

Board Of Visitors for the National Fire Academy Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report

Meeting Schedule

Dec. 6, 2021

March 15, 2022

Aug. 15, 2022

Introduction

The Board of Visitors for the National Fire Academy (NFA) plays an important role in supporting the academic stature of the NFA. The primary purpose of the Board of Visitors is to:

- Review NFA programs to ensure they fulfill the basic mission of the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA).
- Ensure that NFA facilities are adequate for their assigned purposes.
- Ensure appropriate funding levels for NFA programs.
- Provide advice and recommendations to the USFA.

The Board reviewed the NFA in the first 3 areas listed above. This report is offered in fulfillment of the fourth responsibility. After 2 years of virtual meetings, the NFA Board of Visitors was glad to gather in person to review NFA programs, facilities, and funding. After receiving briefings from USFA program representatives, the Board would like to emphasize the following:

- NFA has multiple **vacancies** in key leadership and critical support positions. Addressing this requires adequate funding and streamlining of the hiring process.
- **Information technology** (IT) continues to be an issue for the campus and programs of the NFA. The Board continues to recommend that the NFA and USFA install a full-time chief information officer and create a branch to oversee, update and manage all enterprise functions.
- It is imperative that the USFA and NFA **obtain the required funding** to maintain their mission and the expected role they play within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

National Fire Academy programs

While disruptions from COVID-19 continue to impact operations, the NFA increased on-campus services with enhanced safety protocols and robust flexibility in the face of future disruptions to service. On an annual basis, the NFA provides training and education to over 96,000 career and volunteer fire and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel (96,840 average over 5 years). Classes are delivered in person on NFA's Emmitsburg, Maryland, campus; through online synchronous and asynchronous courses; through partnerships with state and metropolitan fire training organizations; and with institutions of higher education. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the NFA's ability to deliver training. In August 2022, campus was operating at approximately 65% capacity, with return to full capacity expected by October 2022.

U.S. Fire Administrator Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell has brought fresh vision and renewed vigor to the USFA. This emphasizes integrating EMS priorities and relevance to NFA's offerings, enhancing the capture of data and the capacity to use that data to empower activities, and the ongoing enhancement of wildland urban interface (WUI) offerings with special attention to the impact of climate change. The NFA maintains the goal of a student-centric approach with current and relevant professional development opportunities for career and volunteer fire and EMS personnel. The USFA will undertake a strategic planning process to begin this fall. The Board of Visitors looks forward to supporting these efforts.

Education Training and Partnerships

NFA Online: During fiscal year (FY) 2022, the NFA began migrating to Blackboard as the platform for the learning management system (LMS). This migration is still underway. The absence of a functioning LMS has required innovative strategies and workarounds for course management. The Board considers the timely launch of Blackboard to be a priority.

During FY 2022, NFA Online delivered 35,130 completions as of Aug. 10. Additionally, in the single week of Aug. 1-8, another 387 registrations took place. Many of these students participate in National Wildfire Coordinating Group courses hosted on the NFA Online platform. NFA seeks to expand its catalog of online courses.

The NFA **state fire training grants** program offers \$20,000 to each state fire training system/academy. The NFA is currently updating reporting requirements and processes. The intent is to bolster delivery of NFA classes around the nation. The complications and costs of administrative overhead and burden of work results in a decision in some states to not accept or use these grant funds. During FY 2022, there were 42 state fire training grants recipients. There were hundreds of classes that trained thousands of students nationwide.

The NFA's **Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education (FESHE)** program connects the NFA with institutions of higher education engaged in fire and emergency services degree and certificate programs. More than 100 colleges and universities are currently active in the FESHE program. The FESHE program manager position has been vacant for over a year. The position has been redesigned to merge responsibilities for FESHE and state fire training grants.

Things are returning to normal with the **NFA State Weekends** program after being heavily impacted by COVID-19. All states will be returning in 2023. Additionally, several national weekends will allow individuals from throughout the country to attend 2-day classes and experience the NFA campus. Feedback from attendees has been very positive. The NFA intends to add focused weekends emphasizing such topics as leadership, command and control, and a women’s weekend at the NFA (Women in Fire).

Through the NFA **off-campus delivery** programs, each state receives 9 2-day classes, and each region receives 3 6-day classes. Classes not used may be reallocated to other states and regions. The reductions/cessation of on-campus courses during COVID-19 allowed for an increase in 2- and 6-day classes for off-campus delivery. This program has helped establish strong partnerships with state fire training agencies. As an example, the New York City Fire Department (FDNY), New York State Fire Training and the NFA are exploring ways to partner on delivery of NFA courses for FDNY personnel through the off-campus delivery program. See Table 3 regarding offerings and attendees.

Leadership and Community Risk Reduction

The Leadership and Community Risk Reduction (LCRR) Branch includes curricula for Executive Fire Officer (EFO), Managing Officer, Leadership and Executive Development, Community Risk Reduction, Planning and Information Management, Training Management, Fire Prevention, Public Education/Technical, and WUI. LCRR continues to oversee the major overhaul of the **EFO Program**. It is clear that a great deal of research, thought and expertise went into creating a student-centered EFO Program.

Executive Fire Officer Program

Semester 1	Mediated 10-12 Week	M5101	Executive Leadership Introduction to EFO and Research Design	M5105 Thesis
SELF	Resident 10-Day	R5201	Exercise of Executive Leadership: Self	
Semester 2	Mediated 10-12 Week	M5102	Strategic Risk Management Analysis: Organization	
ORGANIZATION	Resident 10-Day	R5202	Exercise of Executive Leadership: Organization	
Semester 3	Mediated 10-12 Week	M5103	Strategic Risk Management Analysis: Community	
COMMUNITY	Resident 10-Day	R5203	Exercise of Executive Leadership: Community	
Semester 4	Mediated 10-12 Week	M5104	Applications in the Exercise of Leadership	
	Resident 10-Day	R5204	Integrating Executive Leadership for Self, Organization and Community	

SELF	Resident 10-Day	R5201	Exercise of Executive Leadership: Self
ORGANIZATION	40 HR Pre-course/Resident 6-Day	R5202	Exercise of Executive Leadership: Organization
COMMUNITY	40 HR Pre-course/Resident 6-Day	R5203	Exercise of Executive Leadership: Community
	Mediated 12-Week	M5104	Capstone I
CAPSTONE	Resident 6-Day	R5204	Capstone II



Executive Fire Officer Program – October 2022

242 Current Students	
R5201	209 Completed to date
R5202	99 Completed
R5203	78 Completed
M5104	32 Enrolled
R5204	



- Since EFO Program start in 1987, 4632 legacy students have graduated.
- Last legacy class graduated September 2022.



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The **Managing Officer** Program was due for a refresh during FY 2022. Unfortunately, limited staff availability and the ongoing needs of the EFO Program redesign have caused the Managing Officer Program update to be further delayed. Table 1 outlines the application and admission data for the EFO and Managing Officer programs.

Table 1: EFO Program and Managing Officer Program application and admission data

	EFO Program			Managing Officer Program		
	Applied	Admitted	Admit %	Applied	Admitted	Admit %
FY 2017	268	163	60.8	218	153	70.2
FY 2018	298	189	63.4	240	153	63.8
FY 2019	252	37	14.7	229	129	56.3
FY 2020	145	0	0.0	267	85	31.8
FY 2021	244	89	36.5	240	100	41.7
FY 2022	517	120	23.2	195	24	12.3
Total	1,724	598	34.7	1,389	644	46.4
Average	287.3	99.7	34.7	231.5	107.3	46.3

Note: The information provided in this chart came from the FY reports in the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) admissions system. The numbers may be different in other documents based on the way the data is included in each line or category. Values may also vary depending upon when data was retrieved.

Response

The NFA Response Branch includes curricula for Incident Management and Coordination, Emergency Medical Services, Fire and Investigative Sciences, Hazardous Materials and Response to Terrorism, Responder Health and Safety, Planning and Information Management, and Training Management Programs. The board was impressed with the new **advanced simulation system** to support ongoing delivery of Incident Management and Coordination courses, including newly developed courses related to **All-Hazards Incident Management Team** qualifications.

Training, Administration, Planning and Analysis Branch

In the past, students and their supervisors were asked to opt in to survey participation regarding post-class outcomes. Now those same individuals are automatically entered into the survey program and may opt out. This has resulted in a significant increase in participation from the supervisors of participating students.

Changes are in progress regarding the way **contract instructors** are recruited and contract bids are structured. The hope is to separate the bid for course amounts from the travel cost; this change should improve geographic diversity (e.g., cadre from California will be paid equally as cadre from Pennsylvania). USFA and NFA leadership have been intentionally **reaching out to affinity groups** such as the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters, Women in Fire, the National Association of Hispanic Firefighters, Native American Fire Chiefs Association, and the International EMS and Firefighters Pride Alliance to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion and ensure that all members of fire and EMS feel welcomed to attend and instruct at the NFA campus.

Targeted efforts to recruit, hire and onboard new instructors have been hampered due to the lack of available staff to evaluate candidates and perform interviews. Additionally, the **hiring process** for contract instructors is complicated and time intensive, disincentivizing potential instructors from joining the teaching pool. NFA has assigned a staff member to serve as the point of contact to assist interested instructors with navigating the federal contracting system. NFA staff is working to implement a quarterly contract instructor hiring process that will alleviate the challenges identified in FY 2023.

This year, the **American Council on Education** (ACE) reviewed 18 courses (15 repeat and 3 new). The ACE credentialing program provides third-party, unbiased assessment of course content and rigor. Many schools accept ACE-approved NFA courses for academic credit transfer. Table 3 offers an overview of course deliveries and attendees.

In FY 2022, there were several resident courses where the number of qualified applicants exceeded the class capacity. Table 2 is a list of those classes where there was a backlog of more than 10.

Table 2: FY 2022 course backlog

FY2022 course backlog	
Emergency Medical Services: Quality Management (R0158)	27
Special Operations Program Management (R0254)	11
Commercial Fire Sprinkler Plans Review (R0263)	25
Command and Control Decision-Making at Multiple Alarm Incidents (R0297)	42
Command and Control of Incident Operations (R0312)	58
Fire Inspection Principles I (R0390)	11
Fire Inspection Principles 2: Inspection of Structures and Systems (R0391)	13
Plans Review for Fire and Life Safety (R0393)	34
Leadership in Supervision (R0645)	11
Fire Investigation: Essentials (R0772)	161
Fire Investigation: Electrical Systems (R0776)	22

Table 3: Course delivery student completions

	FY 2021 Final		2022 Preliminary		Difference		% Difference	
	Offerings	Attendees	Offerings	Attendees	Offerings	Attendees	Offerings	Attendees
NFA sponsored								
Resident								
2-day	23	342	45	780	22	438	195.7	228.1
2/6-day	69	917	135	2,336	66	1,419	195.7	254.7
6-day (pilot)	7	120	5	74	-2	-46	71.4	-38.3
10-day	32	522	47	868	15	346	146.9	166.3
Subtotal resident	131	1,901	232	4,058	101	2,157	177.1	213.5
Nonresident								
2-day	215	3,497	209	3,288	-6	-209	-2.8	-6.0
6/10-day	30	490	31	569	1	79	103.3	116.1
Mediated	18	367	1	32	-17	-335	-94.4	-91.3
Virtual	62	1,389	65	1,403	3	14	104.8	101.0
LMS		6,9674		40,090	0	-29,584		-42.1
Subtotal nonresident	325	75,417	306	45,382	-19	-30,035	-6.8	39.8
Total NFA sponsored	456	77,318	538	49,440	82	-27,878	118.0	-36.1
State sponsored								
6-day	869	12,708	944	14,297	75	1,589	108.6	112.5
Approved	314	4,762	330	5,307	16	545	105.4	111.4
Total state sponsored	1,183	17,470	1,274	19,604	91	2,134	107.7	112.2
College	589	3,936	460	3,024	-129	-912	-21.9	-23.1
Total NFA	2,228	98,724	2,272	72,068	44	-26,656	102.0	27.0

The NFA continued a systematic study of its resident courses with students and their supervisors to determine long-term training effectiveness. During FY 2022, 529 students and 523 supervisors responded to the long-term evaluation. As with previous years' responses, students indicated that they were able to transfer the training skills and learning to their jobs, and supervisors reported improved performance. The data in Table 4 show:

Table 4: Long-term evaluation results

Long-term evaluation reporting elements	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Students reporting they were able to apply NFA training at home	91.0%	94.3%	93.9%	88.1%	93.8%
Students reporting NFA training improved their job performance	97.1%	96.3%	96.4%	91.8%	97.4%
Students reporting they shared NFA training with their peers	97.9%	95.1%	97.2%	91.7%	96.2%
Students reporting they conducted formal courses with NFA material	24.8%	23.6%	24.2%	17.0%	22.9%
Students reporting they established new policies and procedures based on NFA training	77.1%	72.5%	70.8%	63.2%	59.7%
Supervisors reporting improved performance from NFA training	90.9%	89.4%	92.3%	92.5%	93.6%
Supervisors reporting improved departmental performance	91.1%	86.9%	91.4%	91.7%	93.6%
Supervisors who say they will recommend NFA training to others	97.4%	96.4%	96.9%	96.2%	97.6%
Supervisors reporting NFA benefits outweigh costs	94.7%	92.4%	95.2%	93.9%	95.2%

Note: Data reported was derived from NFA Long-Term Evaluation Forms sent to both students and their supervisors 4 to 6 months after the NFA training class ended.

National Fire Programs

While the National Fire Programs (NFP) is not officially within the charge of the Board of Visitors, the close work between NFA and NFP requires consideration of NFP efforts to provide context to the NFA assessment.

The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) has updated and delivered training for NFIRS program managers as well as end users. The NFIRS COVID-19 Special Study has reported 24,507,473 responses for 2020-2022 from 12,473 reporting fire agencies, as of Nov. 23, 2022. The USFA reports that there were 105 COVID-19-related on-duty firefighter fatalities from March 2020 to November 2022. Subcommittee members Kevin Quinn and Mark Rivero met with NFP for an informational meeting on NFIRS on Nov. 2, 2021.

USFA Publications has released noteworthy reports including “America Burning Revisited” and “EMS Safety Practices.” The USFA supported by DHS Science and Technology also released an [Augmented Reality App](#) supporting prevention officers in wildfire mitigation.

National Emergency Training Center/physical plant

The size, age and scope of the NETC campus facility continue to offer both challenges and advantages. The historic nature of many of the NFA buildings adds complexity to the ongoing maintenance and repairs. On behalf of students and other stakeholders, the Board appreciates the tremendous support FEMA has provided to address capital improvement and maintenance issues on campus. We applaud the continued outstanding work of the NETC Management, Operations and Support Services (MOSS) in managing the physical plant and numerous activities held on campus each year. MOSS Director Al Fluman retired in December 2021. The Board wishes to recognize Mr. Fluman for his tireless efforts to maintain and improve the campus during his tenure at the NETC.

The reduction in on-campus course delivery due to COVID-19 allowed progress on deferred maintenance and enhancement projects. The Board is especially pleased to see much-needed upgrades to the fire alarm system in multiple buildings and enhancements to campus security.

Supply chain issues curtailed the extent to which some projects could be completed. Nonetheless, crucial enhancements were made to heating, ventilating and air conditioning/filtration systems; solar energy array; Americans with Disabilities Act compliance; and connectivity. Ongoing projects include establishing multiple rooms (for canine service animals as well as canine accelerant dogs attending NFA courses with their handlers), improvements to the burn range including the addition of new restroom facilities, and efforts to map the Wi-Fi connectivity gaps throughout campus. Additionally, staff roles have been requested for security, nursing and IT support to enhance the health, safety and security of all who work and visit the NFA. Many projects including energy efficiency initiatives are still underway. The Board supports the acquisition of additional land to allow expansion of the solar array and further reduce the climate impact of operations.

The NETC campus continues to need a robust, safe and welcoming **physical fitness, health and wellness center** for use by students, instructors and staff. NFA should lead the fire service by example in the arena of fitness as it does in so many other areas.

IT continues to be an issue for the campus and programs of NFA. Students require more connectivity while on campus, distance courses do not currently have an adequate LMS, application and registration processes are antiquated, extensive data resources are underutilized, phone systems are outdated, and overall bandwidth is inadequate. With the growth and importance of IT, the Board continues to recommend that the NFA and USFA install a full-time chief information officer and create a branch to oversee and manage all enterprise functions.

Funding

The USFA and the NFA continue to demonstrate commendable stewardship with respect to fiscal responsibility. While the operational budget has remained relatively stable, inflation results in higher costs for operations. The USFA has had to leave several positions vacant as it does not have adequate funds to cover all the employees' salaries and benefits costs. It is imperative that the USFA and NFA receive an increase in funding to maintain their mission and the expected role they play within DHS/FEMA, as well as recruit and retain valued staff.

The NFA has established memorandums of agreement with other agencies to provide training on the NFA campus. This will allow for high-quality and cost-effective training delivery, expanding the reach of NFA without draining funds from the operational budget. However, the USFA bears the full cost of NETC maintenance. Appropriate cost sharing must be addressed by FEMA.

The NFA is unique in the federal government because its specific mission is to train state, local, tribal and territorial first responders and their leaders, not primarily federal employees. A reduction in resident classes at the NFA would result in a degradation of incident management capabilities, community risk reduction, hazardous materials response, and arson detection and prosecution.

While training has a cost, the lack of training is even more expensive in terms of life loss (both civilian and firefighter), property damage, litigation, economic impact and societal effects. According to USFA data, in calendar year 2020, there were 102 on-duty firefighter fatalities and 141 on-duty firefighter fatalities in calendar year 2021 (<https://apps.usfa.fema.gov/firefighter-fatalities/>). According to the NFPA, in calendar year 2021, there were an estimated 3,800 civilian fire fatalities (source: <https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/US-Fire-Problem/Fire-loss-in-the-United-States>).

Observations

As part of the annual Board of Visitors on-campus meeting, the Board members meet with students and instructors to gain insight into the lived experience of those who visit campus.

Student feedback

An important element of the Board of Visitors meeting on campus is the opportunity to interact with students. Although there is a small sample size limited by the classes meeting on campus and the Board's available time, the information is still instructive.

Praise/success

Multiple students commented on the **high quality of training** offered by the NFA. Many participating students had visited campus more than once and expressed a deep appreciation for the opportunity to learn from experts in the field in a setting that removed them from the obligations and distractions of daily life. One student interviewed was revisiting campus after a 25-year gap. They expressed appreciation for the major improvements throughout campus.

Concerns/complaints/requests

Students in several classes reported multiple attempts to attend campus for **training that had been delayed, deferred or canceled**. There seemed to be a general impression that this was largely due to the pandemic. While frustrating, this seemed understandable to those who mentioned it. Issues with the **lack of an effective LMS** had negatively impacted course delivery.

Multiple students suggested that the NFA **increase offerings related to responder mental health** as part of the emphasis on responder health and wellness. The Board supports any efforts to expand awareness of fire and EMS provider mental health training and encourages the exploration of expanded partnerships with the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, International Association of Fire Fighters or other partners to bring additional attention and resources to this important topic. This should extend to consideration of resources for on-campus students who face mental health or stress concerns while on campus.

Board celebrations and concerns

The Board recognizes several **successes** that deserve recognition:

USFA staff has exhibited competence, professionalism and dedication above and beyond expectation throughout the disruptions brought on by COVID-19. This includes taking on new projects, developing alternative methods of delivering old projects and providing support for understaffed programs. The Board is intensely grateful for everything these individuals do on behalf of the NFA campus and the nation's fire and EMS service.

Time, facilities and funds have been used effectively to make **enhancements to existing and future training programs**. This has occurred under incredibly challenging circumstances.

Efforts to incorporate **diversity, equity and inclusion** throughout the curriculum as appropriate and within the staffing, contract instructors and admission process are recognized and appreciated. All facets of the fire service should feel welcome at the NFA.

The Board also wishes to call attention to these specific **concerns**:

Multiple **vacancies** in key leadership and critical support positions are impacting program delivery including processing applications of students, interviewing and onboarding new instructors, reviewing and refining existing courses and programs, and developing new offerings. Existing staff has undertaken added duties to compensate for the lack of staff. This could result in overworked, overstressed staff and ultimately in additional vacancies and a reduction in quality of service. The Board acknowledges that hiring is a challenge in almost all sectors, including throughout the emergency services. We urge the USFA and FEMA to provide any resources available to expedite the hiring process.

The full array of IT services at NETC is in desperate need of upgrades. As noted on page 9 of this report, it bears repeating that students require more connectivity while on campus, distance courses do not currently have an adequate LMS, application and registration processes are antiquated, extensive data resources are underutilized, phone systems are outdated, and overall bandwidth is inadequate. With the growth and importance of IT, the Board continues to recommend that the NFA and USFA install a full-time chief information officer and create a branch to oversee and manage all enterprise functions.

In conclusion

The Board would like to thank the dedicated and passionate staff, faculty, students and administrators who all contribute to the success of the NFA and USFA. The Board applauds the USFA for 48 years of dedicated service in support of the nation's fire, EMS and emergency services in the unwavering pursuit of a safer nation.

Fiscal Year 2022 Board of Visitors

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Fairfax, Virginia

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