT Analysis*)
- **Coordinate with industry and academic partners to develop additional defense-adjacent industries based in critical minerals:** Various niche defense-adjacent industries exist in Kansas and Missouri which present opportunities for further development and investment attraction. While the following examples are not comprehensive, they represent two of the most valuable opportunities which already have invested stakeholders available to partner with the NSC.
 - **Critical Minerals:** Kansas and Missouri both possess mining and refinery industries for critical minerals such as zinc, lead, gypsum and various rare earth minerals. These minerals are critical to the development of modern defense-related technology and are used in various products such as batteries that have crossover applications to civilian use. The NSC should seek opportunities to work hand-in-hand with private industry and other existing entities that seek to increase critical mineral production and application in the Crossroads Region. Possible partners are readily available in the academic and industry participants of the recent Critical Materials Crossroads conference. Successful collaboration could increase the economic impact of a valuable niche industry for the region. Additionally, increasing the region's production of critical minerals could build a hub of technological research and manufacturing around advanced materials that are critical to national defense technology and have significant applications in civilian products such as batteries. Targeted growth in this field would very likely grow the NSC defense ecosystem by attracting additional federal investments for defense-related research and offering opportunities defense-related private industry.
 - **Hydrogen Storage:** Kansas has been identified as a possible hub for hydrogen storage. This concept revolves around the state's existing network of salt caverns which would be ideal for meeting hydrogen storage requirements and which already have been used in some instances to store natural gases. Establishing Kansas as a hydrogen storage hub would increase the state's and the NSC region's standing in national security because hydrogen is a key element of rocket propulsion and has applications in Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) use Hydrogen fuel cells, both emerging topics in defense-related innovation. The NSC would have numerous potential partners in advancing the reality of a hydrogen storage hub in Kansas. One of the leading partner organizations would be the HARVEST Hydrogen Club coalition, a group of academic and private industry stakeholders which has sought federal funding to establish a hydrogen hub in Kansas.



Gaps to Success

- ***Coordination and communication between levels of advocacy:*** Aligning efforts between advocacy interests is a difficult and complex process that can be highly dependent on personal relationships. The NSC must ensure it continues to prioritize coordination and communication between its local and state-level advocates from across Kansas and Missouri in order to most effectively conduct coordinated advocacy efforts to policymakers.
- ***Advocacy funding:*** Establishing dedicated sources of funding for defense community advocacy is also a difficult process, especially if funding is not provided through a state-level or other governmental budget.



Strategic Direction 3: **Invest in Targeted Areas for Defense Workforce Attraction**

To support this Action Plan, Matrix conducted an analysis of the NSC defense industry workforce aimed at uncovering specific strengths and challenges in the region pertaining to workers. The key takeaways of this analysis have been discussed in this report, and the full analysis can be found in Appendix C of this report. The following actions are related to the findings of the workforce analysis and the information gathered during the stakeholder engagement process.

Shorter-Term Actions

- ***Determine the key competitive advantages of the region and focus workforce development efforts in that industry sector:*** To best expand its defense industry workforce, the NSC should identify the existing or potential portions of the national defense industry that its ecosystem can best support, and succeed in, then corner that specific market. The preeminent example of this strategy is Huntsville, Alabama, which has successfully turned itself into the “Defense Hub of the South” through a focus on the rocketry industry and other space-centric innovation. Based on the presence of the national aerospace industry such as the Boeing Company, significant research and educational institutions, and available airports and airspace, the NSC should focus on its aerospace and aerospace-focused technology industries.

Additionally, NGA–St. Louis’ ongoing expansion provides an opportunity for the St. Louis area, and possibly the greater NSC defense ecosystem, to brand itself as a leader in defense-related geospatial technology. Linking the expanded capabilities of the future NGA–St. Louis campus with the high-quality universities of the area has the potential to create best-in-class training programs and workforce development opportunities for the region.
- ***Promote DoD SkillBridge programs:*** The DoD SkillBridge program is rapidly becoming a preferred tool for transitioning service members to obtain high-value employment after their military careers. SkillBridge also provides an opportunity for employers to recruit and develop employees with specialized defense industry skill sets. The NSC should view the SkillBridge program as a strategic tool for workforce development by educating and assisting desired defense industry employers to implement it in their organizations.
- ***Explore possible veteran education and training programs and incentives:*** Nearly all states offer some sort of education benefit to veterans and service members. Many also have specialized training programs designed to transfer military experience to civilian credentials or provide direct workforce training to veterans. Kansas and Missouri both offer programs designed to provide training and education to veterans, but they should directly compare their offerings to best-in-class programs offered by other states. These include programs such as the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) program, Florida’s standardized University Military Credit system which translates military training and experience directly to college credit hours at Florida state universities, and Texas’s Hazelwood Act which provides education benefits to



qualifying veterans and their spouses and dependents. The NSC should explore how Kansas and Missouri could feasibly expand their veteran education and training opportunities to provide similar best-in-class offerings specifically tailored toward the aerospace industry or other select industries. Doing so would increase the competitiveness of the NSC defense ecosystem in veteran retention and increase the effectiveness of training pipelines for defense industry employers.

Longer-Term Actions

- ***Invest in National Guard capabilities and capacity:*** The National Guard of both NSC states, particularly of Missouri, makes up a significant proportion of service members in the NSC defense ecosystem. Because the region lacks active-duty military installations compared to local competitor states like Colorado and Texas, the National Guard represents the most significant opportunity to locally grow the veteran workforce. The NSC should aggressively compete for new National Guard missions and coordinate state investments into their respective National Guard forces to ensure they maintain high-quality infrastructure and capacity to accept new missions. Doing so will raise the military and defense industry profile of the NSC defense ecosystem without necessarily competing to attract competitive active-duty mission sets.

Gaps to Success

- ***Aligned Stakeholders:*** As with advocacy, the actions in this strategic direction will require input and collaboration between many different stakeholders from both the private and public sectors. There are many inherent difficulties in this type of coordination, but it should be possible to unite the various stakeholders behind the common goal of alleviating the skilled workforce shortages that currently exist in the NSC defense ecosystem.
- ***Political Will:*** These actions are primarily ones that will require engagement by state legislators and, most likely, dedication of state resources. The NSC will need to ensure that its priorities are heard in the Kansas and Missouri capitals and that it has the strategic communication tools necessary to sell its defense industry vision.

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Conclusion





The NSC defense ecosystem is not currently a major player on the national defense industry stage. However, the region has many unique advantages that can enable it to expand its defense industry impact, gain additional defense investments, and increase its defense industry workforce. The NSC should first develop itself along the lines of other successful defense-related non-governmental organizations and ensure its structure and funding sources are established for the long-term mission of coordinating defense support assets across Kansas and Missouri. After this is accomplished, the major strategic directions that the NSC should pursue to build its defense ecosystem and grow its defense investments are:

- 1** Increase the NSC's military-friendly position through active coordination with local military installations and with state-level policies.
- 2** Develop coordinated regional advocacy to fund priority projects and win new missions.
- 3** Support targeted areas of strength for defense industry economic development and skilled workforce attraction, particularly in aerospace and aerospace-related defense technologies.

With success in these areas, the NSC will unite the various stakeholders that make up its defense ecosystem, become more competitive for federal and private industry defense investments, increase the value of its existing military assets, and become an increasingly desirable location for skilled veteran workers.



