



January 5  
Task Force Report & Recommendations

## A MESSAGE FROM FIRE MARSHAL KEVIN REARDON



Dear Governor DeWine,

It gives me great pleasure to present to you the initial report of findings and recommendations from the Ohio Task Force on the Volunteer Fire Service. This report is the culmination of various stakeholder meetings. These meetings were conducted in every corner of Ohio with volunteer firefighters. Additionally, task force meetings were held where members discussed and reviewed many issues affecting the volunteer fire service in Ohio. Our meetings and discussions have been influenced by a survey to the volunteer firefighting community in which we asked questions about their challenges and rewards of being a volunteer. The fire chiefs of volunteer fire departments received a different survey focused on budgets, community financial support and other data.

Based upon national statistics, volunteer fire departments make up the vast majority of fire departments in the United States. Based upon currently available data, this is also true in Ohio. In 2021, Ohio fire departments reported 1.5 million incident reports to the office of the Ohio State Fire Marshal representing fire-related incidents and other emergencies such as EMS support. While there are some volunteer fire departments that are doing well in many respects, Ohio has other departments that are not doing well at all. Many are financially challenged in multiple areas. Coupled with recruitment and retention difficulties and cumbersome training requirements, Ohio has created an environment where long term survivability of many volunteer fire departments is a major concern.

It goes without saying that the work of the task force could not have happened without the support of the volunteer fire service in Ohio. Throughout our in-person and virtual meetings, the volunteer community came forward to present to the task force much-needed information and detail necessary to successfully accomplish this task.

Thank you for taking the lead on this very important issue. It is vital to the safety of all Ohioans to both recognize and address the long-term sustainability of the volunteer fire service in Ohio. The members of the Task Force remain available to answer any questions that you may have.

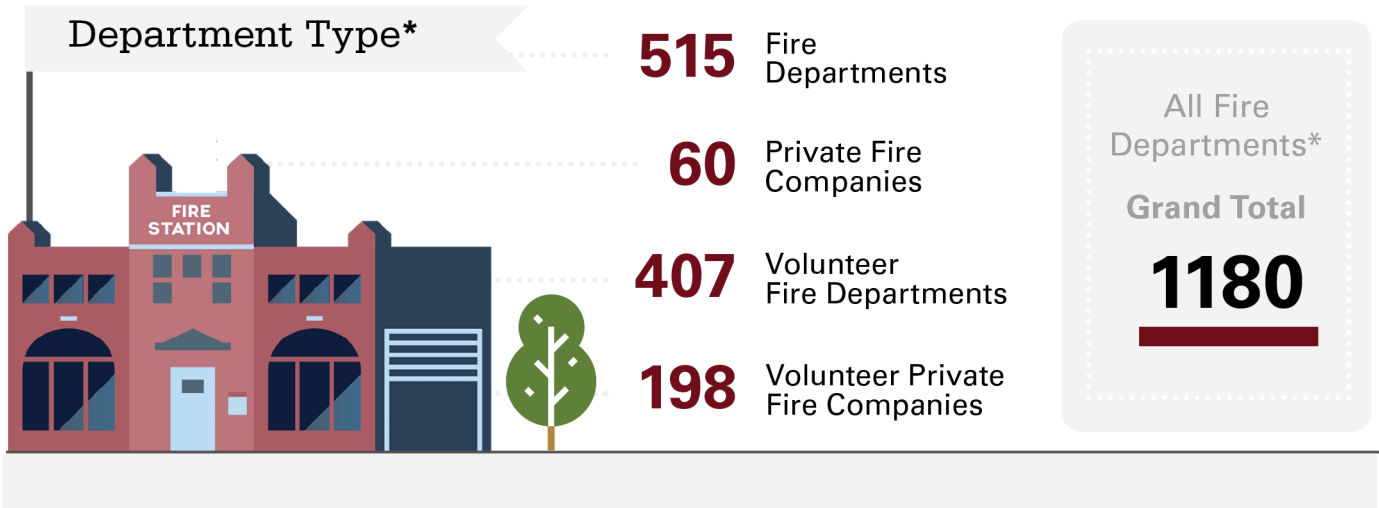
Respectfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin S. Reardon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Kevin S. Reardon**  
State Fire Marshal



# VOLUNTEER FIRE SERVICE IN OHIO



# 9%↑

increase in calls from 2018–2020\*\*

**49,253**  
fire calls in 2018

**50,956**  
fire calls in 2019

**53,878**  
fire calls in 2020

**850,137**  
EMS calls

**924,330**  
EMS calls

**947,947**  
EMS calls

**1,264,303**  
Fire department calls

**1,356,853**  
Fire department calls

**1,381,398**  
Fire department calls

## Biggest Challenges Impacting Volunteer Fire Service in Ohio



**Recruitment and retention**



**Time demands**



**Financial resources at the local level**



**Training Requirements**

\*As reported to the Division of the State Fire Marshal \*\*Information from the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS)/Ohio Fire Incident Reporting System (OFIRS) \*\*\* Ohio Emergency Medical Services

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## INTRODUCTION

Ohio's volunteer fire departments should be adequately funded, properly resourced with equipment that meets the needs of the community and is housed in fire stations that are safe and built to current building standards. Sufficient personnel should be ready to respond to emergencies within a reasonable time.



### Ohio's Challenge

Through extensive roundtable discussions around the state and a detailed survey of the fire service, the Task Force members heard firsthand the many challenges which the volunteer fire service face. In Ohio, we make it hard to become and remain a volunteer firefighter. Some of the impediments include:

- Most volunteers must pay for their own training. The typical cost can range from a few hundred dollars to over \$1,000.
- Most volunteers must take time away from work to complete training. This is problematic for employers and the volunteer fire department.
- Many volunteers need to purchase their own personal protective equipment (PPE) at an average cost of \$3,000 to \$4,000.
- All volunteer firefighters must complete recertification training every three years. This training is minimal and not burdensome on its own but to the volunteer with a full-time job and family it can prove a challenge.
- Every volunteer firefighter must immediately respond, leaving their family, their employer, or other commitment at a moment's notice to go help someone in their community. Response times for volunteer fire departments can be more than 15 minutes. EMS responses can be even longer, thus cutting into the "golden hour" that is needed to get victims to an appropriate trauma center.
- Currently in Ohio, very few volunteer firefighters have any benefits, financial or otherwise, from their community or local jurisdiction.
- On a bad day, an average volunteer firefighter may be injured or killed in the line of duty for doing a job that pays nothing.

It is no wonder that the volunteer fire service in Ohio is struggling. Inconsistent and varying levels of funding at the community level exacerbate the problem. These issues have been present for many years. They are not becoming any less of a problem; in fact, they are getting worse. The average age of a volunteer firefighter in Ohio is 54 years old which leaves recruiting volunteers a major concern. We have reached the point where some volunteer fire departments are forced to conduct fundraising projects (spaghetti dinners, bake sales, etc.) to raise money to purchase diesel fuel for fire equipment to respond to calls. Volunteer fire departments do their best to provide their citizens with high quality professional emergency services, but many are facing the grim reality that the days of being there for their community may be numbered.

## Introduction *(continued)*

In 2021, the Division of State Fire Marshal (DSFM) received 1.5 million incident reports from all of Ohio's fire departments. Many of Ohio's 1,180 fire departments are volunteer or combination (volunteer/partially paid). Clearly, the volunteer fire service in Ohio is providing a significant level of emergency services to Ohio's 11.5 million citizens.

The value and heritage of the volunteer fire department is irreplaceable. Currently, the fire service is at the crossroads of reliability and affordability. Our responders need support, and our communities need help.

Due to the current environment within the volunteer fire service in Ohio, if significant changes are not implemented statewide to correct operational deficiencies that exist, we can expect to see a significant number of volunteer fire departments close their doors over the next five to ten years. This will create a severe lack of emergency services to communities throughout Ohio.

### **The Task Force on the Volunteer Fire Service in Ohio, focused recommendations based on the following issues:**

Recruitment & retention of volunteers.

Training issues involving current requirements and potential changes to improve and enhance volunteer firefighter training.

Financial stability of Ohio's volunteer fire departments.

Many of the proposed recommendations will require legislative support and approval while others will require policy changes within existing programs that regulate firefighter / EMS training and support. Finally, some best practices may be implemented at the local level.

## Addressing the Challenge



Recognizing these present and future challenges, Governor Mike DeWine created the Ohio Task Force on Volunteer Fire Service (Task Force) in April 2022, in partnership with the Ohio Department of Commerce – Division of State Fire Marshal. The Task Force is comprised of 25 representatives from around the state with representation from the state's volunteer fire service as well as state, local and municipal government agencies.

The mission of the Task Force is to improve the future sustainability of volunteer fire departments in Ohio. The Task Force was charged with making recommendations using informed evidence-based best practices, specifically focused on recruitment & retention, financial resources, and training to achieve long term stability.

The goal of the Task Force is to provide an open forum for those in Ohio's volunteer fire service. The Task Force committed to capturing current constraints, especially in vulnerable communities, ensuring that those in Ohio's fire service, our partners, and the public, are fully informed and protected.

The Task Force conducted research through committee and sub-committee meetings, regional roundtables (see appendix A), and a survey to Ohio's fire service. This research was reviewed, and recommendations were presented through three major sub-committees:

## Recruitment & Retention

The majority of the fire services provided to residents in the state of Ohio are provided by volunteers. Outside of large urban areas, most emergency fire services come from community residents. These residents typically have full time jobs but are still willing to be trained and called upon to assist in the event of an emergency. Each year, we are seeing fewer volunteers available to meet the community needs.

## Training

Initial certification training for volunteer firefighters is a fast-paced curriculum in which large amounts of critical information is covered quickly and ineffectively. This results in high failure rates amongst applicants which is a significant barrier to recruitment. Traditional continuing education requirements are also perceived to be a burden and challenge for staff retention. Training, initial certification and continuing education, needs to be evaluated for innovative approaches to curriculum structure, delivery, and access that supports professional development without sacrificing safety or skill competence.

## Financial Management, Taxation, & Budgeting

Volunteer fire departments typically protect underserved and under resourced communities. However, it is vital that volunteer fire departments in Ohio have secure, stable and adequate funding to protect their communities competently and safely.



*Recruitment & Retention*



# TOP RECRUITMENT & RETENTION CHALLENGES

# 6.5%



decrease in number of volunteer firefighters from 2018-2021

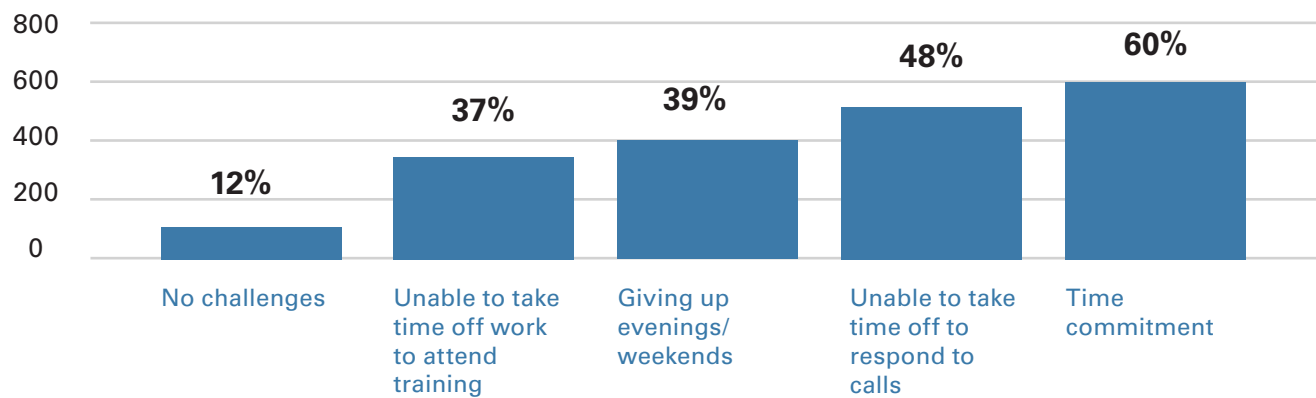


The Task Force conducted a survey focusing on addressing the challenges faced by the volunteer fire service. The Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of Emergency Medical Services provided the survey to all certified fire service professionals in the State of Ohio. Specific questions were presented based upon how the individual identified their service level (Chief/Administrator, Volunteer, or Retired). Approximately 3,689 individuals participated in the survey (see appendix B) that was first distributed on September 19, 2022. Those responses revealed the following challenges related to Recruitment & Retention:

Question 7 shows that 60% of volunteers face time commitment as their biggest challenge, with lack of flexibility at work proving to be a particular burden.

## Challenges Faced as a Volunteer Firefighter

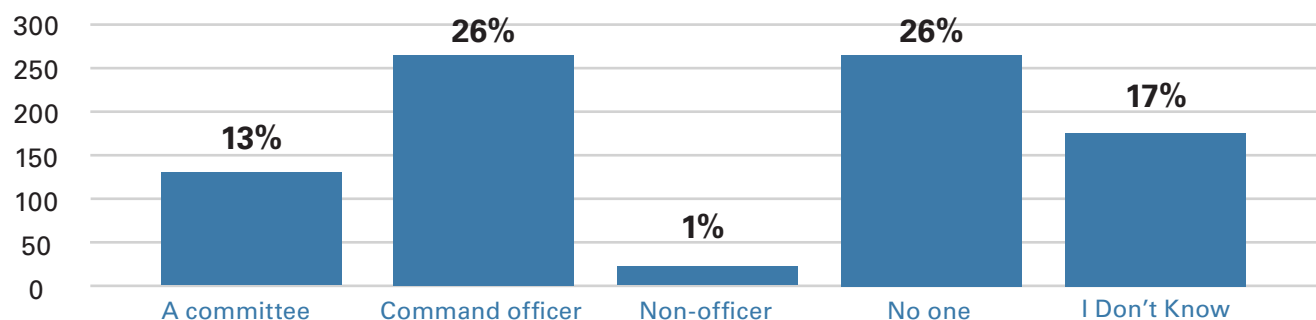
Count of responses



Question 10 reveals that nearly half of volunteers either don't know or believe no one is responsible for recruitment within their department.

## Who Has Primary Responsibility for Recruitment and Retention in Your Department?

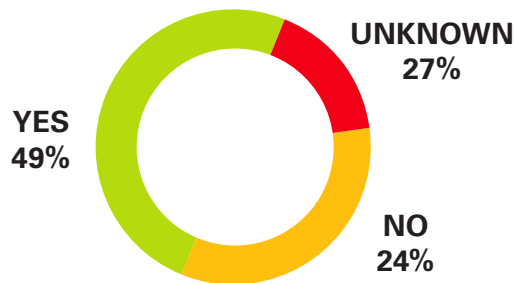
Count of responses



## TOP RECRUITMENT & RETENTION CHALLENGES (continued)

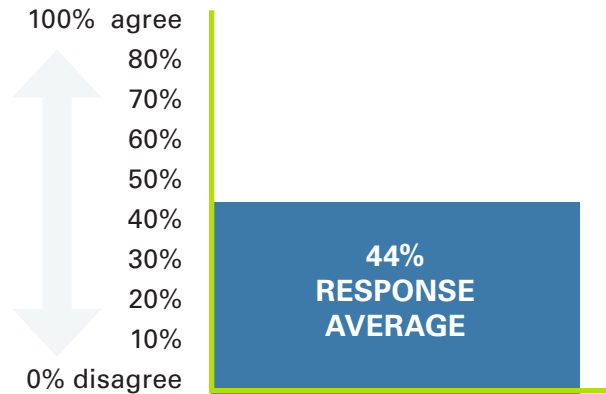
Question 6 shows that over half of volunteers would not or do not know if they would join another volunteer fire department.

### If You Have Left Your Department, Would You Join Another Volunteer Fire Department?



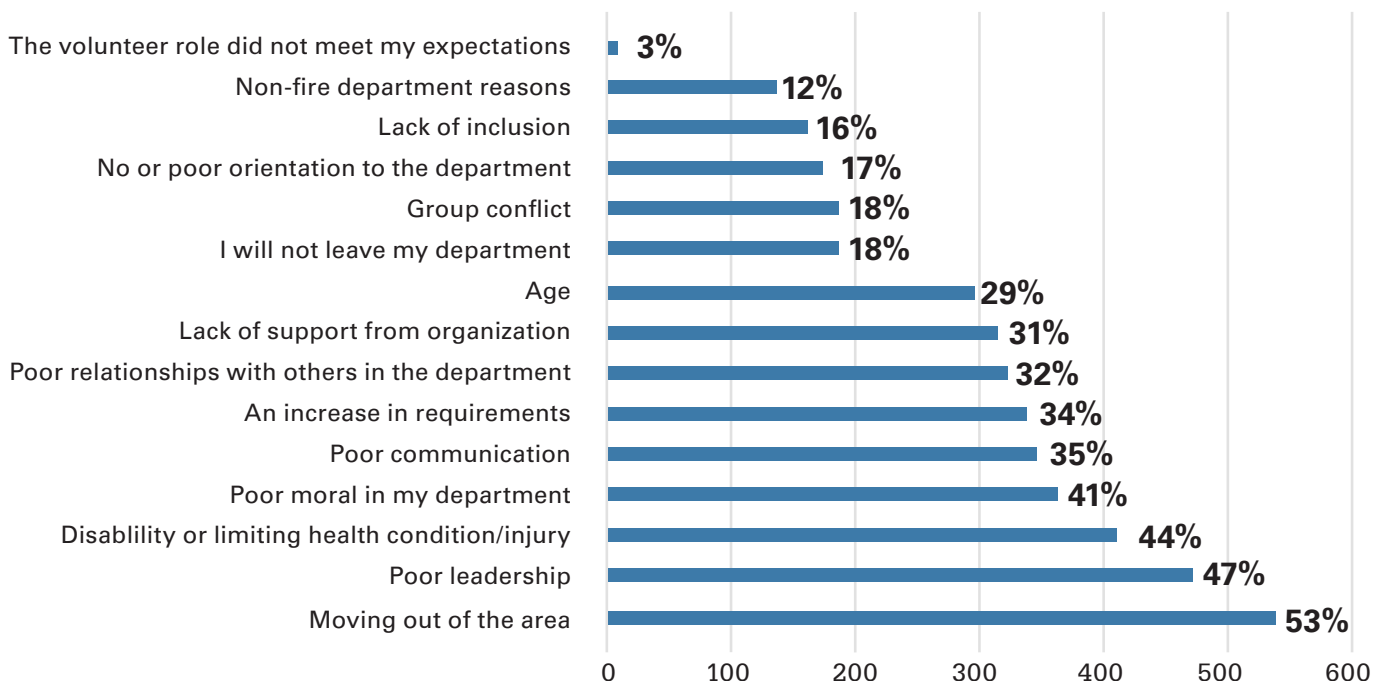
Question 11 shows that 44% of volunteers recognize that their department has a high turnover rate of volunteers.

### It Seems as if My Department Has High Volunteer Turnover.



Question 15 revealed that aside from moving, poor leadership and morale are leading contributing factors for leaving their department.

### What Would Cause or Caused You to Leave Your Department?



# RECRUITMENT & RETENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendation #1

### Division of State Fire Marshal

- The Division of State Fire Marshal should establish a full-time volunteer recruitment/retention coordinator with a network of regional coordinators across the state. The Ohio Fire Academy could support regional coordinators with part time Intermittent Fire Training Officers (FTO's) and current regional networks.
- The Division of State Fire Marshal should coordinate the production of public service announcements (PSA's) focused on the needs of the volunteer fire service. The PSA's should be provided to all statewide media markets and available social media platforms.

## Recommendation #2

### Paid Leave

- ORC 124.1310 should be expanded to allow state employees 16 hours of paid leave per month for volunteer fire department emergency calls and training. This would take the current limitation of 40 maximum hours per year to 192 maximum hours per year.
- Public service leave should be provided for volunteer fire and EMS departments (model after ORC 124.132 – Disaster Service Leave)
  - Any member of a volunteer fire department that provides fire and EMS services may be granted leave, identified as public service leave, separate from paid-time-off or sick leave, from work not to exceed 120 hours (15 days) each year to respond to emergencies or attend training.
  - The volunteer will provide a signed letter from the department chief to their employer with the number of hours spent per response or training to be deducted from their allocated public service leave amount. This provision would apply to non-state employees only.
- Tax incentives should be considered for private business who provide paid leave to volunteer firefighters who leave work to respond to emergencies and participate in training.
- Employers should be eligible to earn tax incentives by allowing volunteers to make up hours they are absent from work due to their volunteer duties.

## Recommendation #3

### Point Based Non-Wage Incentives

The Division of State Fire Marshal and the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS should be tasked with establishing a statewide structure of non-wage incentives to support the retention and recruitment of volunteer firefighters. Non-wage incentives could include:

# RECRUITMENT & RETENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Recommendation #3** *(continued)*

### Point Based Non-Wage Incentives

- Length of Service Awards Program (LOSAP) that would function like a pension benefit.
- Tuition voucher redeemable for 2 years paid tuition at any of Ohio's career technical schools, state colleges, or state universities.
- Up to 50% state income tax credit.
- Up to 100% local property tax abatement for the volunteer's primary personal residence.

Eligibility of these non-wage incentives would be based on a point system established to incentivize and measure the level of service that an individual volunteer firefighter provides to their community. This point system would consider time spent covering a range of volunteer responsibilities, including on-call shifts, training (on station or online), work details, responding to emergency incidents, and other related official duties.

- The point system would establish the minimum annual participation points required for eligibility of the non-wage incentive programs (LOSAP, Tuition, Tax abatements,).
- Local property tax abatement/refund is based on volunteer fire department activity level points accrual. Local jurisdictions would be reimbursed by the State of Ohio for 50% of the abated property tax.
- State income tax credit/refund based on volunteer fire department activity points accrual level.

Please reference appendix B to determine specific eligibility requirements for participation in the point based non-wage incentives.

## **Recommendation #4**

### Workforce Development/Education Tuition Waiver

- The Division of State Fire Marshal should waive all course tuition fees, dorm fees, and related expenses at the Ohio Fire Academy (OFA) for all volunteer firefighters. Additionally, many OFA courses are already eligible for college credit at Ohio colleges and universities.
- The State of Ohio should provide a tuition voucher for the following:
  - Up to 2 years paid tuition at any of Ohio's career and technical schools or state institution based on verified volunteer fire department activity level (see appendix B for eligibility).
  - Training to obtain certifications for Volunteer Firefighter, Firefighter I & II, Fire Safety Inspector, Public Safety Instructor, all EMS Responder levels, all Career Technical education, all college degrees (AS, BS, MS).

In lieu of the verified volunteer fire department activity level, this program could also be utilized by new volunteer firefighters after completion of initial volunteer firefighter training and upon written agreement with the local jurisdiction to serve as a volunteer firefighter for a period of 5 years.

Participants that fail to meet the 5-year term of service agreement or the minimum annual points accrual (see appendix B) shall be required to reimburse the state of Ohio for all tuition costs, paid by the state, as a participant in this program.

## **Recommendation #5**

### **Establish a Length of Service Award Program**

A Length of Service Award Program (LOSAP) for the volunteer fire service should be established within the State of Ohio. LOSAPs effectively function as a pension/retirement system for volunteer firefighters. Under this program, volunteers can earn service credits or monetary contributions (like deferred compensation) throughout their service and receive benefits once the entitlement age or appropriate length of service is achieved.

Service credits are based on volunteer service activity level as established in the annual volunteer service points chart (see appendix B). Upon reaching the age of entitlement, the volunteer firefighter will begin receiving monthly monetary benefits. The benefits the volunteer firefighter receives will depend on the service credits earned. This could also be a defined contribution plan that works similarly to a 401k, where the state/sponsor of the program contributes a fixed amount of money to an account annually on behalf of the volunteer firefighter. This balance would then be payable to the volunteer upon reaching entitlement age.



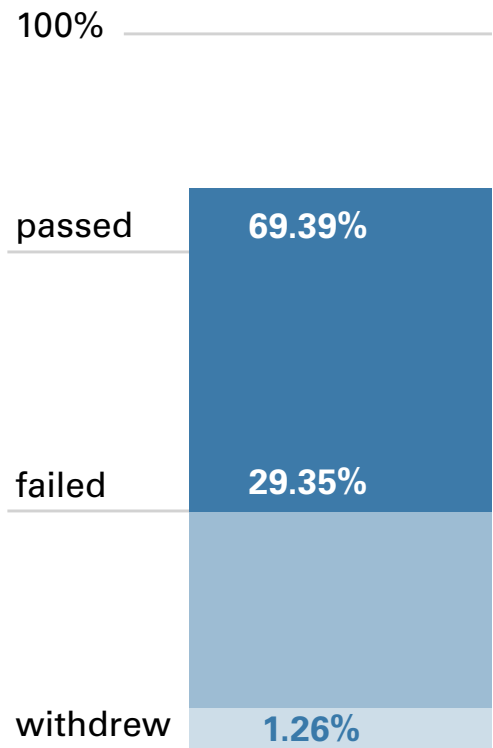
*Training*

## TOP TRAINING CHALLENGES

Currently, initial certification training for volunteer firefighters is limited to 36 hours while a paid career firefighter must complete a minimum of 244 hours. The current 36-hour restriction on volunteer firefighter certification training is an outdated 40-year-old state law that has not kept pace with the constantly changing demands on the fire service. Volunteer firefighters respond to the same types of emergencies as paid career firefighters and because of longer response times, fires in rural areas can be much larger by the time the firefighters arrive. Thus, volunteer firefighters can be exposed to much higher levels of risk because they often are faced with fighting larger fires with far fewer people and only 15% of the training afforded to paid firefighters.

As a direct consequence of this outdated 36-hour requirement, the current volunteer firefighter curriculum delivery model is an extremely fast-paced, instructor-led, classroom lecture; followed by an expedited demonstration of the hands-on skills. The accelerated curriculum overwhelms many potential recruits with a flood of information and does not allow any time to develop competency of hands-on skills. This creates high levels of frustration for students which causes many of them to drop out of class or fail certification exams, thus creating a significant barrier to recruitment of new volunteers across the state.

### Exam Completion Rate



*Total exam pass rate of initially enrolled students.*

## TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendation #1

#### Certification

The Task Force recommends replacing much of ORC 4765.55 "Fire service training programs" by redesigning the 36-hour volunteer firefighter curriculum to a competency-based instruction and authentic assessment model to the proposed model below:

- **Fire Apparatus Driver/Operator (FADO):** Create a new standalone certification for volunteers and/or retirees, allowing communities to recruit individuals who want to support their local volunteer fire department by driving/operating a fire truck only.
- **Exterior Support Firefighter:** This standalone certification updates Ohio's current Volunteer Firefighter certification to meet the new National Fire Protection Association 1010 "Standard for Firefighter, Fire Apparatus Driver/Operator Professional Qualifications". The Exterior Support Firefighter certification is for volunteers only and would allow communities to recruit and train individuals who want to support their local volunteer fire department but do not want to drive/operate a truck or enter a burning building.

# TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Recommendation #1** *(continued)*

- Ohio Volunteer Firefighter: This updated certification would build on the Exterior Support Firefighter certification to meet the National Fire Protection Association 1010 “Standard for Firefighter, Fire Apparatus Driver/Operator Professional Qualifications” for interior structural firefighting. This certification is for volunteers only and would allow communities to recruit and train volunteers who want to support their local volunteer fire department at all levels of capability.

This approach is designed to directly address current problems identified by the volunteer fire service and to provide maximum flexibility for rural communities struggling with aging populations or lack of working age staff.

## **Recommendation #2**

### Training Delivery

Students today can learn new and challenging course material more effectively due to advances in technology in online learning. The Task Force recommends a complete redesign of the volunteer firefighter curriculum delivery (teaching) methodology.

- Leverage current technological advances in online distance learning by providing hybrid learning.
- Allow students to complete the state certification exam in an ‘open book’ format allowing for a self-paced, self-guided, online, and video-based format.
- Allow students to complete the exam at home or at the fire station over a 12-month period.
- Design should be topic-based, modular format so as students’ progress through the online exam, they may also complete the hands-on skills requirements for each topic.

## **Recommendation #3**

### Other Training Considerations

- Consider reducing Firefighter I from age 18 to 17. This would encourage high school students that have a serious interest in firefighting to become involved in the profession at an earlier age and not have to wait for high school graduation to become a volunteer firefighter.
- The Division of State Fire Marshal should coordinate with Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS on the expansion of online continuing education opportunities and learning management system offered for free to all volunteer fire departments.





*Financial Management, Taxation, & Budgeting*

## TOP FUNDING CHALLENGES



Funding for the fire service in Ohio is not funded by one source, but rather is funded through a myriad of different methods in Ohio. Fire response is primarily delivered by township and municipal governments. Townships largely rely on property tax levies, while municipal governments depend on local income taxes. Traditionally, rural Ohio has been largely dependent on volunteers rather than paid career firefighters because of these funding constraints.

Regrettably, several local governments are finding that funding the fire service is becoming a growing challenge. While a number look to the state and federal government for assistance by way of grants or loans, those dollars are proving unable to match the demand. Task Force members heard from many rural firefighters and fire chiefs during the regional roundtables and via the survey that too many departments are dependent on rather extraordinary fundraising efforts, including spaghetti dinners, fish fries, and even GoFundMe pages to supplement limited resources.

Unfortunately, many local citizens and some policymakers may not know of these challenges. Indeed, the survey revealed that even a startling number of survey respondents could not identify the revenue source for their department. Those unfamiliar with the present state of volunteer fire departments may be surprised to discover several departments are using equipment from the 1960s and 1970s. Often equipment simply goes unreplaced and volunteers reuse turnout gear time and time again, which poses a great health risk due to carcinogen exposure. Some citizens may be surprised that their local volunteer department is now part of a joint fire district to provide some economies of scale. While local governments are often asked to do more with less, the reality is many volunteer fire departments in Ohio today are simply forced to do less with less. If you ask those in the fire service, this poses risks and dangers to not only the volunteer firefighter but to the public as well.

## FINANCIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendation #1

#### Fiscal Resources

- Consider dedicated fire and EMS funding revenue from gasoline, license plates, and new car sales/leases. If adopted, 2 cents from each gallon of gasoline sold would generate approximately \$130 million in revenue statewide that could be distributed to volunteer fire departments.
- Consider the reallocation of property tax. Rural property values and economic conditions in many cases cause these revenue streams to be woefully inadequate in covering the operational costs associated with providing adequate emergency and life safety services. Townships and municipalities should consider setting aside a portion of their funding to evaluate the potential efficiencies a joint district may offer. These funds could be utilized to research, plan, and begin the legal process for forming the joint fire district. In many instances throughout the state and country, joint fire districts have proven to provide increased economies of scale, operational efficiency, and reduced competition for the same staffing resources.

# FINANCIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendation #1 *(continued)*

- The state should consider an increase in the percentage of retaliatory tax on foreign insurance companies that sell fire insurance in Ohio that is allocated to the state fire marshal's fund from 20% to 25%. This will assist in establishing new funding for long term support of volunteer fire departments, specifically financial assistance. The Division of State Fire Marshal is partially funded via a 0.75 % surcharge on fire insurance premiums in addition to a 20% retaliatory tax on out of state and foreign insurance companies. Historically, these funds may experience fluctuations due to construction and real estate market conditions. The revenue stream is difficult to predict due to variations in insurance premiums and associated taxes.

## Recommendation #2

### Grants and Loans

- The Division of State Fire Marshal should establish a grant program to assist with funding volunteer fire department-based cadet programs and/or explorer programs. Several survey responses indicated recruitment successes by those departments utilizing such programs. These programs would further community engagement which in turn may foster revenue supporting measures.
- The state should consider establishing a Volunteer Fire Department Infrastructure grant program that would make available \$5 million annually for a period of five years. This competitive grant funding would be used for fire station construction, renovation and/or expansion of facilities only. Equipment and other appliances would not be eligible.
- The Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) should consider expanding current grant programs or establishing a new Ohio Firefighter Turnout Gear Grant program to cover or reimburse the cost of turnout gear for Ohio's firefighters. This grant program could mimic the Ohio Law Enforcement Body Armor Program established by then-Attorney General Mike DeWine that is currently jointly administered by the BWC and the Ohio Attorney General's office.
- A fund should be established that would incentivize the formation of full time EMS response for those volunteer fire departments that have a high enough EMS call volume to support this type of operation - based on a determination of the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS. The state would provide salary support to provide coverage for (2) Emergency Medical Technicians, (2) Paramedics or a combination of both for a period of three years. This would greatly decrease the amount of time it takes to get a volunteer EMS crew on the scene of an emergency. To be eligible to receive this funding, communities would have to agree to keep the same or better level of service for a period of three years following receipt of this funding. The Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS would administer this program.
- Funding should be increased for the following grants that are provided through the Division of State Fire Marshal:
  - Firefighter I Training grant increase to \$1 million annually (currently \$700,000)
  - Fire Department Equipment Grant increase to \$2.5 million annually (currently \$1 million).
- Increase the Revolving Loan Program that is provided through the Division of State Fire Marshal to \$2 million annually (currently \$300,000), for a period of five years.

# BEST PRACTICES FOR LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

## Task Force Recommendations

- Establish Cadet/Explorer Programs to be affiliated with local high schools. This has been a proven source for students interested in a career in the fire service, and it also provides a recruitment resource of new volunteers for volunteer fire departments.
- Provide sleeping quarters for on call members or those not living in the community. Sleeping quarters reduce emergency response times, expand the recruitment pool of potential volunteers, and creates the opportunities for the formation of dedicated crews.
- Institute live-in programs for college students, young singles, and others. Live-in programs provide non-wage incentives that help reduce emergency response times, expand the recruitment pool of potential volunteers, and create the opportunities for the formation of dedicated crews.
- Establish a defined recruiting/onboarding process with established expectations/steps:
  - Ride along, application, interview, orientation (observer status until certification).
  - Create relationships and team building opportunities so new applicants feel welcome and a valued part of the department.
  - Do not make applicants wait 6-12 months to begin the process (continuous recruiting).
  - Communicate expectations, rules, requirements, boundaries, fees.
- Establish on call duty crew assignments:
  - Scheduled duty shifts (even 2- or 3-hour blocks) allows people to schedule time, provides better visibility on staffing availability, improves accountability, provides ability to track times when no coverage or service is available.
  - Established on call duty crews reduce response times, improve reliability, accountability, operational coordination, discipline, and build camaraderie.
- Training
  - Training programs must be organized, structured, and productive to communicate importance of training as a priority and not waste of candidate's time.
  - Consider 1 topic/week with multiple schedule options (Monday p.m., Friday p.m., Saturday a.m.)
  - Assign dedicated training officer to coordinate/plan program.
- Collaborate with teachers, guidance counselors, and Ohio Department of Education Trade & Industrial Education to develop a curriculum that provides Career Connections/Explorations for younger students linking volunteer community service and career opportunities for Firefighters and EMS providers.
- Collaborate with high schools and local fire departments in rural communities to develop a volunteer fire training course primarily served by Volunteer Fire Departments. This would be outside of the Career Tech programs and focused on local community service.

## CONCLUSION



The work of the Governor’s Task Force on Volunteer Fire Service would not have been relevant, fact-based, and impactful without the input that was received from the volunteer firefighting community throughout Ohio. Their willingness to meet with the Task Force members at our roundtable sessions was without doubt educational, meaningful, and beneficial to the work of the Task Force. Ohio’s volunteer firefighters are among some of the most dedicated, highly professional, and passionately driven citizens you will find. Their desire to serve their community is not only highly commendable, but also uncommon in today’s world. Societal changes have resulted in a significant decline in participation within the volunteer fire service and we must not underestimate the importance this community asset is to protecting life and property.

As this report shows we have reached the point where action now needs taken. Many of these issues are not new, these are long standing issues that have not and will not resolve themselves on their own. This is an opportunity for a reimagining of the volunteer fire service in Ohio, one that not only relies on local support but one that has the resources of the state of Ohio to help assist those struggling communities. This is also an opportunity to show our appreciation to volunteer firefighters all over Ohio who devote countless hours of time, energy, and personal resources to help their fellow citizens.

The members of the Task Force appreciate the opportunity to serve in this capacity and remain available to assist with the implementation of these recommendations.



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# APPENDICIES

## A. Roundtable Map



### Ohio Task Force on Volunteer Fire Service

#### Regional Roundtable Map



Department of Commerce

Division of State Fire Marshal



## B. Survey Data

The results of the survey, including extended response answers, can be accessed [here](#).



## APPENDICIES

### C. Annual Volunteer Service Points Chart

Annual Volunteer Service Points Chart			
Administrative Points	Points	Min/Yr	Comments
Training (Continuing Ed/FD drills)	1/hour	18	Must average 18 CEUs/year – 54 total in 3 years
Administration hours	1/hour	12	Admin. hours may include reports, planning, official meetings, bookkeeping, records and filing, work details, maintenance & repairs, teaching
Stand-by shifts	1/shift (6 hrs.)	50	Assumes 6 hr. shift coverage on station or standby from home,
Leadership	10		Completion of one year term in elected or appointed position (may replace 10 standby hours)
Total admin points		80	Each volunteer must earn a minimum of <u>80</u> Admin points plus:
Emergency Response points	Points	Min/Yr	Comments
Based on annual FD call volume	1/call		Total minimum annual points for incentive package eligibility: 80 Admin Points + Emergency Response points based on annual call volume
<200 calls @ 10% =	1/call	10	90
201-300 calls @ 7.5% =	1/call	38	128
301-500 calls @ 5% =	1/call	50	130
501 or more calls = 3.5% min =	1/call	50	130

Points accrual for service activities can be stacked. For example, during a 6-hour shift a volunteer could earn the following points:

- 1 point for 6-hour shift (standby from home or on station)
- 1 point for emergency call during shift
- 1 point for 1 hour of training during shift
- 2 points for 2 hours of maintenance/repair projects or (admin hours for officers) during shift
- 5 points total during shift

## APPENDICIES

### C. Annual Volunteer Service Points Chart *(continued)*

Existing volunteers will receive a one-time award of points based on training and local response on incidents. This will be verified by the local Fire Chief. Initial point awards are as follows:

Years of Service	Points Earned (Maximum)
0 – 5 Years	450
6 – 10 Years	900
11 – 15 Years	1,350
16 – 20 Years	1,800
21+ Years	2,250

### D. National Volunteer Fire Council Best Practices

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) represents the volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue personnel throughout the United States, providing resources, training, advocacy, and programs to help the volunteer emergency services thrive. Making sure departments have adequate staffing is a priority for the NVFC.

There is no magic solution that will fix all recruitment and retention challenges for every department. Instead, departments need to take a critical look at what is working and not working, get feedback from their existing members, and identify areas for improvement. However, the NVFC has identified certain best practices that can have a positive impact on a department's recruitment and retention initiatives.

#### ■ Let Your Community Know You Need Volunteers

Often volunteer and combination departments do not sufficiently market their need for volunteers or the types of volunteer opportunities they have available. A national survey the NVFC conducted in 2014 found that 79 percent of those polled did not know if their local fire department was seeking volunteers and 41 percent were unsure whether their local department was volunteer, combination, or career.

However, that same survey showed 29 percent of those polled had an interest in volunteering as an emergency responder. Within the 18-34 age group, there was a 45 percent interest in volunteering as an emergency responder.

Department members need to be marketers for their departments. Let your community know you utilize volunteers and that they can make a difference by volunteering with your department. Keep the messages positive and focus on the benefits for the volunteers and the community. Make it clear that there are many volunteer roles available – both operational and support – and that training is provided.

The NVFC offers FREE tools to help market your department. The NVFC's Make Me A Firefighter campaign offers an online platform for departments to post their volunteer opportunities, receive applicants, create customized recruitment materials to use online and/or in print, track the progress of potential recruits, and access additional training and resources to help recruit new volunteers. [www.MakeMeAFirefighter.org](http://www.MakeMeAFirefighter.org)



## APPENDICIES

### D. National Volunteer Fire Council Best Practices *(continued)*

#### ■ Utilize the Marketing Funnel

Raising community awareness about the need for volunteers is just the first step in a multi-step process that can be looked at as a “marketing funnel.” The tools and tactics a department utilizes for recruitment should aim to move potential recruits through this funnel.

##### ○ Step 1: Interest

Educate the public and raise awareness that your department utilizes volunteers and needs more volunteers. Look for areas of opportunity. For instance, if there is a large population in your community that is currently underrepresented in your department (women, certain age groups, minority groups), consider ways you can better and more effectively reach them.

##### ○ Step 2: Invite

Most current fire service volunteers were invited, and effective invites are typically personal. Find ways to reach target audiences and provide them with a specific invitation to join your department or learn more about the volunteer opportunities available.

##### ○ Step 3: Sample

Interested individuals often get involved after having a chance to sample what it’s like to be a volunteer. Sampling activities like ride-alongs, junior firefighter programs, open houses, citizen fire academies, and others build the confidence and excitement needed to truly consider the opportunities.

##### ○ Step 4: Commit

At this stage a potential recruit decides if they are willing to commit to the department. Follow-up is key. Don’t let interested individuals fall through the cracks due to a lack of follow-through. Let them know they are wanted, and that your department is a place they can belong.

##### ○ Step 5: Train

Once a recruit makes the commitment to join, they need to be trained. Training is time intensive and can be overwhelming. Offer flexibility whenever possible and assign mentors to help recruits acclimate and learn. Recruits that feel a personal connection to the department through a mentor program and/or bonding with other recruits through shared training experience are more likely to want to remain an active member.

#### ■ Make Your Department a Place People Want to Volunteer

A key factor in keeping volunteers is to make sure the department is a place people want to be. Volunteering as an emergency responder requires a significant time commitment – time away from family and the volunteer’s other interests. If the volunteer is not getting a positive experience in return, they will likely leave. A 2020 survey of current and former volunteers by the NVFC found that the main reasons volunteers leave are a department atmosphere full of cliques and groups that exclude others, department leadership that doesn’t support the needs of members, generational conflict among members, and lack of camaraderie or sense of community.

### D. National Volunteer Fire Council Best Practices *(continued)*

Leadership is critical in influencing the culture of the department. Leaders need to set the tone for a positive and inclusive department, create and enforce standard operating procedures that establish a safe environment for all, and train members on appropriate behavior and the types of behavior that won't be tolerated. Equally important is to show members that leadership supports them and hears them. Recognize good work and accomplishments among members, keep lines of communication open, and listen to and address concerns that members have.

Remember that the mental wellbeing of members is just as important as their physical wellbeing. Supporting behavioral health and providing access to needed resources can be the difference between a volunteer staying or leaving the department.

#### ■ Implement Non-Wage Benefits to Motivate Volunteer Retention

A three-year study of the fire service conducted by Dr. Candice McDonald revealed that financial incentives were not the key to addressing volunteer firefighter retention. Monetary payments didn't even make the list of top strategies proven to retain volunteer firefighters in the United States. What did land on the leaderboard was non-wage benefits. Aligning non-wage benefits with the needs and wants of younger generations is proven to reduce turnover and will create an attractive organization that volunteers will want to engage in.

Important non-wage benefits include uniforms, branded items, an attractive working environment, professional development, and camaraderie activities. While it may seem simple, providing members department-issued uniforms and branded items at no cost to them is ranked as a top non-wage benefit by firefighters. Wearing a uniform and branded items specific to the department is a motivating factor and fosters a sense of belonging and personal pride. These items also represent professionalism in the community, helping to raise the stature of the department in the public eye.

Organizations that provide professional development opportunities have higher rates of retention. The fire service, like any other business, needs diverse skill sets to stay fully operational. Instead of outsourcing for services, fire service organizations can invest in their own people. This not only meets the needs of the fire department, but it also meets the needs of the volunteer by giving them skills they can add to their resume. Adult career centers and community colleges are filled with professional development courses and certifications that can be used to achieve this goal.

For example, having a web site presence is key for public visibility and volunteer recruitment. Instead of spending needed funds on outsourcing web site development and maintenance, a department can send interested members to be training to learn how to use web site platforms. The department gains in-house webmasters, and the members gain skills that can benefit them in the job world.

Additional non-wage benefits used by successful departments include:

- Offering a washer/dryer for personal clothing use
- Offering a quiet area for members who telework or are in school
- Partnering with a local gym for free gym memberships or creating a gym inhouse

## APPENDICIES

### D. National Volunteer Fire Council Best Practices *(continued)*

- Holding family movie and game nights
- Offering diverse team-building activities
- Partnering with area businesses or government for discounted purchases or admission for active volunteers
- Tuition assistance for volunteers and/or their family members
- Partnering with government to offer tax incentives for active volunteers

#### ■ Promoting Work-Life-Volunteer Balance

Volunteers begin to disengage when the requirements of the fire service start to interfere with home and work commitments. When home/work demands are not being met due to the demands of the fire service, emotional exhaustion can take place and the volunteer can develop cynical feelings towards the department. The conflict between fire service and home/work life causes the member to lack the energy and devotion to serve the community, which can lead to missed training and failure to respond to calls.

Members sacrifice time from family and friends to protect the community. In return, they need a hassle-free environment during the time dedicated to volunteering. Some ways departments can do this include the following:

- Move from a percentage of call requirement to hours available requirement.  
Provide hybrid training, with recorded classroom training sessions and in-person skills checkoffs.
- Create and post quarterly training schedules with start and end times. Be sure to stick to the stated times as this helps members to schedule and honor home/work commitments.  
Don't ask members to give up more than one night a week away from home for non-emergency items.
- During meetings, be mindful of wasted time. Reduce unnecessary discussions during business meetings by sticking to a pre-developed agenda.
- Signups for special events and fundraisers should be broken down into three-hour shifts. By keeping the shifts short, members can enjoy the event with their families before or after their shifts. It also allows members to honor outside personal commitments before or after the event.



## APPENDICIES

### D. National Volunteer Fire Council Best Practices *(continued)*

#### ■ Engage the Families

The home environment plays a critical role in positive member performance. Members with supportive and engaged family members are less likely to fall victim to burnout. Involving the family should start at the recruitment level. The NVFC offers a guide on its web site for family members of volunteer firefighters to serve as a resource for spouses, children, parents, siblings, and significant others of volunteer and paid-on-call responders. Providing this guide to new families entering the fire service may remove misconceptions. Some departments with high retention rates also hold family orientations.

It is important to create an environment that is supportive of family inclusion. Departments with high retention success rates have been known to plan family dinners and game nights, host quarterly cookouts, offer family-focused holiday parties, and hold family recognition nights. Departments can offer workshops to spouses to discuss firefighter cancer, behavioral health, fitness, etc. Engaging families and members together also builds team cohesion and can reduce possible insecurities.

#### ■ Stress and Behavioral Health Management

Firefighting and emergency response are stressful jobs with high levels of risk and unpredictability. The job stress volunteer firefighters face can impact the wellbeing of the responders and their family. To prevent family or volunteer disengagement, it is important for volunteer first responders to have access to professionals that can assist them with dealing with work-life issues.

While many companies offer employee assistance programs (EAPs), such services are usually not available for volunteer firefighters and EMS providers. The NVFC recognized this service gap and now offers members a solution tailored to the distinct needs first responders and their families. The NVFC First Responder Helpline provides immediate assistance in a crisis moment as well as confidential counseling, resources, and referrals to assistance for a range of issues, including:

- |                     |                               |                       |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Stress management | • Relationships               | • Grief or loss       |
| • Depression        | • Financial or legal concerns | • Problem gambling    |
| • Family conflict   | • Substance misuse            | • Child or elder care |
| • Anxiety           |                               |                       |

## APPENDICIES

### D. National Volunteer Fire Council Best Practices *(continued)*

#### ■ Utilize Existing Resources

Most volunteer and combination fire and emergency service departments are pressed for time and resources. Instead of ‘reinventing the wheel’ when it comes to recruitment and retention, departments can utilize existing resources, tools, and best practices and customize them to meet their department’s needs. Here are some resources available from the NVFC:

##### **Make Me A Firefighter Campaign**

This free recruitment campaign allows departments to post their volunteer opportunities, create customized recruitment materials, track the progress of potential recruits, and access additional training and resources to help recruit new volunteers.

[MakeMeAFirefighter.org](http://MakeMeAFirefighter.org)

##### **Virtual Classroom**

The NVFC provides dozens of online courses covering a variety of critical fire service topics, including recruitment and retention, leadership, health, and safety, and more. The multi-course Recruit Track can be used as part of a department’s onboarding process to ensure essential topics are covered early and consistently in a recruit’s experience.

[virtualclassroom.nvfc.org](http://virtualclassroom.nvfc.org)

##### **Psychologically Healthy Fire Departments: Implementation Toolkit**

This guide helps fire department leaders promote and support wellbeing among their members, thus fostering a successful, high-performing department.

[nvfc.org/phfd/#toolkit](http://nvfc.org/phfd/#toolkit)

##### **Share the Load**

This program provides resources to help departments support the mental wellbeing of their membership.

[nvfc.org/help](http://nvfc.org/help)

##### **Fire Corps**

This program provides tools and resources to help departments utilize and recruit nonoperational volunteers.

[firecorps.org](http://firecorps.org)

##### **National Junior Firefighter Program**

This program offers tools and resources to help departments start, implement, expand, and recruit for a local junior firefighter program.

[nvfc.org/juniors](http://nvfc.org/juniors)

##### **NVFC Membership**

Membership costs just \$21 per year and includes an accidental death and dismemberment insurance policy, access to the NVFC First Responder Helpline, all training free in the NVFC Virtual Classroom, access to the Volunteer Voices online community, and much more.

[nvfc.org/join](http://nvfc.org/join)



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Chair, State Fire Marshal

**Jack Smith**  
Vice Chair,  
Deputy State Fire Marshal

**Aaron Jennings**  
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