



# Supplementing Volunteer Resources

A symposium co-sponsored by



**ASSOCIATION OF  
FIRE DISTRICTS**  
OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK



**NYSAFC**  
New York State Association of Fire Chiefs

September 25, 2014

Clifton Park, NY

*Summary and Recommendations from the  
Symposium held for the Fire Services in New York State  
on September 25, 2014*



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## **Background**

Recruiting and maintaining adequate membership in the volunteer fire service across New York and the nation have been dominant concerns of fire administrators and leaders for more than two decades. Beginning in the 1980's, actions were initiated to encourage increased volunteer participation and retention, but many of the gains have been offset by demographic, social and economic changes that continue to make it difficult to bring-in and sustain volunteer rosters at satisfactory levels.

Approximately 84% of the firefighters in New York State are volunteers and there are 15,000 fewer volunteer firefighters today than there were 20 years ago. Fire departments across the state have had to initiate a variety of measures to maintain the scope of services they provide in their communities, often depending on mutual aid and/or consolidation with neighboring departments and arranging for paid or contract services to supplement a decline in volunteers.

Many fire departments have successfully implemented changes to address staff and volunteer shortages, but most departments continue to face challenges in their efforts to bolster or even sustain volunteer memberships in a time when community expectations and operational demands are increasing.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the September 25, 2014 symposium was to evaluate and summarize issues related to supplementing volunteer resources in the fire service that will lead to the preparation of a guidance document that fire districts across the state can use when considering options and strategies to address fire department staffing and meet operational demands.

The symposium discussions and guidance are intended to serve as a resource for fire districts and departments when they are evaluating options to enhance volunteer participation; but also includes options to supplement volunteer resources by consolidating services, contracting for services or adding paid staff to supplement the volunteer force.

The goal was to capture successful strategies and identify 'best practices' that fire departments have used to address volunteer participation and enhanced staffing. It further recognizes failures and challenges that departments have encountered when working to meet staffing needs and provides an analysis of the range of options departments can consider when addressing their volunteer force and staffing requirements.

## **Participants**

A list of the 28 symposium attendees is included as an attachment to this report.

Participants included long-serving and experienced fire service leaders from across New York State that are considered ‘subject matter experts’ in areas of volunteer fire department management. Many serve as administrators of volunteer departments and are directors or officers of independent fire districts. Several represented fire companies that have combined volunteer and paid staff and others have tenure with career departments and now work with volunteer organizations.

Most of the participants have served as Chiefs and line-officers in both volunteer and career fire departments, they have held administrative or other organizational leadership roles in their department and many sit on statewide boards and/or associations that represent fire service interests.

Attendees represented a wide range of community profiles in the state, including rural towns and villages, small cities, plus small and large suburbs. They came from fire departments and districts that provide fire protection to a few thousand residents and from jurisdictions that serve hundreds of thousands of residents.

## **Date and Location**

The symposium was held on September 25, 2014 at the *Clifton Park–Halfmoon Fire Department* in Clifton Park, NY, which is situated in New York’s Capital District, just north of Albany, NY.

**Agenda**

8:30 AM	Arrival and Greetings	
9:00	Welcome and Introductions	
9:15	Setting Goals and Policies	<p>Authorities, Legislation and Standards</p> <p>Determining Paid and/or Volunteer Expenses and Budgeting</p> <p>Equal Opportunity and Diversity</p> <p>Legal, Civil Service and Union Issues</p>
10:30	Organizing a Program	<p>Developing Task Objectives</p> <p>Job Descriptions and Classifications</p> <p>Qualifications and Physical Requirements</p> <p>Estimating Hours, Full and/or Part-Time</p> <p>Command, Management and Supervision</p>
11:30	Bringing Volunteers In	<p>Recruiting and Screening</p> <p>Evaluating Qualifications and Fitness</p> <p>Background Checks and Residency Issues</p> <p>Interviewing, Hiring and Probation</p>
12:15 PM	Lunch	
1:00	Proper Care and Handling	<p>Training and Education</p> <p>Mentoring, Trainers and Supervision</p> <p>Monitoring, Evaluation and Discipline</p> <p>Compensation, Rewards and Incentives</p> <p>Promotion, Advancement and Retirement</p>
3:00	Now ... Let's talk Again about Goals, Policies and Organization	<p>Is change possible? What will it take?</p> <p>How can our discussions today be introduced in your department or organization?</p> <p>What about legislation and global thinking in the fire service? What is needed? Where is it going?</p>
5:00	Adjourn	

## **Mission Statement**

Symposium participants prepared a mission statement to guide future efforts to evaluate and implement measures to strengthen volunteer participation and supplement volunteer resources in New York State.

### ***Developing Volunteer Resources in the Fire Service – Mission Statement***

Our mission is to share knowledge, information and resources that are critical to recruiting and maintaining volunteer forces in the fire services of New York State, and when necessary provide analysis and support that will aid fire departments in developing effective measures to supplement volunteer resources. Critical to this mission is our ability to balance a committed and outspoken promotion of our core volunteer purpose and values with a need to adapt and make changes in how we fulfill our service role in an evolving public safety environment. The challenges associated with maintaining and supplementing our volunteer resources will be best met through collaboration and education of fire service personnel and community leaders across the state as they join together to look at our proud accomplishments and honestly consider changes that will preserve and strengthen our future.

## **Challenges and Limitations**

Fire departments across New York report difficulties in recruiting and maintaining adequate numbers of volunteer personnel, and they also face obstacles and challenges in their efforts to supplement volunteer forces with other kinds of staffing or organizational change. While priorities and circumstances differ among departments, the symposium highlighted that the following problems and limitations represent the central issues affecting staffing in the volunteer fire service.

### *Demographics*

Population loss results in fewer available volunteers

An aging population and the movement of young people out-of-state affects volunteering

Population loss reduces the total assessed value of property and funding raised by property taxation

Two earner couples and single parent households have less time available for volunteering

Suburban sprawl can affect the 'community identity' that traditionally promoted volunteerism

Family mobility prevents community rooting and identity that favors volunteering

The mobility and dispersion of extended families affects the links that promote volunteering

Shifting populations leave many departments stressed, while others must cope with expansion

Public expectations of firefighters remain high, regardless of population and revenue trends

Increases in population bring an even greater demand for services

### *Member Attitudes*

An organizational focus on buildings and apparatus too often overshadows staffing needs

Reluctance to consider or honestly evaluate staffing options and organizational change

Inability to blend and reconcile the traditional all-volunteer culture with other staffing opportunities

Resistance to sharing services, apparatus and building arrangements with other departments

Opposition to partnerships or consolidation with other departments when it may have benefits

### *Public Expectations*

The public expects departments to keep pace with technological advances in public safety

Public safety providers are expected to embrace increasingly rigorous standards and protocols

The public does not recognize how volunteer fire departments differ from other public services

Our reliance on volunteers is unlike any other public service and the challenges are not well recognized

Keeping citizens apprised of advancing technologies and standards for public safety is difficult  
The expectation is that public service providers will constantly look for cost reductions and savings  
The public demands increasing services, particularly for EMS and specialties that no other agency provides

*Budgets and Finance*

Difficulty adapting to variable economic trends, particularly when revenues and fundraising are tight  
Pressure to reduce local government and community service spending  
Legislative restrictions of revenue increases; tax caps and tax freeze  
Resistance to tax and fee increases  
Changes in giving patterns that reduce fundraising efforts  
Funding increasingly costly training and related staff expenses  
Purchase of duplicate equipment and apparatus when resources could be shared among departments

*Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS)*

Where applicable, departments that provide EMS must continually evaluate how EMS duties fit with their core mission and their ability to provide the community with quality and efficient service.  
Demands associated with EMS training and certification, plus compliance with standards and protocols of care are commonly cited as significant barriers associated with volunteer recruitment and retention.  
The inability of fire districts to bill for EMS services limits resources that could be used for volunteer development

*Career and Volunteer*

Managing the advantages, problems and issues associated with combined staff  
Gaining support for changing to combined volunteer and career staff  
Recognizing when it's time to consider change  
Volunteer acceptance and labor relations issues

*Laws, Legislation and Labor Relations*

Gaps exist in state legislation to address supplementing volunteers with paid or contract staff

No legal authority for counties to provide regional support and services

Restrictive taxing limits impact the ability to fund services

Laws limit the ability to charge user fees and apply other revenue options

*Manpower and Staffing*

Protecting your current volunteer corps when new recruiting is difficult

Employers increasingly resist letting volunteers respond to calls

Meeting physical standards and health and safety requirements for volunteers

Solutions and options differ for rural and suburban departments based on demand for services

The time required to meet minimum training standards

*Organization and Shared Services*

Departments have not performed objective self-assessments and/or gap analysis

Overcoming opposition and resistance to change

Competition among departments that unintentionally discourages sharing of resources

Difficulty managing challenges and the political impacts of change

## **Discussion Topics, Focus and Approach**

The symposium topics and discussion areas are outlined in the agenda above and were set using the attached ‘white paper’ that was prepared prior to the symposium by the NYS Association of Fire Districts. The agenda and discussion were not rigid, however, and symposium participants were able to freely integrate and enhance their ideas throughout the day in a framework that revisited important concepts as new and overlapping topics were explored.

To assure a balanced and objective approach in preparing the symposium summary and findings, professional facilitators were used to guide the discussions, manage the agenda and capture the group’s suggestions and recommendations.

Two facilitators prepared independent sets of notes throughout the discussions that were used to prepare this symposium summary. These observations were supplemented by the notes of several participants and follow-up suggestions that were submitted after the meeting. Information from the white paper and data from state fire administrative organizations and associations were used to provide related support and perspective.

## **Fire Service Organization and Definitions**

Fire department staffing in NYS is organized in three ways ...

- Career departments, those having full and/or part-time paid personnel and no volunteers
- Combined volunteer and paid departments; usually in large suburban communities, small cities or large villages. In most situations, either volunteer or career personnel will make-up the primary force, which is then supplemented by smaller numbers of volunteers or paid-staff, whichever applies
- All-volunteer departments; which are the predominant means of staffing fire services in rural areas and are also common in suburban and village areas

Fire departments in NYS are administered and funded in one of three ways ...

- City or Village Departments – which are funded and operate as a department of the municipal government
- Fire Districts - independent taxing and governing entities responsible for providing fire protection for one or more communities in a service area that may overlap political jurisdictions

- Volunteer Fire Companies - independent not-for-profit organizations that usually have their own service area boundaries which may include all or part of one or more towns and/or villages. They contract with the towns or village they serve to provide fire protection

The types of staff used in the various fire services across the state include the following ...

- Volunteer Firefighters – are not compensated, but can be awarded certain benefits such as retirement credits, help with higher education expenses or credits and partial health benefits
- Career Firefighters – usually refers to full-time personnel that receive a salary and some type of benefits package
- Paid-On Call Firefighters – compensated personnel who are called when needed within the framework of a plan that may set on-call periods and usually limits the number of hours worked
- Houseman or Station-Keeper – compensated personnel that usually performs non-firefighting support functions to insure facility, apparatus and/or operational readiness
- Paid Staff – a general term that usually refers to a paid firefighter that works part-time with a fire department that has a combined volunteer and paid staff. A full-time firefighter is most often referred to as a career firefighter in both a combined and fully compensated department

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### *Volunteer or Staff Needs Assessments*

All fire departments should perform a ‘needs assessment’ or ‘gap analysis’ that looks at volunteer or staff considerations. This review should particularly look at demographic, service demand and volunteering trends in the community – and it should be documented or formally prepared in writing so that it can be shared with current and future leadership as a department policy or staffing blueprint.

### *Volunteer Recruitment*

Review the company by-laws to insure they emphasize incentives for recruitment and do not unwittingly discourage volunteers

Embrace standards for qualifications, physical demands and training; but review policies to determine if restrictive or outdated provisions can be amended to enhance volunteer participation

Review and continually update membership policies related to women, minorities, age restrictions, and medical and physical limitations

Be clear with volunteers about what you expect from them and ask them what they expect from you; discuss training requirements, the potential benefits available to them and the timeline they face in achieving goals

Interview prospective members at their home; it insures the spouse is on board with their commitment and fosters family support

Seek candidates for various tasks, not all members must be interior qualified firefighters; they can help with administration, maintenance, inventory, record-keeping, scene support ....

### **Best Practice - Assessments**

Look for a retired management professional in your community that might volunteer, or at nominal cost, help your department facilitate a discussion and prepare a report outlining your volunteer and staffing options. An independent set of eyes will add value to your results; they can sort through internal conflicts and help you stay on track

Look to recruit beyond the traditional family ‘son follows father and brother’ model. Recruit the daughter, the son’s friend, the other kids on the block and the new family in town.

*Recruiting That Works*

- Increase community awareness about volunteering and where you most need help
- Do more than appeal for volunteers, be job and task specific, about your needs and the recruit's
- Young people are 'linked-in' – be robust about your web and social media use
- Use 'fire prevention week' to recruit, not just educate
- Be present and visible at every community event, festival, outing and gathering
- Promote youth 'ride-alongs', internships and events
- Connect with schools and colleges on scholarships, presentations and career-days
- Find a way to bring-in non-traditional volunteers like commuters and temporary residents
- Recruit members for life – of course – but look for a 3 to 5 year commitment as well
- Partner with veterans, civic clubs and other community organizations

**Best Practice - Strengthening Your Commitment to Recruiting**

Ask volunteers to join, yes, it's very important ... but there's more. Establish a 'volunteer program' that involves goals, targets, incentives, briefing materials and a team of committed recruiters

**A  
Prospect's  
Guide to  
Joining the  
North Syracuse  
Volunteer Fire**

**contents**

- >from the chief
- >why volunteer?
- >about us
- >organization
- >response
- >our mission
- >our vision
- >opportunities
- >benefits
- >expectations



### *College & Fire Department Partnerships*



Member recruitment that involves area colleges can provide a continuous cycle of volunteers who gain ‘on-the job’ training, life skills and it looks great on their resume.

#### *Recruiting at the Campus*

Some fire departments interact directly with local colleges to recruit from among the student population. Many students like the off-campus participation, exciting work and see it as a great opportunity to improve their job seeking potential.

Students can add to a fire departments response core on workdays, and some departments use them as ‘bunk-in’ staff that support an immediate on-scene response, which also eliminates transportation issues and focuses their attention on the firefighting priority.

#### *Tuition Incentive Programs*

Fire departments in Nassau County are among a growing number statewide that take advantage of tuition assistance or scholarship programs that pay community college tuition for students that volunteer. John Mirando of the Rockville Centre Fire Department says their program is “bringing in younger members because they can attend Nassau community College for free”.



Nassau County  
Firefighter Tuition  
Assistance Program

The Fire Association of the State of New York (FASNY) sponsors the Higher Education Learning Plan (HELP), a tuition reimbursement program that helps student volunteer firefighters offset the cost of education at their local community college. Erie County and other areas of the state are putting these ideas and opportunities to work.



FASNY: Volunteer Firefighters  
OK'd for Tuition Aid in Erie County

*Successful Strategies ... Focusing on Youth*

Fire departments across the state often report that their most successful recruiting centers on programs for young people. Some wonder if the investment and training will pay-off when it is expected that young folks so often move-on, but the greater outlook is that retaining even a percentage of these young recruits in your home department – while knowing some will later join a neighboring district – produces tremendous value for the entire fire service that lasts for a generation.

*Proven Youth Mentoring Programs*

One the easiest ways to encourage youth participation, this approach allows members to recruit young volunteers and serve as their mentor and partner, thus guiding and strengthening their development as a firefighter and confident member of the firefighting team.

Senior fire department members or others looking to help in ways not involving a high level of physical activity will often step in to organize and mentor these young people. It can actually strengthen your organization when officers step-back, limit themselves to an oversight role and give senior members the opportunity to mentor.

*Junior Firefighter Programs*

**Best Practice – Junior Firefighter programs are popular across the state**

Junior Firefighter programs have long been touted statewide as one of the most successful means of recruiting new members. The Rockville Center Fire Department in Nassau County is cited as a leader in demonstrating the advantages of youth oriented growth in the fire service. Juniors can begin at age 13 and they don't go to active fires, but they learn the basics and run drills at the firehouse; and once a year they attend a skills course at the County fire training center. They gain experience and their enthusiasm builds as they near graduation and full-membership in the department.

*Explorer Programs*

Firefighter Explorer programs have a long tradition of success throughout New York State and are highly valued as an educational and character building opportunity for youth that encourages a new generation of fire service volunteers.

The Henrietta Fire District in Monroe County sponsors Explorers in 12 district fire departments and provides them with training in engine and ladder company operations, fire extinguisher use and conducts a Midnight protective 'gear donning' drill.



*Volunteer Retention*

Integrate and train volunteers quickly ... get them safely involved in regular operations early ... prompt up front interest and let them experience immediate value

Prepare a 'task book' that outlines volunteer options and roles – assure a job for everyone

Volunteer duties must remain important and credible, but value is personal, find out how each member seeks fulfillment

Don't skimp or fail to recognize even the smallest contributions ... to the extent possible, 'pour-it-on' when it comes to high-profile tasks, gear, communication devices, uniforms, t-shirts and fun wear, patches, awards and especially 'thank yous'

Deal with conflicts among the membership. Bring parties together, put issues on the table, let all have a say, be fair and objective, move quickly to solutions, move away from the past and focus on the future

Friendships, value-adding peer groups, goal oriented teams and healthy competition all advance the strength and success of an organization. Be watchful, however, for cliques and alliances that seek gain for a segment of the membership at the expense of others. Factions that cast superiority and exclusivity are disruptive to the organization's mission and drive members away.

Work with all your officers, leaders and supervisors to use a lot of positive reinforcement. Place emphasis on leadership, respect, listening, appreciation, guidance, learning, teaching, patience, fairness and objective evaluation

Members will value an emphasis on quality, standards, policies, rules, order, education and hard-work - *but find time for fun* – social gatherings, recreation, comradery, sharing and leisure

***Best Practice – A Member Oriented Department***

Many departments have improved value and interest for their volunteers by establishing teams or levels of participation where members can determine their best fit and serve at a level they are comfortable with. Active and energetic volunteers can pursue training and seek increasingly more rewarding responsibilities, even stepping up the ranks to leadership roles. For others, helping with support or administrative functions brings all the value they need. It is often called a squad program and can have all or some of these features.

*Administrative Support* – these members need only basic fire operations training and do not perform on-scene duty; their activities center on firehouse organization, inventory management, communications and technology readiness, recordkeeping, reports, etc.

*Scene Support* – members have basic fire operations training; they work outside the hot zone to insure needed equipment and resources are available and ready at the scene, they perform logistics functions, track personnel, plus assist with communications and security

*Exterior Firefighter* – requires basic firefighter operations training; works the fire scene exterior on pump, ladder and hose operations

*Interior Firefighter* – requires advanced and specialty firefighter training; performs interior firefighting operations

***Managing Change and Member Attitudes***

For volunteer fire departments, issues associated with recruitment and retention have been at the top of their agendas for more than two decades. Changes in volunteer trends and challenges that make it difficult to recruit and replace personnel are expected to continue, which forces many fire departments to look at alternative staffing options that include shared service arrangements, contracting and/or adding paid personnel. And even for career or combination paid/volunteer departments, dwindling revenues and tight budgets are forcing them to consider historic changes to how they staff their departments.

In facing these challenges, it is most often the membership of the departments that must come to terms with and honestly look at their situation when considering fundamental and dramatic change. For many departments, unfortunately, action is too often put off until next year, and then the next. Many in the fire service worry that if the culture of fire service remains fixed to our past and fails to proactively deal with dwindling membership and tight revenues, then time and politics will force change upon us.

In areas where it is not possible to maintain volunteer rosters or fund adequate personnel, options for the future will center on the following ...

- Building a sustaining and successful volunteer recruitment and retention capability
- Developing shared service, joint venture and common resource arrangements
- Organizational consolidation with a neighboring department(s)
- Reducing or discontinuing services
- Implementing service and operational efficiencies
- Tax, user fee and/or other revenue increases
- Adding paid staff to supplement volunteers
- Using volunteers to supplement paid or career personnel
- New and amended legislation

All of the options above can be fraught with citizen and political opposition, but the most common and formidable resistance to these choices almost always comes from the fire department members and leaders. Implementing these options can be divisive and engenders a sense of loss and failure that overwhelms a fair and balanced evaluation. As time, demographics, social and economic trends and resource limitations continue to pressure more and more departments; the fire services as a group must join together to aggressively develop strategies to address these problems.

The opportunity still exists to lay-out and implement solutions from within the fire service and individual departments, but continuing inaction will eventually result in crisis fueled changes that may not favor the fire service or the citizens we serve.

***Best Practice – Implementing Change***

A strategic and integrated statewide approach will form a framework leading to success. In the end, departments must make the best choice for their situation, but leaning on the experience and progress of partners across the state will ease the challenge. Fire district meetings that are facilitated by trained area specialists can be followed by county and regional forums to share ideas and solve problems. State organizations can provide leadership, guidance, training, legal and planning support.

The first and most important group we must influence about change is ourselves; the firefighters. Planning our own future starts with discussions in every firehouse across the state that looks at the options above and takes the outcomes ‘no’, ‘it’s impossible’, or ‘it won’t work’ off the table. Then, in an objective and balanced approach, the group must evaluate the options in the context of the following questions ...

- Define the culture of your department and its ability to adapt and determine its own future
- Are you providing a reasonable level of service? ... Do you provide the minimum level of service ... and if so, can you honestly say you are delivering the minimum level of service?
- What is your community’s expectation of service? Does your level of service match the community’s expectations?
- Does your level of service meet the *life safety* needs of your community?
- Do you comply with OSHA 1910.156 minimum standards?
- Can you comply with *NFPA 1720: STANDARD FOR THE ORGANIZATION AND DEPLOYMENT OF FIRE SUPPRESSION OPERATIONS, EMS OPERATIONS AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS TO THE PUBLIC BY VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENTS -- or -- NFPA 1710: STANDARD FOR THE ORGANIZATION AND DEPLOYMENT OF FIRE SUPPRESSION OPERATIONS, EMS OPERATIONS AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS TO THE PUBLIC BY CAREER DEPARTMENTS?*
- Is it time for a change, or if not, can a plan for change be introduced?
- With some work, push, education and outside help, can the timeline be moved up?
- Will briefings or guidance by experienced fire service facilitators help?
- What strategies or approaches can be used to overcome conflicts and change minds?

Discussions in local firehouses – in fact, it should be repeated and continuous discussions – are the seeds for making change that will sustain the staffing needed to perform our vital fire protection mission. Talk of shortcomings and challenges in the fire service can no longer be hushed because we fear the choices or put-off when change appears insurmountable. It is these firehouse discussions that will eventually emerge and generate supporting interest among neighboring fire departments, the citizens we serve and leaders who can make a difference.

Parallel to local discussion about supplementing staff in the fire service, state and regional fire organizations and associations must work with all interested parties to speed the pace toward solutions. The time has arrived when staffing must be a primary, not secondary topic on statewide meeting and conference agendas -- and beyond discussions, the emphasis at this level should be the organization of programs and services that will help local fire departments address staffing and implement change. State fire service leaders must remain on the frontline in briefing and educating

legislators, state officials and local government representatives to insure positive legislative outcomes. Their action should now be moving beyond identification and framing of the problem and be measured by successful staff retention and improvements.

### *Shared Services, Joint Ventures and Consolidation*

For most departments, sharing and joint services are the initial step to overcoming staff shortages and are now in common use. *Shared services* go beyond mutual aid and establish formal agreements to regularly respond along with neighboring departments in situations like day-time calls and when there are alarms at critical facilities. *Joint ventures* are preferred ways to maximize training and maintain access to highly specialized staff. It is expected this kind of inter-departmental support will gain favor as staff shortages persist, but departments need to closely examine if such measures are a long-term solution, or do they merely delay a more comprehensive approach to staffing problems.

*Consolidation* or a corporate merging of fire departments and their administration, staff, finances and operations is a far more difficult concept to advance; but in communities where population, revenues and volunteers are dwindling, it may come to be the only viable option. And even in other districts, where respected and forward looking leaders can gel member and community support, consolidation can make a lot of sense in terms of combined staffing and cost savings for residents and taxpayers.

Sharing and consolidation options both require bold and committed leaders who can overcome opposition and instill a change of attitude across the department's membership. It means changing a department's long tradition from having all resources under their control to a system where they see value and community benefits in sharing. Independence and a communal identity are hard to give up, but pride and exclusivity are expensive.

For many departments struggling with membership, consolidation deserves a closer look. Schools are doing it, towns and villages are considering mergers and hospitals are well along the way. In horse and buggy days every neighborhood had to have its own fire brigade, but with modern equipment, speedy transportation, instant communications and advancing technology, fire departments can easily service a wider jurisdiction. In NYS, towns and counties are not authorized

#### **Best Practice ....**

##### ***The Round Lake - Malta Shared Station***

These neighboring fire companies recognized that as adjoining communities they both needed better service, apparatus and facilities, but the expense of duplicating improvements in both districts could not be justified. So the two departments formed a single entity to add a shared central station housing a new ladder truck. In this way, the area can be served by one new truck instead of two, three stations instead of four, and the two departments retained their independence and main stations.

to provide fire protection, but all across the nation, fire services are successfully organized on the county and regional level to take advantage of economies in personnel, facilities, apparatus and resources. Consolidation, full or partial, should not be dismissed or cast-aside ... it deserves an honest and comprehensive examination by a diverse group of community stakeholders, not just those in the department. And to be effective, consolidation must be based on a clear plan with well thought-out execution.

Not all the issues associated with consolidation are linked to staffing, but where departments are willing to open the discussion, they will also find benefits in sharing facilities and significant savings will occur when they no longer need to duplicate the purchase of expensive equipment and apparatus. And it does not necessarily mean community fire halls must be shuttered; it can still make sense to use local halls as substations to house first responding apparatus, and if feasible the hall can still serve as a station-house for local volunteers. When the discussion is openly and objectively laid on the table, options and understanding will emerge and the haze cloaking change can brighten to opportunity and progress.

*Watch for casualties of change* – Even when change is good, some members will have a hard time making the adjustment. Consider how you can help those affected get through the transition.

### *Combining Volunteers and Paid-Staff*

Fire departments with combined paid and volunteer staffs have existed in New York State for more than a century and are primarily found in larger urban or suburban districts.

In some areas, volunteer departments are looking to supplement a reduction in the volunteer force by adding paid staff, while there are also career departments that have sustained population and revenue losses and seek to reduce costs and maintain services by adding volunteers to the paid ranks.

There are several operational considerations to address when combining paid and volunteer staff and also numerous workplace relationship issues that must be monitored.

In organizational and operational areas, it will be necessary to consider the following requirements.

- When adding volunteers, there is a requirement to establish a continuous volunteer recruitment program
- It will need to be determined how shifts and schedules will be used. Will volunteers and paid staff be called out to respond jointly to the same calls, or will paid staff work days and volunteers take the nights and weekends?
- What about training; will the standards and requirements be the same or will levels and expectations differ – how will training be related to their tasks and assignments?
- And duties; will volunteers and paid staff be assigned and take-on the same tasks, or will the paid staff be drivers or interior personnel, while volunteers provide exterior or scene support operations?
- How will management, supervision and rank be handled? Will volunteers supervise paid staff, or will management assign supervisors from one or both groups? Will it depend on who the ranking officers are and how will rank be assigned among volunteer and paid personnel? Go to the Scarsdale Fire Department Organization Chart in Attachment 5 to see how they organize paid and volunteer staff.

When you have a combined force of volunteer and paid staff, maintaining a healthy and productive workplace means paying a lot of attention to the relationships among the staff

- Volunteer duties and assignments must remain important, credible and professional
- Relations and social integration among volunteers and paid staff must be monitored and fostered – take steps to avoid ‘we and them’ factions, promote joint participation and insist that each respect the role and contributions of the other
- Provide volunteers and paid staff the same uniforms, turn-out gear, patches and rewards – reinforce that they are partners, members of the same team and support a common goal
- Should the laws be changed to allow career staff to also volunteer in their communities

***Best Practice – Mentoring Partners***

Departments using combined volunteer and paid staff have had great success in establishing partner mentoring, where a volunteer is paired with a paid member of the department and each is an equal and contributing mentor to the other. They strive to better understand each other's work and share how they personally benefit from the fire protection service they provide. Some departments leave the one-on-one bond in place and let it flourish, while others will rotate teams to broaden the experience among more members of the force

***Career Departments***

Many career fire departments are under pressure to reduce costs and limit budget increases, which usually means reducing staff and implementing operational efficiencies. Changes that career departments have made or are considering include the following

- Using part-time staff for some duties or partial-day staffing
- Adjusting the numbers of full-time vs. part-time staff
- Examining the scope of their services and eliminating or reducing responsibilities where feasible – such as EMS, inspections, community service, etc.
- Moving to contract services for EMS or other programs
- Adding or increasing fees for service
- Increasing the use and reliance on mutual aid
- Sharing services and equipment with other departments
- Adjusting pension and health care benefits
- Limiting, or implementing changes, to reduce overtime
- Staff reductions commonly referred to as “brown outs”

Not all career departments are unionized, but where unions are in place it means coordinating changes within the framework of the contract. Cities and municipal departments are also subject to civil service requirements and also need to present proposed changes in a public hearing.

### *Using Housemen or Station Keepers*

Housemen are usually compensated by a fire district or department, can be full or part time and are legally subject to civil service laws and policies. They are mostly considered supplemental staff, and while they can be firefighters, their houseman role involves non-firefighting functions at the fire house in areas of facility and equipment maintenance, apparatus readiness, communications and recordkeeping.

While the use of housemen is common, they are generally considered a stop-gap or helping hand measure that does not fully address the broader staff shortage problem. For a volunteer department, using a houseman also adds to the supervision and administrative load for company officers or fire district commissioners.

### *Paid On-Call Staff*

Authorizing legislation is required before paid on-call staff can be used in NYS, but they are in common use in other areas such as the New England states. If they were to be approved as an option in NY, they would be considered paid firefighters and hiring would be linked to civil service laws and involve local public hearings. Several policies and standards would have to be considered in establishing these positions; including qualifications, training standards, job and task roles, the on-call schedule and off-call status, definition and limits on minimum and maximum hours, pay and compensation and physical requirements. This category differs from recall and the provisions of the Volunteer Fireman Benefit Laws (VFBL) would not apply.

### *Community Relations and Public Awareness*

Work with area employers on reasonable measures that will bring back the work-day response. Employers are more likely to support a program that releases volunteer responders during the workday when there are standards and rules that assure it is not overused or abused

Go beyond making presentations at the senior center and school. Consider developing a fire department marketing strategy. You might get help from a retired business professional that wants to volunteer but not fight fires, or contact a college marketing program about business student(s) who might help you develop a marketing plan.

Make an extra effort to document the savings, cost-cutting and efficiencies your department has implemented. Citizens and political leaders will respond more favorably to your requests if you can demonstrate how you have taken action to reduce expenses.

Use positive and productive applications of social media and engage traditional media to increase public awareness and feature the challenges volunteer services face in recruitment and other areas.

### *Political Challenges*

As noted previously, the biggest political challenges are not necessarily the citizens you serve or local and state political leaders – the most serious political hurdles are often the membership of your department or other competing interests in the fire service. Political influence and change is often a long and multi-dimensional process that involves repeated and overlapping initiatives among a series of leaders and interest groups.

- It starts with the membership of your department as the leadership brings those with differing attitudes to a point of consensus and action
- In many communities, consensus within the fire service is what it takes to align citizens and local elected leaders on local goals and action – although anything that affects spending and taxes certainly increases the challenge
- Movement on laws, legislation and supplemental or special funding is often first taken to town, county and city elected officials; then to state and/or federal fire service support organizations to engage legislators
- At the same time, state fire organizations and associations may have initiated political action to advance parallel support
- Throughout the process, leaders in the fire service find that the collective interests and mobilization of firefighters across the state can be their most important and reliable allies in advancing political support -- we have more in common than not.
- And just as the fire service can be a widespread and dynamic agent for change, leaders must always be mindful that groups representing other interests, organizations or regions across the state – and even other fire service groups – may have competing proposals or may not embrace your cause. This reminds us that honest and open dialogue is the key.
- At each of these steps, continuous and ongoing citizen outreach is critical to building and maintaining public support

*Legislation*

Some of the improvements and changes proposed to address staffing issues in New York's fire services will require new or amended state laws and legislation.

**County and Town Resources** -- Under current law, towns and counties are not authorized to provide fire services, and while there are no proposals for towns or counties to form fire departments, it does make sense to grant greater authority for larger towns and counties to sponsor shared services and resources that local fire departments can access. It is already done with training and hazardous material teams, but more could be done to make key first response resources available on a wide area basis. Examples include fly cars and ambulances, but an engine company, manpower squads or a crash rescue unit that is on-duty and available to respond across a multi-district zone are other suggestions. These types of regional resources would go a long way toward helping local fire departments with workday staffing shortages and can fill gaps where departments are not able to maintain highly specialized staff requiring advanced training.

**Paid-On Call Authority** – Many fire districts have considered using paid firefighters on a call-in or as-needed basis. They would be called-in and paid only when a response is required and would not be on stand-by duty shifts at the station. State legislation is required to define and authorize this type of staffing.

**Fire District Ambulance Service** – Fire districts would like legislative authorization that permits them to charge fees for EMS services where the district desires to provide this service. Legislation has already been proposed but stymied by special interests in the state legislature.

**Tax Cap Options** – Fire districts would like to see amended legislation that provides them greater flexibility from tax cap restrictions, particularly in consideration for mandates imposed by law or implied by generally accepted standards.

**Fee and Billing Practices** – Legislation is needed that gives fire service organizations options and flexibility to consider charging or billing for certain services when other traditional revenue sources can no longer sustain expected services

### *Budgets and Funding*

Much of the budget and funding emphasis in the fire service has shifted away from seeking increased funding and growth and instead now focuses the cost of maintaining service, offsetting rising costs of core functions and measures to increase efficiency.

As fire departments become more concerned about maintaining adequate staff, their long-term planning will look to achieve efficiencies in facility improvements and apparatus needs – with additional emphasis placed on objectives and resources that supplement personnel. For years, when volunteer rosters were strong, departments were able to direct resources toward capital expansion and today’s need to invest in supplement volunteer staffing was not a concern.

A number of fire departments are looking at the following options to offset reductions in funding, revenue and staff.

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Partnerships and shared resources with neighboring departments

Performing detailed analysis of cost-cutting, operational savings and increased efficiencies the department has implemented to justify requests to the community and government for increased support

Requesting public safety fees from colleges, not-for-profit and tax exempt organizations in the district in return for emergency services provided and assumed

Charging fees and billing insurance providers for EMS and special operations services

Fire districts seek relief from state imposed tax cap restrictions, particularly in view of the many mandates and compliance standards they are required to comply with

### *Planning Change*

- ✓ Perform a Needs Assessment
- ✓ Include all the stakeholders in discussions and analysis
- ✓ Be honest and clear about how changes will affect taxpayers and service
- ✓ If you decide to hire staff, gain approval of the plan from taxpayers and other stakeholders
- ✓ Review local and state laws regarding options, requirements and/or limitations
- ✓ Apply competitive practices and meet civil service requirements when hiring staff
- ✓ Initiate a professional hiring process with job descriptions, expectations and policies
- ✓ Use Standard Operating Guides and an Organization Chart when managing staff and volunteers

## Attachments

1. List of Symposium Participants
2. NYS Association of Fire District's Whitepaper
3. Ithaca and St. George's Experiences
4. Looking-Back at the 1987 Report on the Future of the Fire Services
5. Scarsdale Fire Department Organizational Chart

### Attachment 1 List of Symposium Attendees

First	Last	Representing	County
John	Anspach	Fairview Fire District, 1 <sup>st</sup> VP Dutchess Co Assoc of Fire Districts	Dutchess
Ted	Aroesty	Exec Director, Brighton Fire District	Monroe
Dave	Brewer	Commissioner, Rocky Point Fire District	Suffolk
Tom	Cain	Chief, Scarsdale Fire Department	Westchester
Bill	Clark	Facilitator	Niagara
Jack	Clark, Esq	Attorney, DuCharme, Clark & Sovern	Saratoga
Don	Corkery	President, State Chiefs Association	Suffolk
Jerry	DeLuca	Executive Director & CEO, State Chiefs Assoc	Albany
Joe	DeStefano	Secretary/Treasurer Assoc of Fire Districts	Suffolk
Jay	Egan	Fire District Manager, Selden Fire District	Suffolk
Gil	Frank	Administrator, Garden City FD	Nassau

<b>First</b>	<b>Last</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>County</b>
Tony	Gallino	1 <sup>st</sup> Vice President, Assoc of Fire Districts	Suffolk
Jim	Harrington	Chief, Gates Fire Department	Monroe
Ken	Hassett	Commissioner, Clifton Park-Halfmoon Fire District	Saratoga
Tom	Herlihy	President Assoc of Fire Districts	Onondaga
Alan	Hodges	Commissioner, Boght Fire District	Albany
Art	Hunsinger	Assistant Chief, Clifton Park-Halfmoon Fire District	Saratoga
Roger	Lander	Facilitator	Genesee
Julius	Leone Jr.	Director, Office of Emergency Services	Chautauqua
Dale	Lingenfelter	Chief, Niskayuna Fire District 1	Schenectady
Ken	Preston	Commissioner, North Greece FD	Monroe
John	Quick	Commissioner, Ulster Fire District #1	Ulster
Norman	Reepmeyer	Commissioner, Boght Fire District	Albany
Tom	Rinaldi	2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice President Assoc of Fire Districts	Saratoga
Bill	Young, Esq.	Attorney, Young, Fenton, Kelsey & Brown	Albany
Carl	Zeilman	Director, Office of Emergency Services	Saratoga

**Attachment 2      NYS Association of Fire District's Whitepaper**

**Supplementing Volunteer Resources White Paper**

**I.      The Future Challenge, Supplementing Volunteer Resources in New York State**

Developed by: Tom Rinaldi, Region 1 Director, Association of Fire Districts, New York State  
518-944-5263, [tom@rinaldi1.com](mailto:tom@rinaldi1.com)

While there are approximately 96,000 volunteers out of the estimated 114,000 firefighters in the state, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit and retain volunteers. Admittedly, there has been limited success in obtaining new members through a number of local and statewide initiatives; but retention will remain an ever present challenge. The number of volunteers has declined by approximately 15,000 in the past 20 years. Similar declines have been documented in other states that rely primarily on volunteer staffing. The decline of volunteerism is especially evident in the provision of emergency medical services. This decline is magnified in many fire districts with a lack of adequate staffing especially during normal work hours. Some districts have already met the challenge by hiring paid staff including officers which is provisioned by Town Law 176, 18-a with such qualifications as conducting a public hearing and publishing a legal notice of that hearing. For departments which are not robustly supported by tax-based funding, the loss of volunteers can also affect the ability to raise Fire Company support through various local fundraising activities.

While several fire districts have resorted to paid staff, a majority continue to rely on volunteer staffing. It has been observed that for many districts, staffing, especially during normal working hours, has become such a challenge that they rely on mutual aid daily. Mutual aid was originally developed to provide occasional aid during a major event or fire with the intention of returning the favor when a major fire occurred in one's home district. The effect of daytime or 24-hour mutual aid is that those residents in the district receiving assistance are not providing tax funding to maintain the district that is providing the mutual aid assistance. Rather, the full burden of funding is being borne by the residents in the district providing the aid. For example, based on the district's budget, each time my fire department is dispatched the cost is approximately \$4,400.

The purpose of holding a symposium on supplementing volunteer resources is to provide information to fire districts that may in the future need to supplement volunteer resources in their respective communities. The product of the symposium is to provide a guidance document with valuable information for those who may consider hiring resources for their district. It is intended to garner information from fire districts and departments who have already supplemented their volunteer firefighting forces. During the facilitated symposium, they will be asked to share their experiences with all of our member fire districts.

The project will consist of a multi-hour facilitated symposium, followed by the production of a document to be distributed to interested fire districts. From start to completion, it is expected that the entire project should be completed within 120 days.

## **II. Historical Evolution**

The volunteer fire service has a rich history in the United States dating back to the 1700s with the institution of suppression and prevention measures in Boston and New Amsterdam. The first volunteer firefighter force officially recognized was in the City of Philadelphia initiated by Benjamin Franklin. The first professional fire department was not organized until 1853 in Cincinnati, Ohio. In the early years of firefighting, volunteers protected the cities and villages which were the centers of industry. Many of these early departments were supported by the industrial owners who had a vested interest in providing funding and equipment to volunteers in the community. Up until World War II, the outlying agricultural areas were largely unprotected or were provided limited protection by village departments who sometimes contracted with towns to provide fire service. Very often there was simply no protection. After the war as troops returned to work in the cities or in the new industries that developed during and after the war, many moved to the “new” suburban subdivisions to stake out a piece of rural America for themselves. As these fire trained soldiers moved to the suburbs and as the cities spilled out into the countryside, new fire suburban volunteer departments were formed in the late ‘40s and early ‘50s. The members were shift workers, farmers, and veteran soldiers who had been trained during the war to fight fires on board ships and at the airfields. The proliferation of suburban fire departments were well staffed around the clock by shift workers, remaining farmers and suburbanites who had the sense and moral obligation to help others. Meanwhile, the fire stations provided a social nucleus for the community’s blue collar workers.

As industry relocated to the South or overseas, so went the shift workers and simultaneously as the number of farms began to diminish, many of the industrial-based communities were transformed into bedroom communities where everyone left for jobs elsewhere during the day and returned that evening. This has evolved to where some departments are staffed primarily by the retired, young students and those who happen to be available during the day. Many departments have come to rely on automatic mutual aid which was intended to bring more departments to the scene of an incident but, now in many cases, the arriving apparatus is also under resourced, demonstrating the greatest need - - manpower. In many cases, the fire department is no longer the center of the community, being displaced by schools. Coincidentally, there are fewer ladies auxiliaries today brought about by the need for two incomes in many families. Also, community life is very different today. It’s been 70 years since the end of WWII which signaled the suburbanization and the growth of the volunteer fire service. Volunteerism peaked in the late ‘50s and ‘60s and has been in steady decline ever since. I describe under resourcing as the fire service’s “dirty little secret” because if the public only knew how understaffed many volunteer departments were during the

period from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. they would be appalled. The problem is they don't care enough or know enough to do anything about it and at the same time don't want to know in fear of higher property tax required to fund supplemental staffing.

### **III. Why Study Supplementing Volunteer Resources**

While there are several methods to supplement volunteer staff, such as paid station keepers, paid on-call firefighters or by simply hiring firefighters, most districts have not dealt with hiring paid staff and could use legitimate guidance. There are a host of issues that have to be addressed: expectations, human resource issues, documentation, civil service issues, issuing pay checks, testing, qualifications, performance reviews, administrative assistance, record keeping, different state and federal regulations pertaining to paid staff as opposed to volunteer staff, training requirements, equipment, policies and procedures, dealing with volunteer and paid conflicts, and contract negotiations. That's just to name a few.

In New York State there are approximately 42 cities that have paid or mostly paid departments, the largest being the Fire Department of New York City (FDNY). Yet there are approximately 17 cities that have volunteer departments which are included in the 1,850 fire suppression organizations including fire districts, villages and contract fire protection departments in the State. Some of these organizations have already turned to combination departments with both volunteers supplemented by paid staffing, so the process has already begun. There are approximately 40 combination departments in the state to date, including Niskayuna Fire District – Schenectady County, the Village of Fredonia Fire Department-Chautauqua County, and the Brighton, Greece Lake Shore, North Greece, Ridge-Culver, Ridge Road plus other departments in Monroe County. In Westchester County there is Fairview, Harrison, Greenville, and Rye Brook plus other departments. Some departments have begun to hire "housemen," while not technically firefighters they may supplement volunteer staffing during the day. The trend has begun and will challenge other departments in the near future since daytime understaffing is a "real" problem. In other areas of the country, combination departments have become the norm for the same reasons, lack of daytime staffing, understaffing and the inability to recruit younger members. Those areas of the country include several departments in Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware. Statistically, of the 26,354 fire departments nationally, three-quarters of them or approximately 19,224 are staffed by volunteers, 4,892 departments now operate with a combination of compensated and volunteer staffing, and 2,238 are fully staffed by paid personnel. The number of combination departments continues to rise due to the inability to provide adequate services using only volunteers. The handwriting is on the wall and as a service to our member districts; we should be providing guidance and education to mitigate as best we can the transition to supplemental staffing.

The problem lies in a combination of factors that reflect our society's evolution, good or bad. Population growth has meant an increase in the numbers of calls for service

putting added pressure on the volunteer staffing component and systems. Rising expectations by citizens have led to demands for increasingly sophisticated services and additional services not previously provided. External drivers, such as legislated regulations, legal considerations, and the legal implications of complying with standards as though they were mandates have all had an impact on the volunteer community. Family considerations: two-job parents, two-earner households, and more competition for personal and family time all factor in the decline in the number of volunteers on the front line. Consider that just 10 percent of the general population is willing to assume the risk associated with being a firefighter and it narrows the field of eligible candidates considerably. Volunteering to be a firefighter is not like service to any other community organization, the risk of injury and death is higher and the training requirements are much more demanding. As demand for services outstrips resources, there have been many areas of the country and state where there is a natural progression from departments staffed by volunteers to some form of combination system, to a fully paid service. The pace of change is different from place to place as are the problems encountered along the way. It depends largely on how successfully deficiencies at all levels in organizations are identified and resolved by fire department leadership and the extent to which appropriate services can be delivered successfully.

The signals for change include community growth and complexity, community aging, scratched or missed calls, unreasonable response times, reduced staffing, inability to raise funds, officers filling lower operational positions, mission creep, internal controversy, waning political support, decreased interest to participate, too many jobs too little time, volunteers priced out of the community, demographic changes, catastrophic losses and the inability to recognize the need for shared resources.

#### **IV. Solution**

While it's not expected that the Association be capable of solving the problem, it can surely mitigate the institution of the solutions. We need to recognize that mitigative measures include resource sharing, supporting changes to the building code to include the installation of residential sprinklers, the development of manpower squads, broad based funding changes to lessen the tax burden on individual governmental entities, and providing best practices in the procurement of supplemental staffing. We are not about to reinvent the wheel because the development of combination departments is not new. The question now becomes who did it right, who did it wrong, how to proceed, how do we avoid the hazards that others have encountered. Our goal is to collaborate and collect information from those departments who have experienced the shift to paid staff and provide guidance to those departments and districts that are not familiar with hiring supplemental staffing in an all volunteer world. A transference of best practices to the unannointed.

#### **V. Benefits**

Many studies and documents outline the symptoms and reasons for having to supplement volunteer resources. Others have identified options and strategies such as combination departments, paid-on-call and part-time personnel. We are currently unaware of any organization that has compiled a guidance document on the trials and tribulations of planning for supplementing volunteer resources. When the time for change comes, several factors have to be examined and it's not time to jump in with both feet, it's time for a strategic plan. The district must examine both the organization and the options available to it. It is essential that all members of the organization identify the department's mission and core values and stay focused on them. Whether in the end the change is a revitalized volunteer organization or a move to some type of partially paid organization, a careful articulation of core values is critical to the success of the organization. Those core values must be carried out through the evolutionary process. Once it is clear that change is necessary to preserve the department's ability to engage in its core mission, creating a paid staff is not necessarily the first option to consider. Time needs to be allotted for a self examination and having the answers to key questions may help resolve a department's staffing issues. It is strongly suggesting that the initial evaluation be facilitated by a disinterested third party to prevent emotion from overshadowing real needs. Questions that need to be resolved;

- **Does the department have the right leadership?** The lack of dynamic, adequately prepared leaders has been an issue in the volunteer fire service.
- **Does the department offer benefits and incentives?** Benefits are defined as safeguards to protect your firefighters and their families against unexpected financial strain due to death or disability. Such benefits are essential to assure that members are treated as valuable assets.
- **Are department membership standards appropriate?** Should requirements increase to ensure that volunteers have adequate skills to deal with the dominant types of calls and does the department really need a requirement that all members have the same expertise to respond to all types of calls?
- **Can you use diversification strategies?** Essentially not everyone in the department has to be proficient in all of the jobs of the department, human resource sharing can be helpful in recruiting new talent.
- **Trim the non-essentials.** Identify essential functions and services the department is required to provide, and reduce or eliminate non-essential services. You cannot be all things to all people, and yet we will burn out members trying.

Develop and adopt a strategic plan to include the following;

- The Vision, project three years out.
- The Mission, indicate the purpose.
- The Values, which govern the operation of the department and its inter-relationships with the local community and other stakeholders.
- The Objectives, should relate to the expectations and requirements of all major stakeholders, including staff, and should reflect the underlying reason for operating the department.
- The Strategies, should reflect the roles and guidelines by which the mission and objectives are achieved. Identify strengths, identify and resolve weaknesses,

identify opportunities, and identify and avoid threats from within and outside of the department.

- The Goals, are specific time-based measurements to be achieved by implementing Strategies in pursuit of the Objectives. Goals should be consistent, realistic and achievable.
- The Program, execution of the plan and the key strategies. These should cover resources, objectives, timelines, deadlines, budget and performance targets.

**VI. Evaluation**

The final product of this process will be evaluated by successful utilization of the guidance document as an integral piece of the process in executing the program of supplementing volunteer resources. The document is not meant to be the answer to all of the issues that are presented, but as a thoughtful consideration of the challenges presented to organizations deeply immersed in volunteer staffing. This will be a huge step that should not go without planning and some knowledge of the results of the transition to paid staffing. There may be a need to look at supplementing volunteer resources district wide, town wide and perhaps countywide with legislative impacts that may take years to institute. Will there be sufficient time to do it right?

**VII. Cost**

The cost of producing a guidance document on Supplementing Volunteer Resources will include the following;

- Facilitators to obtain the information from key stakeholders who can provide the pertinent information.
- Identifying key stakeholders and participants who have the experience of dealing with the issues of supplemental staffing.
- Fulfilling logistics issues such as facility for the workshop, food/beverage service during the workshop, lodging for participants if traveling more than 50 miles from home base.
- Identify any equipment needed to successfully accomplish the task.
- Developing and printing the final document, and surrendering key documents and products to the Association.
- Copy costs associated with printing and distributing the documents as needed.

### **Attachment 3 Ithaca and St. George's Experiences**

#### **Ithaca Fire Department Looks for Volunteers**

*Wed Mar 19, 2014*

**By Justin Zoll**

*ithacatimes.com*

The Ithaca Fire Department is looking for volunteers. According to Chief Tom Parsons, the department has not done much recruitment "in a while," although it is nominally a "combination department," that is, it includes both professionals and volunteers. The current professional staff has been reduced over the years in response to budgetary stresses caused by the financial crisis of 2008-2010. It reached a high of 72 in 2009 and has since declined to 64 members.

"They cut other departments first," said Parsons, "and I've got a global perspective on this; I know we're part of bigger picture here. We're at the cut-off level; we can't cut any more. Right now we are just filling vacancies from retirements." He does not expect volunteers to be able to alleviate the stress on the department. "I look at the volunteers as a supplement to the work we do," he said. Parsons said that government officials believe that adding volunteers will cut costs, but he does not believe that to be true. "It won't replace personnel," he said.

Some retired firefighters become members of the fire police, a volunteer segment of the department that assists with directing traffic at the scene of a fire. There are 15 volunteers in the department now and all but three are in the fire police. Beginning in 2012 the volunteers were collected from all the departments and gathered together in a newly created Company 9, a process that was completed last year.

"It was a tumultuous transition," said the chief. "There was a lot of pointing of fingers. But to have the necessary camaraderie or esprit de corps they need to have enough people together to develop it. As they settle down I hope to have the volunteers recruit new volunteers."

Parsons himself joined the Ithaca Fire Department as volunteer while he was still a Cornell student. The so-called "bunker program" allowed students to live at the fire station. The chief said that the bunker program was the predominant aspect of the volunteer program until it was discontinued in the mid-2000s.

"Budgets got tight in the early 2000s. It was a funding issue," he said. "The training is expensive. It involves 8 to 15 [training staff] and 100 hours of training are required." For many years the state standard was 40 to 60 hours, but it has since caught up to the Ithaca department requirement. "The staff have to take time out their schedules to do the training; we try to have off-duty personnel do it."

When Parsons joined the department in 1981 as a junior at Cornell, the student bunkers went out on every call. As the number of calls began to increase the department went to an eight-day cycle for the student bunkers. They could not do daytime calls because they were in class; 13 to 14 alarms per day was "not conducive to studying."

"We put the students on schedule," explained Parsons. "Four out of the 16 [that were in each station] would be on a shift. If they had exams, they would get the night off, and then there was winter break ... and the

summer. In reality we only had one or two people on shift most of the time.” He recalled that when he while was trying to keep up with being a full-time student and a volunteer fireman, he became so exhausted that he came down with mononucleosis.

It began to be difficult to maintain a volunteer force because of the call volume, which has increased from 2,000 alarms per year when Parsons joined the department in the early 1980s to 5,000 alarms per year now.

“The population is bigger,” he said, “and it is a more residential population. Building codes now require that you install automatic alarms. We have fewer fires now, but we have more alarms. Every dorm room has a smoke alarm now. It wasn’t that way when I was in school.”

He said the department is also kept busy assisting with medical calls from two populations. “It’s the very old, who are often in senior housing,” he said, “and there the issue is just frailty, and then there are the young. As a former student here I don’t like to say this, but we do have to deal with young people who are, shall we say, rather impaired.”

Parsons has seen the city of Ithaca change substantially since he arrived in town in 1978 to start at Cornell. Both Cornell and Ithaca College have grown, but several major manufacturers have left town.

“There was Ithaca Gun and Morse Chain, which became Borg-Warner, and they had hundreds of employees,” he recalled. “National Cash Register, NCR, in what is now the South Hill Business Park, had hundreds more people. Then there was Evaporated Metal Films on Spencer Street and other light manufacturers.

“They all had neighborhood fire companies,” Parsons continue. “People lived in town and belonged to the neighborhood fire stations. In the morning people came over to wash the trucks, and then they would take kids on a ride on the fire truck to go get ice cream. In those days the truck could pick up [volunteer firefighters] on the corner as you were on your way to the fire.” In the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s there were relatively few paid professionals in the department, generally one per truck and all the officers in the department. The volunteers did the firefighting. At their peak there were over 100 volunteers in the department.

In 1987 the city department began providing service to the town of Ithaca. The town requested that stations be built on South and West hills. Stations in town were decommissioned and the companies were moved to the town.

Parsons described the change to a largely professional force as an evolutionary process that happened slowly between 1985 and 2005. “It was one of those things,” he said. “It happened slowly, so you didn’t realize that it was happening while it was happening.” Parson joined the department as professional firefighter in 1985.

The need for volunteers is definite. The national “recommended standards” are that there should be four people on each piece of apparatus deployed. The Ithaca department is able to muster two persons at this point.

Because the volume of calls it handles, it is not possible for the Ithaca department to be an entirely volunteer group. All volunteer departments typically handle only 500 to 700 calls per year, according to Parsons. Because of the high volume in Ithaca, he said, the volunteers would never replace any of the paid personnel.

Parsons is still looking for the funding to go ahead with a large-scale training program. The department applied for a federal grant and did not get it in the last round. The grant would pay for the training program itself and would also allow them to hire a part-time volunteer coordinator to recruit and retain members. (The last volunteer coordinator was Marcia Lynch, who is now the public information officer for Tompkins County.)

If you would like to volunteer, said Parsons, simply go to any station and fill out an application. You will be interviewed and then have a meeting with Company 9 (the volunteer company) and begin to ride along on calls to see if the job is for you. If it is something that you want to do, then the department will schedule your training and you will emerge a “Firefighter 1” and you will begin going into burning buildings to put the fire out.

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### **The Prince George’s County, Maryland Experience**

The Prince George’s fire department has been on an unprecedented hiring spree, bringing in about 250 new recruits during the past three years to improve safety and response times. But the hiring has not been without controversy.

The county is the nation’s largest combination volunteer and career fire department, with 820 career fire and rescue staff working side by side with more than 1,000 volunteers. The recent spurt — all career firefighters — has exacerbated tensions among volunteers who worry that they are being pushed out.

“The bottom line is about service,” said Prince George’s Fire Chief Marc S. Bashoor, adding that hiring more paid firefighters will improve response times. “We have demonstrated that our service has suffered because we worried if it was a paid person or a volunteer putting out the fire.”

For the county’s volunteer rank and file, the hiring of more paid firefighters is a direct threat to a grand tradition in the county: a robust and active volunteer firefighting corps that shows unprecedented investment in its community. Volunteer firefighters also point out that they continue to save the county money by reducing expenses on emergency services.

“The volunteers have a long history in Prince George’s,” said Pete Mellits, head of the Prince George’s County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association, which has opposed some of the recent hirings. “Our goal is not to be antagonistic to the chief and the union. Our goal is to preserve the volunteers.”

The dispute in Prince George’s is mirrored nationwide. In suburban and rural counties alike, local governments are looking to increase the amount of professional paid firefighters, sometimes at the expense of volunteer ones. In many cases, officials say that they need more professional firefighters to keep up with population growth and that it’s harder to find volunteer workers. About 69 percent of firefighters nationwide are volunteers, but like Prince George’s, volunteerism is dwindling, decreasing 13 percent during the past 30 years.

By hiring more paid staff, localities can ensure that they will have enough emergency workers, experts say. Kimberly Quiros, director of communications for the National Volunteer Fire Council, said tensions have always existed among career and volunteer firefighters as both feel one is trying to take the job of the other. At the end

of the day, she said, volunteer firefighters save taxpayers \$147 billion a year. “That’s money that just simply is not going to be available” if volunteer companies disappeared, Quiros said. “The volunteers really provide a huge benefit for communities that can’t afford to pay and have an all-career staff.”

Indeed, Jonathan Wood, president of the Fairfax County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association, said Fairfax went through similar growing pains in the 1970s as career crews replaced volunteers. He said it is not uncommon for volunteers to feel threatened by such changes. “Let’s say you work at an organization that said a portion of it is going to be outsourced to China,” Wood said. “That person is going to say, ‘Well, hold it. That was my job.’ You can see where emotions can run high.” Those tensions are common enough that the National Volunteer Fire Council offers classes to departments transitioning to add career staff on how to keep the peace and effectively manage fire and rescue services.

### **Quarrel in Morningside**

The friction between volunteer and county-paid firefighters has hummed behind the scenes in Prince George’s since the first career staff members came on board in the 1970s. But that tension has sharpened in recent years as the county ramps up recruiting after a hiring freeze during the recent recession.

The tension came to a head last year when the volunteer firefighters in Morningside, a small town in Prince George’s, found themselves in a feud with the county about the future of their department. The volunteer firefighters argued that they should not be required to take additional county-paid staff, which is ultimately funded by taxpayers.

The debate got so bad that Morningside’s volunteer fire chief, Michael White, had threatened to remove a county-owned ambulance from the station, while Bashoor threatened to strip White of his title.

“Prince George’s County entered into a new agreement with the [union] without consulting the stakeholders that would be directly affected by this unilateral change,” White wrote in a letter blasting the county fire department. “This new agreement explicitly prohibits the current staffing model that has been successfully utilized at the MVFD Fire Station.”

Bashoor said the county’s aggressive hiring of career recruits has stemmed from several factors. The county has to meet the terms of the recent union contract designed to make working conditions safer. Bashoor also said volunteer participation is dwindling, the population is growing and an average of 39 career personnel retire annually.

With 37 volunteer corporations and a union representing the career firefighters, the struggle is to develop a cohesive way of serving the community with “38 different personalities” that have different ideas about what is best, Bashoor said. Indeed, because of the new hires, response times are expected to improve. In 2011, average fire engine response times clocked in at 7 minutes 1 second. That time is expected to drop to 6 minutes 50 seconds by the close of this fiscal year, based on 2014 budget documents. The response time for basic life-support calls is also expected to improve by at least 12 seconds this year compared with 2012.

“For years, the Prince George’s fire department staffed itself like a rural volunteer department and not like the 15th-busiest fire department in the United States,” said Andrew Pantelis, president of the union representing paid firefighters in the county.

### **Effect on local budgets**

Prince George's fire officials say they need to hire more career crews to also avoid overtime costs and keep crews safe. In fiscal 2013, the county budgeted \$5 million to pay for firefighter overtime. But the department spent all of that halfway through the budget year. Prince George's wound up exceeding its planned overtime spending by about \$3.9 million, according to county records.

But volunteer savings are real, and the training is comparable to that of paid staff, Mellits and others say. In 2013, Morningside's chief said volunteers provided more than 25,000 hours of staffing to the community, equivalent to more than \$1.7 million in taxpayer savings. On the whole, the county's volunteer fire and rescue members save Prince George's tens of millions of dollars annually, according to the county's Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association. "It's been a long tradition," said Monique Ackerman, 38, who has been a volunteer firefighter since he was 16. "I believe it is dying out."

To help strike a balance between the two sides, leaders representing volunteer firefighters in Prince George's are considering ways to develop a collective bargaining unit similar to the union that represents career firefighters. The idea, Mellits and others hope, is to give the volunteers more leverage. "Are we providing staff to support the community or to support a union contract?" Mellits said.

In Morningside, for instance, instead of complying with the additional staffing requirements, volunteers decided in November to become the ninth all-volunteer company out of the county's 45 stations. That helped end the showdown over the ambulance. The new arrangement at Morningside, which started this month, is reportedly going well. But that doesn't mean fresh conflicts won't arise.

"It has been a struggle for the two sides to live harmoniously day-to-day," Bashoor said of the county's historic rift between volunteer and career staff. "But when that bell rings, everyone stands up to do the job."

A report was prepared in 1987 by the New York State Academy of Fire Sciences titled *The Future of the Fire Service in New York State*. The conclusions were those of a panel of state and local fire service leaders ... and their findings were remarkably similar to the analysis and recommendations pronounced more than 25 years later at the 2014 symposium on *Supplementing Volunteer Resources in the Fire Service*.

In the years since the 1987 report was prepared, fire departments have undertaken various measures to address staff and volunteer issues. But the consensus of the 2014 symposium provides striking confirmation that many of the same concerns about fire service organization and staffing that were expressed 27 years ago still persist today and the changes called for almost three decades ago remain our challenge today.

*The 1987 report highlighted the following problems and concerns that were affecting volunteer recruitment and the future of the fire service at that time*

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Declining populations and related demographic changes that reduce volunteer recruitment and fire department revenue sources

Declining volunteer enrollments

Volunteers were having difficulty committing the number of hours required for training and response

Difficulty recruiting and maintaining an adequate number of volunteers to provide day-time protection during the work week

Increasing reliance on mutual aid, which is considered a temporary or stop-gap solution for addressing staff shortages

Few employers now permit release of workers to respond to work-day calls

Paid departments or career forces are also being pressured to reduce staff

An increase in the cost of providing fire services at a time when revenue sources are decreasing

Increased requirements to meet safety and OSHA requirements

The increase in time consuming and demanding training requirements

*The 1987 report made the following general observations about the direction and future of the fire service in New York*

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We must change the way we organize and operate fire departments ... a change is necessary for survival. The fire service in NYS cannot continue on the path it is now following

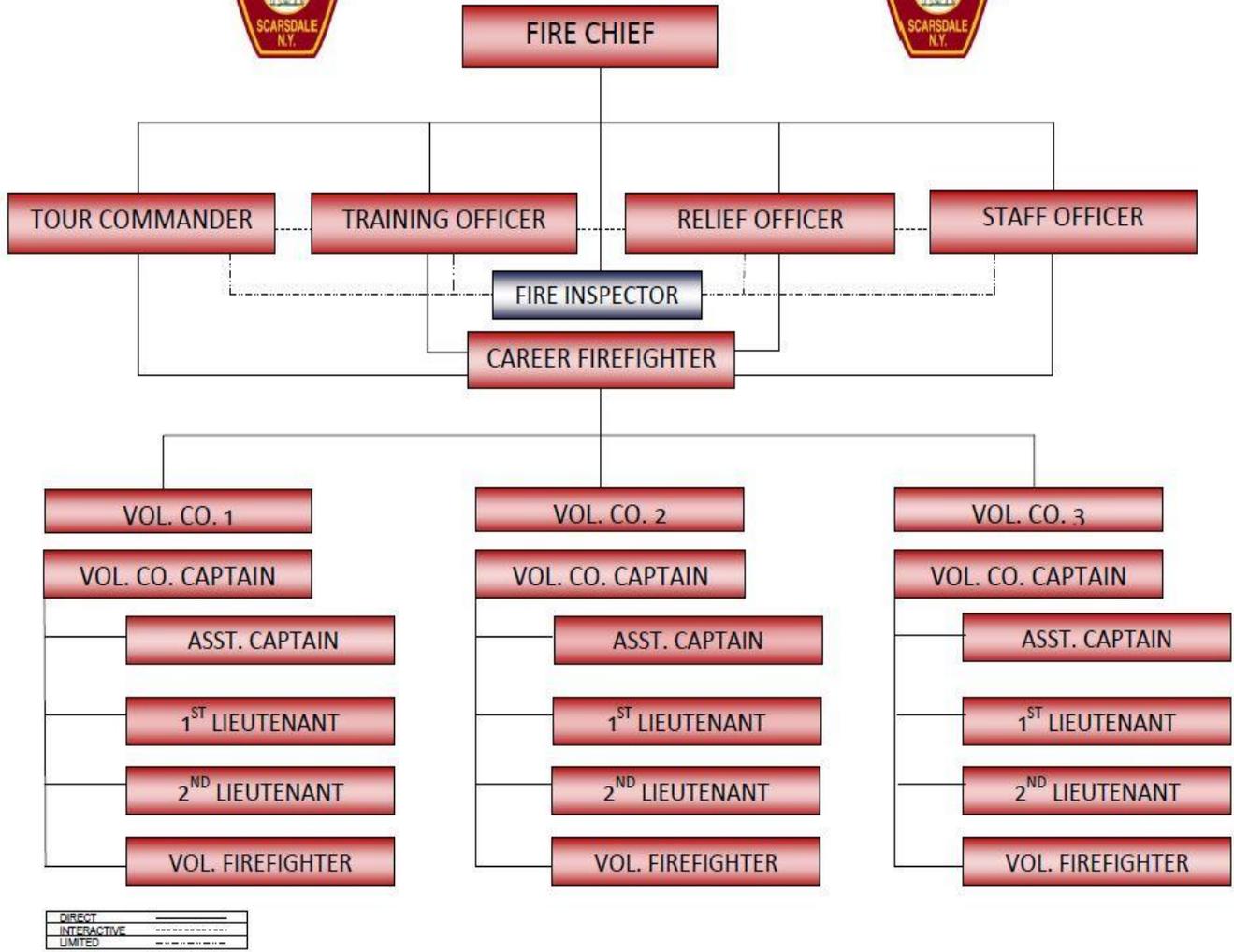
We should not reinvent the system, but we should consider options that have been successful elsewhere in the nation

*This was the primary recommendation contained in the 1987 report*

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Establishing town or county-wide fire services, or placing increased emphasis on developing shared resources throughout a town or county, appears to have operational and cost advantages over reliance on several independent departments

SFD ORG Chart



References and Related Reports

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