

Workgroup Summary

Fire Service Recruitment and Retention

Overarching Goal:

Invest in recruitment and retention programs to address the shortage of firefighters and make the fire service more diverse and inclusive.

Issue:

In recent years there has been a steady decline in the number of firefighters in the nation. This decline is impacting both career and volunteer departments, leaving the communities they serve vulnerable to threats and increasing the stresses among firefighters and the municipalities. It is imperative that we invest in programs to incentivize individuals to join volunteer and career fire departments.

Historically, the fire service hasn't had to recruit and retain members actively. There were usually too many applicants for career positions, and communities fully supported their local volunteer department generation after generation. But that has changed, and dramatically so over the past few years, due to retirements, time demands, and the effects of the pandemic.

The National Fire Protection Association's 2022 U.S. Fire Department Profile estimated there are 1,041,200 career and volunteer firefighters in the United States, which is approximately 62,100 less than in 2010. In 2010, the rate of firefighters per 1,000 citizens was 3.57. In 2020, the rate of firefighters per 1,000 citizens was 3.14. At the same time, call volumes have more than tripled, primarily due to increased emergency medical calls. With firefighter shortages come response time delays, closed stations, firefighter safety issues, mandatory overtime and increased time demands on volunteers, and financial impacts on municipalities.

The fire service also struggles to recruit and retain women and people of color. Women represent 11% of volunteer firefighters and 5% of career firefighters, according to the NFPA's 2022 U.S. Fire Department Profile.⁸ The most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2020 reported that 13.1% of career firefighters were Hispanic or Latino, 8.4% were African American, and 1.2% were Asian-Pacific Islanders.⁹

Accomplishments:

Recruitment

- ▶ The Recruitment and Retention Workgroup has identified dozens of best practice programs around the nation. The list includes programs that are fire and EMS created and managed, partnerships with other fire service organizations, partnerships with community colleges and universities, etc.
- ▶ Apprenticeship, cadet, internship, and supplemental education programs are being actively used around the nation as a vehicle to recruit career and volunteer fire and EMS personnel with much success. Examples include:
 - ▶ High school fire programs
 - ▶ Los Angeles Fire Department (CA) Firefighter/EMS Magnet High School program
 - ▶ Vermont high school apprenticeship
 - ▶ Fairfax County (VA) Public Schools Academy program partnership with the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department
 - ▶ Evergreen Fire-Rescue (CO) high school Cadet Emergency Medical Responder program
 - ▶ City of Rochester (MN) Fire Department high school firefighter program

- ▶ Gwinnett County (GA) Fire and Emergency Services Department/Maxwell High School of Technology Fire & Emergency Services/Firefighting program
- ▶ Long Beach (CA) Fire Department Fire Pathways program
- ▶ City of Miramar (FL) Fire Department/Broward County (FL) School District - Everglades High School Fire Academy Program and emergency medical training
- ▶ Loudoun County (VA) Public Schools – Academies of Loudoun
- ▶ Cobb County Fire Department/Cobb County School District – Osborne High School (GA) Firefighting Pathway program
- ▶ Sioux City (IA) Community School District/Sioux City Career Academy fire science pathway program
- ▶ Stafford County (VA) Fire and Rescue/Stafford County Schools High School Firefighting Pathways Program
- ▶ Pflugerville (TX) Fire Department/Hendrickson High School Fire Academy
- ▶ Salem (OR) School District – West Salem High School CTE Emergency Services Program
- ▶ Allegheny County Emergency Services and Allegheny County (PA) Fire Academy/ Highlands High School and North Hills High School Fire Service Training Class
- ▶ Jefferson County Public Schools – Fairdale High School Fire Science and EMS Program and Fern Creek High School Fire Science Program
- ▶ Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy (MA)
- ▶ Chicopee Comprehensive High and Chicopee High School (MA)
- ▶ New Hampshire Fire Academy – Outreach program with high school counselors
- ▶ Fire service sponsored youth programs (Junior/Cadet Firefighters, Explorers, etc.)
 - ▶ National Fallen Firefighters Foundation National High School Fire and EMS Cadet Symposium
 - ▶ National Volunteer Fire Council Junior Firefighter Program
 - ▶ Prince William County (VA) Fire Junior Firefighter
 - ▶ Waukegan (IL) Fire Department Cadet Program
 - ▶ Nassau County (NY) Junior Firefighters (NVFC)
 - ▶ Vermont week-long cadet program (resident program)
 - ▶ South Media (PA) High School /Local fire (PA law) - Schoolhouse to Firehouse
 - ▶ Alessandro High School First Responder Pathway Program (Hemet, CA)
 - ▶ Fort Lauderdale (FL) Fire Explorer Program
 - ▶ Hershey Fire Department (PA) Junior Firefighters
 - ▶ Howell Township Fire Company #1 (NJ) Volunteer – Junior Firefighter Program
 - ▶ Alpha Fire Company – Littlestown, PA – Junior Firefighter Program
 - ▶ East Norwich (NY) Junior Firefighter Program
 - ▶ Hauppauge (NY) Fire Department Explorer Post #660
 - ▶ Smyrna (GA) Fire – Junior Firefighters
 - ▶ El Paso (TX) Fire Department Summer Youth Academy

- ▶ East Valley Cadets Program – Mesa (AZ) Fire Department (this is a regional Cadet program hosted in Mesa, that includes Mesa, Gilbert, Queen Creek, Apache Junction areas)
- ▶ Fairfax County (VA) Fire & Rescue Explorer Program
- ▶ Solutions for At-Risk Youth (SFARY) – Richmond (CA) Fire [SFARY Firefighter Youth Academy | SFARY Firefighter Youth Academy](#)
- ▶ Milwaukee Fire Department – Junior Fire Institute - <https://mkejfi.com/>
- ▶ Fire Cadet Program - Dekalb County Fire Rescue Department (GA)
- ▶ Broward County (FL) Fire Chiefs Association – Explorer & [Cadet Committee Cadet / Explorer Subcommittee – Fire Chiefs Association of Broward County \(fcabc.com\)](#)
- ▶ Internships - college related, summer hire, others
 - ▶ Fairfax City (VA) summer hire
 - ▶ New Hampshire tech program live-ins (career path)
 - ▶ Vigilant Hose Company (Emmitsburg, MD)
 - ▶ College Park (MD) Fire Department)
 - ▶ Elsmere (NY) Albany County – “bunk-in” students
 - ▶ Oklahoma State University
 - ▶ St. Michaels University (VT)
 - ▶ Greenville City (SC) Fire Department Firefighter Summer Training Program
 - ▶ Alabama A&M University “FireDawgs” (Wildland Firefighting)
 - ▶ Clackamas County (OR) Fire District Firefighter Internship Program
 - ▶ USDA Forest Service wildland firefighter outreach with HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) Florida A & M, Southern University in Louisiana, Tuskegee University, and Alabama A & M University
 - ▶ Laramie County (WY) Fire Authority
- ▶ Youth Camps, Girls Camps, etc.
 - ▶ West Virginia University/WVU Fire Training - Junior Fire Fighter Camp
 - ▶ City of Manassas (VA) – Girls Camp
 - ▶ Portland (OR) Local 45 – Girls Camp
 - ▶ Arlington County (VA) Herricane Camp
 - ▶ Vermont - Women’s Camps
 - ▶ Phoenix Fire Camp (NY) NY Women in Fire
 - ▶ Fairfax County (VA) Fire & Rescue Summer Camp
 - ▶ Women in Fire (various – nationwide)
 - ▶ El Segundo (CA) Girls Empowerment Camp
 - ▶ Charlotte (NC) Fire - Camp Ignite
 - ▶ CAL FIRE (CA) Camp Cinder <https://www.fire.ca.gov/camp-cinder>
 - ▶ Wentzville (MO) Fire Protection District – Kids Camp
 - ▶ Orange County Fire Authority (CA) Fire – Empowerment Camp
 - ▶ Lafayette (PA) Fire – Kids Camp <https://www.lafayettefire.com/cadetcamp/>

- ▶ Eugene-Springfield (OR) Fire & EMS – Camp Ignite
- ▶ Delaware State Fire School - Camp Fury
- ▶ Los Angeles City (CA) Fire Department – Girls Camp
- ▶ Anchorage (AK) - Northern Lights and Sirens
- ▶ Prince George's County (MD) Fire & Rescue - Camp Embers
- ▶ Girls Future Firefighter Camp <https://girlsfuturefirefightercamp.com/>
- ▶ Aurora Fire Rescue (CO) – Camp Spark <https://www.9news.com/article/news/local/aurora-fire-rescue-camp-spark-girls-firefighters/73-13e36e77-3394-4fb0-9f13-a62de0c99bff>
- ▶ Black Fire Brigade (Chicago non-profit)
- ▶ Greenville (SC) Fire Department Firefighter Training Camp <https://www.greenvillesc.gov/1991/Firefighter-Summer-Training-Program>
- ▶ Des Moines (IA) Summer Fire Camp https://www.dsm.city/departments/fire/iowa_hero_academy.php
- ▶ Aspire Academy – Mesa (AZ) Fire Department (this is regional and will rotate to other cities each year)
- ▶ Camp Fury – Tucson (AZ) Fire Department
- ▶ Henrico (VA) Fire Department – Girls on Fire
- ▶ Milwaukee Fire Department (+ Milwaukee Police, Girl Scouts, Bell Ambulance, Milwaukee Area Technical College) - <https://www.gswise.org/en/members/for-girl-scouts/camp-and-outdoors/camp-hero.html>
- ▶ Camp Blaze – North Bend (WA)
- ▶ Blazing Brave Camp (GA) – Decatur Fire Rescue & DeKalb County Fire Rescue
- ▶ Programs for Women
 - ▶ Dallas (TX) Fire & Rescue - L.A.D.D.E.R. program
 - ▶ San Antonio (TX) Fire – Hero Like Her Program
 - ▶ Women in Fire – Various programs around the nation
 - ▶ Girls Build – Portland (OR) – Port of Portland Fire & Rescue/Hillsboro Fire
- ▶ High School Programs that use STEM for fire recruitment
 - ▶ UL FSRI Programs [FSRI Safety Academy](#)
 - ▶ FDNY High School Robotics Club
 - ▶ Firefighter Youth Academy (Richmond, CA) - Support for Actively Rising Youth (SFARY) <https://www.firefighteryouthacademy.org/>
 - ▶ Scappoose (OR) Fire District
- ▶ STEM Middle School & Community Programs
 - ▶ UL FSRI [Xplorlabs](#) - with modules on:
 - ▶ [The Science of Fire Forensics - UL Xplorlabs](#)
 - ▶ [The Science of Thermal Runaway - UL Xplorlabs](#)
 - ▶ [The Science of Fire Safety - UL Xplorlabs](#)
 - ▶ [The Science of Extraction to E-Waste - UL Xplorlabs](#) (lithium-ion batteries)
 - ▶ For more info on all the above ULRI.xplorlabs@ul.org

- ▶ The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) has a national recruitment campaign for volunteer fire and EMS members -- Make Me a Firefighter campaign (<https://makemeafirefighter.org/>)
- ▶ Several states have statewide recruitment campaigns for volunteer fire and EMS members. Example include:
 - ▶ Maryland State Firefighters Association
 - ▶ Firefighters Association State of New York – Recruit NY
 - ▶ New Hampshire State Fire and EMS Recruiting Network
 - ▶ Ohio State Fire Marshal’s Office
 - ▶ Vermont – All fire stations host open houses on the same day
 - ▶ New York State “Fire In You” campaign includes a website that will help a potential recruit identify and contact their local volunteer department.
- ▶ The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) is working with U.S. Department of Labor to create a national apprenticeship program for the fire service and EMS. Examples of apprenticeship programs include:
 - ▶ California Joint Apprenticeship Committee (CAL-JAC) <https://caljac.org/>
 - ▶ Washington State Firefighters Joint Apprenticeship Committee with Department of Labor and Industries (L&I)/Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council (WSATC)
 - ▶ Oregon - Oregon State Firefighters Council
 - ▶ Pittsburgh (PA) EMS
 - ▶ Milwaukee (WI) Fire Department Fire Cadet program <https://city.milwaukee.gov/fpc/Jobs/Fire-Cadet/Learn-More.htm>
 - ▶ New Hampshire Fire Academy – Apprenticeship New Hampshire [Earn As You Learn, Hire Skilled Workers | ApprenticeshipNH](#)
- ▶ The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) is working with U.S. Department of Education and other entities on Comprehensive Technical Education (CTE) and cadet programs for the fire service and EMS.
- ▶ The National Fire Academy maintains an active partnership with more than 100 colleges as part of its Fire & Emergency Services in Higher Education (FESHE) Program. <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/nfa/about/feshe/index.html>
- ▶ Several national fire service associations have submitted a grant under the FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) Program to create a national media campaign including Public Service Announcements (PSAs) that share what the fire service does, how individuals can serve as either career or volunteer members and connects them with local opportunities (searchable by zip code). The Recruitment and Retention Workgroup, which includes representatives from each of the national fire service and EMS organizations, and affinity associations, would play an integral role in helping with this campaign upon successful grant award.
- ▶ Several national fire service associations have submitted a grant under the FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) Program to create a nationwide “How to Become a Firefighter” portal showcasing new and existing recruitment resources and related social media sites. The Recruitment and Retention Workgroup, which includes representatives from each of the national fire service and EMS organizations, and affinity associations, would play an integral role in helping with this campaign upon successful grant award.

- ▶ Fire service organizations and fire departments around the country have produced promotional recruitment videos. Examples include:
 - ▶ National Volunteer Fire Council has a page dedicated to this at <https://makemeafirefighter.org/what-its-like> and a “Ride With Us” Video series that depicts the life of a firefighter
 - ▶ The City of Milwaukee (WI) Fire Department had two promotional videos professionally produced called “A Place For Everyday Hero’s”- <https://youtu.be/Fx9ibSXMctQ?si=4DgHPXYDfEYadDD2> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFrgbjmSfjE>
 - ▶ California’s Becoming a Firefighter (a collaboration of Cal-JAC & Firefighter Candidate Testing Center). <https://www.youtube.com/@BecomingAFF>
- ▶ The Recruiting and Retention Workgroup is exploring ways to bridge EMS training for military medics while the individuals are still in the service. The United States Army’s COOL (Credentialing Opportunities On-Line) Program is a valuable resource in this area <https://www.cool.osd.mil/army/index.html>
- ▶ Many fire departments are partnering with the Department of Defense SkillBridge program which provides an opportunity for military service members to gain valuable civilian work experience through specific industry training, apprenticeships, or internships during the last 180 days of service.
 - ▶ Fairfax County Fire - Hero to Hero (Skillbridge), Hiring our Hero’s, and Hire Vets Now. Veterans are able to use the GI bill during recruit school.
 - ▶ Department of Defense Skillbridge [DOD SkillBridge Program - Authorized SkillBridge Organizations Page \(osd.mil\)](#)
 - ▶ Hilton Head Island (SC) Fire & Rescue Skillbridge [SkillBridge Program Job Opportunities \(hiltonheadislandsc.gov\)](#)
 - ▶ New Hampshire Skillbridge for Fire & EMS careers [DOD SkillBridge Program | Goffstown, NH \(goffstownnh.gov\)](#)
 - ▶ Oceanside (CA) Fire Skillbridge [SkillBridge | Oceanside, CA – Fire](#)
 - ▶ Dallas (TX) Fire & Rescue Skillbridge [Dallas Fire Rescue Internship DOD SkillBridge Program \(dallascityhall.com\)](#)

Other programs for veterans and spouses include:

- ▶ Connecticut Fire Academy (GI Bill)
- ▶ Illinois Fire Service Institute – University of Illinois (GI Bill)
- ▶ Massachusetts Fire Academy (GI Bill)
- ▶ ICC Military Families Career Program (Vets & Families) Fire & Building Officials
- ▶ Vegas Valley Veterans Handcrew (BLM Wildfire) [Vegas Valley Veterans Crew | National Interagency Fire Center \(nifc.gov\)](#)

Recruitment and Retention

- ▶ Members of the Recruitment and Retention Workgroup have brought awareness to recruitment and retention resources available to career and volunteer fire and EMS members around the nation through podcasts; webinars; presentations at state, regional and national conferences; magazine articles; and social media.

- ▶ FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grants continue to play an important role in firefighter recruitment and retention in both career and volunteer fire service agencies across the nation.
 - ▶ The Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grants (SAFER) was created to provide funding directly to fire departments and volunteer firefighter interest organizations to help them increase or maintain the number of trained, "front line" firefighters available in their communities.
 - ▶ There are three SAFER efforts that have had a significant impact:
 - ▶ Hiring of Firefighters (Career),
 - ▶ Recruitment and Retention for Fire Departments (Volunteer),
 - ▶ Recruitment and Retention for Interest Organizations which support state, local, tribal, and territorial efforts.
- ▶ The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) has developed a Bullying and Workplace Violence Prevention Toolkit called "Respect Our House" <https://www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/resources/resource/bullying-and-workplace-violence-prevention-toolkit>
- ▶ The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters (IABPFF), the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and the IAFC Volunteer and Combination Officers Section (IAFC-VCOS), the National Association of Fire Training Directors (NAFTD), the National Association of Hispanic Firefighters (NAHFF), and Women in Fire issued a Joint Statement declaring they will not tolerate harassment, bullying behavior, or discrimination of any kind and that all members of fire, EMS, and rescue services should be treated and treat others with dignity and respect. <https://www.nvfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Anti-Harrassment-and-Bullying-Statement.pdf>
- ▶ The U.S. Fire Administration collaborated with NVFC to create a "Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services" manual <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/retention-and-recruitment-for-volunteer-emergency-services.pdf>
- ▶ NVFC has conducted research and on recruitment and retention and offers the following reports:
 - ▶ Volunteer Retention Research Report <https://www.nvfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/20Aug-NVFC-Retention-Research-Report-FINAL.pdf>
 - ▶ Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Formative Research Results https://www.nvfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/NVFC_Formative-Research_2015_Report_v1f.pdf
- ▶ Firefighters Association of State of New York (FASNY) conducts an annual census (survey) of volunteer departments to establish some empirical data/baselines of the status of the volunteer service in the state.
- ▶ The Recruiting and Retention Workgroup identified a variety of best practices related to retention:
 - ▶ Benefits for volunteer firefighters (local)
 - ▶ Nassau County (NY) – Fire tuition
 - ▶ Spring Lake (NJ) Fire Department – Drop-in office space for teleworkers
 - ▶ Hershey (PA) Fire Department – Drop-in office space and Wi-Fi for teleworkers
 - ▶ Aspen (CO) Fire -- Health insurance for volunteers
 - ▶ Virginia – Mortgage relief program for volunteer and career

- ▶ Stafford County (VA) Fire – 401K program for volunteers
- ▶ Fairfax County (VA) Fire – Length of Service Award Program (LOSAP) for volunteers and a local property tax credit program to incentivize volunteers <https://fcvfra.org/become-a-volunteer/>
- ▶ Local property tax credit programs to incentivize volunteers
 - ▶ Gettysburg (PA) [Volunteer Fire Protection Service Tax Credit Program | Gettysburg PA](#)
 - ▶ Prince William County (VA)
 - ▶ Loudoun County (VA)
 - ▶ Cumberland County (PA) – Real estate tax paid by the volunteer, up to \$250. [Volunteer Firefighter & EMS Tax Credit | Cumberland County, PA - Official Website \(cumberlandcountypa.gov\)](#)
- ▶ State tax incentive programs to bolster volunteer fire department ranks
 - ▶ Maryland – \$7,000 income tax credit after 3 years of active service <https://marylandvolunteer.org/benefits/>
 - ▶ New York State – \$200 income tax credit and property tax reduction of up to 10% of the assessed value of property for qualified volunteers
 - ▶ Delaware – \$1,000 tax credit
 - ▶ Maine https://www.maine.gov/revenue/sites/maine.gov/revenue/files/inline-files/23_employer_fire_ems_volunteer_ff.pdf
 - ▶ Alabama – Volunteer firefighters can get mileage tax credits on their state income tax
 - ▶ Pennsylvania – Tax credits for volunteers <https://www.osfc.pa.gov/recruitment-retention/Pages/Volunteer-Tax-Credit-Incentive-Program.aspx>
 - ▶ Iowa - \$250 tax credit <https://www.iowafirefightersassociation.com/250-tax-credit>
 - ▶ Illinois – Volunteer emergency worker credit (Public Act 103-0009) is a \$500 non-refundable credit <https://tax.illinois.gov/individuals/credits/volunteer-emergency-worker-credit.html>
 - ▶ Oklahoma <https://oklahoma.gov/content/dam/ok/en/fire/documents/ok-gov-fire-imported/FTAC%20Tax%20Credit%20Packet%2012-20-18.pdf>
 - ▶ Nebraska – \$250 refundable income tax credit <https://revenue.nebraska.gov/incentives/volunteer-emergency-responders-incentive-act/general-information>
 - ▶ Arkansas <https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Home/FTPDocument?path=%2FAssembly%2F2023R%2FFiscal+Impacts%2FHFB1241-DFA1.pdf>
 - ▶ North Carolina <https://www.ncleg.gov/Sessions/2021/Bills/House/PDF/H575v1.pdf>
 - ▶ Wisconsin Legislative Council Study Committee on Volunteer Firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician Shortages https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lc_study/2016/1498/010_july_26_2016_meeting_9_30_a_m_legislative_council_large_conference_room/july26mins_emt
 - ▶ South Carolina –\$3,000 tax credit for qualifying volunteers for over 20 years called the VIP program. There is a bill before the General Assembly this year to double it to \$6,000. Details on the program here: <https://statefire.llr.sc.gov/osfm/vip.aspx>
 - ▶ West Virginia -- \$1,000 tax credit <https://tax.wv.gov/Documents/TSD/tsd453.pdf>

- ▶ Tennessee – Pay incentive, paid directly to firefighters Career: \$800.00 per year, must be Firefighter II within 3 years to remain eligible, completes 40 hours of in-service each year Volunteer: \$600 per year, must be Firefighter I within 5 years to remain eligible, completes 30 hours of in-service each year.
- ▶ Virginia Tax Credit for Volunteers
<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title58.1/chapter30/section58.1-3019/>
- ▶ Tax incentives for firefighters to live in communities they serve
 - ▶ Baltimore City (MD) – \$2,500 property tax credit
 - ▶ Portland (OR)
- ▶ College tuition assistance programs to recruit and retain
 - ▶ Texas A & M
 - ▶ NY State – Statewide reimbursement per semester – grades based – commitment to volunteer fire department for another year.

Recommendations:

- ▶ Support the development of apprenticeship, cadet, internship, and supplemental education programs as a vehicle to recruit career and volunteer fire and EMS personnel.
- ▶ Continue to support efforts of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) which is working with U.S. Department of Labor to create a national apprenticeship program for the fire service and EMS.
- ▶ Support efforts of the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) working with U.S. Department of Education and other entities on Comprehensive Technical Education (CTE) and cadet programs for the fire service and EMS.
- ▶ Create an online repository of best practices for recruitment and retention.
- ▶ Create national media campaign including Public Service Announcements (PSAs) that share what the fire service does, how individuals can serve as either career or volunteer members and connects them with local opportunities (searchable by zip code).
- ▶ Create a nationwide “How to Become a Firefighter” portal showcasing new and existing recruitment resources and related social media sites.
- ▶ Explore ways to bridge EMS training for military medics while the individuals are still in the service.