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INTRODUCTION

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Volunteer Alberta was retained by the Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association (“AFCA”) to develop a strategy to assist volunteer fire departments in recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighter personnel, along with an associated toolkit for use by departments.

The Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Strategy has been informed by:
- ideas and perspectives gathered through an environmental scan of the best practices used by local fire departments;
- other research and review of literature regarding practices utilized to attract and retain volunteer fire service personnel; and
- translatable knowledge and expertise regarding best practices for the successful recruitment and retention of volunteers in many contexts.

KNOWN ISSUES AND BARRIERS

To inform the strategy, work was undertaken to identify and explore major issues and barriers to recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Facilitated regional recruitment and retention meetings were held in fall 2008, which helped identify barriers faced by fire departments.

Based on these findings, primary research on best practices was gathered through interviews with members of volunteer fire departments in Alberta as well as other provinces and states. This research supplemented by a literature scan on recruitment and retention issues in volunteer fire service.

Major issues and barriers impacting recruitment and retention include the following major areas:

Employer-related – A lack of support of volunteer firefighting by employers. Employers were especially unsupportive of the on-the-job time volunteer firefighting requires.

Family-related – Volunteer firefighting requires a time commitment which separates volunteer firefighters from their loved ones at unpredictable times; being called away from work impacts family income.

Availability of people – Many people work outside the community during the day; Alberta’s transient population makes retention difficult.

Time commitment – There are increased demands on volunteers time, and many different ways to spend free time – i.e. entertainment or with family. Codes of practice and discipline action for missing training are necessary, but discouraging for volunteers.
Perceptions and public image – People may begin volunteer firefighting without properly understanding the role, or the overall experience; volunteer firefighters may quit after traumatic experiences. The local reputation of the fire department also may not encourage volunteerism.

Structural challenges – Unrealistic demands from municipalities, but low funding; a lot of time taken up by administrative tasks; high turnover of volunteers.

Another major issue identified subsequent to the environmental scan phase is that of cross-generational recruitment.

For more information on the aforementioned barriers, please refer to the Environmental Scan of Recruitment and Retention Practices Among Volunteer Fire Departments, which was submitted to the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association on November 20, 2009 by Volunteer Alberta.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGY

The Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Strategy is intended to help volunteer fire departments overcome barriers to recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. To do this, the recommended tactics in the strategy are designed to support the following objectives:

- Increase volunteer firefighter recruitment, including non-traditional firefighter demographics (such as women, immigrants, and First Nations);
- Increase volunteer firefighter retention, including retention of firefighters that move between Albertan communities;
- Increase overall awareness of volunteer firefighting in Alberta, especially by key stakeholders affecting volunteer firefighting (i.e. political stakeholders);
- Provide all Albertan fire departments with a volunteer screening framework easily adaptable to individual communities and departments.
OVERALL APPROACH

The strategy consists of a two-pronged approach employing local and centralized initiatives.

Local Initiatives

In light of the great diversity among fire departments, the strategy provides a number of tactics and tools that can be adapted and used by fire departments at the local level. This enables each department to tailor their approaches depending on their local conditions and priorities. (For example, some departments may have excellent buy-in from employers, but family-related issues may be the major barriers; others may place a higher priority on perception issues.) The accompanying tools take the form of instructional guides, templates, and samples. Each department will be able to customize the templates and samples with the logo and slogan.

To aide individual departments in identifying local barriers and priorities, a self-assessment tool is included in the accompanying toolkit.

Centralized Initiatives

To reinforce and support fire departments in their local activities, a number of centralized initiatives are recommended. These initiatives are those best addressed at the provincial level, as they are require resources or management that goes beyond any single fire department.
TARGET AUDIENCES

There are three different categories of audiences to whom initiatives under the strategy are targeted: the community-at-large; members of the fire department; and political stakeholders.

Several key audiences have also been identified, and specialized nuanced tactics have been developed for them. These audiences include First Nations firefighters who face unique issues related to availability of funding and the prioritization of other community issues.

COMMUNITY–AT-LARGE

The continuation of any business, service, or group is contingent upon community support. Support of the community-at-large is critical to influencing key stakeholders and potential department members. Support from the community-at-large affects many aspect of firefighting – from employer-supported volunteerism to new volunteers. Several distinct audiences in this category are identified and described.

**Business Owners and Employers**

Support from local business owners and employers gives a boost to fire department retention rates. Although sometimes they can be focused on the bottom line of their business, most community-based small business owners recognize their dependence on the community, and are willing to give back.

Communications with this group must emphasize the gains the business receives from employee volunteer firefighting, including training, skills, and health and safety knowledge; and should emphasize the opportunity to give back to the community. It could be emphasized to this audience that community support is a cycle – community members support the business and the business supports the community. In essence, supporting volunteer firefighters is good for the bottom line of their business.

The support of businesses can also be attracted by opportunities that raise awareness about their “giving back to community”, such as forms of recognition, advertising opportunities, and free promotion.

**Community Groups**

Community groups include schools and other organizations such as sports teams and religious organizations. Making connections to community groups serves as both a recruitment technique and an aide in garnering support from a wide range of actively-engaged community members. Community members involved with several groups have pride in their community - making them likely candidates for further involvement in community-leading organizations such as the local volunteer fire department.
Becoming involved with community groups serves to create community connections, provides opportunity for word-of-mouth marketing, and bolsters the image of the department in the community. There is a considerable spectrum of opportunities to engage with community groups, in terms of time and level of engagement. For example, fire department members can volunteer at the events of community groups, or simply invite groups to use the fire hall for meetings.

Communications to community groups should emphasize the joint benefits of working together. The fire hall should have an image of as a leading partner in creating a safe, well-rounded, and supported community.

**Residents**

A typical community resident may not think about the volunteer fire department on a regular basis. He or she may be aware that it exists, but unaware of the direct and indirect benefits the community receives from the presence of the fire department. Residents also may not realize that their fire department is run by volunteers.

Support of the fire department by community residents is key to the perception of the volunteer fire department – and therefore key to successful recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Residents are not only a target for general awareness-raising initiatives, but also represent the major pool of potential volunteers for the department.

Communications with residents will be aimed at increasing general awareness of the volunteer fire department and generating interest in being involved in volunteer firefighting. Targeted communications should take place to recruit both traditional and non-traditional volunteer demographics such as: women, immigrant populations, and First Nations populations.

**Women**

The main target for female firefighter recruitment should be women who are already engaged in the community through other volunteerism opportunities. This is an indicator that they value their communities, and are inclined to contribute to them further. One barrier that should be addressed, however, is the issue of childcare. A group of women that is typically actively involved in the community is stay-at-home mothers; the availability of childcare may be a deciding factor in their choosing to become volunteer firefighters.

A predominance of male firefighters in a community may result in a perception of the fire department as an “old boys club”. Care should be taken during recruitment efforts to emphasize this is not the case, and that the fire hall is welcoming to new members. In this case, it may be important to emphasize diversity and harassment policies and actions the fire hall has in place.
Immigrant Populations

Research into engaging immigrant populations in communities through volunteerism has shown that the main reason immigrants volunteer is to give back to the community (Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (“CSGVP”) 2007). Volunteer firefighting can be communicated to immigrants as an important service that improves community safety and cohesiveness. Similar to communications to local business owners, volunteer firefighting can be positioned to immigrants as a way to give back to the community.

Immigrants are more likely to list barriers to volunteering than native-born Canadians. One of the top reasons immigrants do not volunteer is that they do not know how to become involved (CSGVP). It is recommended that volunteer fire departments examine the demographics of their community and adjust recruitment efforts accordingly. One tactic cited as successful by fire departments is to first focus efforts on engaging a few members of a local immigrant population; others are then more likely to follow. Immigrant populations are likely to volunteer at religious organizations (CSGVP). This may be an effective venue for appealing to these populations through advertising, personal recruitment, or speaking engagements.

One special concern with engaging immigrant volunteers as firefighters is that their English-language skills must be very good. They must be able to understand what is being said and speak quickly when responding to a fire. Please see the tool Volunteer Firefighter Screening Process Guide for screening practices related to this particular barrier. In the event that an applicant’s English skills are not sufficient, the immigrant may still be engaged in the fire department as an administrative volunteer. This would give the applicant an opportunity to improve their English skills, perhaps even to the level where they can apply to be a volunteer firefighter.

First Nations Populations

Fire departments located on First Nations face several challenges in addition to those faced by fire departments on non-settlement land. In meeting with Leon Smallboy (Fire Safety Coordinator at First Nations (Alberta) Technical Services Advisory Group), it was noted that some of the issues affecting the recruitment and retention of firefighters faced by First Nations fire departments are:

- Inadequate funding – First Nations fire departments are provided a set amount of funding dollars based on formulas established by Indian Northern Affairs Canada, some of which have not changed since 1990. Funding affects the ability to provide compensation for responding to fire calls.
- First Nations may not see their fire departments as a priority because of other issues affecting their community (including issues related to water, the environment, roads, and social issues);
- Other issues (such as youth engagement) related to cultural nuances.
It was also noted that issues relating to volunteer fire departments on First Nations are impacted by broader community issues. While the initiatives in this strategy can help enhance the ability of fire departments located on First Nations to improve recruitment and retention of firefighters, success will be dependent on broader issues first being addressed.

FIRE DEPARTMENT MEMBERS

Internal communications are an important part of the Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Strategy. Companies often state that it is far less expensive to keep a current customer happy than to find a new customer. The same principle applies to firefighter retention. Initiatives to ensure current firefighters feel well-supported, appreciated, and happy are important.

It is important that the reality of the volunteer firefighter experience matches the way it is portrayed during recruitment. Current firefighters also need to be treated in ways that make them want to continue firefighting, and inspire them to assist with recruitment efforts. When this is the case, current volunteer firefighters act as excellent ambassadors. Their recruitment by word-of-mouth advertising is exceptionally valuable and supports other external messaging and recruitment efforts. In this way, firefighter recruitment is inextricably tied to firefighter retention.

POLITICAL STAKEHOLDERS

The support of political stakeholders is important for the continuation of the fire department, in terms of financial and other support, and for the department’s public image. Political stakeholders include the following individuals:

- Chief Administrative Officer (‘CAO’), or immediate municipal supervisor
- Local municipal councillors;
- Tribal councils;
- Other local opinion-shapers (individuals with influence in the community);
- Members of the Legislative Assembly.

These audiences are concerned with the “bigger picture”. They have the ability to influence public opinion around questions such as:

- What does the department give to the community?
- Why is the community better off having a fire department?
- Why do volunteers matter to the department?

A political stakeholder with a poor or inaccurate view of the fire department risks answering these kinds of questions in unfavourable ways, which can significantly hurt recruitment efforts.
As key influencers and opinion-shapers, it is important these stakeholders are well informed and supportive of the fire department. These stakeholders must be given reliable information about the activities of the fire department and provided opportunities to connect with the department and its volunteers. This enables them to form and relay favourable and informed opinions of the department. Political stakeholders are also often concerned with re-election. If the fire department is important to the community, it will be important to this group.

It is important to note that all communication with political stakeholders should be done in consultation with, or through, the CAO or immediate municipal supervisor.
LOCAL INITIATIVES

CONTEXT

Local support for the fire department is an essential condition for success in recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. It is therefore crucial to build local support among employers, community groups, and residents.

The level of local support is influenced by the public perception of the fire department. Well-run fire departments that are seen as “professional” typically have more success in recruiting and retaining more committed and desirable volunteers.

Local fire departments need to undertake a series of initiatives that improve the public perception of the fire department. This includes initiatives that raise awareness about the department; generate interest in volunteering for the department; and reinforce volunteer management operations in the department so that the department is “walking the talk”.

Individual fire departments should use the Department Self-Assessment Tool to determine which initiatives are appropriate for their department.

OBJECTIVES

- Increase awareness of volunteer firefighting among target audiences, including non-traditional firefighter demographics such as women, immigrant populations, and First Nations populations;
- Undertake local public relations that promote a positive and realistic image of volunteer firefighting;
- Attract more volunteer firefighter applicants, including those from non-traditional firefighter demographics;
- Increase retention through tactics that ensure current volunteers continue to feel valued and supported by the fire department;
- Inform current volunteers about the department’s recruitment campaign and engage them in contributing to the recruitment campaign;
- Facilitate and smooth relations with local municipalities and other key stakeholders.
RECOMMENDED INITIATIVES

1. **Involve current volunteer firefighters in planning formal recruitment drives.**

The importance of current volunteer firefighters can not be underestimated or underappreciated. The majority of new volunteer firefighters generally come from direct referrals of existing members of the department (National Volunteer Firefighter Council).

Existing volunteer firefighters should be asked and encouraged to contribute to the planning of a recruitment campaign. This secures a higher level of “buy-in” from existing volunteers; if they have helped plan the recruitment drive they are more likely to participate in it and believe in it. This also enables the department to benefit from the ideas and perspectives of existing volunteers and what they think will work. It demonstrates that the department values their experience and views. It also ensures that the realities of being a volunteer firefighter will be accurately communicated to potential recruits.

Meaningful involvement from existing volunteers also reduces the risk that existing volunteers will feel underappreciated. A campaign drive planned and dictated from “on high” can unintentionally leave existing volunteers with the feeling they are “not good enough” and need to be replaced.

The campaign should be positioned to current firefighters as helping the department gain more resources in order to continue a standard of serving the community with excellence. It should also be communicated that recruiting more firefighters will result in a better firefighting-life balance for current firefighters. Informing current firefighters of the recruitment drive should take place at a regularly scheduled meeting.

An incentive program can be attached to a recruitment drive as a means of encouraging existing volunteer firefighters to act as recruiters for the department. This takes advantage of the powerful role each volunteer firefighter plays an ambassador of the department and of volunteer firefighting generally. It also provides a means of involving all department members in recruitment. For example, an incentive could be offered for the department member who refers the highest number of applicants or informational event attendees. This could be combined with a provincial incentive (see “Centralized Initiatives”) that awards the department with the highest number of applicants or new recruits per year.

Accompanying Tools:

- Dialogue Guide for Informing Current Firefighters of the Recruitment Drive
- Fire Department Climate Evaluation
2. **Raise local awareness through traditional and new media activities.**

Broad-based (i.e. mass media) techniques should be used to create awareness among target audiences. Broad-based activities should utilize local media that will be encountered by the “community-at-large” on a regular basis.

The intent of these communications is to raise awareness about the fire department and its important role and work in the community. Key messages could include:

- Fire departments create a better quality of life for the community.
- Fire departments give individuals the chance to grow their skills and capabilities.
- Firefighters are public heroes and community leaders who commit to serve their community.

Communications should include a call-to-action to encourage interested individuals to find out more about volunteer firefighting.

**Local/Regional Newspaper Advertising**

Newspaper advertising is important to local audiences. According to a 2008 NADbank Readership Study, three quarters of adult Canadians read a printed edition of a daily newspaper each week. The study also indicated that Canadians turn to daily newspapers as a source for local news.

Advertisements in local newspapers or bulletins can be used to generally advertise the fire department’s existence and role. It should also be used to trumpet support for community groups (e.g., messages of congratulations, encouragement or support). It should also be used to recognize supportive local employers. This kind of recognition helps foster goodwill, thereby assisting in recruitment and retention efforts.

**Social Media**

Social media is any internet-based application that allows (and encourages) two-way interaction between the creator of the content and the reader. Examples are the websites Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Companies are currently growing the use of social media marketing to support and enhance other marketing. A survey by 6S Marketing in 2009 found that 70% of Canadians use social media.

One advantage of social media is that the message seems more sincere – as it is coming from individuals, not faceless organizations. This advantage can be capitalized on by having current volunteer firefighters use social media to convey the realities of volunteer firefighting in their communities.

The use of social media must be balanced with the need to ensure it does not create department inefficiencies. A social media policy should be developed for paid staff and
volunteers responsible for updating social media. A sample social media content policy is included in the accompanying toolkit. Volunteer firefighters can also engage in social media at their home during personal time (as many people do with respect to their hobbies and volunteerism).

It is recognized that use of social media is limited among communities, including First Nations communities, due to cultural factors or lack internet access. The intent of social media usage is to spread first-hand accounts of what it is like to be a volunteer firefighter. In communities which do not use social media, print media (such as a newsletter) can be used in the same way to disseminate firsthand accounts of volunteer firefighting.

**Fire Department Newsletter**

Creation of a fire department newsletter which is disseminated to the community may serve to address issues related to the public perception of the fire department. A fire department newsletter could be created to inform the public about fire hall events, introduce members of the fire hall to the community, and demonstrate to readers the realities of involvement with the fire department.

Department events may also be advertised for free in the Coffee News Flyer, by submitting the events on www.coffee-news.ca/whats-happening.

Accompanying Tools:

- Sample Key Messages for Target Audiences
- How-to Use Social Media
- Social Media Guidelines
- Tips for Creating a Newsletter Which Increases Recruitment

### 3. Engage in local public relations.

Local fire departments should engage with local newspapers and radios by providing them with local stories and interviews related to the fire department. The key to engaging these media outlets is to provide them with news (facts, not opinions) that relate tangibly to the community – emphasize the local angle. This includes news releases that are issued by centralized AFCA public relations (see “Centralized Initiatives”).

Public relations are different than paid advertising. Advertising is purchased space. Public relations are ongoing relations with local reporters, editors and announcers in newspapers, radio and TV. Building and maintaining these relationships can encourage these individuals to pursue news stories and other coverage of the fire department, which effectively serves as “free advertising” for the department.
Accompanying Tools:

- How-to Guide: Media Relations and Press Releases
- News Release Template and Sample News Release
- Backgrounder Template and Sample Backgrounder
- Sample Key Messages for Target Audiences
- How-to Create Effective Key Messages

4. **Use of promotional items.**

Some departments interviewed in the Environmental Scan indicated that “gimmicky items … are effective ways of encouraging familial support”. Exposure of promotional items - such as bumper stickers, t-shirts, hats, mugs, or canvas bags – with customized messages for firefighters, spouses, families, and co-workers can draw attention to how volunteer firefighters are key contributors to the community.

Accompanying Tool:

- How-to Guide: Commercial Donations

5. **Attendance at trade shows.**

Trade shows are identified by many fire departments as highly important for recruiting and retaining volunteers and raising awareness of the department. Fire departments who report the most success in trade show recruitment are those using professional approaches and resources.

Accompanying Tool:

- Trade Show Marketing Basics

6. **Engage in regular and ongoing outreach with local employers.**

Employer support is key for successful recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. As such, fire departments should keep in regular and ongoing contact with local employers.

Communications with employers should seek to do the following:

- Convey the importance of the fire department to the community and the importance of having volunteer firefighters.

- Express how important it is that the fire department has the support of local employers.
• Resolve myths about volunteer firefighter service and convey facts in realistic and straightforward ways, including clearly stating the expectations of volunteer firefighters. Use statistics on frequency of calls to help employers understand that the time commitment is not unreasonable.

• Articulate the direct and indirect benefits to the employer, including:
  o outlining the training that volunteer firefighters receive and how that translates into better employees with stronger skill sets;
  o noting that volunteer firefighting results in young employees establishing firmer roots in the community, reducing the likelihood that they will leave the community and the employer;
  o explaining the kinds of recognition the employer will receive from the department, and that will help promote their business in the community.

• Regularly update them on fire department events, including upcoming training sessions;

• Thank and recognize them for their ongoing support.

Employers can be engaged by the fire department through a variety of means, including:
• open houses;
• Q&A sessions with employers;
• appreciation dinners;
• mailing out information packages;
• direct contact with Fire Chiefs, including one-on-one meetings;
• regional public relations (flyers, newspaper, and radio);
• newspaper advertising
• quarterly newsletters;
• appreciation dinners.

Accompanying Tools:
• Sample Key Messages for Target Audiences
• Volunteer Firefighting: Factsheet for Employers
• Tips & Best Practises: Liaising with Employers
• Letter to Employers Not Yet Involved with the Fire Department
• Letter of Thanks to Supportive Employer

7. Engage community groups on a regular and ongoing basis.

Active and regular engagement with community groups can support recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters in direct and indirect ways.

Involvement with community groups raises the profile of the fire department in the community and provides the opportunity for fire halls to recruit those who are already volunteering for other organizations. Targeting those who already volunteer is likely to be a successful recruitment tactic. Ten percent of volunteers donate 54% of total volunteer hours (CSGVP, 2007). Those
who are already involved in other community organizations are more likely to give more of their
time to community-minded services.

There are many opportunities for volunteer fire departments to partner with community groups in
ways that will indirectly support recruitment and retention. For instance, departments can
partner with community groups to provide services such as psychological support or child care.
(These elements are discussed later.) Partnerships can also extend to joint planning and
execution of events in the community, which enhances the reputation of fire department as a
professional and community-minded organization.

It has been noted that community engagement may be a particularly effective method of
garnering support for firefighting in First Nations. Fire department participation in, or hosting of,
community events shows the Tribal Council that firefighting can be used to improve the
community’s overall standard of living. Community engagement by fire departments on First
Nations should be positioned as part of a collaborative way to address other issues the
community may face. The Hobbema Community Cadet Corps program has proven to be largely
successful in engaging First Nations youth in community service and may be used as a pilot
project for volunteer fire departments’ engagement with youth community organizations.

Particular forms of community engagement which would address the barriers to cross-
genерational recruitment are the Junior Firefighter and Cadets programs. Continual engagement
with these programs will create connections with youth while simultaneously appealing to the
parents of the program participants.

Although community groups are run by residents, this group should be contacted in a separate
manner from residents as the messages are different. Community groups should be
communicated to as potential partners. The common purpose shared by community groups and
the fire department (i.e., to make the community a better place to live) should be emphasized in
these communications.

Not all community groups are appropriate targets. Listed below are specific organization-types
(described according to the International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations) which should
be targeted by fire departments:

- **Culture and Recreation Groups** – Sports groups in particular. Emphasize the “team”
  aspects of firefighting, as well as the physical health benefits.

- **Health** – Specifically public health and wellness education groups, and emergency
  medical services groups. Emphasize the ability to put existing skills to work in a new and
  exciting environment.

- **Social Services** - Specifically daycare groups, disaster/emergency prevention and
  control groups, and refugee assistance groups. Emphasize the ability to put existing
  skills to work in a new environment, the opportunity to give back to the community, and
  the opportunity (for new immigrants) to become involved in the community.
• *Development and Housing* – Specifically community and neighbourhood organizations, and social development organizations. Emphasize the opportunity to improve the safety and quality of life of the community.

• *Volunteerism promotion and support organizations* – Organizations that recruit, train, and place volunteers and promote volunteering. Promote volunteer firefighting as an attractive and worthwhile volunteer opportunity.

• *Religious Groups* – Emphasize the ability to make a contribution to the community, and to use skills and experiences in new ways.

A number of tactics can be utilized for engaging community groups:

• holding “open house” events;
• providing tours of the fire hall;
• hosting community events or meetings of other community organizations at the hall;
• exploring partnering options with local community groups;
• using the connections that existing volunteers have with other community groups as a means of connecting with them;
• one-on-one meetings between the Fire Chief and the leader or senior manager of these groups;
• social media;
• distributing literature about the fire department;
• including groups in regular newsletter mailing;
• updating community groups on upcoming fire department events.

8. **Reach out to recruitment audiences with targeted messages.**

Volunteer firefighting needs to be positioned in different ways for different audiences. While there are many messages and selling points that are “good for all seasons”, it is often necessary for a fire department to adjust the approach for particular audiences that have not typically been engaged by the department in the past.

The methods of engaging audiences also should depend on the audiences themselves. While broad-based media such as newspapers and radio are often used, there is much “clutter” nowadays in print and on the airwaves. Specialized publications, media and approaches should be explored to connect with target audiences.

**General Residents**

This group includes traditional firefighter demographics which typically face fewer barriers to joining the fire department. The most effective recruitment of this group will likely take place through traditionally-used mechanisms and tactics.

Messages that will resonate with this group include ones that:

• Offer the opportunity to work as part of a team;
• Promote volunteer firefighters as community leaders;
• Note the opportunities for training and skill enhancement;
• Emphasize personal development resulting from volunteer firefighting; and
• Offer a volunteer opportunity which is meaningful and has a direct impact on the health of the community.

General promotion of volunteer firefighting at the local level should ideally involve consistent use of branding established at a province-wide level. (See “Centralized Initiatives”.) Promotion of volunteer firefighting can utilize this brand in several forms of media including:

- Newspaper advertising
- Social media and website
- Trade fairs
- Local billboards
- News releases used in public relations
- Promotional Items
- Newsletters, flyers and leaflets in public meeting places (e.g., coffee rooms, etc.)

Women

The majority of volunteers are women. As such, this group may already be involved in community groups and through that involvement may have already experienced contact with the fire department. If already involved in their community, they are potential volunteers as they have a desire to strengthen and improve their community.

Stay-at-home mothers in particular should be targeted, as they are more likely to be available during the daytime, when firefighter coverage is reduced. Stay-at-home mothers are typically involved in their local communities, but may have unique concerns about firefighting such as the availability of child care, discrimination or harassment. Departmental policies and procedures regarding these special concerns should be clearly communicated to this group.

Women can be targeted with messages that promote:
- the opportunity to contribute to the community;
- the opportunity to improve the community’s standard of living;
- the opportunity to take an active role in helping ensure their children/family are safe;
- the opportunity to partake in a new experience;

It is important that messages to this group:
- promote the openness and welcoming environment of the department, including promotion of diversity policies;
- note the availability of services such as child care;
- emphasize the level and standards of training and safety that are provided;
- include testimonials from existing volunteer firefighters who are female, noting the rewarding nature of the experience.
Mechanisms that can be used to uniquely target this group include:

- posters on community billboards in supermarkets;
- providing literature at local yoga studios or fitness studios;
- presentations to school councils (parent councils);
- networking and making presentations to community groups;
- articles and advertisements in the community newsletter.

Immigrant Populations

One particularly strong motivator for immigrants to volunteer is the opportunity to give back to their community. Immigrant populations also appreciate opportunities to establish social connections in their new communities. Volunteer firefighting should be positioned to immigrants as an excellent and dynamic opportunity that serves both these goals.

All recruitment documents need to make clear that good English-language skills are a requirement for volunteer firefighting. The safety issues involved in firefighting make this a paramount concern. As such, an English language skills testing process for all applicants has been included in the Volunteer Screening Process Guide.

Immigrants with less developed English-language skills should not be discouraged from volunteering at all. Instead, they should be encouraged to participate in other volunteer opportunities in the fire hall that are just as important, such as administrative positions and child care. These can be presented as opportunities to improve their English skills, which can then lead to firefighting roles.

Some targeted mechanisms that can be used to reach immigrant populations include:

- Local ethnic publications, such as a newsletter;
- Presentations to local cultural groups;
- Advertising on local ethnic radio stations (if available);
- Leaving literature (brochures, posters, etc.) at ethnic grocery stores;
- Community engagement (especially if the immigrant group has a community association);
- Encouraging existing volunteers to recruit from friends and coworkers that are members of immigrant populations;
- Encouraging immigrant volunteers to recruit fellow members of their communities.

First Nations Populations

The majority of the populations in First Nations communities are young people. Communicating to this group is therefore especially important. A main focus of recruitment messages should be the benefits firefighting brings to the individual. In addition to personal benefits, emphasis should be placed on the social aspect of the fire hall, as this is a key motivator for younger audiences.
Tribal Councils in First Nations communities are another target audience for these communications. Nuanced materials should be prepared for Tribal Councils which emphasize volunteer firefighting as a means of enhancing community unity and improving quality of life in the community.

Accompanying Tools:

- Tips & Best Practices: Using Community Engagement as Recruitment
- Tips & Best Practices: Volunteer Recruitment
- Sample Key Messages for Target Audiences

9. Regularly engage with political stakeholders.

Communications aimed at recruitment targets, and other activities that raise general awareness (such as engagement with community groups) will typically reach political stakeholders in a community. However, other tailored messages and strategies should also be used with political stakeholders. Communicating with political stakeholders should be done primarily in consultation with the municipal Chief Administrative Officer (“CAO”) or immediate municipal supervisor. Communication with other political stakeholders, such as MLA’s should be done through the AFCA (see “Centralized Initiatives”).

Communications with political stakeholders need to:

- Outline and emphasize the benefits of volunteer firefighting to the community – in terms of fiscal savings for the municipality and province, in terms of quality of life it adds, and in terms of community pride instilled;
- Demonstrate the importance of the fire department to the community through facts and updates such as:
  - Number of calls responded to each month;
  - Types of serious incidents the fire department assisted with;
  - Major achievements of the department in keeping the community safe;
- Emphasize that the fire department doesn’t just respond to fires – it responds to all emergency situations in the area;
- Describe recent activities of the fire department that show it is a community leader
  - Note community-related work the department has participated in;
  - Amounts raised for charity;
  - Major events hosted such as open houses, etc.
• Make an “ask” – that is, articulate needs the fire department may have, and which would assist in continuing to provide the above-listed benefits, such as:
  o Spreading the word about a recruitment drive;
  o Referring or recommending names of individuals that could be approached to join as volunteers;
  o Lending support to the department in a particular way.

Political stakeholders can be engaged regularly through a variety of mechanisms, including:

• Personalized tours of the department;
• Ride-alongs with the department;
• Invitations to speak or attend special events of the department;
• Regular newsletters;
• Attending regular meetings of local council;

It is emphasized that these actions must only occur after consultation with, and approval from, the CAO.

Accompanying tool:

• Letter to Dignitary Template

10. Bolster firefighter psychological support services.

Many departments report that having psychological support professionals available is important for retention of volunteers. Suggested practises to bolster the psychological support offered to firefighters are as follows:

• Provide information to both firefighters and spouses to prepare them for traumatic calls.
• Train every Fire Chief (and when possible Deputy Fire Chief) through the Critical Incident Stress Management program. Firefighters who have been with the department a long time may also be offered the opportunity to take this course, ensuring there is ample psychological support in the fire department.
• Fire Chiefs offer (and publicize) an “open-door policy” to both firefighters and spouses who need someone to talk to following a traumatic incident.
• Where possible, engage local professional psychological counsellors as skilled volunteers to provide on-call counselling services.
• Other sources of counsellors which may be engaged as skilled volunteers to provide voluntary, on-call counselling services are school counsellors, local RCMP, and hospital staff to assist the Fire Chief in providing psychological support to firefighters.

Establishing the aforementioned support services in the fire hall will make firefighters feel that their health is important to the fire hall. Publicizing these services to current firefighters will be important in the usage of the services. If the department already offers these services, effort should be made to ensure current firefighters are made aware.
11. Develop a spousal support network.

Spousal support networks have been found to be successful in easing concerns of spouses of new firefighters. One such support network model has been developed by the Leduc County Fire Department.

In a spousal support network, spouses of longer-serving volunteer firefighters engage in regular contact with spouses of younger or newer volunteer fire firefighters. The network encourages the development of friendships and acquaintances among spouses. It serves as a mechanism where concerned spouses can find support and advice from other individuals who understand and appreciate their concerns. This helps secure and maintain the support of family members of volunteer firefighters.

A spousal support network should ideally be administered by a volunteer (preferably a spouse of a senior firefighter) and supported by the Fire Chief. Activities undertaken by the spousal support network should provide opportunities for camaraderie, discussion and fun. Some examples of activities a spousal support network can offer are:

- Spousal appreciation nights;
- Outings and social events (movie nights, etc.);
- Regular coffee hours;
- An availability agreement with a local chaplain or pastor.

In addition to the spousal support network, a special welcome package should be created for spouses of new firefighter recruits. This package would contain information about the fire department related to issues of interest such as: safety, child care, psychological support, and fire hall events. This package should convey that the Fire Chief is available to discuss concerns the spouse may have.

Accompanying Tools:

- Volunteer Firefighting: Factsheet for Families
- Sample Welcome Letter to Spouses
- Family Orientation Guide
- Tips & Best Practices: Liaising with Families

12. Establish child care services.

Recruitment and retention can also be enhanced by establishing a reliable child care plan for volunteer firefighters and their families. This serves as a selling point in recruitment efforts, and aids in retention. It addresses many barrier issues including:

- Concerns from potential recruits about what happens to their children during a call, particularly if the recruit is a single parent, a stay-at-home parent, or from a dual-working household;
• The inability of a volunteer firefighter who has children to respond to fire calls if they do not have child care arrangements, which in turn places increased pressure on other volunteers;
• Volunteer firefighters who become parents and begin to have child care needs, who might otherwise leave the department over child care concerns.

A childcare plan may also encourage spouses to join the fire department, knowing that their children will be taken care of in the event that both spouses are called for a fire.

Several options exist for establishing a childcare program, including:

• Establishing child care provision by the department, using either paid staff or volunteers;
• Engaging volunteer daycare workers in the fire department on an on-call basis;
• Partnering with community groups (such as religious organizations) to provide child care;
• Forming a voluntary support network comprised of volunteer firefighters and/or neighbours;
• Integrated as an ongoing activity of a spousal support network.

Child care can be marketed as a volunteer opportunity for stay-at-home parents and spouses of firefighters. It should be positioned as a way to be involved with the local fire department (and give back to the community) without the danger of fighting fires.

The method for child care chosen by the department necessarily depends on the size of both the community and fire hall. Regardless of the childcare program, volunteer police information checks and child welfare checks should be used for all child care providers, to protect children and ease parents’ minds.

13. Establish diversity policies in the fire department.

Diversifying the demographics of Alberta’s fire halls has become an important issue. While undertaking targeted recruitment efforts to diversify the firefighter base, it is important to recognize that some barriers to recruitment might be overcome by implementing and publicizing diversity policies. These policies would outline that discrimination and harassment are not tolerated by the fire department, and include incident reporting and disciplinary action procedures.

The creation of such policies is consistent with many other modern workplaces. Implementing and following these policies enhances the fire department’s public reputation as a professional, open and community leading organization. This, in turn, assists in recruiting volunteer firefighters from non-traditional groups.

Accompanying Tool:

• Sample Diversity Policy
14. Create firefighter service recognition awards.

Creating a series of recognition awards at the department or regional level can be very effective in showing appreciation to current volunteer firefighters. A current volunteer who feels appreciated is much more likely to speak positively about the fire department by word-of-mouth and will be an effective ambassador in recruiting friends, family, work colleagues, etc.

Recognition awards can be chosen based on nominations from fellow firefighters. Examples can include:

- “Outstanding Service” – awarded to a firefighter, or a group, who goes above and beyond expectations in a specific situation;
- “Outstanding Commitment” – awarded to a firefighter who actively promotes volunteer firefighting in a community, measured by the number of referrals or recruitments;
- “Outstanding Learning” – awarded to the firefighter(s) who has completed the highest level of training;
- “Outstanding Recruit” – awarded to a new firefighter who stands out among the year’s recruits.

In addition to these action-oriented awards, other awards for length of service could also be given to volunteer firefighters. (For example, awards at one, three, five, ten, fifteen, etc. years of service with the department or other departments continuously.) These awards could be handed out at an annual department-level or regional-level volunteer firefighter appreciation event (such as a dinner or social function).

An annual regional event offers the opportunity to give awards to entire departments such as “Most Learned Department”, “Least Incidents Department (safest community)”, “Cleanest Department”, “Best Protector” (most firefighters per capita), etc.

The community-at-large should also be involved in the recognition of volunteer firefighters. The fire hall could put on an annual fundraising event (such as the New Years party held by Leduc County Fire Services) involving ticket sales to the community. At this event, awards celebrating current volunteer firefighters could be handed out, and/or recognition of retiring, moving or departing firefighters could be celebrated. An event such as this would not only provide the opportunity for the community to recognize the contribution of volunteer firefighters, but would also provide an opportunity to market volunteer firefighting to the community.

15. Establish a proper volunteer screening process.

Up-front communication around time commitment and expectations is important for improving recruitment and retention of volunteers. Clearly communicating expectations of volunteers at the beginning helps avoid frustrations and losses later. (For example, a volunteer quitting after discovering the time commitment is more demanding than he or she initially thought.)

Putting in place an effective and robust volunteer screening process is important for effectively recruiting, managing and retaining volunteers. The volunteer screening process can be broken down into three phases: pre-hiring, hiring, and managing.
Accompanying Tools:

- Volunteer Screening Process Guide
- Volunteer Firefighting: Factsheet for Applicants
- Volunteer Firefighter Position Description
- Sample Application Form
- Letter to Successful Applicants
- Letter to Unsuccessful Applicants
- How-to Guide: Buddy System
- How-to: Be a Mentor
- Tips and Hints: Interviews
- Sample Questions: Individual Interview
- Sample Questions: Group Interview
- Sample Questions: Exit Interview
- Sample Questions: References
- New Recruit Orientation Guide
- Volunteer Firefighter Performance Evaluation Form
- Tips & Best Practices: Volunteer Management
CENTRALIZED INITIATIVES

CONTEXT

To reinforce the local recruitment and retention initiatives undertaken by fire departments, a series of centralized initiatives are also recommended. These are intended to address issues that: are Alberta-wide in scope; require capacity beyond the resources of any single fire department; or which by their nature make sense to coordinate at a provincial level.

The centralized initiatives recognize that local fire departments have limited time and resources, which are predominantly dedicated to running the department and responding to fire calls. Ideally, the centralized initiatives should be coordinated by a provincial body. The Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association is uniquely positioned to undertake these initiatives as it is a provincial-level organization with the mandate and connections to successfully implement them.

Centralized activities are intended to complement local initiatives, not replace or substitute them. The idea is that the centralized initiatives act as a broad blanket covering the entire province in areas common to all departments; while local initiatives are taken by local fire departments at the community level based on the unique circumstances and opportunities in each community.

OBJECTIVES

- Build a consistent image for volunteer firefighting in Alberta that is positive and engaging and supports recruitment;
- Facilitate intra-Alberta volunteer firefighter retention;
- Undertake provincial public relations that promote a positive and realistic image of volunteer firefighting;
- Broaden awareness of volunteer firefighting among target audiences, especially non-traditional firefighter demographics;
- Enhance relationships with the Albertan government and other provincial stakeholders.

RECOMMENDED INITIATIVES

1. Develop a brand for volunteer firefighting that can be used in a provincial campaign.

There is much room to improve levels of awareness in all Albertan communities about the opportunity of volunteer firefighting. Many younger people may not have been asked to consider volunteer firefighting. Others may not realize such an opportunity exists. Still others may be from non-traditional groups who assume volunteer firefighting is limited to a certain demographic group.
There is also a lot of room to shape the general public’s view of firefighting by “branding” the volunteer opportunity. The nature of volunteer firefighting also lends itself to such branding. For example, an effective brand for volunteer firefighting could convey the following:

- Volunteer firefighting is interesting, challenging, demanding, fulfilling and exciting – it is a unique opportunity that stands out from many others.
- Volunteer firefighting is not limited to Caucasian males, but is open to many other groups including females, immigrant groups and Aboriginal peoples.
- Volunteer firefighting involved dedication and service to the community, helping improve the safety and quality of life of the community.

Some fire departments have already developed brands that they use locally. For example, Vegreville Emergency Services has used a brand of “Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things”. Other fire departments have adopted a “Public Heroes” brand.

A professional communications agency should be retained to develop a provincial volunteer firefighting brand. The brand should include visual and thematic components, including a logo and slogan that can be used in all centralized and local recruitment-related activities. For example, the brand could be used in:

- Newspaper advertising;
- Radio advertising;
- Trade show materials;
- News releases;
- Associated collateral (brochures, fact sheets, etc.)

The brand would be used in centralized materials (e.g., advertising, website, etc.) Ideally, branded materials in “template” form would also be developed and produced centrally and distributed to fire departments for local use. This would enable local fire departments to easily use the brand in conjunction with their local initiatives.

Special branding materials tailored to First Nations audiences should also be developed, promoting the value of volunteer firefighting to those communities in culturally-appropriate ways.

2. **Undertake a province-wide awareness and recruitment campaign.**

Once a brand is developed, a province-wide awareness campaign should be implemented to bring attention to the opportunity of volunteer firefighting. The awareness campaign could incorporate many elements.

**Mass Media Advertising**

Mass media advertising could be coordinated centrally to appear strategically throughout the province. This could include:

- Billboards placed along major highways in rural Alberta, where there will be a very low cost-per-exposure, as many people will see the billboard repeatedly;
- Advertisements through the Alberta Weekly Newspapers Association;
- Radio spots on strategically selected radio stations that reach the target audiences;
Advertising should drive viewers, readers and listeners to a central hotline and/or central website where they can get more information.

Promotional Photo Contest
The premise of a photo contest of this sort (coordinated at the provincial level) is to allow firefighters to contribute directly to the campaign. Ideally, the promotional photo contest would be held in connection with launch of the new volunteer firefighting brand. The contest would serves as a means of showing the full spectrum of what volunteer firefighting is about – gaining skills and knowledge, making the community safe, and contributing to the overall health of the community. The nature of the contest would naturally highlight the benefits that volunteer firefighting brings to the community and the individual.

Firefighters could enter the contest by taking an inspiring picture of their experience as a firefighter, and then filling in a tagline such as “I am a hero because…” or “Our department makes a difference by…”. To keep costs down, the photo entries could be submitted to a photo sharing site such as Flikr. Due to privacy regulations, as well as a desire to remain tasteful, photos involving scenes from calls where victims are visible should not be permitted.

The winners of the contest could be decided by the central body which runs the contest or by encouraging members of the general public to vote on the pictures. An important component of public voting would be to include a link to information about volunteer firefighting and an application form to become a volunteer firefighter. Winning photos could be used in subsequent advertising and informational materials.

Public Speaking Engagements
During the campaign, the AFCA could also identify and engage in speaking opportunities to raise awareness of volunteer firefighting. Speaking opportunities would discuss:
- the value of volunteer firefighting;
- the importance of volunteer fighting to Alberta communities;
- successes and opportunities volunteer firefighting has brought to communities; and
- the challenges associated with modern volunteer firefighting.

These speeches could also be given during events over National Fire Prevention Week. They should seek to engage a broad range of audiences, including: municipalities, rotary clubs, public servants, business audiences and others.

Accompanying Tool:
- Ideas: Public Speaking Engagements
3. **Centrally coordinate public relations.**

Centralized public relations conducted by the AFCA would improve the perception of volunteer firefighting. It is recommended that the AFCA employ one full-time public relations officer to conduct these activities. The public relations officer would be responsible for conducting public relations on a provincial level, and supporting regional public relations. Public relations activities will raise knowledge of volunteer firefighting through reputable earned media sources such as opinion-editorial columns, newspaper articles, and radio interviews. The public relations officer would also organize and coordinate the utilization of a recruitment spokesperson network; and coordinate the creation of regular newsletters.

**Earned Media**

“Earned media” refers to publicity gained through promotional efforts, as opposed to paid media (such as advertising). Some earned media outlets are newspaper and radio. Earned media has more credibility than advertising in the minds of the target audience because it is delivered through a third-party (the media outlet), not through paid sponsorship. Events that have provincial reach (such as awareness weeks, National Fire Prevention Week, provincial recognition awards, etc.) should be leveraged in centralized earned media activities.

Utilizing earned media requires several steps, including:

- **Media target identification** - The public relations officer should work with local fire halls to leverage rural media (typically newspapers and radio).
- **Media database preparation** - The names, locations, and contact information of the chosen media.
- **Media kit development and maintenance** - Promotional material about the AFCA and volunteer firefighting.
- **Receiving media inquiries** - The person should have training in media relations to effectively receive and respond to media inquiries.

The public relations officer should be responsible for providing easily customizable draft news releases to local fire departments when there is newsworthy information about volunteer firefighting in Alberta. Centrally-created news releases will aide in consistent messages about volunteer firefighting across Alberta, which will support the centralized branding initiative.

**Recruitment Spokesperson Network**

A network of spokespersons could be created across the province. The network would provide a readily called-upon, diverse group of existing volunteer firefighters who could speak first-hand to media and other audiences about the importance, value and fulfillment of volunteer firefighting. It would also serve as a tactic for meaningfully involving current firefighters in a recruitment drive.

The spokespeople would be selected from across the province with a special effort made to showcase spokespersons from non-traditional firefighter demographic groups (such as
women, immigrant populations, and First Nations populations) who are able to portray firefighting through a unique lens.

A similar campaign has been conducted by Servus Credit Union to promote the “Young & Free Bank Account” (see www.youngfreealberta.ca). While the Young & Free “Spokester” position is considered a full-time job, the firefighter spokesperson positions need not be, although remuneration for the spokespeople could be offered. A formal recruitment process, similar to that of applying for a job (including a description of personal characteristics and the duties required), should be followed to fill the spokesperson positions.

Engaging current firefighters as spokespeople provides a credible “face” for volunteer firefighting – to show potential applicants the realities of being a firefighter. Activities spokespeople could engage in are:

- Regular use of social media (for example, posting “tweets” on twitter.com about firefighter activities);
- Regular blog posts about firefighter activities (see, for example, http://www.manchesterfire.gov.uk/our-emergency-response/firefighter-blog.aspx);
- Contributing opinion-editorial articles to provincial and regional newsletters;
- Public speaking engagements at community events across the province;
- Public speaking to volunteer firefighter audiences;
- Responding to questions from potential volunteer firefighters;
- Submitting write-ups or providing interviews to major daily newspapers (e.g., Edmonton Journal, Edmonton Sun, Calgary Sun, Calgary Herald);
- Make suggestions and provide feedback to the AFCA about future recruitment efforts.

External Quarterly Newsletter

Since many volunteer fire departments are supported by municipalities (which are in turn supported by the Government of Alberta) and other organizations, regular communication with provincial and municipal governments and other stakeholders should be considered a priority. An external newsletter should be distributed on a quarterly basis to stakeholders including: the Minister of Municipal Affairs; provincial MLAs; Tribal Councils; and municipal governments. Supportive employers could also be included on the list of stakeholders to receive the newsletter.

The newsletter would provide regular updates about Alberta’s volunteer fire departments. The newsletter could include items such as: news about regulations affecting firefighting; best practices; inspiring stories about firefighters; and challenges to volunteer firefighting. Regular publishing of this newsletter would keep volunteer firefighting in the minds of provincial and local government officials.
Internal Quarterly Newsletter
An internal newsletter should be created and disseminated to volunteer fire departments regularly. This newsletter would serve several purposes, including providing information about issues affecting volunteer firefighting in Alberta; and knowledge-transfer documents and information which aide local departments in supporting centralized public relations activities.

Accompanying Tools:

- How-to Guide: Media Relations and Press Releases
- AFCA Backgrounder

4. Create a central website to provide recruitment information to the public and to support local fire departments with tools and information.

To support the recruitment and awareness campaign, a centralized Alberta volunteer firefighting website should be developed. This would be a central resource that any Albertan interested in firefighting would access for more information. Elements of the awareness and recruitment campaign (e.g., advertising) would drive audiences to the website. The website would also house centralized recruitment resources. Local fire departments could also have micro-sites within the central website to provide department-specific information.

It is recognized that the AFCA already has a website, however in a Google search for “Alberta volunteer firefighting” the AFCA website is not on the first page of results. It is therefore recommended that if the AFCA website is revamped as recommended, search engine optimization be used to improve website traffic and web presence. As opposed to search engine marketing (which uses paid means to improve website traffic), search engine optimization involves altering a website’s content and HTML coding to increase its relevance to specific keywords (such as “firefighting” and “volunteer”). This reduces the barriers to search engine indexing activities (that is, the process by which web pages are downloaded and categorized to increase the speed of search results). It is also recommended that Google’s Local Business Center be used to create a free listing for the AFCA website on Google Maps.

The central website would also include an intranet component that is only accessible by members of volunteer fire departments, which could host the following resources:

**Provincial Equipment Repository**

In discussions with Leon Smallboy (Fire Safety Coordinator with the First Nations (Alberta) Technical Services Advisory Group) about particular issues facing fire departments on First Nations, it was noted that many of these fire departments lack the proper equipment (in both quantity and quality) to be able to effectively recruit and retain firefighters and respond to calls. It was also noted that having inordinately old equipment (especially compared to
municipalities) negatively affected the perceptions of the fire department among current firefighters and the broader community.

One step in solving this problem is to create an area of the central website where Alberta fire departments (both volunteer and professional) that are upgrading their equipment can post their used equipment as available. This should allow users to indicate whether the equipment is being given away or is for sale. If the equipment is available to be donated to a volunteer fire department, an application process or selection criteria should be established to create equality in deciding which departments are able to access the donated equipment.

**Best Practises Forum**

As found in the consultation and environmental scan process, many great recruitment and retention initiatives are already being undertaken by fire departments across Alberta. A best practises forum on the centralized website would facilitate the sharing of best practises among fire departments that may not communicate regularly. This forum would need to be moderated in the form of posing questions to participants such as “what types of employer appreciation events do you have in your community?” Ideally this component would be accessible to out-of-province Fire Chiefs as well, further facilitating the development of new ideas and sharing of best practices.

**First Nations Fire Department Network**

Consultations about particular issues facing fire departments on First Nations found that there are political issues which affect mutual aide agreements. These political issues have caused situations where neighbouring First Nations communities cannot share firefighters or equipment, even though the fire departments may be lacking either one. This issue requires work with the federal government to remove barriers to the merging of fire departments in the same community.

One initiative the AFCA could undertake is to facilitate communication between neighbouring fire departments. This could be done through the centralized website by setting up a special forum area where First Nations Fire Chiefs could communicate and collaborate on the issues they face.

Another opportunity to enhance communication and resource-sharing among First Nations communities is to use the Telehealth and Schoolnet videoconferencing capabilities (managed by the First Nations (Alberta) Technical Services Advisory Group) to enhance the training opportunities available to First Nations firefighters, especially those in remote communities. An approved training theory component could be conducted over videoconferencing, giving firefighters in isolated communities the opportunity to access information that previously would have taken months to co-ordinate. Conducting training through videoconference technology would also cut down on the costs to provide training to isolated communities.
5. **Establish centralized resources that can support province-wide and local recruitment and retention initiatives.**

Several complementary centralized recruitment resources could be developed and implemented to support province-wide and local recruitment and retention efforts.

**Provincial Recruitment Hotline**

This would be a central phone number that could be cited in advertising, informational materials, and the website. The hotline would be answered by a live individual who is trained to answer general questions about volunteer firefighting, and who can fill out an application on behalf of the caller and submit it to the caller's closest fire department. It has been suggested that this call centre be located in and manned by the Fire Commissioners office.

**Provincial Volunteer Firefighter Database**

This would provide a centralized listing of firefighter names, demographic information, addresses, departments, and training accomplishments. The database should have separate tables for applicants and current firefighters. A user-friendly information management form (integrated into the centralized website as a “firefighters only” page) should be available to firefighters so they are able to update their information if they move. If the firefighter changes their address, information about the closest fire department can be sent to the new address.

**Online volunteer firefighter application form**

An online application form, built as part of the centralized website, would be integrated with the volunteer firefighting database. Information input in the form would automatically be entered in the database, and the application would be automatically forwarded to the fire department closest to the applicant.

These centralized resources would work together to make it easier for interested individuals to apply to be a volunteer firefighter. A comprehensive database, recruitment hotline, and online application will make it easy to track statistics related to volunteer firefighting and will support the recruitment campaign by providing a central location for information.

Another advantage of a centralized database is the ability to create an automated information system so that whenever a firefighter changes his or her location, the system sends information to the individual about the fire department in his or her new location. This would facilitate intra-Alberta firefighter retention at a fraction of what it would cost to do this manually. Additionally, the system could be set up to include a tool which helps facilitate sharing training (and other...
events) between regions by sending e-mail alerts to eligible firefighters when training events are happening in their region. Many other features and functions could be designed into this database which would facilitate resource-sharing and firefighter retention.

6. **Leverage National Fire Prevention Week activities.**

National Fire Prevention Week is an awareness-raising tool for fire safety and for the services firefighters provide to the communities they serve. Many fire departments currently use Fire Prevention Week as an important community engagement tool that advances their recruitment objectives.

Although National Fire Prevention Week is already being used by local fire departments as a promotional tool, there is an opportunity for the AFCA to enhance the week by organizing provincial events. Activities the AFCA could conduct during National Fire Prevention Week include:

- a large kick-off event to begin National Fire Prevention Week celebrations;
- a speaking tour of Alberta fire halls;
- public meetings with communities (including MLAs, mayors, tribal councillors, and town councillors) to talk about the importance of fire halls;
- professional development seminars with firefighters and Fire Chiefs to develop skills essential to their roles; and
- other activities which raise awareness about the ways volunteer firefighting contributes to communities.

When possible, key provincial political figures such as the Lieutenant Governor, Premier and Minister of Municipal Affairs should be involved in AFCA-driven events. Local fire halls should also be encouraged to involve local leaders such as MLAs, Mayors, Reeves, Tribal Councillors, and Town Councillors in National Fire Prevention Week events.

National Fire Prevention Week could coincide with an annual recruitment drive, with the AFCA giving out prizes or incentives to departments with the most applications.

Accompanying Tools:
- National Fire Prevention Week Planning Kit
- Ideas: Public Speaking Engagement
- Template: Letter to Dignitaries

7. **Celebrate National Firefighter Health Week**

National Firefighter Health Week is a week developed and supported by the National Volunteer Fire Council, and is used to raise awareness about health and wellness issues affecting first responders. Although National Firefighter Health Week of American origin, it would be easily adaptable to Alberta, as Canadians share many health concerns with Americans.
A National Firefighter Health Week in Alberta could be planned to correspond with National Fire Prevention Week. Publicity activities could be undertaken during this week to draw attention to the benefits volunteer firefighting brings to the individual firefighters.

The National Firefighter Health Week website contains a planning guide for each day of the celebration week, as well as tools for firefighters, families, and departments which encourage a healthy lifestyle for these groups. “Monthly Challenges” are also available online, which give ideas for various initiatives departments can use to keep their firefighters healthy.

For more information on National Fire Health Week see: www.healthy-firefighter.org/page/720/National_Firefighter_Health_Week.htm

8. **Create province-wide recognition awards.**

Province-wide recognition awards should be created and awarded to complement local efforts (see “Local Initiatives”). These awards could be based on either general nominations, or chosen from among winners of corresponding local or regional recognition awards.

For example, one such award could be titled “Alberta Volunteer Firefighter of the Year”. Firefighters who have served over a certain length of time (perhaps 15 years) should also be recognized at the provincial level.

9. **Explore Canada-wide terminology standardization.**

Alberta’s economic growth has attracted many inter-provincial migrants. Canada-wide standardized training is a recommended area of investigation. If firefighter terminology were standardized across Canada, it would facilitate the recruitment of those who move to Alberta from outside of the province with previous experience in volunteer firefighting in another province.
HOW TO USE THE STRATEGY AND TOOLKIT

The strategy has provided a range of initiatives and activities which could be undertaken at both local and centralized levels. The accompanying toolkit provides instructional guides, templates, and samples to help local fire departments in carrying out initiatives deemed appropriate for their community. Local fire departments should start by completing the tool: Local Fire Department Self-Assessment Tool, which will aide in identifying the areas where the Recruitment and Retention Strategy and Toolkit can help them improve.

Most the sample and template tools include words or phrases which are underlined and written in red. These are the spaces where local fire departments should customize these tools with information specific to their department. After this is done, these words or phrases should be coloured black and the underline should be removed - no other formatting elements should be changed.

Fire departments will notice that the templates and samples do not come with graphic elements. These tools are meant to be used in conjunction with a provincial volunteer firefighting brand, the creation of which could be part of the third phase of the Volunteer Alberta/AFCA contract. This phase could also include workshops and coaching support to help fire departments in implementing the initiatives detailed in the strategy.
Please rate each area of your department according to the scale below. If you rank any statement below a “3”, use the associated tool to improve this area of your department.

5 = I agree (this statement is definitely true for my fire department).
4 = I agree slightly (this statement is sometimes or partly true).
3 = Uncertain (I don’t know).
2 = I disagree slightly (this statement is usually not true).
1 = I disagree (this statement is definitely not true for my fire department).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Find out more…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior members of the department members understand the perception members have of the department</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Tool: Fire department climate evaluation, page 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My department engages in targeted recruitment of volunteers</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Page 4: Target audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My department has a comprehensive volunteer screening process</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Page 16: Initiative 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My department has a clear volunteer firefighter position description used in recruitment materials</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Tool: Volunteer screening process guide, page 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My department uses an application form</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Tool: Application form</td>
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<tr>
<td>My department interviews applicants</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Tool: Volunteer screening process guide, page 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My department checks applicant’s references</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Tool: Sample Interview Questions, page 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My department informs applicants of their acceptance or rejection in a professional manner</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Tool: Letter to successful applicants, page 69</td>
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Tool: Local Fire Department Self-Assessment Tool
**Used by:** Fire Chief and department’s fire officers
**When to use:** To assess which areas of the strategy apply to the fire department. Also use as a transfer document for new Fire Chief
**Learn more:** Recruitment and Retention Strategy, page 3
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Find out more…</th>
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</table>
| My department adequately orientates new recruits                         | 1 2 3 4 5 | Tool: Volunteer screening process guide, page 46  
Tool: New recruit orientation guide, page 73  
Tool: How-to guide: Buddy System, page 74 |
| My department regularly engages with traditional and new media           | 1 2 3 4 5 | Tool: How-to use social media, page 120  
Tool: Tips for creating a newsletter, page 114 |
| My department attends trade shows                                        | 1 2 3 4 5 | Page 13: Initiative 5  
Tool: Trade show marketing basics, page 115 |
| My department has diversity policies in place                            | 1 2 3 4 5 | Page 23: Initiative 13  
Tool: Diversity policy template, page 86 |
| My department makes the family of new recruits feel welcome               | 1 2 3 4 5 | Page 21: Initiative 11  
Tool: Family orientation guide, page 93  
Tool: Sample welcome letter to spouses, page 91  
Tool: Factsheet for families, page 90 |
| My department conducts regular evaluations of volunteers                  | 1 2 3 4 5 | Tool: Volunteer screening process guide, page 46  
Tool: Volunteer firefighter performance evaluation form, page 71 |
| My department conducts exit interviews when firefighters leave           | 1 2 3 4 5 | Tool: Sample Questions: Exit Interview, page 65 |
| The Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief are interested in the best practises of other departments | If yes see… | Tool: Tips & best practises for volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention, page 76 |
| My department is interested in buying equipment from other departments   | If yes see… | Page 31: Initiative 4 |
| My department is good at planning and marketing events for National Fire Prevention Week | 1 2 3 4 5 | Page 34: Initiative 6  
Tool: National Fire Prevention Week Event Planning Kit, page 114 |
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<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Find out more…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| My department is regularly featured in local press or radio              | 1 2 3 4 5 | Page 12: Initiative 3  
Tool: News release template and sample news release, page 99 - 100  
Tool: Backgrounder template & sample backgronder, page 101 - 102  
Tool: How-to guide: Media relations & press release, page 103 |
| My department regularly speaks to the public                             | 1 2 3 4 5 | Page 15: Initiative 7  
Tool: Ideas: Public speaking engagements, page 107 |
| Individuals in my department have the ability to create effective key messages | 1 2 3 4 5 | Tool: Sample key messages for target audiences, page 94  
Tool: How to create effective key messages, page 97 |
| My Fire Chief has regular contact with the municipality                  | 1 2 3 4 5 | Page 19: Initiative 9  
Tool: Letter to dignitary template, page 83 |
| My department regularly recognizes and celebrates its volunteers         | 1 2 3 4 5 | Page 24: Initiative 14  
Page 35: Initiative 8  
Tool: Volunteer recognition ideas, page 123 |
| My department regularly connects with employers                          | 1 2 3 4 5 | Page 13: Initiative 6  
Tool: Thank-you letter to employers, page 89  
Tool: Tips & best practices for liaising with employers, page 76  
Tool: Letter to employers not yet involved with fire department, page 88  
Tool: Factsheet for employers, page 87 |
| My department is able to get commercial donations                        | 1 2 3 4 5 | Page 13: Initiative 4  
Tool: How-to guide: Commercial donations, page 116 |

While this assessment serves as a guide to the accompanying toolkit, not all sections of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy have been identified as areas your department should consider. Please see the full Recruitment and Retention Strategy for additional suggestions to improve other aspects of the fire department affecting recruitment and retention.
This evaluation has been adapted from the “Team Climate Survey” Dr. Lois Frankel’s book See Jane Lead (p. 169). Its purpose is to provide a forum for members of the fire department to share their thoughts about the department in a candid and anonymous way. This climate evaluation should be administered at least once per year or more often if the Fire Chief deems it necessary. When soliciting feedback of any type, it is important to:

a. **Ensure the anonymity of respondents.** Consider having someone other than the Fire Chief administer and tally the responses. If you do so, ensure that respondents know the Fire Chief will not be reading the handwritten comments, and that their anonymity is protected. This will encourage honest responses and alleviate the fear of “retribution”.

b. **Give the respondents time to complete the evaluation.** Hand out the evaluation at the beginning of a regularly scheduled meeting and allocate 10 – 15 minutes in the agenda for its completion.

c. **Let respondents know the information collected will be acted on.** No one wants to do anything they feel is pointless. The first time you conduct a fire department climate evaluation, make sure you let the respondents know that the results will be used to improve the fire department. After receiving the results, follow up by making the results publicly available either at meetings, or posted somewhere in the fire hall. Finally, ensure that the actions you take as a result of the climate evaluation are communicated as such. The next time you conduct a climate evaluation, introduce it with a review of the actions you took in response to the last evaluation.

d. **Alter the questions on the climate evaluation to reflect previous results and the department.** An initial fire department evaluation is included in this toolkit, however this evaluation may need to be altered based on its applicability to each local department. If the department has mechanisms in place which address issues the department faced in the past, add questions about these mechanisms to assess their effectiveness. The next fire department climate evaluation undertaken will most likely vary from the guide given based on the responses of the first evaluation and actions taken in response to the evaluation.

e. **Have the Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief take the evaluation independently.** This helps illuminate the difference between what the administrators of the fire department believe and what the volunteer fire fighters believe. If responses between the two groups are similar, it tangibly shows the Chief and Deputy Chief connection they have to the department. If some areas differ vastly, it indicates where there is room for improved understanding.
Anytown Fire Department Climate Evaluation

Your responses to this evaluation will aid in improving the fire department with respect to recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Questions in this evaluation will focus around the fire department’s “climate” – including how we work together as a team. The results of this evaluation will help the fire department improve its operations, thereby increasing recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. You should not put your name on the evaluation – all responses are anonymous.

Part One

Instructions: Using the scale 1 = not descriptive of our department, through 10 = highly descriptive of our department, answer each of the following questions as candidly as possible.

1. Communication
   Fire department members freely consult with one another and in-depth discussions about issues impacting the team and how the team can be improved happens frequently.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

2. Decision Making
   Solutions to problems and decisions are arrived at through thorough discussion as opposed to one or two people making decisions for the entire fire department.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

3. Meetings
   Meetings are effective – they are held frequently, length is appropriate, and discussion time is adequate.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

4. Initiative
   Everyone exhibits responsibility for introducing new ideas for solving the issues problems the fire department encounters.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

5. Standards of Excellence
   Standards used to judge individual effectiveness and accomplishments are clearly defined and effective forms of feedback.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
6. **Training and Practices**
Training and practices are valuable, and time is managed efficiently during these events.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

7. **Support**
The fire department’s support programs and services are well utilized and valuable.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

8. **Belonging**
Fire department members take the time to understand one another and make everyone feel like an integral part of the team.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

9. **Trust**
Fire department members trust one another and openly discuss most matters.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

10. **Appreciation**
Fire department members feel appreciated not just by the department, but by the entire community.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

11. **Social Activities**
Social activities put on by the department are held regularly and encourage team-building.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

12. **Critique**
Fire department members take time to give each other feedback (both positive and developmental) about how they are working together without “blaming” each other.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

13. **Communication with Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief**
Fire department members feel able to talk openly with the Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief about issues faced by the fire department.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
Part Two

Instructions: In this section you are asked to answer five questions. Again, please do so honestly, but understand that your responses will be reported as written. Therefore, if anonymity is important to you, avoid phrases that would identify you.

1. What do you like best about the fire department?

2. What could the fire department do to be even more effective in improving recruitment and retention of firefighters?

3. What is the most important general area (either those listed in Part One or your own) to be improved upon in the next X months?

4. Are there any other programs or procedures you'd like to see implemented in the fire department? (Examples: more family events, a shiftwork scheduling system, etc.)

5. What do you think is the public perception of the fire department? How could this be improved?

6. Do you have any other comments about either the fire department or this evaluation?

Thank you for your time. Your insight is greatly appreciated.
Informing current firefighters of the recruitment drive should take place at a regularly scheduled meeting. It is recommended that this discussion take place at the same meeting the Fire Department Climate Evaluation is administered (see tool: Fire Department Climate Evaluation). The Fire Chief and Volunteer Coordinator (where applicable) should both have had time to familiarize themselves with the Recruitment and Retention Strategy. The following guide will help facilitate department discussion of the upcoming recruitment drive. It is critical that current firefighters understand that they are not being replaced; that the recruitment drive will help the department gain more resources in order to continue serving the community with excellence.

Background

- Volunteer Alberta contracted to create a Recruitment and Retention Strategy for Volunteer Firefighters in response to AFCA concerns about these issues;
- Report suggests several initiatives that can be undertaken by the AFCA, as well as local departments to improve the recruitment and retention of volunteers;
- The Anytown Fire Department appreciates the commitment current volunteers have shown to the department, and wants input as to what the fire department can do to aid in the recruitment and retention of volunteers;
- The recruitment drive will help the department gain more resources in order to continue a standard of serving the community with excellence, as well as result in reduced demands on current firefighters’ time.

Administer Fire Department Climate Evaluation

- Explain that the climate evaluation will assist the fire department in assessing what current volunteers think about different aspects of the department;
- Responses will be anonymous. The Volunteer Coordinator will be administering the evaluation, including compiling the results. There will be no retribution for honest responses;
- At a future meeting the evaluation results, and possible options for action, will be discussed by the fire department. A plan will then be made for how the department can improve recruitment and retention.
Recruitment Campaign Information

- Inform the current firefighters of the initiatives from the strategy which you are considering implementing;
- Ask for feedback on how firefighters feel these initiatives would be received by the community;
- Ask if anyone would like to help with the implementation of any initiatives;
- Ask if there are additional initiatives which current volunteers think would be effective in increasing retention in the community.

Retention Initiatives

- Thank current firefighters for their service;
- Indicate that keeping current firefighters, because of their experience and excellence is also an important priority for the department;
- Brief firefighters on recruitment initiatives you are considering implementing. Ask for their feedback on whether they believe these initiatives would be effective, or if they properly address the concerns they have;

Ensure the firefighters know that the results of the Fire Department Climate Evaluation will be used to improve retention as well.
The volunteer screening process can be broken down into three phases: pre-hiring, hiring, and managing. Additional information on volunteer screening can be found at: volunteeralberta.ab.ca/screening.

**PRE-HIRING PROCESS**

1. **Determine the risk**

   In this phase, the volunteer fire department must ask itself several questions to help in the volunteer recruitment process. These questions will help the department determine its volunteer needs.
   
   - What are the needs of your community? (i.e. Are there more calls for house fires or field fires? How often are calls received?)
   - What are the department's existing capabilities (or capacity)? Do these capabilities meet the needs of the community?
   - What capabilities should the department improve on? (Think beyond responding to fire calls – does the department need more administrative personnel? Is someone who can speak to school groups or political bodies needed in the department?)
   - Write a clear position description – Volunteers leave when they misunderstand the role, or have different expectations than what it turns out to be. Issues such as these indicate that clear and honest volunteer position descriptions are necessary and need to be shared with the volunteers upfront.

2. **Write a clear position description**

   In all recruitment materials, both the time commitment and other expectations of volunteer firefighters must be clearly communicated. This can be accomplished by engaging volunteer firefighters as spokespeople and by using social media as a recruitment tool. Open and regular communication of the realities of volunteer firefighting will result in applicants who understand and handle the role of a volunteer firefighter.

   Not everyone is well-suited to the role of volunteer firefighter. Recruitment documents should be similar to those for a paid position and should also include a position description which lists the characteristics, attributes, and skills required of volunteer firefighters. Please see the “volunteer firefighter position description” in the accompanying toolkit.

   Recruitment documents, including informational brochures and factsheets, could be developed on a centralized level as part of the branding materials suggested in “Recommended Centralized Initiative 1”. Ideally, branded materials in “template” form would be developed and produced centrally and distributed to fire departments for local use.

3. **Establish a formal recruitment process**

   Volunteer fire departments will have greater long-term success in recruiting and retaining a solid volunteer base if a formal recruitment process is established and followed. This recruitment
process could be similar to that of recruiting an employee as the time invested in, and expectations of, the firefighter are paramount to what an employer would expect.

The Environmental Scan found that small fire departments felt that they could not afford to turn away any applicant; however, this practise contributes to an unhealthy volunteer base – where volunteers are unwilling or unable to fulfill the expectations of volunteer firefighting. Successful practises for screening volunteers, as reported in the Environmental Scan, include:

- Application form & information sheet;
- Interviews with the Fire Chief;
- Interviews with the entire fire department;
- Letters of recommendation (or reference checks);
- Criminal record checks;
- Signing waivers;
- Written tests and/or physical tests.

It has been noted that English language skills are very important for volunteer firefighters and as such, must be included in the screening process. The accompanying Application Form tool includes a section where all applicants rate their English language skills. This skill level may be confirmed through a pre-screening interview conducted over the telephone. A selection of the following tests could be developed centrally by the AFCA or AEMA, and implemented as a part of the volunteer screening process which applicants with English skills lower than “fluent” must complete:

- Alberta Communication Test
- English language skills assessment tests, which can be completed through either the Catholic Social Services Language and Vocational Assessment program, or some Community Adult Learning Councils;

During interviews, repeat questions exactly as asked, but do not rephrase the question to assess comprehension skills.

HIRING PROCESS

1. Use an application form

Use an application form to collect general information, such as name, address, experience, and schooling. See tool: Volunteer Firefighter Application Form.

The application form could also ask for the applicants’ availability, giving multiple options such as ‘weekday - daytime’, ‘weekday - evening’, and ‘weekends’. This practise will enable the facilitation of shiftwork for volunteer firefighters, identified in the Environmental Scan as a practise which increased retention.

2. Conduct Interviews

Interviews are an important part of the volunteer firefighter applicant screening process – they give the department the chance to evaluate the applicants’ suitability and provide insight for the
applicant about the reality of volunteer firefighting. Having a standardized interview form is also recommended. Results should be recorded and kept in a personnel folder for each individual, along with their other application documents.

Conducting multiple interviews has been established as an effective means of volunteer screening. Interviews should take place first with the Fire Chief – to determine if the applicant has, or can obtain, the necessary skills to be an asset to the fire department. One of the best practises in fire departments that were able to successfully retain firefighters was to tailor the volunteer opportunity to the skills and interests of the volunteer. Probing into the applicants’ interests and skills helps establish that the department is interested in working collaboratively with the individual.

If the applicant is successful in the first interview, a second interview should be conducted with senior members of the fire department. This should be an informal interview focusing on whether the applicant will work well with existing department members – areas of questioning could revolve around personality, work ethic, involvement with other community organizations, etc. Please see the Sample Questions in the accompanying toolkit.

3. Follow-up with references

The applicant should be asked to provide at least two references – one of these should be a current employer (when possible). Requiring an employer to be a reference will allow the fire department to determine how the applicant conducts himself/herself in a professional setting as well as provides the employer an opportunity to ask questions about the duties and expectations of volunteer firefighters. It has been demonstrated that regular consultation with employers aids in high retention rates, as it eases employers’ concerns, and helps them recognise the importance of volunteer firefighting to the community. A standardized reference check form (see tools: Application Form and Questions for References) should be created and used and results of reference checks recorded and stored in a personnel folder.

4. Request a police record check and medical or physical examination

As individuals who are traumatized after a fire or accident are vulnerable individuals, at risk for abuse by those in positions of power, a police information check should be done for every volunteer firefighter. If a comprehensive volunteer screening process (such as this one) is in place at a fire department, the cost of volunteer police information checks may be covered by the Government of Alberta under Volunteer Alberta’s Volunteer Police Information Check Program (VPICP) in communities where a fee is charged for this service. For more information about this program, see http://voan.volunteeralberta.ab.ca.

It is important to note that many immigrants feel it is “insulting to be told that a criminal record check would have to be conducted to look into their past for public safety reasons” (Chaisson and Morel). In its research, Volunteer Alberta has found that many immigrants feel that going into a police station for a police record check is intimidating. This builds a strong case for ensuring all volunteers know the purpose of the police information check – to help protect the individuals the department is trying to help. It is important that immigrants know they are not being singled out for police information checks – every department member must undergo the
checks. In interviews, immigrants noted that having someone go with them to the police station to support them through the process is helpful and makes them feel comfortable.

A process should be in place to review police information checks that come back not cleared. This process should be developed by the AFCA, and should detail situations in which an applicant whose police information check is not cleared could be engaged in the department doing other tasks. Convicted felons and other individuals who pose a risk to the fire department should not be engaged as administrative volunteers. Each department must have one individual who is responsible for administering the volunteer police information checks and liaising with applicants while they are undergoing this process. This individual must be well aware of the centrally-created policies regarding engaging applicants whose police information checks come back not cleared.

Other checks specific to the volunteer position should also be utilized. For example, a child welfare check should be utilized when a volunteer is administering the child care program.

In order to ensure the safety of both the applicant and the rest of the fire department, a medical examination may be requested in the absence of physical tests. If the department currently has a physical test process in place, a medical examination is unnecessary. The medical or physical examination should ensure that the applicant is in good enough physical health to safely fight fires. If an applicant is not in good enough physical condition to safely be a volunteer firefighter, he or she should still be engaged in the department by doing administrative tasks.

MANAGING VOLUNTEERS

1. Conduct an orientation and training session

Training is an important part of any volunteer-engaging program, especially volunteer firefighting. Once an applicant has been accepted as a volunteer firefighter, a multi-step orientation should take place, consisting of:

- Orientation to the department – layout, location of key materials, policies and procedures, introduction to other volunteer firefighters and support staff;
- Buddy system – pair the new recruit with a mentor – someone to help them along, answer any questions, and generally help the recruit feel welcome in the department. The roles of these two individuals should be as similar as possible;
- Spousal Support – Spousal support was cited as a major obstacle to volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention. As the volunteer begins work at the volunteer fire department, when necessary a spousal support mentor should be offered to the spouse of the volunteer as a means of easing any concerns the spouse may have. Effort should also be made during this time to involve the spouse in the operation of the fire department;
- Safety training;
- Role-specific training – for a firefighter this would consist of Lakeland College Emergency Training, for an administrative volunteer, this would consist of training regarding any administrative duties not taught by the mentor;
- Throughout the orientation, the Fire Chief should maintain an ‘open-door’ policy, allowing the new recruit to discuss any questions or concerns he/she may have. It is also important to keep records and information about all firefighters in their personnel file.
2. **Supervise and evaluate**

The buddy system is one form of supervision. After an initial probationary period (perhaps three months, or until the mentor has transferred enough knowledge to the applicant), the mentor should evaluate the new recruit. This evaluation should focus on the applicant’s suitability to – and skill concerning - the assigned role, and additional training or information which the applicant may need to receive. If the buddy feels that the individual is not enjoying his/her role, or for other reasons may become ‘toxic’ to the department, an intervention should take place, where the Fire Chief discusses these concerns and tries to alter the volunteers’ role so as to keep the volunteer still actively engaged with the department.

On top of the probationary period created by the buddy system, a general probationary period could be instituted as well, with formal performance evaluation done by the Fire Chief. Standardized forms should also be used in this process and results recorded.

Volunteer hours for all volunteers should be tracked, both for evaluation and grant-application purposes. There are several ways to keep track of volunteer hours including:

- Record all volunteer hours in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Enter all recorded volunteer hours into this spreadsheet;
- Have a sign-in sheet at meetings and training events requiring a signature and record the length of time of the meeting or training event;
- Record all volunteers present at an emergency response and the length of time the response took;
- To record volunteerism at the fire hall, have volunteers write down what they did and have a witness sign the volunteerism record.

3. **Follow-up with new recruits**

Direct and open contact between new recruits and the Fire Chief should be maintained, especially throughout the probationary period. This contact should be two-way in nature – the Fire Chief should ensure that the new recruit is satisfied with the volunteer experience, and the new recruit should be consulted for feedback in regard to the processes and structure of the fire department as the ‘new eyes’ may see opportunities for efficiencies that may not have been realized before.
Become a Volunteer Firefighter with the Anytown Fire Department

You are …

... a team player
... a quick thinker
... a natural leader
... an excellent communicator
... able to thrive in high-stress situations
... older than 18
... ready for a challenge

Your mission: To enhance Anytown through quick response to emergencies, fire safety education, and support of the fire departments’ other activities.

You have:

- A Canadian class 5 drivers license
- Grade 12 education certificate or equivalent
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills. Communication testing will be included in the selection process.
- Ability to understand and communicate in English (written and oral)
- Excellent physical condition (physical tests or medical checks are required)
- Current Standard First Aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) Level C certificates
- Other requirements

Your responsibilities:

- Work as part of a team to respond to emergency situations
- Protect citizens in times of crisis
- Rescue and evacuate people from hazardous environments
- Perform the duties of emergency responder, fire suppression, and public education as assigned
- Learn the trades of emergency responder including different jobs such as hose and pump operator
- Respond to a broad range of emergency situations including motor vehicle accidents
- Provide pre-hospital care for victims
- Be a community role model
- Responsible for upgrading and maintaining skills/knowledge and physical requirements
- Maintain fire station and the upkeep of firefighting equipment

Your environment:

- Fast paced and ever-changing
- Team-oriented

Estimated hours: average number hours per week

Interested? Learn more at: www.anytown.com/fire or 780-000-0000

Not your calling? The Anytown Fire Department has a variety of other volunteer opportunities.
Volunteer Firefighting in *Anytown*: Facts for Applicants

- Alberta has over 430 fire departments. Of these, approximately 95% depend entirely on volunteer firefighters.
- Alberta has more than 10,000 volunteer firefighters – this is approximately 3 times the number of Alberta’s total career firefighters.
- The Fire Chief of the *Anytown* Fire Department is John Smith, who has been firefighting for *number* years. Interesting fact about John: prior to being involved in the fire department, John taught self-defense classes.
- The fire department uses a XYZ, model 10 Fire Truck, a jaws of life machine, list other equipment.
- On average, the department receives *number* calls per month. This includes: *number* structural fire calls, *number* other emergency response calls, and other statistics about the types of calls.
- The fire hall hosts approximately *number* events per year for the community.
- Before being allowed to respond to emergencies, each firefighter must complete *number* of hours, levels, or courses of training. In total there are *number* levels of training which volunteer firefighters are able to complete.
- Approximately *number* hours are spent on training per week.
- Benefits of volunteer firefighting in *Anytown* include: discounts at the grocery store, free immunization shots, other perks your department offers.
- Personal benefits gained from volunteer firefighting include: a rich volunteer experience which looks great on a resume, the improvement of interpersonal, team building, leadership, and crisis management skills, and the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way to the community.
- Apart from responding to calls, most volunteer firefighters spend *number* hours at the hall, maintaining equipment and performing other necessary duties.
- Special initiatives of the *Anytown* Fire Department include: the Junior Firefighter program, Learn Not to Burn educational program, emergency rescue demonstrations, other initiatives or events the fire hall puts on.
- More information about the *Anytown* Fire Department can be found online at department website, by phone at phone number, or by visiting the fire hall, located at address, hours of operation.
Thank-you for your interest in volunteering with the Anytown Fire Department! Ensure you have read all informational materials before filling out this application form. By filling out this application form, you are committing yourself to take part in the applicant screening process which includes interviews, reference checks, police record checks, and physical tests. Please note: failure to agree to screening procedures may disqualify applicant.

Information collected will only be seen by the Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chief, and Volunteer Coordinator (if applicable).

Position Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position applying for:</th>
<th>How did you learn about this position?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Did anyone refer you to the fire department? If so, who? |

Personal Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Given Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Home Phone</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cell Phone</th>
<th>Business Phone</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mailing Address</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergency Contact Name</th>
<th>Emergency Contact Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drivers License Number</th>
<th>Drivers License Class (and special endorsements)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please rate your spoken English language skills:

- □ Basic (can talk in English about simple things and familiar topics)
- □ Beginner (can have simple conversations about unfamiliar topics in English)
- □ Intermediate (can have detailed conversations about unfamiliar topics in English)
- □ Fluent (obtained high school diploma in Canada, or can have rapid, detailed conversations in English about unfamiliar topics)

Please rate your written English language skills:

- □ Basic (can write in English about simple things and familiar topics)
- □ Beginner (can write about unfamiliar topics in English)
- □ Intermediate (can write about unfamiliar topics in English)
- □ Fluent (obtained high school diploma in Canada, or can write in detail about unfamiliar topics in English)

### Employment Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present place of employment</th>
<th>Employer Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Employer Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your regular hours of employment?</td>
<td>Availability during employment times?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General availability:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Weekdays (morning/afternoon)</td>
<td>☐ Weeknights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Weekends</td>
<td>☐ Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

May we contact this employer?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous place of employment</th>
<th>Employer Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Employer Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

May we contact this employer?
Police Information Check

Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offence for which you have not received a pardon?
☐ No  ☐ Yes, describe:

Do we have your permission to submit your name for a police information check?
☐ No  ☐ Yes

Driver Abstract Check

Do we have your permission to conduct a driver abstract check?
☐ No  ☐ Yes

Volunteer Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact Person</td>
<td>Contact Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of involvement</td>
<td>May we contact this organization?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact Person</td>
<td>Contact Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of involvement</td>
<td>May we contact this organization?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any other volunteer or extracurricular (ex/ sports) involvement?
Related Skills & Experience

Do you have previous firefighting or emergency response experience?

☐ No  ☐ Yes, please detail

Do you have previous military or police experience?

☐ No  ☐ Yes, please detail

Other experiences that may apply to this position?

☐ No  ☐ Yes, please detail

Please indicate your skill level in the following areas on this scale:
1 – A trade, licence, recognized certificate or extensive experience
2 – Advanced skills level and/or post secondary courses or apprenticeships
3 – Familiarity acquired through personal experience, high school courses, or related training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing apparatus or scuba diving</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building construction or design</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blueprint reading</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firefighting tasks</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue procedures</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis management</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public speaking</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events coordination</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio communication</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team building</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Certifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certification</th>
<th>Expiry date</th>
<th>Emergency Medical Responder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)</td>
<td></td>
<td>□ No □ Yes, level __________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Aid</td>
<td></td>
<td>□ No □ Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defibrillation</td>
<td></td>
<td>□ No □ Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other medical response training</td>
<td></td>
<td>□ No □ Yes, please detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relevant certificates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reference Check Authorization

I ________________________________ authorize <community/area> Fire Department to contact the persons or organizations listed below for the purposes of obtaining reference information including information in my personnel file(s). These persons are authorized to disclose such information.

Personal References

These references are those that you have met in your personal life, and can include family, friends, teachers, and colleagues (not direct supervisors).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Phone number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Professional References

These references are those that you have met through work (direct supervisors) and volunteer experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Length of involvement/employment</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Strategy & Toolkit
Prepared by Volunteer Alberta for the Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association
Personal information on this Volunteer Application is being collected under the authority of the Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPP) Section 33(c). It will be used to determine your suitability, eligibility or qualifications for volunteerism. Questions about the use or collection of this information should be directed to John Smith, Volunteer Coordinator at 780-000-0000.

I certify that the information given on, or attached to, this application is correct. I understand that any falsification of statements, misrepresentation, deliberate omission, or concealment of information may be considered just cause for immediate dismissal.

I understand the information provided in this form will be used to assess my suitability for the position of Volunteer Firefighter.

I authorize Anytown Fire Department to contact my previous employers as indicated, to obtain a police information check (if agreed to on page 2), and to obtain and review my medical examination.

__________________________________________  __________________________
Applicant Signature  Date
Interview Tips:

- Ask the applicant if it is okay for you to take notes during at the beginning of the interview;
- Whether you conduct the interview in a formal or informal setting, ensure that you take short notes about how the candidate answers the questions, as well as what the candidate said;
- Don’t talk too much, give the applicant time to think and fully answer;
- Record information about appearance, interaction with the interviewer (and any others he/she might have come in contact with), and communication skills;
- Paraphrase the applicants responses to clarify and ensure proper understanding;
- Use active listening techniques such as slight forward lean, eye contact, open body language, and asking follow-up questions which give you more information about what the candidate has said;
- Leave time between interviews or other meetings (about 10 to 15 minutes) to make notes on general observations about the applicant;
- Minimize distractions during the interview (by forwarding phone calls, turning off the computer monitor, close the door, etc.).

Tips for Asking Questions:

- Ask open-ended questions which allow the candidate to elaborate on his/her past experiences. These questions begin with words like: how, when, where, which, and what;
- Ask for “situation, action, results” answers where the interviewee gives a brief overview of the situation, the action taken, and the result of the action;
- Consider the order of the questions you’re asking – you will get more information from the candidate if you group the questions by topic;
- The accompanying sample interview question sheets provide base questions which can be asked in interviews. Where appropriate, ask follow-up questions to probe the candidate’s response.
You may not ask about an applicant’s:

1. Race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, sexual orientation, marital status;
   • However, you can ask whether the applicant has reached a specific age (for example, “Are you 14?” or “Are you 21?”), since minimum age is a criterion for acceptance;

2. Height, weight;
   • However, you can require all applicants to complete physical tests, or medical checks;

3. Number of children, childcare responsibilities;

4. English language skills;
   • However, you may ask what languages are read, spoken, or written fluently by the applicant, if the volunteer position requires such skills, and as long as an applicant is not asked to indicate how the skills were acquired;
   • You may require all applicants to take written and oral language tests;
   • One technique used by Edmonton Police Services when screening immigrant applicants is that in interviews, questions are not rephrased (but the original question may be repeated);

5. Educational achievement;
   • However, you may ask the applicant’s highest completed level of education;

6. Discharge from the military;

7. Indicators of economic status (social club memberships, etc.);

8. Personal property;

9. Spouse or partner;

10. Physical limitations or disabilities;
   • However, you may require all applicants to undergo physical tests or medical tests.

11. Political affiliation.
Thank the applicant for meeting with you and explain the purpose of the interview – to ensure the volunteer is aware of the responsibilities and commitments of being a volunteer firefighter, and to allow the assessment of whether the applicant is a good fit for the position. Interviews are a part of a “risk management” approach your department is applying to the recruitment of volunteer firefighters, and are meant to facilitate open and candid two-way communication.

**Question 1:** What do you know about the fire department? What made you apply?

**Question 2:** What do you consider to be your biggest strength? Why do you think this would be an asset to the fire department?

**Question 3:** What would you like to gain from volunteering with the fire department?

**Question 4:** How much time per week do you expect to commit to volunteering with the fire department?

**Question 5:** Can you describe a stressful situation you have been in? How do you deal with stress at work? How do you get rid of stress when you are at home?

**Question 6:** Community involvement is important to the fire department – are you involved with any other organizations in the community? If so, why did you choose those organizations to be involved with?

**Question 7:** The fire department is a team-based organization. Can you tell me about a time when you had a conflict with a team member or co-worker? Please describe the situation, the actions you took, and the end result.

**Question 8:** Please tell me about your favourite supervisor – what made you enjoy working with this individual?

**Question 9:** Tell me about a time when you had a conflict with a supervisor – how did the conflict come about and how was it resolved?

**Question 10:** When you have entered a new workplace in the past, how did you go about creating relationships with your co-workers?

**Question 11:** Tell me about a time when you spearheaded a project – what actions did you take that were successful in getting the project completed?

**Question 12:** Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?

**Question 13:** How would you react in this situation: The organizer of an event calls in sick – on the day of the event – and hasn’t left any written record of what needs to be done. You’re in charge now-what actions would you take to ensure the event is run successfully?
Question 14: How would you react in this situation: You are placed in charge of a team of people responsible for completing a project on a very tight timeline; however, you do not have a relationship with any team members. How do you build a team atmosphere, delegate tasks, and inspire the team to meet a seemingly impossible deadline?

Question 15: How comfortable are you in confined spaces? How comfortable are you with heights?

Question 16: How will this volunteer opportunity fit in with your current employment? Have you spoken to your employer about being involved with the fire department?

Question 17: Have you spoken to your partner about this volunteer opportunity?

Question 18: Do you have any questions for me about either this role or the fire department in general?

Thank the interviewee for his or her time and give a timeline of when they will hear if they have been accepted.
This interview could be conducted with a hiring committee of three people (or as the
departments resources allow).

Thank the applicant for meeting with you and explain the purpose of the interview – to introduce
the applicant to several members of the fire department, and ensure the volunteer is a good fit
for the fire department.

Have each member of the fire department describe their role within the fire department and talk
about how or why they got involved with the fire department.

**Question 1:** Tell us about yourself – why would you like to be involved with the fire department?

**Question 2:** What attracted you to the fire department?

**Question 3:** Based on what you know about the fire department – what skills and attributes do
you feel you can bring to the department?

**Question 4:** Describe three of your greatest strengths? Please tell us why you think these
strengths are important to the fire department.

**Question 5:** What are your goals for the next 2 years? How will being a member of the fire
department contribute to the achievement of these goals?

**Question 6:** Teamwork is vital to the fire department. Please describe a time when you worked
in a team – what challenges did you face and what were the benefits, if any, of working in the
team?

**Question 7:** Have you discussed joining the fire department with your family? How do they feel
about it?

**Question 8:** Do you have any questions for us, either about the fire department or about our
roles?

Thank the interviewee for his or her time and give a timeline of when they will hear if they have
been accepted.
When a volunteer firefighter leaves your department, an exit interview will help you identify what your department is doing well and what can be improved upon. Exit interviews are a critical tool for improving recruitment and retention for your department. Below are some sample questions which you may ask during the exit interview. Generally, exit interviews should not exceed 30 minutes in length and should be conducted either by the Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chief, or the Volunteer Coordinator.

**Question 1:** What were your initial reasons for joining the fire department?

**Question 2:** Did your experience with the department meet the expectations you had before joining? Please detail why or why not.

**Question 3:** What did you enjoy most about your involvement with the fire department? What does the department do well?

**Question 4:** What did you enjoy least about the fire department? What areas can the department improve in?

**Question 5:** What aspects of the fire department have improved the most since you joined?

**Question 6:** Why did you decide to leave the organization? Did anything trigger this decision (an incident, an event, etc.), or was it a gradual decision (time commitment, money, recognition, etc.)?

**Question 7:** Did anyone in the fire department discriminate against you, harass you, or cause you to feel unwelcome? (Follow up if yes.)

**Question 8:** Do you feel the programs, events, and initiatives of the department meet the community’s needs? How could we improve these areas?

**Question 9:** Did social events make you feel included in the department, and enhance your relationship with other members of the department?

**Question 10:** Did you feel valued and recognized by the department and the community? If not, what can we do to make our volunteers feel appreciated?

**Question 11:** Did you feel your other commitments and responsibilities (employment, family, involvement with other groups) were respected by the fire department?

**Question 12:** Were emergency operations well managed? Did training prepare you for the realities of emergency situations?

**Question 13:** If you could only improve one aspect of the fire department, what would it be?
Question 14: Is there anything else which would assist in the improvement of the department, especially with regards to our ability to recruit and retain volunteers?

Ensure you thank the applicant for their service to your fire department – tell them their involvement was appreciated not only by you, but by the community as a whole. Cite areas where the firefighter improved, as well as some of his/her strengths. If the firefighter is leaving the department due to relocation, give the firefighter information for how he or she can become involved with the volunteer fire department in their new community (if applicable).
Before contacting any references, ensure you have received written permission to contact these references and ask for information (see tool: Volunteer Firefighter Application Form).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Name of applicant:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of reference:</td>
<td>Reference check done by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference phone number:</td>
<td>Relationship to applicant:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time known applicant for:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Questions for Personal References

**Question 1:** How long have you known this individual?

**Question 2:** Would you say this individual is community-minded?

**Question 3:** Describe this individual’s interpersonal skills.

**Question 4:** Which organizations or events has this individual been involved in within the last year?

**Question 5:** How does this individual cope with stress?

**Question 6:** Has this person mentioned involvement with the volunteer fire department to you? Please describe how he/she explained his/her potential involvement to you.
Questions for Professional References

Question 1: What were the start and finish dates of the volunteer placement or employment? How would you describe his/her overall performance?

Question 2: What position(s) did the individual hold? What duties did these involve?

Question 3: Past employers/ volunteer positions: What was the individual’s reason for leaving this position?

Question 4: Please rate the individual on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest score) for the following skills and characteristics. Please explain where necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to adapt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to teach others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to learn quickly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good judgement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Question 5: Based on what you know about volunteer firefighting, would this individual be successful in the role of a volunteer firefighter?
Ms. Jane Smith
Mailing Address Line 1
Mailing Address Line 2
Anytown, Alberta   Postal Code
Day – Month - Year
Anytown Fire Department
Mailing Address Line 1
Mailing Address Line 2
Anytown, Alberta   Postal Code

Dear Ms. Smith:

Thank-you for taking the time to interview with the Anytown Fire Department – we certainly enjoyed learning more about you. We are pleased to offer you the position of volunteer firefighter at our department. Congratulations!

Please come to the fire department at time on date for orientation. If this time does not work with your schedule, please contact, Bob Jones, Volunteer Coordinator at 780 – 000 – 0000 to arrange an alternate orientation date.

The fire department uses a “buddy system” as part of the orientation process. You will be paired with Sally Hansen, who will help you get accustomed to the fire department, and begin your training in role-specific duties. Sally Hansen will be your main contact during the probationary period of number months.

Please find enclosed the training schedule for the next few months. As per our discussion about expectations of the fire department, you are expected to attend these training events. We look forward to seeing you at orientation on date. If you have any questions beforehand, please contact either myself or Sid Taylor, administrative assistant at 780 – 000 – 0000.

Thank-you for considering being part of the Anytown Fire Department!

Sincerely,

John Smith,
Fire Chief
Anytown Fire Department

cc. Personnel file: Jane Smith
Ms. Jane Smith
Mailing Address Line 1
Mailing Address Line 2
Anytown, Alberta Postal Code
Day – Month - Year

Anytown Fire Department
Mailing Address Line 1
Mailing Address Line 2
Anytown, Alberta Postal Code

Dear Ms. Smith:

Thank you for taking the time to interview with the Anytown Fire Department for the position of volunteer firefighter. Your enthusiasm about responding to emergencies in our community was impressive, but unfortunately you were not selected to join our fire department as a firefighter. There are many other volunteer positions at the Anytown Fire Department such as administrative positions, event planning positions, childcare positions, and other volunteer positions in your department. If you are interested in any of these positions, please contact Bob Jones, Volunteer Coordinator.

Anytown Fire Department will keep your application on file for X years. We encourage you to consider re-submitting your application in the future.

Sincerely,

John Smith
Fire Chief
Anytown Fire Department

cc. Personnel file: Jane Smith
The following areas are to be assessed by the volunteer’s supervisor. These areas demonstrate competencies which are necessary to involvement in the fire department.

1 = Almost never 2 = Seldom 3 = Sometimes 4 = Frequently 5 = Almost always

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Skills</th>
<th>Skill Level</th>
<th>Learning &amp; Teaching</th>
<th>Skill Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Demonstrates effective oral communication skills</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>• Seeks informal opportunities to learn (mentoring, etc.)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is willing to speak up, communicate information and ask for clarification</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>• Shares knowledge with other members of fire department</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listens to feedback and acts to improve</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>• Actively involved in efforts to teach public safety information</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exhibits appropriate attitude</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Solving/Decision Making</th>
<th>Skill Level</th>
<th>Technical Skills</th>
<th>Skill Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Analyzes situations and takes appropriate action quickly</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>• Has the technical skills required for the position</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offers creative solutions to problems</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>• Is willing to enhance technical skills</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Flexible and adapts to change</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>• Uses technology to perform work efficiently</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uses good judgment and establishes priorities</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>• Shows up to, and is actively engaged in, training events</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maintains agreed shifts</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Skill Level</td>
<td>On the Scene</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Makes a positive contribution to the fire department team</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>• Responds to calls in a timely manner</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Resolves interpersonal conflicts in a timely and appropriate manner</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>• Uses equipment and tools appropriately</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pitches in to help others</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>• Follows safety procedures and guidelines</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Involved in social and team-building events put on by department</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>• Interacts with victims and bystanders appropriately</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Level of Performance</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Outstanding</td>
<td>Major strengths are:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Very good</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Satisfactory</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Marginal</td>
<td>Areas for improvement:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other supervisor comments**

I have discussed this evaluation with the volunteer □ Yes, Date_____________ □ No

**Volunteer’s area of interest for future growth**

**Plan for improvement**

Original in personnel file, date___________________
This orientation guide can be used by the person orienting the new recruit to the department. This guide serves as a checklist, and works well with the buddy system detailed in the volunteer screening section. If used with the buddy system, the initial probationary system may be considered complete when each item on this checklist has been covered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Completed?</th>
<th>Individual responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome &amp; introduction</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Department tour &amp; location of key materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction to members of department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Area of coverage</td>
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<tr>
<td>History of department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date established</td>
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<tr>
<td>Milestones and achievements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role of department in community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Department initiatives and activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paperwork</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal information</td>
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<td>Emergency contact information</td>
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<td>Health card information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction to department benefit package</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department support services</td>
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<td>Counselling, Critical Incident Stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spousal support services</td>
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<td>Childcare services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policies and procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting attendance expectations, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Code of conduct</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Overview of equipment and apparatus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribute personal protective equipment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Review the use of PPE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrate use of public education and</td>
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<tr>
<td>prevention equipment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remaining questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback on orientation</td>
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As part of the orientation process, the fire department should have a buddy system in place which pairs a new recruit with a volunteer who has been with the fire department for several years. This system is one way to provide role-specific training to new recruits while alleviating some of the orientation work otherwise be done by either the Fire Chief or Volunteer Coordinator. Below is a step-by-step guide for how to create the buddy system:

1. Recruit the buddy from the pool of volunteers who have been with the fire department for several years. These individuals should be friendly, approachable, and willing to pass on their experiences and knowledge.

2. Assign buddies by matching characteristics as closely as possible. Is your new firefighter a single mother? Assign a buddy who can empathize with her situation and share her experiences. When

3. Introduce the buddy’s and act as a liaison during the orientation process. Ease the transition by introducing the buddy’s, starting conversations between them, and creating a checklist of training activities that need to be done as part of orientation.

4. Conduct a check-in with the buddy and new recruit at one, three, and six month intervals to ensure there is a good relationship. Questions you could ask to find this out are:
   - How do you feel about your relationship with your partner?
   - How often do you meet to fulfil the orientation requirements? Is this often enough
   - Recruit: Do you feel you can approach the buddy at any time to ask questions?
   - Recruit: Has the buddy made you feel welcome to, and included in, the fire hall?
   - Buddy: Do you think you have been able to provide valuable information and perspectives to the new recruit?
   - Buddy: How do you think the new recruit has transitioned into the fire department?

5. After the agreed upon initial probationary period (one in which the buddy is responsible for orientation training) has passed, formally thank the buddy and express the fire department’s appreciation for the work that the buddy has done in training the new recruit and making him/her feel welcome to the department.
A firefighter mentor is someone who is experienced in firefighting and willing to share this experience by “showing the ropes” to a new recruit. Mentoring is an important aspect of the fire department – it orients the recruit to the department in a way that a one-day orientation session can’t. It teaches the recruit how the fire department works while they experience it for themselves. Mentoring helps improve retention as it is a powerful way of welcoming a new recruit to the department by teaching skills, listening to their perspectives, answering questions, and helping him or her get to know other members of the department.

Here are some tips on the role of a mentor:

- Follow a guideline (see tool: New Recruit Orientation Guide) or ask your Fire Chief or Volunteer Coordinator what specific areas they would like you to teach the new recruit about;
- Mentoring is more than giving advice – it is teaching the new recruit how the fire department operates;
- Mentoring gives the new recruit the opportunity to ask questions – ensure you use language to encourage the recruit to ask questions. (For example, don’t say “that was a dumb question”);
- Occasionally check to make sure the new recruit understands what you have said. Try asking, “does that make sense?” or asking a recruit to repeat an exercise without mentors help;
- Tip the new recruit off as to resources (online or print) which are useful information sources;
- Don’t do everything for the new recruit – walk him or her through procedures instead of making him or her watch;
- Mentoring is not a one-off action, it requires a significant time commitment on behalf of both the mentor and the new recruit, make sure you are able to accept this time commitment. It may help to set a schedule for when the mentoring will take place;
- Introduce the new recruit to other members in the department;
- Help the mentor understand the language (abbreviations, etc.) which firefighters use;
- Be willing to share your own experience as a firefighter. This includes both the good and the bad, but do try not to dwell too much on bad experiences;
- When giving feedback use a “sandwich” approach: talk about what the recruit is good at, talk about areas the recruit could improve in, and finish with a positive comment about the recruit’s progress;
- Accept that personalities may clash – don’t be afraid to tell the Fire Chief or Volunteer Coordinator if there are problems in your relationship with the new recruit;
- If you plan on mentoring in the future, it may be useful to write down what you learned from your mentoring experience after each new recruit you mentor;
- Make a point of regularly asking the new recruit for feedback on how you are explaining different aspects of the department; this will help you grow as a mentor.
The following list of tips and best practices has been summarized and compiled from Phase 1: Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Environmental Scan, as well as resources developed and collected by Volunteer Alberta – a provincial expert in supporting organizations to successfully engage volunteers. Additional Volunteer Alberta resources can be found online at volunteeralberta.ab.ca/resources_and_links/resources.asp.

### Tips & Best Practices: Liaising with Employers

**Be proactive.** Talk to potential employers before their employees express an interest in volunteer firefighting. Employers who are supportive of volunteer firefighting can serve as a firefighter recruiter by encouraging their employees to join the fire department. Communications with employers should:

- Explain the importance of the volunteer fire department to the community – including the fact that it creates infrastructure which attracts new residents
- Explain the role of volunteer firefighters – including training, call frequency, and personal development opportunities
- Use factsheets to demonstrate the realities of volunteer firefighting – including the number of volunteer firefighters in the community, the number of calls per month, the average length of each call, etc.
- Discuss and clarify the expectations of both the fire hall and the employer as they relate to volunteer firefighters
- Give the employer real examples (localized, if possible) of how the skills gained from volunteer firefighting apply to their employees’ various work situations

**Ensure frequent, candid communication** with employers whose employees are current members of the fire department. This includes:

- Informing employers about upcoming events (both internal and for the entire community) the fire hall is hosting or is involved with
- Informing employers about upcoming training opportunities
- Using factsheets to demonstrate the realities of volunteer firefighting – including the number of volunteer firefighters in the community, the number of calls per month, the average length of each call, etc.
- Discussing and clarifying the expectations of both the fire hall and the employer as they relate to volunteer firefighters
- Publicizing that the Fire Chief or Deputy Fire Chief is available to talk to employers (if the Fire Chief/Deputy Fire Chief has limited office hours, ensure the hours are publicized)
- Writing meaningful and timely letters of thanks to the employer at various times throughout the year, and conducting an annual employer appreciation event
- Giving employers free advertising by including the business name/logo on some fire department advertising materials
If the department has enough firefighters, **use a shift work system** which tries to accommodate the firefighters work schedules. Inform employers about this possible option, framing it as a tool that helps employers maintain the constancy of their employee base. This may encourage employers to support volunteer firefighting more actively.

Use an **employer welcome package** when a business’ employee joins the fire department to ensure the employer has accurate information about volunteer firefighting.

Have a designated **employer liaison** (or several) at the fire hall. This may be the Fire Chief, or it may be a committee of volunteer firefighters. Establish duties for the liaisons; including greeting employers, making introductions and making efforts to ensure their active involvement at events.

Ensure the business benefits from employee volunteerism by **publicly recognizing** supportive employers through:

- Signage and logo placement at events
- Advertising in fliers, coffee readers, and other fire hall publications
- Plaques of recognition
- Thanking employers biannually in the community newspaper or local radio
- Allow supportive employers to make a brief statement at department events about their support for volunteer firefighters. Rotate this privilege to ensure that this is not the same employer at every event.
Tips & Best Practices: Liaising with Families

Embrace family members as part of the department’s “extended family” by including them in events, helping family members meet each other and develop friendships, having family-inclusive events, and recognizing the need to make allowances for familial commitments.

Facilitate and promote a departmental child care plan – this may be an opportunity to recruit spouses and family members as volunteers for the fire department.

Reassure families (especially spouses) of the safety of their loved ones through:
- Welcome packages & family orientation events
- Ongoing information packages and updates
- An open-door policy for families to discuss concerns and issues
- A spousal support network where spouses can discuss their experiences with, and concerns about, volunteer firefighting
- Engaging entire families in the fire department by considering them for committees such as event planning committees. Children can be engaged at these events by helping to organize or run various activities
Tips & Best Practices: Volunteer Management

Establish a Volunteer Appreciation Committee of 3 – 5 people who assist the Volunteer Coordinator with volunteer appreciation (and therefore retention).

**State the expectations** the fire department has of its firefighters upfront during the interview process.

Use a **“buddy” or mentor system** to orient new recruits to the fire department

Communicate that there are **other volunteer opportunities** with the fire department besides firefighting – including childcare and administrative positions – in the event that the volunteer feels firefighting is not for him or her. If an applicant does not seem to be the right “fit” for the department, refer him or her to other volunteer opportunities within the community – this will help establish relationships with other community groups.

**Use agendas** for meetings and circulate them (and the accompanying materials) beforehand. This demonstrates that the Fire Chief is prepared for the meetings, gives firefighters the opportunity to think about the topics beforehand, and helps identify when meetings are not needed. For example, if there is only one agenda item, and it is not time-sensitive, it is a better use of volunteer’s time to cancel the meeting and discuss the item at the next meeting. Put important issues early in the agenda to allow people to deal with the item while they are “fresh”.

If meetings last for more than one hour, **schedule a 5 – 10 minute break** every hour to allow attendees to recharge, check their e-mail/phone calls, etc. **Set a time limit** for meetings and stick to it; this shows you respect the volunteer’s commitment to be there and acknowledge that their time is valuable. Consider this time limit when creating the agenda and scheduling meetings. Also assign a time limit (or estimate) to each agenda item. Time budgeting takes practice – inform volunteers that you may initially over- or under-estimate the amount of time any agenda item will take, but that in the long run time budgeting will improve the efficiency of the meetings.

**Assign the following roles** to individuals (these responsibilities could be rotating to make every volunteer feel included):

- **Time keeper** (duty is to observe the time and compare it to the agenda. If the time spent on any particular agenda item exceeds the budgeted time, this individual must wrap up the discussion and table the item until a later date).
- **Scribe** (record comments and discussion, this individual generally does not take part in the discussion so it may be worthwhile to recruit a scribe from outside of the fire department).
- **Facilitator** (this may also be the chair – role is to facilitate discussion by introducing topics and keeping discussion and comments on topic. The facilitator should also encourage comments from everyone and not allow one person to dominate the discussion).
Try to **individualize the roles** and responsibilities of volunteers to their interests and areas of expertise.

**Schedule** training and recognition **events with other fire departments** in the region. In the Recruitment and Retention Strategy, it was recommended that the AFCA develop an intranet for Fire Chiefs – this could be used as a tool for connecting to fire departments in the region to organize group training events.

**Let firefighters know they are appreciated.** If the department receives compliments or thank-you notes, ensure that the firefighters are aware of this – if it is a card, post it in the hall. If it is an e-mail or given verbally, tell the firefighters at the next meeting.

Conduct regular climate surveys (see tool: *Fire Department Climate Evaluation*) to encourage a culture of continuous improvement and to ensure that volunteers feel well-supported by the department. Establish and maintain volunteer firefighter monitoring and evaluation systems.

Hold events for volunteers and firefighters that don’t revolve around firefighting, but instead build a team atmosphere.
Tips & Best Practices: Using Community Engagement as Recruitment

Position members of the fire department as community leaders and role models in communications (especially earned media activities).

Conduct targeted engagement with select community groups as detailed in the Recruitment and Retention Strategy. Let community groups hold meetings in the fire hall to help create connections between community groups.

Have “open house” events which help the community understand the role of firefighters. Attend trade fairs with professional materials in hand – give visitors an experiential understanding of the fire hall by letting them interact with firefighters, giving demonstrations, and providing written information (which directs interested individuals to the AFCA website for more information and to apply to be a firefighter).

Use formal speaking engagements to demonstrate the professionalism of the department.
**Tips & Best Practices: Volunteer Recruitment**

Set an annual department-specific volunteer recruitment goal.

Appoint someone as a Volunteer Coordinator. This individual may not necessarily be a volunteer firefighter, but would be in charge of recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Establish a Volunteer Recruitment Committee of 3 – 5 people to assist the Volunteer Coordinator with recruitment.

Engage in targeted recruitment of those already involved in other community groups. The 2007 *Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating* indicates that 78% of all volunteer hours come from 25% of the volunteers. Ensure that time commitment and role responsibilities are clearly communicated in recruitment materials. Obtain written permission to communicate with applicants employers to assess supportiveness before accepting the applicant.

Highlight that there are a variety of volunteer opportunities with the fire department – including administrative and childcare roles. This will encourage those who are not interested in volunteer firefighting to apply for involvement with the fire department and ease the time commitment of other volunteers.

Show the realities of volunteer firefighting by asking volunteer firefighters to be spokespeople in your community. This includes the use of social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube) to document and share what it is like to be a volunteer firefighter.
May 20, 2010

Salutation. First Name Last Name
Title or description
Mailing Address Line 1
Mailing Address Line 2
Anytown, AB   T0T 0T0

Subject: The topic you are writing about

Dear Salutation. Last name:

Briefly detail why you are writing to the dignitary. Begin with "We are writing to update you…". Create interest in your letter by tying the subject matter to the local benefits received by it (ex/ fire safety training, professional development, community pride, community safety, etc.).

Use several (short) paragraphs to detail general benefits the community gets from the fire hall. Pay considerable to and effort when crafting this section about the local fire department. The content serves as both an introduction to - and reminder about – the role of the fire department in your community. This information can be re-inserted in letters to all dignitaries. There are several main ideas to highlight in this section. Facts about the fire department or volunteer firefighting in Alberta may be helpful to emphasize the benefits the fire department brings to the local community. It is important to profile the fire department as more than a fire rescue service, but as a community group which actively contributes to the quality of life, education, and social capital of the entire community. It would be appropriate to highlight a few important words or phrases with bold-type.

Name of specific event, initiative, or request

Write a one line summary of the event, initiative, or request including its purpose and how you would like the dignitary to be involved. Provide further details about the event, initiative, or request. Here are some tips for writing about each:

Events:

- Give necessary information about what will happen at the event (and where it is taking place) - include a concise itinerary of the event.
- If other groups have helped organize the event, name these groups. State who will be attending the event, and (when possible) include an estimate of the number of people attending.
- Publicity opportunity information – if any media will be attending, ensure that you include this information. If you would like the dignitary to be involved in the event (making a speech, cutting a ribbon, etc.), include this request near the beginning of this section. If you do ask the dignitary to make a speech, ensure enough information is included for him/her to do so.
- Detail the significance of the event – giving information about why attendance would be beneficial to the dignitary.
Initiative

- Briefly describe the initiative and the direct and indirect beneficiaries.
- State your request precisely for the dignitary. For instance, if you are writing to an MLA, or other government official, you might be asking them to voice support for a particular initiative. If you are writing to a leader of a community group, you might be asking them to forward the information to their members.
- Describe the history of the initiative, including detail if it was created in response to certain requests or problems in the community, description of the initiative’s founders, etc. For annual initiatives, discuss past experiences and the results from previous years (ex: “following last year’s National Fire Safety Week education campaign, our district saw a 20% decline in accidental fires”).

Request

- If you are writing to request a change in policy or legislation, outline this at the beginning of this section – ensure to name the item as specifically as possible (the name and number). Identify how the policy affects the fire department, and include specific, real-life examples where possible.
- If you are writing against a piece of policy or legislation, propose how it could be changed to benefit the fire department. If you are writing to advocate for a piece of policy or legislation, support your position with examples and include counter-arguments to those who oppose the legislation. Either way, show consideration the other position in the debate. Explain why your particular position more comprehensively addresses the underlying problems.
- If you are writing to business owners about actions they could take to support volunteer firefighting, include the direct and indirect benefits of volunteerism or the particular initiative for the business or business community.

Close the letter by briefly summarizing your purpose for the letter (1 or 2 lines maximum). Provide a location where additional information about the local fire department can be accessed. If the department has a Q&A sheet, attach this to the letter and indicate it is enclosed. More information about the Anytown Fire Department can be found online at www.anytown.ca/fire or by phone at 780 – 000 – 0000. If you would like to be in contact with the dignitary, indicate that you would like to meet with them and suggest a day and time, or say “your earliest convenience”.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the Anytown Fire Department.

Sincerely,

John Smith
Fire Chief
Anytown Fire Department
Tool: Sample Diversity Policy
Used by: Fire Chief, Volunteer Coordinator
When to use: When the fire department does not have existing diversity policies in place as part of standard operating procedures
Learn more: Recruitment and Retention Strategy, page 23

Policy

The Anytown Fire Department is committed to maintaining a diverse base of volunteers and employees that reflect the diverse community which we serve. Any person who supports our mission of protecting Anytown through emergency response, public education, and community service is welcome at the Anytown Fire Department. We continue to provide emergency services to all people in need, without regard to place of origin, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, ancestry, marital status, family status, or disability.

To ensure our services are free of barriers, volunteer and employee diversity is an integral part of Anytown’s practices. Fair and equitable treatment will apply to all aspects of involvement (volunteer or employment) with the Anytown Fire Department. To ensure this, the Anytown Fire Department will actively remove barriers to ensure that each person has equal access to involvement (volunteer or employment) with the department.

Proactive accommodation at the fire hall will be provided, where necessary and reasonably practical, to support employees and volunteers. This includes customizing volunteer opportunities to the abilities of the volunteer, maintaining open channels to report discrimination and harassment, and acting appropriately when these incidents are reported.

Policy Application

The policy will be applied in the following ways:

1. Department administration will ensure that all policies, practices, guidelines and/or procedures do not permit intentional or unintentional discrimination;
2. The department will engage in targeted efforts to recruit and retain volunteers and employees so that the personnel pool is reflective of the community of Anytown;
3. A diverse array of volunteer opportunities will be offered through the fire department;
4. Open communication channels will be maintained for the reporting of discrimination and harassment;
5. Reports of discrimination and harassment will be acted on as protocol dictates and in a timely manner;
6. There will be no retaliation or retribution for a report that was provided in good faith (not malicious);
7. Anyone who retaliates against one who reported an incident in good faith is subject to disciplinary action;
8. Those who submit reports which are not in good faith are subject to disciplinary action.
Reporting Policy

Individuals in a discrimination or harassment situation should take the following actions, provided he or she does not feel immediately threatened by the alleged discriminator or harasser. When there is an immediate threat, the alleged victim may skip this protocol and report the incident directly to his or her supervisor.

1. Ask the alleged discriminator or harasser to stop and communicate to them that his or her the behaviour is inappropriate;
2. Keep a record of the discrimination or harassment. When did it start? Where did it take place? Were there witnesses?
3. Lodge a complaint with the victim’s immediate supervisor. If he or she would be uncomfortable or otherwise reluctant to report to his/her supervisor, then the incident could be reported to the next highest, or another, level of management.

Discipline Policy

The department will take the following actions as the situation dictates:
1. First offense: Discussion with immediate supervisor;
2. Second offense: Immediate suspension from the department for a three month period;
3. Third offense: Permanent suspension from the department.
Volunteer Firefighting in Anytown: Facts for Employers

Volunteer Firefighting in Alberta

- Alberta has over 430 fire departments. Of these, approximately 95% depend entirely on volunteer firefighters
- Alberta has more than 10,000 volunteer firefighters – this is approximately 3 times the number of Alberta’s total career firefighters
- Alberta’s volunteer fire departments are funded by municipal tax dollars, corporate and individual donations, and grants.

Volunteer Firefighting in Anytown

- The Anytown Fire Department was established in year
- Approximately number people volunteer for the fire department. Of these,
  - number are volunteer firefighters
  - number are administrative volunteers
  - number do other jobs such as: maintaining equipment, providing daycare, other duties as appropriate
- The volunteer fire department supports Anytown by:
  - Providing immediate response to emergencies like structural fires, wild fires, vehicle collisions, and other life-threatening events
  - Educating the community about proper fire safety techniques
  - Hosting, or assisting other groups with events like: jaws of life demonstrations, Learn Not to Burn Presentations, other events the department is involved in
  - Developing leadership capacity through training and the application of skills in high-stress situations
- The fire department responds to an average of number emergencies per year
- Percentage responses are during the daytime, percentage responses are during the evening, percentage responses are during weekends
- For approximately percentage of responses, firefighters can return to work within 1 hour of responding to the call
- Volunteer firefighting is a necessary service for the safety of the community. Having a volunteer-run (as opposed to paid) fire department saves the community more than $ number annually. Note: to get the $number amount, multiply the collective number of hours volunteered at the department annually by $32.40 (the average wage of an Albertan firefighter according to the 2009 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey) and subtract any stipend or compensation the firefighters receive.
Salutation. First name Last name
Business Name
Mailing Address Line 1
Mailing Address Line 2
Anytown, AB A0A 0A0

May 20, 2010

Dear Salutation. Last name:

XYZ Grocery is well recognized for being an important contributor to the sustainability of Anytown by providing a local source for fresh foods, ensuring that residents do not have to leave Anytown for basic supplies for living (a description of how the business adds to the community). Your contribution to the community through the support of the Anytown Terry Fox run, Anytown Against AIDS, and Anytown Annual Fall Dance (names of events, programs or groups the business supports) has been noticed by the Anytown Fire Department. We would like to offer you the opportunity to further support our community’s infrastructure through Employer Supported Volunteer Firefighting.

By supporting employees who volunteer with the Anytown Fire Department, you demonstrate that you are committed to the growth and viability not only of XYZ Grocery, but also that of your employees, and ultimately, Anytown as a whole.

As an employer of volunteer firefighters, your business will gain an enhanced reputation and highly skilled workforce with a well developed skill set including communication skills, problem solving, teamwork, and crisis management. Studies have shown that employees whose employers support their community involvement are more loyal to their employer, remain more engaged and productive in their jobs, and ultimately stay with the company for longer terms.

Supporting your employees’ involvement with the Anytown Fire Department is an opportunity to develop a critical partnership with the community, other businesses, and your employees. The attached information brochure provides you with information about volunteering with the Anytown Fire Department.

Thank-you for your time, if you have any questions or would like to further discuss this partnership, please feel free to contact me at 780 – 000 – 0000.

Sincerely,

John Smith
Fire Chief
Anytown Fire Department

Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Strategy & Toolkit
Prepared by Volunteer Alberta for the Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association
Salutation, First name Last name
Business Name
Mailing Address Line 1
Mailing Address Line 2
Anytown, AB   T0T 0T0

May 20, 2010

Dear Salutation, Last name:

On behalf of the Anytown Fire Department we would sincerely like to thank you for your ongoing support of your employee, John Doe’s volunteerism efforts with the Anytown Fire Department. Your support means a lot to the fire department, the community, and in particular to John.

Your support of John’s volunteer firefighting has produced the following results in the past year (time since last letter):

- The quick and thorough response to 78 emergencies;
- Knowledge and skills gained through the completion of 15 training opportunities;
- Enriched community life through the assistance with, or planning of 5 community events;
- The addition of 7 new firefighters in Anytown;
- The increased safety of the community through 20 fire safety education events;
- Other results of community involvement, for example, decreased accidental fires

Other information that could be included in this letter:

- Information about upcoming employer recognition events or initiatives
- Dates of upcoming training events
- Changes that have recently happened in the department, or will happen soon
- Give employers enough information so they feel informed, but not too much that they feel bogged down in details. Keep this letter to a maximum of one page and write concisely.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the Anytown Fire Department. For information about additional ways to support the activities of the Anytown Fire Department, please feel free to contact myself at 780 – 000 – 0000.

Sincerely,

John Smith
Fire Chief
Anytown Fire Department
Volunteer Firefighting in **Anytown**: Facts for Family

- Alberta has over 430 fire departments. Of these, approximately 95% depend entirely on volunteer firefighters.
- Alberta has more than 10,000 volunteer firefighters – this is approximately 3 times the number of Alberta’s total career firefighters.
- Approximately \textit{number} people volunteer for the fire department. Of these,
  - \textit{number} are volunteer firefighters,
  - \textit{number} are administrative volunteers,
  - \textit{number} do other jobs such as \textit{<other jobs volunteers do at the fire hall>}.
- On average, the department receives \textit{number} calls per month. This includes: \textit{number} structural fire calls, \textit{number} other emergency response calls, and \textit{other statistics about the types of calls}.
- \textit{Other facts and statistics about your department which families may be interested in}.
- The **Anytown** Fire Department places the safety of its volunteer firefighters above all else, some safety and training policies include:
  - \textit{List a few safety and training policies.}
  - If you have questions about the safety of family members involved in the fire department, do not hesitate to contact Joe Smith, Fire Chief at 1 – 780 – 000-0000 or joe.smith@anytown.ca. Safety tours of the fire hall and fire safety equipment are also available.
- Perks of volunteering at the fire department include: \textit{discounts at the grocery store, free immunization shots, other perks your department offers}.
- Interested in getting involved with the fire department? In addition to volunteer firefighting, other volunteer opportunities at the **Anytown** fire department include:
  - \textit{Providing child care services},
  - \textit{Administrative duties},
  - \textit{List other duties or positions},
  - \textit{Sitting on any of the following spousal committees: Fundraising committee, events committee, other committees you may have}.
- The **Anytown** Fire Department has a Spousal Support Network which meets \textit{every second Tuesday at 7:00 pm} to discuss concerns and develop friendships which help support the fire department.

Tool: **Volunteer Firefighting: Factsheet for Family**
- **Used by:** Volunteer Coordinator
- **When to use:** When a new recruit with family joins the department
- **Learn more:** Recruitment and Retention Strategy, page 21
Ms. Jane Smith  
Mailing Address Line 1 
Mailing Address Line 2 
Anytown, Alberta   Postal Code 
Day – Month - Year  
Anytown Fire Department  
Mailing Address Line 1 
Mailing Address Line 2 
Anytown, Alberta   Postal Code 

Dear Ms. Smith:  

On behalf of the Anytown Fire Department, I would like to extend a warm welcome to you, the family of John Smith. Being part of the fire service is a rewarding experience for the volunteer, and we hope for the family as well. The following information will assist you in understanding the expectations the fire department has of its volunteers, services offered to the family of volunteers, and ways you can get involved in the fire department.

What will John be doing at the department?  

Volunteer firefighters do many things at the fire department, the most important of which is train. Adequate training ensures the safety of the entire fire crew, and as such, the department has minimum training requirements in place. Training time commitment ranges from a few hours a week to weekend or week-long courses. Attached to this letter is a schedule of upcoming training dates. On average, firefighters spend an average of number hours per week in training.

What should I expect?  

Expect the unexpected. It seems cliché, but those involved with the Anytown Fire Department are often confronted with unexpected situations. Emergency responses may come at inappropriate times – during birthdays, anniversaries, or a visit from in-laws. While these times are inconvenient, somewhere someone needs help. We expect members to show up promptly to emergencies. Every member of the team is needed when responding to emergencies. On average, the department receives number calls per month. More facts about volunteer firefighting are included on the attached “Facts for Family” sheet.

After some events, firefighters may not want to talk about what they saw or did. They may experience sleep deprivation, loss of appetite, and be quiet or sullen. This is known as Critical Incident Stress. The fire department has individuals trained to assist those dealing with Critical Incident Stress.

How does the fire hall support its members?  

The fire hall offers many services to support its members including childcare, individuals trained in Critical Incident Stress Management, a spousal support network, and social events to bring the department together. We hope that you will take full advantage of the services offered by the fire hall.
How can you get involved with the fire hall?

As mentioned above, the fire hall offers many services to its members. Are you interested in getting involved with any of these services? Do you see gaps where there are additional services you need or feel the department should have? Great! We love it when firefighter’s family is involved in the fire department – this shows the true “family” nature of the department. Below is a short description of ways family members can get involved with the department:

- Good with children? Apply to be a childcare provider. When there is an emergency, you will be paged the same way the firefighters are, but instead of responding to the emergency, you will stay at the fire hall and look after the firefighters children. Please note, childcare provider applicants are required to undergo a police information check.
- The fire hall is more than emergency responses – administration work supports the fire hall’s activities. Are you mechanically-minded? Apply to be a mechanic at the fire hall. Great at typing? We always need help with our administrative work. Love working with people? Apply to be a Volunteer Coordinator! There are many opportunities to put your skills to work at the fire hall.
- Is planning your thing? We have many committees which are always looking for members including:
  - Event planning committee
  - Fundraising committee
  - Other committees at your fire hall
- Or maybe you’d just like to see what the fire department is really about by joining the spousal support network. The spousal support network meets on date at time. The spousal support network is a group of firefighter spouses – some who have been involved for 5 years, others involved for 5 months - that meets to discuss concerns or experiences, and develop friendships.

If you have any questions about your family’s involvement with the fire department, please feel free to contact either myself, or Tom Connor, head of the spousal support network.

Sincerely,

Sally Hansen
Fire Chief
Anytown Fire Department
It is also important to orient families of new recruits to the department, as this helps foster an open relationship between the fire hall and the family. Fill out the form below as each step is completed.

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The following sample key messages are designed specifically for each of the listed target audiences. These messages can be used for recruitment on both local and centralized levels. Please note that testing how the messages resonate with the target audiences is an important step, one which will be part of Phase Three of the AFCA/ Volunteer Alberta contract.

**Business Owners**

The following key messages are designed to assist fire departments in gaining the employer support for volunteer firefighting.

- Volunteer firefighting helps employees develop competencies and skills valuable in the workplace, serving as an effective substitute in the wake of reduced budgets for professional development. Examples include first aid training, leadership development, and teamwork skills;
- The volunteer fire department is a team-based environment and will help build positive energy and morale among employees; this morale can be carried back to the workplace, bolstering the team environment in the workplace;
- Volunteer firefighting develops learning, team-building, leadership, and interpersonal skills in employees, which are conducive to creating a competitive workforce;
- Volunteer firefighting helps people establish roots in a community, reducing employee turnover;
- Supporting volunteer firefighting is more effective in building a community profile, while addressing community needs, than passive cash donations;
- Employees whose employers support their involvement in the community are more loyal to their employer and stay longer, reducing the costly need to recruit and train replacements;
- Volunteer firefighting is a necessary service for the safety of the community. Having a volunteer-run (as opposed to paid) fire department saves the community more than $X annually.
  - Note: to get the $X amount, multiply the collective number of hours volunteered at the department annually by $32.40 (the average wage of an Albertan firefighter according to the 2009 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey) and subtract any stipend or compensation the firefighters receive.
  - Volunteer firefighting saves Alberta approximately $70,000,000 annually.

**Community Groups**

General messages:

- The fire department works in tandem with other groups to improve the community;
- The volunteer fire department is a partner in creating a safe, well-rounded community.
Listed below are specific organization-types (according to the International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations) which should be targeted by volunteer fire departments and the key messages that should be used with these groups:

- **Culture and Recreation Groups** (specifically sports groups):
  - The volunteer fire department is a true team, which functions cohesively in a high-energy environment;
  - Volunteer firefighting is another way to experience the friendship and interdependencies of a team environment;
  - Volunteer firefighting is a health-focused activity;

- **Health groups** (specifically public health and wellness education groups, and emergency medical services groups), **Social Services groups** (specifically daycare groups, disaster/emergency prevention and control groups, and refugee assistance groups), and **Religious groups**:
  - Volunteer firefighting is a rewarding experience that allows one to use existing skills in a new and exciting environment for the betterment of the community;
  - The volunteer fire department requires more than just firefighters – it engages volunteers in positions of administration, child care, and psychological support.

- **Development and Housing** (specifically community and neighbourhood organizations, and social development organizations):
  - Volunteer firefighters improve the safety and quality of life of the community, making it a more enjoyable place to live, and increasing its attractiveness;

- **Volunteerism promotion and support organizations** (organizations that recruit, train, and place volunteers and promote volunteering):
  - Volunteer firefighting is a worthwhile opportunity which gives individuals the opportunity to grow through training, teamwork, and community involvement;
  - Firefighting is a unique volunteer opportunity – the opportunities, experiences, and personal growth from firefighting are unavailable in any other volunteer role.

- **Education**:
  - Volunteer firefighters are role models for children, teaching them the importance of contribution to community.

**Residents – General**

- 97% of Alberta’s fire departments are run by volunteers (**Source:** Alberta Emergency Management Agency);
- The volunteer fire department increases the infrastructure of the community, making it a more attractive place for new residents and new businesses;
- Volunteer firefighters are role models in the community;
- Volunteer firefighting is about more than putting out fires – it involves educating the public, constant training, and emergency services.
- Firefighting is a unique volunteer opportunity – the opportunities, experiences, and personal growth from firefighting are unavailable in any other volunteer role.
Resident – Women
- Volunteer firefighters are a true team – one that is open, inclusive, and inviting;
- The volunteer fire department values families – that’s why childcare is available when there are fire calls;
- Volunteer firefighters are leaders who contribute to a sense of community;
- The fire department offers a diverse range of volunteer opportunities – from administration, to firefighter childcare, to responding to emergencies.

Residents – Immigrant Populations
- Volunteer firefighters are a true team – one that is open, inclusive, and inviting;
- Volunteer firefighting is a way to actively contribute to the safety and well-being of the community;
- Volunteer firefighting helps one make community connections and lifelong friendships;
- The fire department offers a diverse range of volunteer opportunities – from administration, to firefighter childcare, to responding to emergencies;
- Volunteer firefighting is a way to immerse oneself in the community.

Residents – First Nations Populations
- There are many ways to help out at the fire department – from administration, to firefighter childcare, to fighting fires;
- Firefighters are respected community leaders;
- Volunteer firefighting offers the opportunity for personal growth and transformation – including acquiring new skills, meeting new people, and expanding one’s network of contacts and influence;
- The fire department is an important component of a sustainable community.

Political Stakeholders
- The presence of a volunteer fire department makes the community attractive to prospective residents and businesses;
- The volunteer fire department develops community leaders;
- The volunteer fire department actively engages citizens in the community and builds capacity in rural Alberta;
- Volunteer firefighting is a necessary service for the safety of the community. Having a volunteer-run (as opposed to paid) fire department saves the community more than $X annually.
  - Note: to get the $X amount, multiply the collective number of hours volunteered at the department annually by $32.40 (the average wage of an Albertan firefighter according to the 2009 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey) and subtract any stipend or compensation the firefighters receive.
  - Volunteer firefighting saves Alberta approximately $70,000,000 annually.
Although Volunteer Alberta has prepared a list of key messages for every target audience described in the Recruitment and Retention Strategy, local fire departments may need to create key messages for public speaking engagements or other targeted recruitment efforts. Key messages state the basics of what the fire department is and define the vision, values, mission, and beliefs of the department. Key messages must be interesting, relevant, and concise to catch the attention of both press and readers or listeners.

This guide will aid the fire department in creating key messages for any event or initiative.

**Key Messages – Considerations**

1. Determine your goal – what is it you want to achieve?
   a. Create awareness by providing basic information and facts about volunteer firefighting and the local fire department
   b. Create understanding of the volunteer fire department by describing the environment in which the fire department operates
   c. Obtain general support for the fire department and volunteer firefighting
   d. Obtain commitment to sustaining the volunteer fire department, or to fire hall initiatives

2. Pay attention to the effect the message will have, ask:
   a. How do I want recipients of the messages to feel as a result of this message? *This influences the tone of the key messages*
   b. What do I want recipients of the messages to think? *This influences the content of the key messages*
   c. What do I want recipients of the messages to believe? *This influences the content of the key messages*
   d. How would I like the recipients of the messages to act, or what do I want them to do? *This will influence the “call to action” – a key message on its own*

**Key Messages - Elements**

A good key message is...

... **Bold** – states facts and makes claims in a forthright manner

... **Convincing** – it informs your audience of the value of the fire department, and how they benefit from the department and the initiative or event advertised

... **Conversational** – it uses language so plan that one who knows nothing about the fire department will understand and be interested in it. Ensure acronyms and abbreviates are spelt out in full

... **Quotable**

... **Easily verified by evidence, facts, or opinions of others**
Key Messages – Do’s and Don’ts

- Refine the key messages several times and solicit input from at least one other person
- Develop separate key messages for each point you would like to make
- Ensure the key messages “roll off the tongue”
- Ensure key messages are easily understood by a wide audience
- Include at least one reference to the provincial brand
- Develop several key messages for each initiative, event, or any publicity opportunity your department undertakes
- Ensure that each set of key messages has an overarching theme which reflects the goals of the fire department
- Have evidence, facts, and opinions of others which support each key message

- Let an individual key message encompass too many points – keep each message simple
- Use run-on sentences – make each key message quick and snappy
- Use lists
- Include too many facts or figures
- Provide in-depth explanations (that’s what the interview is for)
- Use multiple sets of key messages for an individual event or initiative

Key Messages - Words to Use

The words listed below will help you state your message in a clear and bold manner. Key messages should always be written in the present tense (by using words such as is, do, are) as this shows currency.

Action words:
- Enables
- Improves
- Support
- Grow, growth
- Build
- Enhance
- Reflect
- Revamp

Inspiring words:
- Accomplish
- Believe
- Enormous
- Innovative
- Rewarding
- Commitment
- Create
- Powerful

- Enjoy
- Give back
- Enrich
- Works to
- Progress
- Target
- Strengthen
- Focus
- Achieve
- Contribute
- Opportunity
- Limitless
- Dedicated
- Inspire
- Meaningful
- Extraordinary

Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Strategy & Toolkit
Prepared by Volunteer Alberta for the Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association
NEWS RELEASE

May 20, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Title describing the event or initiative

Paragraph one: give a brief description of what, where, and why. This paragraph should not be longer than three sentences and should give a short description of the event or initiative.

Paragraph two: Give more detailed information about the event or initiative – elaborate on who, what, where, when, why, and how. Always use the present tense when writing – avoid words like “will”, “has”, “to be” etc. and limit the use of prepositions like “the”, “however”, and “a”.

Paragraph three: Highlight the achievement the event is meant to celebrate, or the benefits the initiative will bring to the community. Convey enthusiasm by using “active” words and stressing the benefits. Include quotes from key stakeholders like the Fire Commissioner, local Fire Chief, or participants (or beneficiaries) of the initiative or event. This section should detail why the event or initiative is important to the community by emphasizing the local angle.

Paragraph four: While the primary purpose of a news release is to promote the event or initiative, a secondary purpose is to use the opportunity to promote volunteer firefighting in general. The fourth paragraph should link the event or initiative to general information about volunteer firefighting. To ensure accurate reflection of the realities of volunteer firefighting, use statistics to illustrate your points and help achieve the fire department's goals. Trying to show that the commitment isn’t as great as it seems? Use statistics of the frequency of calls! Emphasizing that volunteer firefighting is not as dangerous as it seems? Compare your department’s injury rates to the national or provincial average, or compare with injury rates for various trades. Use surprising statistics that create excitement or interest in volunteer firefighting and your initiative.

Conclusion: Remind the reader why this initiative or event is important to the community. Give the reader where more information can be found, both about the event or initiative and about becoming a volunteer firefighter. This paragraph should be a maximum of three sentences. The length of the entire press release should not exceed 1 page – ensure correct contact information is available below, so that if the media wants an interview, they will be able to contact you.

- 30-

Background: Facts and stats on firefighting in Alberta and the history of the initiative.

Media Contacts:

Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association
Bill Purdy, Executive Director
Phone number (including work and cell)

Anytown Fire Department
John Smith, Fire Chief
Department phone number and cell phone number
NEWS RELEASE

October 20, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Anytown Fire Department Heats Up National Fire Prevention Week

The Anytown Fire Department hosts its Annual Hotdog Roast this Thursday from 1:00 – 4:00 pm to demonstrate the correct use of outdoor fires in Anytown. Join the department for free food and safety tips as part of National Fire Prevention Week celebrations.

This year’s Annual Hotdog Roast is hosted at the Anytown Fire Hall, located at 001 Main Street. Fire Chief Jones starts cooking at 1:00 pm, with a demonstration of safe outdoor fire practices to follow at 1:30. At 2:30 pm Deputy Chief Smith will lead a demonstration of the Jaws of Life while onlookers can continue to enjoy hotdogs, pie, and pop all donated by XYZ Food Market.

Over the 14 years this initiative has run, the Anytown Fire Department has contributed to improving the safety of Anytown through educational events such as the annual hotdog roast. Thanks in part to the educational efforts of the fire department, Anytown’s per capita fire rate is actually lower in 2010 than it was in 1980!

In commenting about the benefits of the event, Fire Chief Jones emphasizes, “Events like these bring the community together in the effort to remain safe. The Annual Hotdog Roast gives the fire department the opportunity to inform residents about how to stay safe while conducting everyday activities like cooking outdoors. Everyone plays a part in keeping Anytown safe.”

While the primary duty of Anytown Fire Department’s volunteer firefighters is to respond to emergencies in the community, an equally important aspect of the role is to educate the public about safety and measures they can take to prevent fires. Following revamped fire safety education efforts last year, accidental fires decreased by 20%! The Anytown Fire Department educates the public through the Junior Firefighter Program, monthly open house sessions at the fire department, and presentations at the Anytown Homeowners Society general meetings.

The Anytown Fire Department currently has 20 volunteer firefighters. Join us on Thursday, October 20th from 1:00 – 4:00 pm to do your part in keeping Anytown safe. For more information about the Anytown Fire Hall, visit www.anytown.com/fire or call 780-000-0000.

-30-

Backgrounder: Statistics on firefighting in Alberta and the history of Anytown Fire Department.

Media Contacts:

Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association
Bill Purdy, Executive Director
780 – 999 – 9999

Anytown Fire Department
Jim Jones, Fire Chief
780 – 000 – 0000

Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Strategy & Toolkit
Prepared by Volunteer Alberta for the Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association
BACKGROUNDER

May 20, 2010

Alberta volunteer firefighters a valuable part of Anytown

Facts and stats

- The Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1947 to promote excellence in fire protection. Today it accomplishes this mission by providing awareness, education, training, technology, and products to the public and fire departments across Alberta. (Source: Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association).
- There are over 430 volunteer-run fire departments in Alberta. Over 420 are run and managed by a staff made entirely of volunteers (Source: Alberta Emergency Management Agency).
- The Anytown Fire Department was established in 1928 with 5 volunteer firefighters, today it serves Anytown through the service of 20 volunteer firefighters (Source: Anytown Fire Department).
- The Anytown Fire Department receives calls for approximately 15 emergency responses per month (Source: Anytown Fire Department).
- Alberta volunteer firefighters dedicate time, knowledge, skills, and passion to a wide range of important programs and services that enhance the quality of life for Albertans in communities whose safety depends on volunteer fire departments.

History of the event or initiative

Paragraph one: Talk about when and why the event or initiative started. If the event is celebrated across Alberta, or across Canada, mention this. If this is the first year of the initiative, talk about the motivations of those who started it, casting them in the role of visionaries responding to a need in the community. This paragraph should not be longer than three sentences.

Paragraph two: Further detail the history of the event or initiative. If the event or initiative has experienced growth over its history, note this and detail what the impetus was. Talk about where the event or initiative is today. If there are statistics on event attendance or participants, use these to add impact to the importance of the event. What have been the results of the event or initiative in the larger community? This paragraph should be written in brief.

Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association

The Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association (AFCA) is a province-wide organization dedicated to excellence in the provision of Member-Client Service. The AFCA offers solutions to promote and support life safety, preventative and protective services based on the values and principles of its members – those involved in fire service on a full time, part time, volunteer, and industrial basis. The AFCA accomplishes its mission through providing awareness, education, training, technology, and products to Alberta’s communities and fire departments. Programs and initiatives supported by the AFCA include the “Learn Not to Burn” and “Risk Watch” programs, Juvenile Fire Setters Prevention program, and other safety and awareness campaigns across Alberta. For more information, visit www.afca.ab.ca.

Anytown Fire Department

Describe the fire department’s mission or vision. Detail how the department contributes to the betterment of the community through community engagement, education, and responding to emergencies. For more information, visit www.anytown.com/fire or phone 780 - 000 - 0000.

Media Contact:
Bill Purdy, Executive Director, AFCA
Phone number (including work and cell) John Smith, Fire Chief, Anytown Fire Department
Department phone number and cell phone number
May 20, 2010

Alberta volunteer firefighters a valuable part of Anytown

Facts and stats
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- The Anytown Fire Department was established in 1928 with 5 volunteer firefighters, today it serves Anytown through the service of 20 volunteer firefighters (Source: Anytown Fire Department).
- The Anytown Fire Department receives calls for approximately 15 emergency responses per month (Source: Anytown Fire Department).
- Alberta volunteer firefighters dedicate time, knowledge, skills, and passion to a wide range of important programs and services that enhance the quality of life for Albertans in communities whose safety depends on volunteer fire departments.

History of the Anytown Fire Department Annual Hotdog Roast
The Anytown Fire Department Annual Hotdog Roast began in 1957 in response to the need for public education about outdoor fire safety techniques. The initiative was started by Fire Chief Hankerton after consultations with community groups and department members about fun ways to educate the public.

The first Hotdog Roast saw the attendance of only about 30 people from the surrounding area. The roast has brought increased awareness of the actions individuals can take to prevent fires in their community. This year, the Anytown Fire Department expects about 500 people to attend the Annual Hotdog Roast. Prior to the Annual Hotdog Roast, there was an average of 800 summertime outdoor fires in Anytown. Today, Anytown Fire Department responds to less than 8 summertime outdoor fires.

Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association
The Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association (AFCA) is a province-wide organization dedicated to excellence in the provision of Member-Client Service. The AFCA offers solutions to promote and support life safety, preventative and protective services based on the values and principles of its members – those involved in fire service on a full time, part time, volunteer, and industrial basis. The AFCA accomplishes its mission through providing awareness, education, training, technology, and products to Alberta’s communities and fire departments. Programs and initiatives supported by the AFCA include the “Learn Not to Burn” and “Risk Watch” programs, Juvenile Fire Setters Prevention program, and other safety and awareness campaigns across Alberta. For more information, visit www.afca.ab.ca.

Local Fire Department
The Anytown Fire Department makes Anytown a safer place to live through emergency response and ongoing public education. Initiatives of the Anytown Fire Department include the Annual Hotdog Roast, the Junior Firefighter Program, and equipment demonstrations. For more information, visit www.anytown.com/fire or phone 780 – 000 – 0000.

Media Contact:
Bill Purdy, Executive Director, AFCA John Smith, Fire Chief, Anytown Fire Department
780 – 999 - 9999 780 – 000 – 0000 or 780 – 111 – 1111
Now that you have created a professional news release and backgrounder, how do you get your story picked up by the news? This tool will give you a guide to getting your story picked up by local media:

Before Writing the News Release

Before writing your news release, develop a set of key messages for the event, initiative, or story you would like to communicate (see How to Create Effective Key Messages). Use these key messages as the building blocks of your news release. Ensure that your key messages can be supported by facts, statistics, and external opinions.

It can be best to title the news release before writing it, as this will help the release stay focused on the main point. Titles should be catchy and concise – they should state the point your news release will make. Try to use action words in the title and always use present tense (ex/ don’t say “will carry out this initiative” say “have begun work on...”). Generally, titles are kept under 64 characters – keeping them short enough to roll off the tongue easily.

News release title analysis:

*Firefighters night raises $2,200 for Canadian Paraplegic Association* (Edmonton Journal, March 7, 2010)

- Active language: “raises” is used instead of “raised”
- Content: The title tells the reader the “who” and “what” but not “why” – compelling the reader to read the article for more information
- Length: 61 characters
- Language: Written in plain language – “Canadian Paraplegic Association” is spelt out, instead of abbreviated as CPA. Avoiding abbreviations (until you have time to explain them – i.e. in the article) gives enough information to capture the readers’ interest. Try it on yourself – would the title “Firefighters night raises $2,200 for CPA” capture your attention? Is it possible you would mistake CPA for Chartered Professional Accountant, or another acronym? An exception to this rule is when the acronym or abbreviation is commonly used, such as “gov’t” (government) or “MST” (Mountain Standard Time).
- Ensure you have the facts, statistics, and external opinions readily available to you before you write the news release – this speeds up the process considerably. Contact any community leaders or experts that you may want to either quote in your news release or do joint interviews with ahead of time.
Writing the News Release

When writing your news release, keep in mind the “human” aspect of the story and relate your key messages to the human impact they have. The human impact should bridge the space between key messages and any facts or statistics you include.

When possible, tie your news release to larger provincial, national, or international happenings – show the media the local angle or effects. A variation of this is offering commentary on another story which is linked to the local fire department (this does not have to be done through a news release, as Letters to the Editor or opinion editorial articles are other vehicles this can happen through).

See the accompanying sample news release for a template and guide of what to include in a news release.

From a branding perspective, it is important to tie the local event, initiative, or story to the Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association’s provincial volunteer firefighting brand. This is important because if your news is picked up by the media, the recipients of the message will also be exposed to the centralized branding initiatives. If the angle you write with does not connect to – or worse, uses a radically different theme than the centralized brand – it will create a dissonance in the minds of news consumers.

True to its name, a backgrounder provides historical information about the topic of the news release. See the sample backgrounder for a template and a guide of what could be included. Backgrounders are succinct – they state factual information in a forthright way without any “filler” information. The length of the backgrounder should be limited to one page, and include the background of the event, initiative, or story (where possible) and the local fire department. Including background information about the Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association is optional, though it may help “complete the picture”.

In both the backgrounder and news release, ensure that good grammar and spelling is used (and don’t trust the automatic grammar/spelling check – always proofread the release either personally or with the assistance of someone else).

Submitting the News Release

If you have a contact at the local media – a reporter you’ve been interviewed by before or personal contact, submit the release directly to him or her. If you do not have a contact, e-mail the news release to the media’s “general” e-mail.

No matter which method is used, put the news release in the body of the e-mail, and use formatting (colours, fonts, etc.) sparingly. When available use the provincial volunteer
Use the firefighting-branded template, and include the local department’s logo. Use the title of the news release as the subject line of the e-mail.

Follow up your news release with a phone call to ask if it was received, ask if there is interest in the story, and offer more details or arrange interviews. When following up with a phone call, ensure that you have the key messages handy.

**Interviews**

If you plan on suggesting that a third party (a volunteer firefighter, community group partner, etc.) conduct a media interview with you, it may be helpful to:

- Create a list of questions and answers and distribute this to the third party
- Distribute the list of key messages to the third party
- Privately converse with the third party prior to the interview (or prior to submitting the news release) to discuss any questions they may have from the question and answer sheet and key messages
- Inform the third party of the news release submission date and to expect a phone call in the next several days

When you suggest a third party interviewee to the media, be prepared to be the go-between liaison with the third party and the media. This involves connecting the two parties, arranging an interview time, and perhaps sitting in on the interview (if it is not a joint interview).

**General Tips for Media Relations**

- Get to know local reporters – if they have a good relationship, and regular contact, with you, they will be more likely to pre-emptively contact you when a story may concern or affect the fire department. When a journalist joins the local newspaper or radio station, make a special effort to introduce yourself (take the journalist to lunch or coffee, or give him or her a tour of the fire department).
- Take newspaper editors or television or radio producers to lunch a couple times per year to keep them up-to-date on the happenings of the volunteer fire department.

**Tips for Pitching to Television**

- Give them ideas about what can be filmed to “show” the story
- Offer a “behind the scenes” story of people in action
- Emphasize the local angle, and offer a third party interviewee to comment on the story
- If possible, do not contact television media later than 2:00 pm. Between 9:30 am and 10:00 am is usually a good time to try to contact these individuals
- Pitch for breakfast or noon shows, as this is generally a “slower” time, and your story will be more likely to be picked up
Tips for Pitching to Radio

- Pitch for morning and drive shows, or for special programs
- Sell the department’s spokesperson as a local expert on volunteer firefighting, volunteering in general, and community engagement
- Emphasize the local angle, and remember that broadcast media generally puts emphasis on entertainment (this is a great media to use to cover your events)
- Try to avoid calling radio media “on the hour” as this is a busy time

Tips for Pitching to Newspaper

- Ask if you can write opinion editorial articles for the newspaper
- Offer photo opportunities, or provide a collection of photo’s about volunteer firefighting (perhaps those collected during the provincial-brand photo contest, detailed in the Centralized Initiatives section of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy)
- Know the submission deadlines and respect them – for example, if the deadline is 2:00 pm, avoid submitting at 1:45 pm.

Advertising Your Event in Coffee News

Coffee News is a one-page community paper which is distributed in restaurants, coffee shops, waiting rooms, and reception areas. The Coffee News “What’s Happening” section advertises non-profit organization’s community events for free. Events can be submitted online at www.coffee-news.ca. The online form allows a choice of which communities should be targeted with the event listing. Coffee News allows events to be advertised for up to 6 weeks, so be sure to submit your event well in advance (a minimum of two weeks is required).
Speeches on the following topics could be prepared either by local fire departments or by the Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association and given during community events put on by the fire department or during National Fire Prevention Week. The local Fire Chief does not have to be the only person who speaks on behalf of the department. If your department has volunteers who work in business or sales positions, these individuals may have public speaking skills which your department could utilize for speech-making opportunities.

**Target Audience: Business Owners**

- Thank-you for supporting your employee’s volunteer firefighting: Volunteer fire departments rely on the support of employers
  - Key point 1: Employer support of volunteer firefighting is key to the department’s capacity to respond to emergencies;
  - Key point 2: The value the fire hall adds to the community is $X;
    - Show this by multiplying the number of hours volunteers donate to the fire department by $32.40 (according to the 2009 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey, the average wage of an Albertan Firefighter was $32.40 an hour).
    - As a whole, volunteer firefighting in Alberta adds $70,000,000 worth of infrastructure to Alberta’s rural communities.
  - Key point 3: Volunteer firefighting is about more than putting out fires – it involves public education, continuous training, and responding to all of the community’s emergencies.

- How volunteer fire departments contribute to personal and professional development
  - Key point 1: Volunteer firefighting develops learning, team-building, leadership, and interpersonal skills in employees, which are conducive to creating a competitive workforce;
  - Key point 2: Volunteer firefighting is a true team activity. Skills learnt at the department are carried back to the workplace.

- Community Investment: The benefits business receives from employees who are volunteer firefighters
  - Key point 1: Volunteer firefighting helps employees develop competencies and skills valuable in the workplace. Examples include leadership, team-building, and ability to deal with stressful situations;
  - Key point 2: Employees whose employers support their involvement in the community are more loyal to their employer and stay longer, reducing the costly need to recruit and train replacements;
  - Key point 3: Supporting volunteer firefighting is more effective in building a community profile, while addressing community needs, than passive cash donations.
Target Audience: Community Groups

- Co-Creating a Community:
  o Key point 1: Volunteer fire departments can work with organizations to contribute to the attractiveness of the community;
  o Key point 2: Volunteer fire departments create infrastructure, improve community safety, and attract new residents and new businesses;
  o Key point 3: Volunteer firefighting is about more than putting out fires – it involves public education, continuous training, and responding to all of the community’s emergencies.

- The benefits of volunteering – how volunteer fire departments aid in the development of active, engaged community members
  o Key point 1: There are many ways to be involved with the volunteer fire department – from administration, to child care, to emergency responses;
  o Key point 2: The volunteer fire department supports the activities of other community groups through: events you host with community groups, letting the groups use the fire hall for meetings, etc.;
  o Key point 3: The fire hall has the same goal as community groups – to make the community a safe and well-rounded community.

Target Audience: Residents – General

- Co-Creating a Community:
  o Key point 1: Volunteer fire departments can work with organizations to contribute to the attractiveness of the community;
  o Key point 2: Volunteer fire departments create infrastructure, improve community safety, and attract new residents and new businesses;
  o Key point 3: Volunteer firefighting is about more than putting out fires – it involves public education, continuous training, and responding to all of the community’s emergencies.

- Volunteer fire departments keep the community safe
  o Key point 1: Volunteer fire departments educate the public about fire safety;
  o Key point 2: Volunteer fire departments respond to community emergencies of all types – not just fires.

- Volunteer fire departments develop community leaders
  o Key point 1: Volunteer firefighters are role models in the community;
  o Key point 2: The fire hall runs the Junior Firefighter program, which builds leadership in youth;
  o Key point 3: The fire hall offers training which improves the skill sets of volunteers.
• Volunteer Fire Departments: A True Team
  o Key point 1: The fire department functions as a cohesive team, where trust and interdependencies are necessary;
  o Key point 2: Firefighting gives individuals the opportunity to develop team-building, interpersonal, and leadership skills in an open and inclusive environment.

Residents – Women
• Volunteer Fire Departments: A True Team
  o Key point 1: The fire department functions as a cohesive team, where trust and interdependencies are necessary;
  o Key point 2: Firefighting gives individuals the opportunity to develop team-building, interpersonal, and leadership skills in an open and inclusive environment.

• How volunteer firefighting contributes to the overall strength of the community
  o Key point 1: Volunteer firefighting builds the community’s ability to handle emergency situations;
  o Key point 2: The volunteer fire department contributes to the community through public education, emergency responses, and involvement with community groups such as the Cadet Corps;
  o Key point 3: The volunteer fire department is a place where individuals can improve themselves while serving the needs of the community.

Residents – Immigrant Populations
• Volunteer Fire Departments: A True Team
  o Key point 1: The fire department functions as a cohesive team, where trust and interdependencies are necessary;
  o Key point 2: Firefighting gives individuals the opportunity to develop team-building, interpersonal, and leadership skills in an open and inclusive environment.

• Giving Back: An Introduction to Volunteer Firefighting in Alberta
  o Key point 1: Basic information about volunteer firefighting;
  o Key point 2: The volunteer fire department contributes to the community through public education, emergency responses, and involvement with community groups such as the Cadet Corps;
  o Key point 3: The volunteer fire department is a place where individuals can improve their own skills while serving the needs of the community.
Residents – First Nations Populations

- The Fire Department: A True Team
  - Key point 1: The fire department functions as a cohesive team, where trust and interdependencies are necessary;
  - Key point 2: Firefighting gives individuals the opportunity to develop team-building, interpersonal, and leadership skills in an open and inclusive environment.

- Helping Out: Strengthening our communities and ourselves through involvement with the fire department
  - Key point 1: The volunteer fire department contributes to the community through public education, emergency responses, and involvement with community groups such as the Cadet Corps
  - Key point 2: Volunteer firefighting offers the opportunity for personal growth and transformation – including acquiring new skills, meeting new people, and expanding one’s network of contacts and influence;

- Knowledge, skills, and other benefits of firefighting
  - Key point 1: Volunteer firefighting develops learning, team-building, leadership, and interpersonal skills
  - Key point 2: Firefighters are respected community leaders

Target Audience: Political Stakeholders

- Critical Business: Benefits the community receives from the volunteer fire department
  - Key point 1: Benefits of the volunteer fire department include: infrastructure, improvement in community safety (e.g. how many buildings were saved, or partially saved, in the past year), and attraction of new residents and new businesses;
  - Key point 2: Volunteer firefighting is about more than putting out fires – it involves public education, continuous training, and responding to all of the community’s emergencies.

- Adding Value – Volunteer Firefighting
  - Key point 1: The value the fire hall adds to the community is $X
    - Show this by multiplying the number of hours volunteers donate to the fire department by $32.40 (according to the 2009 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey, the average wage of an Albertan firefighter was $32.40 an hour);
  - Key point 2: As a whole, volunteer firefighting in Alberta adds $70,000,000 worth of infrastructure to Alberta’s rural communities. This value is obtained by multiplying the 10,000 volunteer firefighters in Alberta by the average salary of a professional firefighter ($70,000);
  - Key point 3: The volunteer fire department actively engages citizens in the community and builds capacity in rural Alberta;
The Alberta Emergency Management Agency (‘AEMA’) creates a yearly “Fire Prevention Week Campaign Kit” which serves as a resource for teaching the public how to be safe around the home and gives tips for how to prevent fires. The 2009 kit also provided fire departments with statistics about fires in Alberta. The Fire Prevention Week Campaign Kit can be found online at www.aema.alberta.ca under “Public Education and Awareness” and “Campaigns”. The “National Fire Prevention Week Event Planning Kit” is meant to supplement the resource prepared by the AEMA with event and marketing ideas.

Like all other recommendations in the Recruitment and Retention Strategy, National Fire Prevention Week (‘NFPW’) should adopt a two-pronged approach with initiatives on both centralized and local levels.

**Recommended Alberta Fire Chiefs’ Association Actions**

1. Disseminate a description of the Fire Prevention Canada or AEMA theme for NFPW to local fire departments explaining the theme and slogan and how they can incorporate it into their NFPW celebrations;
2. Develop a speaking topic (or choose one from the tool: Ideas: Public Speaking Engagements) which ties into the chosen theme of NFPW and promote this speech to fire departments and municipalities across the province. Identify several individuals in locations across the province (north, south, east, and west) who could give this speech in their region;
3. Plan a launch event for NFPW – this should be a publicity-generating event which draws attention to fire safety, volunteer firefighting, and the theme of NFPW;
4. Create a press release for NFPW (using the tools: News Release and Media Relations, News Release, and the Sample News Release). Disseminate the news release to local fire departments (about 1 week before NFPW) and the media (during NFPW);
5. If appropriate, plan professional development opportunities for Fire Chiefs and Deputy Fire Chiefs following NFPW;
6. Plan an event to close NFPW – this may be the provincial-level Firefighter Service Recognition Award ceremony suggested under “Local Retention Initiative #4: Firefighter Service Recognition Awards”. Use this event to draw publicity attention to volunteer firefighting in Alberta.
Recommended Local Fire Hall Actions

1. Try to tie your local community events to the provincial National Fire Prevention Week (NFPW) theme;

2. Plan at least one event for your community to participate in to celebrate NFPW. Planning should begin at least two months before NFPW. For a streamlined planning process, involve only a subset of fire department members (and include spouses where possible) through a “National Fire Prevention Week Planning Committee”. Possible events or initiatives include:
   - Demonstrate the use fire service equipment (ex/ a demonstration of the Jaws of Life);
   - Host an open house and conduct tours of the fire hall;
   - Host a community barbeque;
   - If your community has a Junior Firefighters Program, allow them to help you speak to students and other groups;
   - Have a local or regional Firefighter Service Recognition Award ceremony suggested under “Local Retention Initiative #4: Firefighter Service Recognition Awards”;
   - Place a public service announcement in the local newspaper educating the community about ways to prevent fires;
   - Hang banners around town with fire safety tips;
   - Place sandwich boards (also known as a-frames) displaying the names of volunteer firefighters and inspirational quotes on Main Street. Similarly banners with volunteer firefighter names and inspirational quotes could be wrapped around power poles around the town;
   - Speak to school groups or the town or tribal council about the importance of volunteering and the impact the department has on the community;
   - Have a thank-you breakfast, lunch, or supper for supportive employers;
   - Give supportive employers plaques, certificates, or banners showing their support of volunteer firefighting.

3. Whatever event or initiative you choose to do, draw media attention to it through news releases (see tools: News Release and Media Relations, News Release, and the Sample News Release). Conduct interviews and provide photo opportunities wherever possible.
Recommended Local Fire Hall Marketing Actions

Okay, so you’ve spent time planning your event – but how do you get people to attend? Below are some ideas to help you market your event to your local community.

**Anytime**
- Word of mouth is by far the most effective advertising method – ask members of the fire department to tell their friends, family, neighbours, and colleagues about upcoming events;
- If your community has a calendar (either online or sold as a fundraising tool by other organizations) add your event to the calendar;
- Get shirts printed advertising National Fire Prevention Week in a variety of sizes. The back of the shirt could say “ask me what’s going on”. Get members of the fire department to wear these shirts around town starting as soon as event planning begins. Ensure that all members of the fire department know what will be happening and when. After National Fire Prevention Week, collect the shirts, wash them, and store them at the fire hall.

**Two weeks before**
- Utilize an information sign-up sheet at all your events (including trade shows, if applicable). The contact information (e-mail is easiest) of anyone interested in receiving more information about the fire department should be kept on file. E-mail these individuals about the fire hall’s upcoming events about two weeks before the event;
- Ask businesses if you can hang posters or place a small advertisement for the event by the cash register;
- Advertise in the local newspaper and municipal newsletter;
- Hang fliers in coffee shops, the post office, churches, and other public gathering places;
- Stuff mailboxes with fliers;
- Submit a brief article for the upcoming events column in the local newspaper and for public service announcements or an upcoming events section by local radio stations.

**One month before**
- Community associations are a great resource – they have the contact information of all members on hand. Ask them to send out information about your event;
- Utilize the Chamber of Commerce, Municipal Office, and Volunteer Centre (or Family and Community Support Services office) in your community. These organizations usually have newsletters that they send out to organizations and individuals in the community. Ask them to advertise your event in their newsletter and in their offices;
- Advertise the event after the signature line in your e-mail and on the department’s voice mail.
A regular newsletter about the fire department can serve as an important tool for keeping the community (including residents, business owners, and political stakeholders) informed about the fire department. Those who may not have known about the fire hall before may become interested in either volunteering at the fire hall or supporting it in other means.

Before the newsletter is sent out, the municipality’s Chief Administrative Officer, or the fire hall’s immediate municipal supervisor should have an opportunity to proofread and approve it.

Microsoft Word has a variety of newsletter templates which can be found by opening a new document, and selecting the “newsletter” document-type option.

What to Include:
- Firefighter of the month (or time period during which you publish the newsletter);
- Firefighters who are leaving or retiring;
- Statistics about the fire department
- Pictures
- Message from the Fire Chief (about upcoming fire hall events or initiatives);
- Fire safety tips;
- Upcoming fire hall events (the events of other community groups could also be profiled in the newsletter);
- Training schedule;
- News affecting the fire hall/community;
- Volunteer job descriptions;
- Profile the centralized recruitment website and recruitment hotline (if implemented by the AFCA);
- Profile the department’s social media use (if implemented by the local department);
- Include a guest column by the nearest volunteer firefighting spokesperson (if initiative implemented by the AFCA);
- Frequently asked questions;
- Department contact information;
- Logos or advertisements (especially for businesses which support the fire hall).

Tips for Writing a Newsletter
- Use a simple template – one that’s not too busy or overwhelming;
- Write simply – don’t use a lot of imagery or analogies;
- Remember your audience – when planning articles, think about what they will be interested in reading about. Also – ensure you’re speaking their language by not using acronyms which are specific to the fire department;
- Voice appreciation for current fire fighters – use the newspaper as a place to brag about their accomplishments
- Give current members of the department the opportunity to either submit articles or compile the newsletter (this reduces the workload and gets “buy-in” from current department members).
Trade show marketing typically involves three phases: pre-show marketing, at-show marketing, and post-show marketing. Below is a short summary of what should happen in each phase of the marketing planning process.

Pre-Show Marketing

- Set goals for the trade fair (ex. The number of people who sign up for more information about volunteer firefighting; the number of people who take firefighter application forms);
- Invite specific attendees to the trade show;
- Advertise that the fire department will be attending the trade show;
- Develop and use consistent messaging in professional-looking brochures, handouts, and banners. These items must convey the department’s message quickly and simply;
- Schedule specific people to be present at the booth at certain times;
- Plan for the promotions you will have at your booth (interactive events like demonstrations, contests, or giveaways).

At-Show Marketing

- Use promotions to draw people to the booth;
- Ensure those attending the booth know enough to be able to answer potential questions;
- Talk to other groups at the trade show as a means of engaging with the community (and networking);
- Have a sign-up sheet for visitors to add their information to if they are interested in volunteer firefighting.

Post-Show Marketing

- Follow up immediately with visitors who signed up for more information about the fire hall – give them more information about volunteer firefighting or invite them to a tour of the fire hall;
- Evaluate the success of the trade show as it relates to the goals you set at the beginning of the process.
Gathering commercial donations for the fire hall should always be done in consultation with the municipality’s chief administrative officer, or the most immediate municipal supervisor. Always show your municipal contact the donor package you will be sending out and receive approval before sending.

Getting commercial donations means more than getting free items or space – it means forming a partnership with a business where both parties benefit. For you, this means having a good portion of your expenses covered by the donor. For the business, it means brand building, logo representation, and the opportunity to self-promote. The links between the donor company and the event should be clear. For example – hosting an event educating the public about open fires? Ask a local seller of fire pit accessories (pit covers, etc.) to donate items to the event.

**The Wish-list:** Start by assessing how many events your department would like donations for. Additionally, assess what types of promotional items (as recommended in the local initiatives section) your department would like (pens, bumper stickers, canvas bags, t-shirts).

**The Reality Check:** Gauge the ability of your community’s businesses to supply these items. If local businesses are not able to provide the promotional items you had originally hoped for, consider revising this list as the likelihood of a company outside of your department’s area of coverage donating to the fire department is low.

**When Approaching a Potential Commercial Donor:** Decide on how you contact the potential donor (phone, e-mail, in person) based on your relationship with them. Approaching someone in person ensures that your request is not ignored, but requires more preparation. When in doubt, phone the potential donor. If you are considering approaching a business that one of your volunteers works for, consult with the volunteer first to ask when an appropriate time would be to talk to their employer (depending on the volunteer, you may be able to get him or her to approach the potential donor).

Do your homework! Before you approach a potential donor, know:

- The size of the business (and ensure your ask is an appropriate amount);
- Other organizations or events the business gives to;
- What would motivate the potential donor to participate;
- The benefits the fire department can offer the donor;
- If the donor been involved in your department before.

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**Tool: How-to Guide: Commercial Donations**
**Used by: **Fire Chief
**When to use:** When putting on events or creating fire department promotional items
**Learn more:** Recruitment and Retention Strategy, page 13
Contents of a Donor Package: In addition to a letter, a donor package usually contains the following informational items about the fire department:

- Title page with address, phone, fax, and contact person;
- Table of contents;
- Overview, history, and mission/vision for the agency;
- Demographics of those who attend your events;
- Listing and brief description of programs which the fire hall is seeking donation for;
- The impact the fire hall has on the community.

After discussing a donor opportunity with a business, follow up (within one day) with a thank-you letter and request another meeting when appropriate.

Differences between donation of general promotional items and event-specific donations

Below is a sample donor request for general promotional items. The difference between asking for donations for general promotional items and event-specific donations is the following: an event will be bigger – this allows you to ask for more money or a bigger in-kind donation but... you have to offer more. The solution to this is the development of different donor levels. Here is an example of a breakdown of different donor levels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gold Donor Level</th>
<th>Silver Donor Level</th>
<th>Bronze Donor Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>$250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits:</td>
<td>Benefits:</td>
<td>Benefits:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Name added to event title</td>
<td>- Logo placement on side stage</td>
<td>- Logo placement on all brochures, posters, and fliers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Logo placement on main stage</td>
<td>- Logo placement on all brochures, posters, and fliers</td>
<td>- Booth opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Logo placement on side stage</td>
<td>- Booth opportunity</td>
<td>- Booth opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Logo placement on all brochures, posters, and fliers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Speech-making opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Booth Opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You’ve got donations – now what? After the donor has verbally agreed, ensure you follow-up with a thank-you note and a written agreement according to what was discussed in meetings. In the written agreement, place specified dates you expect to receive the money or in-kind donation, and outline the consequences of cancelling the agreement at specific stages. Ensure that you keep the donor up-to-date on all goings-on which would affect him or her.
You didn’t get donations – now what? Always thank the individual – just because he or she said no this time, doesn’t mean they won’t be interested in the future. Politely (and delicately) discuss why they refused your offer (possible reasons may be timing, cost, lack of perceived benefits, previous commitment, etc.). Be careful about using this as an opportunity to continue selling, if the business owner has already said a firm “no”; do not continue trying to sell the opportunity. If the business owner says “no, because…” and outlines a specific obstacle, this may be an opportunity to repeat or rephrase the benefits to address the concerns voiced.

After the event or designated donation period has ended: Thank the donor for their involvement. Ask them about their satisfaction with the donation experience. If they express dissatisfaction, ask them what you can do to improve the experience and offer creative solutions. Never burn bridges! Do your best to accommodate the donors’ thoughts and feedback.
Ms. Jane Smith
XYZ T-Shirts
001 Main Street
Anytown, Alberta  T0T 0T0

May 20, 2010

Subject: Anytown Fire Department Donation Opportunity

Dear Ms. Smith:

My name is John Smith and I am the Fire Chief of Anytown Fire Department. The fire department is Anytown’s only emergency response unit, and the closest unit which can respond in less than 2 hours due to Anytown’s remote location. The department conducts many activities which contribute to the quality of life in Anytown. The infrastructure that the Anytown Fire Department provides helps maintain our current population, and attract new residents.

However, in order to continue doing so, the Anytown Fire Department must improve its capacity to attract new firefighters. I am writing to you to request your support for the Anytown Fire Department in the form of a donation of 50 t-shirts which would promote the department.

Anytown Fire Department has been in operation for nearly 50 years and has grown from 5 people to 75 people in that time. The fire department is a vital component of Anytown, as seen by the 900 emergencies we responded to last year. This saves the town more than $750,000 annually (note: to get the dollar amount, multiply the collective number of hours volunteered at the department annually by $32.40 (the average wage of an Albertan firefighter according to the 2009 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey) and subtract any stipend or compensation the firefighters receive.)!

In return for your donation of the promotional t-shirts, the Anytown Fire Department will let you approve the t-shirt design – which will include the placement of a maximum 7 inch by 7 inch space for your logo. If you were to donate these t-shirts to the fire department, we would also ensure a 2 inch by 2 inch replica of your logo was placed on all fliers the fire department produces for the next year.

Please find enclosed the Anytown Fire Department’s donation package. I would enjoy meeting with you to discuss this opportunity at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your consideration of this opportunity.

Sincerely,

John Smith
Fire Chief
Anytown Fire Department
cc. Municipality Administration/ Chief Administrative Officer
Using social media as a recruitment medium allows for accurate portrayal of the realities of volunteer firefighting, as it is written by the firefighters themselves.

According to the 6 S Marketing survey, some of the most popular social media tools are:
- Facebook (used by 70% of people surveyed): www.facebook.com/
- Twitter (used by 47% of people surveyed): http://twitter.com
- Blogs (for example, http://wordpress.com or http://blog.com)

It is recommended that local volunteer fire departments establish a presence on at least one of the aforementioned websites. The fire department should select contributors from the pool of current volunteer firefighters. Writing and communication skills should be a primary consideration when selecting a social media contributor. It may also be useful to engage someone from Generation Y to assist with creating and building a social media presence.

Below are suggestions for how each of the recommended websites should be used by local fire departments.

**Facebook**

Facebook is a social networking site where individuals and organizations can create profiles containing information about themselves.

Facebook can be used for both internal and external purposes. Externally, the page can show information about the department and upcoming events. Facebook could also be used to promote internal events, and to post meeting minutes and updates for members. Leduc County Fire Services uses Facebook to communicate with past and present members of the department. This may be one model for departments to base their Facebook use on.

Other suggestions:
- Create a Facebook “group” for your fire department, and utilize the discussion boards for places where people can ask or answer questions about firefighting;
- Facebook can also be used to organize and promote events (by using the “events” application);
- Facebook communications should be aimed at a younger demographic audience (those under 35);
- The Facebook “wall” can be used for volunteer firefighters to share stories about their experience with the fire department;
- Meeting minutes and member updates can be posted on the Facebook page, if this content is restricted to members only;
- Use Facebook as a central location to link to other social media materials, the AFCA website, and the local fire department’s website;
- Use Facebook to send messages to members of the group, or “fans” of the department about upcoming events, opportunities, or initiatives.
Twitter

Twitter is a social networking and microblogging (where sentences, instead of paragraphs, are posted) website. Users are allowed to post information up to 140 characters in length. Similar to Facebook, users of Twitter sign up to “follow” (or monitor) the posts of other users. According to The New York Times, most of Twitter’s usage comes from older adults. Suggested usage of Twitter includes:

- Keeping other community organizations updated on the activities of the fire department;
- Monitoring the actions and events of other community organizations by “following” their posts;
- Using short descriptions to keep the public updated on the daily going-ons of the fire department;
- Allowing department members to make posts about things they are doing around the fire hall;
- Send out event reminders via a short post with a link to a Facebook event;
- Sending out news stories that are relevant to the local fire hall.

Blog

Blogs are used in a variety of ways – some provide commentary or news on a particular subject, others function as more personal online diaries. The local fire department’s blog should be a composite of both types. It should provide a commentary on the fire department in general, and also provide somewhere for firefighters to describe to the public what it’s like to be a volunteer – including training, duties around the fire hall, engagement with the community, and frequency on emergency calls. An example can be found at: http://www.manchesterfire.gov.uk/interactive-fun/blogs.aspx . Suggested blog entries could be:

- Personal descriptions of what it’s like to be a firefighter;
- Issues the fire department is educating the public about;
- General fire safety information;
- Spouses could write about their experiences of being a spouse of a firefighter;
- Detailed information about department events;
- Profile a firefighter of the month.
Sample Social Media Guidelines

- Include name, company name, position in posts and responses (where possible, especially blogs);
- Stay positive;
- Respect copyrights and fair use policies;
- Cite sources & link to supporting documents, websites, and organizations;
- Don’t talk about HR or other confidential topics over social media;
- When responding to negative comments, only correct factual errors, don’t argue with the opinion or point of view expressed. The point of comments is provoke thoughts and interaction;
- Keep track of the amount of time spent updating social media content. A maximum goal of time spent per week updating the social media should be set and aimed for;
- Access to the social media accounts should be controlled and limited to only the designated social media updaters. While it has been suggested that different members of the department speak about their experiences with the department, password access should be limited to only a few individuals;
- Encourage comments – and make sure you reply to those who comment on your posts;
- Posts must not exhibit harassment or discrimination against any group.
An effective volunteer program acknowledges volunteers throughout the year by providing meaningful recognition on an ongoing basis. Appreciation encourages volunteers as it lets them know that the time they spend at the fire department is appreciated and that their accomplishments are important to the department.

A common mistake is thinking that giving a volunteer money is the only way of showing them recognition. Often non-monetary rewards such as praise and recognition are more meaningful to the volunteer than money.

Everyone likes to be recognized in different ways. As such, during the beginning of the volunteer’s involvement with the fire department, the Fire Chief or Volunteer Coordinator should make a point of asking the volunteer how he or she likes to be recognized. Recognition should happen internally within the fire department and also externally during events the community can attend.

External Recognition Ideas

- Host a community supper – which firefighters and family attend for free, and community members pay to attend. Feature live entertainment at this event and recognize the contributions the firefighters make to the community (through speeches by the mayor or other political stakeholders);
- Biannual community newsletter about the volunteer fire department profiling the activities of the department and of the individuals (also make sure to thank supportive employers in this newsletter);
- Biannual fire department appreciation advertisement in the local newspaper (include a thank-you to supportive employers);
- Fire Service Recognition Awards ceremony that community members can attend;
- Hang banners around the community thanking both volunteer firefighters, families, and supportive employers;
- Sandwich boards (also known as a-frames) displaying the names of volunteer firefighters on Main Street;
- Ensure that your community thanks its volunteer firefighters as part of National Volunteer Week celebrations;
- Encourage the local newspaper to profile volunteer firefighters throughout the year.
Internal Recognition Ideas

- Informally verbally recognize and thank volunteers often. It’s easy to get caught up in the day-to-day business of running the fire hall, but one of the most important aspects of volunteer recognition is regularly, and informally, telling volunteers that they’ve done good work. This could take place after an emergency response, after reviewing someone’s work, or at a departmental meeting;
- Share praise of the fire department which comes from members of the community;
- Conduct regular performance evaluations;
- Thank-you cards for both the family and the volunteer firefighter. Hint: writing the cards by hand conveys more appreciation than type-written cards, as it shows you’ve taken the time to write them;
- Fire Service Recognition Awards ceremony only for family and firefighters;
- Choose a ‘firefighter of the month’ and write about them in a fire department or community newsletter. Don’t tell the firefighter they are being chosen; instead, ask for information for the write-up from their friends and family. To reward the firefighter, have a special parking spot for the firefighter of the month.
- Obtain discounts or “perks” for volunteer firefighters from local businesses (see tool: Fundraising How-to Guide);
- Appreciation breakfasts and dinners for firefighters and/or family members;
- Give SWAG (‘stuff we all get’) and promotional items to firefighters and their families;
- Conduct spontaneous draws for prizes at fire hall events (such as training, meetings, etc.)
- Motivational speakers, or entertainment nights specifically for members of the fire hall;
- Start a firefighter baseball, softball, soccer, or football team to encourage bonding;
- Say “please” and “thank-you”. Thank those who come to meetings and practises, and always use “please” when making requests.
LITERATURE SOURCES


Penner, Moly. "Re: English Language Proficiency for Police." Message to Jenna Marynowski. 12 March 2010. E-mail.