Firefighters Association of the State of Pennsylvania

Recruitment and Retention "Tips for Success"

www.becomeapafirefighter.com

The Firefighters Association of the State of Pennsylvania

"Recruitment and Retention Tips"

Through out the years that the Firefighters Association of the State of Pennsylvania (FASP) has been fortunate enough to receive Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), there have been lessons learned that can easily be incorporated into "tips" for others to learn from, reference, and emulate as they develop local recruitment and retention programs. These "tips" have been developed into a series of Tips of the Month which were released and posted in strategic locations (print, on line and hard copy) to the fire and emergency medical service communities not just in Pennsylvania, but around the country.

50 "tips" were compiled as released in print in Pennsylvania Firemen magazine, one per month, for fifty months. We sincerely thank them for their support in this effort. The "tips" were posted on the FASP recruitment and retention website (www.becomeapafirefighter.com), released on the FASP facebook page and the Pennsylvania Fire and Emergency Service Institute (PFESI) website. The support of these organizations and personnel is very much appreciated. Finally, many thanks to those practitioners who provided content used in the development of these "tips" and who are credited in the document.

Of significant importance and understanding is that recruitment and retention of fire and EMS personnel has clearly been documented in Pennsylvania to be a local issue, and must be addressed locally and local leadership has to be present to develop and implement a program to recruit and retain members.

The "tip" are now in your hands for implementation and support materials can be located in the FASP Recruitment and Retention website (www.becomeapafirefighter.com).

On behalf of the leadership and members of the Firefighters Association of the State of Pennsylvania best wishes in your recruitment and retention efforts.

William F. Jenaway, Ph.D.

FASP SAFER Grant Project Manager

Recruitment and Retention
Tip of the Month

https://www.becomeapafirefighter.com/recruitment-retention-tips/

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Released monthly via

- Pennsylvania Fireman magazine
- https://www.becomeapafirefighter.com/recruitment-retention-tips/
- support agencies e.g. FASP web and email, PFESI, NEPFFA, etc.

Additional information on this topic can be found at: www.becomeapafirefighter.com www.responderhelp.com; www.nvfc.org or call 1-800-ASK-NVFC (275-6832).

Need help for your Recruitment & Retention program. The FASP (through a SAFER Grant) provides consultative services to help you with recruiting and retaining members. For help, look for a contact us through the FASP website http://pafirefighters.org/contact-us/ ***with your email and needs.***

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #1 of 50

Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers in the 21st Century

Do you have enough members? Are they the right members? Do you have jobs that need to be done, and no one on the staff can do them? Are you losing more people than you have joining each year? If so, you are not alone! Recruitment and retention has become the major concern of the volunteer emergency response community in America. The numbers tell the story. Only a decade ago, there were over one million volunteer firefighters. These numbers have dropped to just 800,000, and the bleeding continues. For some time, the United States Fire Administration has had a document available regarding recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. However, as time goes on, you must change how you approach recruiting and retaining members. Recognizing this, the USFA provided a grant to the National Volunteer Fire Council to revise the referenced document, create an educational program and provide training to America's fire service. Based upon research conducted, training was conducted training in twelve venues. The research resulted in three key "findings statements" that you must understand before approaching the issues of recruitment and retention.

1.Recruitment and retention are local problems.
– The needs, leadership, and challenges are all local.

2. Recruitment is MARKETING, and you must market ALL THE TIME.
– A needs assessment is critical to making sure you invest your time appropriately.

3. You need to know what your members want as benefits before you choose incentives.

In addition, leadership emerged as a prominent issue as to why people stay or leave. Leadership was characterized as an art, a science, and a style. Good leadership adds a third dimension, and involves going beyond doing things the way they've always been done. It was found that effective leaders look beyond the numbers and set the direction for the organization. They integrate doing business with the whys, whats, wheres, hows, and whens. This will be continued in the next "Tip of the Month".

Credit:	Jenaway, William F., Ph.D., Recruitment and Retention for 21st Century Emergency Services. VFIS News, Volume 7 Number 2 pages 1-2

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #2 of 50

Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers in the 21st Century…continued

As part of a FEMA/USFA project. the Public Safety and Environmental Protection Institute of Philadelphia based St. Joseph's University, in collaboration with the NVFC conducted research to better define the reasons fewer people volunteer their time to organizations such as volunteer emergency service agencies. If your members are leaving, it may be for the same reasons the research pointed out… - a lack of time? - poor leadership? - health and medical problems? - family responsibility? - volunteering no longer being relevant to the member? - relocation? - other interests? - competing demands (work, family, school, sports, etc.)? - a problematic organization? - the fact that no one asked them to stay. To know for sure, you may have to poll members who have left your organization.

What makes people stay involved is a separate issue. Much of the ability to retain people centers on motivating members through a shared VISION. Research has found that this is facilitated effectively in many cases when an organization can: - accommodate individual needs - provide rewards and recognition - provide adequate supervision and leadership - challenge members. Retention issues are not only individual, they can be by group, and may be local issues. While volunteer emergency responders typically join to help others, over time new factors enter into why they stay. In fact, today, benefits play a significant role in why and how long members stay. Research from St. Joseph's University found numerous types of retention programs that worked; however, what worked in one community did not necessarily work in a neighboring community, reinforcing that recruitment and retention are local issues. Again, you will need to poll local personnel to determine reasons members no longer volunteer.

The critical success factor is someone locally taking responsibility and authority to work recruitment and retention issues to sustain needed staffing.

Credit:	Jenaway, William F., Ph.D., Recruitment and Retention for 21st Century Emergency Services. VFIS News, Volume 7 Number 2 pages 1-2

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #3 of 50

Developing a Recruitment and Retention Plan

With each of the subsequent recruiting and retention "tips" you will have the opportunity to consider how, if at all, that technique can help your organization. The tips should help you develop a comprehensive recruitment and retention action plan for your organization.

This tip is intended to provide you a format to develop an action plan to consider what various resources or techniques can be of help to accomplish your goal, how you would want to access those resources, to whom you should assign the tasks, and how to determine effectiveness of the effort.

RECRUITMENT

Activity	Timing	Resource, Location, Cost, and Funding Source	Responsibility	Status

RETENTION

Activity	Timing	Resource, Location, Cost, and Funding Source	Responsibility	Status

The development of such a plan assists in keeping the organization on target to perform tasks, take necessary actions, obtain necessary resources, etc. Without a plan, many times efforts become disjointed and ineffective.

Critical to the success of any such plan is a recruitment and retention coordinator. This person must have the interest, skills, knowledge, and desire to establish the program tasks and goals and implement, then monitor the efforts. If there is no coordinator, there is no program and the coordinator should not be a person who has extensive responsibilities in the organization, e.g. Chief, President or Chairman. This will be extensively discussed in a future tip.

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #4 of 50

Assigning Responsibility and Accountability for a Recruitment and Retention Plan

Like any other task, the function of recruiting and retaining members has to have someone leading the charge. Unlike some functions though, the leader of the recruitment and retention program should not be a current senior officer. This is a demanding challenge and as a result requires commitment, which means time and some experience. As will be seen throughout this series, recruitment and retention is not just an add on job for the Chief, President, Chairman of the Board, etc. In fact you may want to reach out to the community and look for someone with human resource expertise, or someone who helps people find employment.

In today's world, we cannot rely on previous recruiting and retaining techniques by relatives and friends joining to help their neighbors. While this may work in some smaller communities or rural areas, it is not sustainable in suburban communities. Therefore the first task of the Recruitment and Retention Coordinator is to determine

- What skill sets and knowledge sets does the organization need?
- Where can I find individuals who have or want to obtain those skills and knowledge?
- What will it take to incent those individuals to join?
- What will it take to keep those individuals engaged once they join the organization?

These critical questions serve as the basis for developing your plan and requires engagement with officers, members, and the community. As can be seen very quickly, this can be time consuming and complicated and thus cannot be another task of current leadership, but requires a leader in its own right.

In addition, recruiting is different today than it was a generation ago. What motivates people is different. How people are communicated with is different. The image and mission of the fire department may be different. How will we market the fire department?

These all require work efforts that are focused and meaningful. This requires the organization to Assigning Responsibility and Accountability for a Recruitment and Retention Plan

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #5 of 50

Developing an "Everyone Get One" Program

Multiple research projects have identified that one of the most common and effective methods used to recruit members is by "word of mouth". This technique has long been used successfully in a variety of organizational initiatives to grow the membership ranks. Each fire/EMS agencies can use such a program to have each member or a percentage of its membership reach out to friends, neighbors, family, co-workers, and the general public to join the local fire/EMS agency.

Key Steps to implementing such a program include:

1. Appoint a project or committee chairperson – Such a program can increase your membership. It takes leadership and a plan, with one individual constantly promoting such a program. A non-firefighter, (business person, spouse, parent, community leader) can easily be used in this role.
2. Set a realistic goal – This way you can monitor success, but avoid being too aggressive in your expectations. If you are conducting this type of program for the first time, under-estimate your potential success so that everyone can share in the sense of accomplishment when it is achieved.
3. Keep the campaign period short – In this way you can concentrate members efforts and avoid burnout. You may want to also strategically analyze the time of year that will maximize participation and related success. Don't conflict with major initiatives or typically busy persids of the organization.
4. Use incentives – Introduce some value and competition to the process by rewarding individuals for their recruiting efforts and to incent those joining the organizations. Determine the most appropriate incentives by asking the individuals that will be involved in the program, what would motivate them to be aggressive in the activity.
5. Keep the program as simple as possible – This will encourage participation and minimize workload of the staff. Do not use any special applications or forms. Simply have the referring member sign their name at the top of the application being submitted.
6. Constantly communicate the program's goals and success – Create an engaging and meaningful theme and keep it in the forefront of the members.

These steps can be used to develop, update and revitalize your "Everyone Get One" membership recruitment drive.

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #6 of 50

Understand Your Culture and Its Relationship to Staff

It is critical for us to understand why we are losing members, or cannot get new members, before we begin any recruitment or retention process. Like any organization people drive a culture and that culture becomes something members are content with and can work within, or cannot work within it and decide to leave or join another organization.

This concept of cultural impact was assessed during research into fire service volunteerism over the last decade. The concept was reinforced in the symbolism found in two texts, Collapse and Bowling Alone. In Collapse, by Dr. Jared Diamond, he relates five components to collapse or failure of a culture, including:

- Climate change (such as relationship with elected officials or the community)
- Hostile neighbors (such as other fire departments or groups seeking members or funds)
- Trade patterns, (such as how service is delivered, consolidations, mergers, etc.)
- Environmental problems (such as politics in the community, labor-management conflicts, and external strife), and
- Society's response to environmental problems (such as positive or negative support to fire and EMS agencies).

Each society and the volunteer fire and EMS system will choose to succeed or will choose to fail.

In Bowling Alone, Dr. Robert Putnam warns our stock of social capital, the very fabric of our connections with each other, has plummeted impoverishing our lives and communities. More Americans are bowling than ever before, but they are not bowling in leagues. Putnam shows the corollary of how changes in work, family structure, age, suburban life, television, computers, women's roles and other factors have contributed to the decline of social capital; which affect volunteers in general and specific to firefighting.

Knowing your culture and the impact upon it and from it become critical to staffing stability.

Recruitment and Retention
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What Do You Want In a Member?

Like any business or group of people, your members have to serve a purpose and therefore, must have certain interests, skills, knowledge, capabilities, or be willing to engage in those attributes. That means you need to develop a job description and performance expectations for members so that they understand what is expected of them and you don't waste time and resources developing a member that may not have the critical capabilities to help you.

What are you looking for:

- Firefighter
- EMS responder
- Administrative help
- Fundraising help
- Other

Develop a list of requirements from the candidate:

- Age range
- Education
- Background clearances
- Citizenship & residency
- Physical and mental capability and capacity
- Valid driver license
- Etc.

Then search locations in and around your community, where you can find these types of potential members. Don't just advertise for members and expect them to flock in and meet specific needs.

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #8 of 50

Recruitment in a Social Distancing World

As with many areas of life, the coronavirus pandemic and integration of social distancing will change how we interact with people and recruiting fire and EMS personnel will be affected. We only need to look at changes taking place in other aspects of life where contacting people is critical to success. Political campaigns (door to door canvasing), military recruiting and college recruiting have all struggled to adjust to the new realities of recruiting in a time of social distancing and shelter-in place orders, becoming almost 100% media and social media driven.

Community activities being curtailed are another scenario which will modify recruitment. With protracted periods of social distancing, these in-person interactions may no longer be viable from a public health standpoint. How then, can we engage people in such a world?

1. Leveraging pre-existing personalized social connections is one option that involves contacts between people who belong to the same social network, such as friends, families, acquaintances, or neighbors. In this model , individuals called “captains” commit to identifying and encouraging at least 10 people they know to join. The captains, in turn, recruit other captains, thereby increasing the reach of these efforts even further. Research demonstrates that this approach can be substantially more effective than traditional efforts.
2. We can take this to today’s world and expand the approach to social medial applications using emails, tweets, text messages, and facebook posts to motivate engagements.

The concept that a person is more likely to be swayed by friends than strangers is very compelling. This is very much consistent with a “word of mouth” effort and the “Everyone Gets One” program promoted in the FASP Resource Center.

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #9 of 50

Using Remote Techniques to Recruit Members

Clearly the world is changing and a new normal as being created. The use of social media has been identified as a new normal cultural factor in recruiting people, but basic techniques can still work.

To achieve this, use your various social media tools not just to post messages and photos but to create excitement about your organization, develop a team that will share your messages and then them to be shared again. Solicit and constantly look for ways to get people to like and visit your site(s) for information. This is more entertaining and visual oriented than traditional techniques.

Use your sites for

3. recognizing members of the organization for efforts, achievement and activities
4. agency recognition within the community or the fire service
5. letting the public know what you are doing, fire prevention activities, incidents you responded to, etc.

Use social media and electronic communication techniques (as well as posters and mailers) to:

1. Make members feel safe and confident in doing what is necessary for the organization
2. Publicize volunteer fire and EMS activity pluses & minuses on facebook, twitter and other social media venues you may be using to get the word out.
3. Reach out to those who have left the organization to join your site(s) to keep in touch
4. When you get interest from someone, schedule an interview and tour, using social distancing and access restrictions as appropriate, making them feel comfortable and safe visiting your station.
5. When chatting with someone or meeting with them, stress relationship building, service to community, and developing the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve success.

Today's volunteer is constantly looking at how the service can help them --- so tell them. They can learn or practice skills and knowledge about plumbing, electrical, HVAC, construction and every other trade or management task. There is NO better learning ground for life, than that of a volunteer fire and EMS provider. This is the biggest selling point of all, regardless of where or how you promote it.

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #10 of 50

Recruiting Veterans

Each year over 200,000 individuals leave military service and return to the community, most from where they were born and raised. These are very talented individuals who have worked within a organized structure to achieve objectives in sometimes difficult and life threatening situations.

Learning from our forefathers, those in the military make good fire and EMS personnel, many times coming with the skills and knowledge already needed to fight fires, rescue people and perform medical services. This is a very talented pool of job seekers looking for military-like or military friendly organization to become a part of for a career or to volunteer. So, the question becomes – how do I attract them? Here are some steps:

1. Develop a recruitment strategy for veterans. Find out who is returning home, when they are returning home, etc. If there are local groups such as the VFW or American Legion (from whom you probably already have members), work them to recruit.
2. If you do have connections to current members of the armed forces (their parents, relatives or friends) advise them the fire company is a way for the returning service member to get engaged with civilians and the community, make new friends, etc.
3. Do the marketing thing. Work with local military recruiters when individuals leave the service to route them to you for engagement. Provide promotional items if necessary, to peak their interest.
4. If there are existing veteran websites in your area, they may be willing to allow you to advertise your organization.
5. Be able to translate the current military activities, language and engagement into your organization. Current members with prior military experience can help achieve this.

These are just a few tips, but here is the big one….Veterans can play a big part in your organization. Recruit them, engage them, make them welcome and they will help make your organization successful.

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #11 of 50

Recruit and Retain at the Same Time

One aspect of the move to social media communication is the interest the public has in the fire department and emergency medical service operations. People are naturally inquisitive about happenings in their community and the fire and EMS system provides news and information. But, let's fact facts; most people "follow" fire and EMS social media, because they want to know "what's going on"?

So, let's capitalize on this aspect!

When you have an incident, provide a brief description including photos if possible and permitted. Between incidents, send afire or injury/illness prevention message……..OR

Focus on a member's activity. Recognizing volunteers for their service is a significant motivator for people who donate their time. This is a great opportunity to recognize and thank that member, while asking the public if they have an interest, how they, too, can become part of a community organization

These are the times where you can accomplish two key personnel management objectives:

1. Acknowledge the good performance of the members of the organization and give credit to the members who did the good work.
2. Recruit new members by constantly asking individuals to join your organization.

An effective way to accomplish this it to develop a standardized message for recruiting. The message should always have an ask – "PLEASE JOIN THE MYTOWN FIRE AND EMS DEPARMENT". This can be accomplished via a simple tag line to place at the end of the social media post or any in conjunction with any printed document you prepare and distribute.

This constant and consistent approach to messaging with help you accomplish both retention and recruitment at the same time.

Recruitment and Retention
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The Value in Exploiting Social Media Opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to unprecedented expansion of electronic communication. The tools available include facebook, twitter, yelp, flickr, linkedin, pinterest, youtube, snapchat, Instagram and more. Each gives you an opportunity to send a message that can help recruit a member or retain a member.

Think about this, social media builds engagement. If you have 100 facebook followers, and those 100 share a post to 100 followers, you have reached 10,000 people. If you message a simple one of "we need members, if interested call"..with a photo of training, meeting, fundraising, etc.. you have 10,000 potential candidates.

Look at it another way. Using the same 100=10,000 contacts as above; you post that Fireman Smith is your firefighter of the year and why he or she has earned that distinction. His or her interest, value, and influence in the community has risen. He or she feels empowered and ready to work harder.

By using these techniques, you are also continuing to build relevance and social capital in the community, while supporting your existing members and recruiting new ones.

You may already have a facebook page, website, twitter or other account, but you need to be active and maintain the account – keep it current and post often.

While it is important to capitalize on the opportunity provided by social media, we must be able to control the information communicated on the site. Social Media policies that are effectively developed and approved by department officers, communicated properly to members, and require sign-offs by all members to assure understanding, will enable the organization to monitor and manage the site for proper utilization.

In today's emergency service community, social media can be a powerful tool (or a missed opportunity). Social media and the example above provide the potential to help emergency service agencies with everything from recruitment to employment engagement to communications.

credit: *"Managing and Leveraging Workplace Use of Social Media", SHRM website*

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #13 of 50

Recruitment & Retention Social Media Considerations

We have been discussing the expanded use of social media techniques to recruit and retain fire and EMS personnel, but with any social media platform, there are a number of benefits and challenges and it is important to know them as you select a media platform for your efforts.

This starts with understanding why you need an official social media presence regardless of the size or location of your organization. There are a number of reasons to have this on-line presence that includes the following.

- The facilitating of improved open communication with your community, and building your credibility, reputation and base of contacts.
- Your members can post news, engage the public with questions to respond to, and ask them if they will join, what might engage them to join, etc.
- Your organization can broaden it visibility with the business community and enhance their role in your recruitment, retention and operations.
- You can target a broader audience, even neighboring organizations, possibly embracing regionalization of recruitment, retention and operations.
- Expanding your opportunity to engage the public and business community for non-recruitment/retention efforts such as public events, fundraising and fire/injury prevention programming.

There are some challenges as well, starting with security, legal liability and those who are not fans of your organization. Don't be frightened or use this as an excuse. Key to the challenges include the following.

- Making sure that security is in place on the site to limit fraud, spam and virus attacks.
- Making sure there is monitoring to limit data and identity theft or compromise.
- Making sure members do not use the site to distribute illegal, objectionable, offensive materials.

Knowing these values and challenges will help you understand the effectiveness of having on on-line presence and what to include

credit: *"Managing and Leveraging Workplace Use of Social Media", SHRM website*

Recruitment and Retention
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More Recruitment & Retention Social Media Considerations

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credit: *"Managing and Leveraging Workplace Use of Social Media", SHRM website*

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #15 of 50

Business Social Media Recruitment and Retention Techniques We Can Use

Social media has proven to be very valuable in the business community to recruit and retain staff and we in the emergency service community can learn from them, particularly regarding potential and current member/employee engagement.

Businesses have realized that they can no longer recruit good people by just posting a job or relying on word of mouth or traditional sources. Even our competitors for volunteers have realized this and both have begun using social media techniques to accomplish recruiting members and employees. For example, your social media sites can be used for

- Posts and messages about your meetings, training, incidents, fundraisers, etc.
- Informal networking, where you are simply posting stories about your organization or its people
- mining for talent of simply posting for openings – asking openly "Are you interested in supporting your community?" "Want to learn some live saving skills?".

Also have a method to get interested persons to your website, which MUST have, a recruitment page, a link to your application (preferably fillable), and information about benefits and value of joining. Another consideration is posting stories about your members – anniversary announcements, promotion announcements, what else they do in the community, their full time job, etc.; all make excellent posts.

Employees and members tend to feel more engaged if they are informed and feel as though they contribute. Communication can be to the members and about those members. Social medial enables timely communication of key information and member engagement. Recent published items include news articles and social media posts about

Clearly, we in the fire and EMS community can learn a lot from the business community about successful social media techniques to recruit and retain people. Here's an idea – reach out to a business (or college) in your area that uses social media for recruiting and retaining personnel and ask them for some assistance!

Credit: https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/tookkits/pages/managingsocialmedia.aspx

Recruitment and Retention
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Your "Volunteer" Web Page

Most fire and EMS agencies have a "recruitment", "join now", or "volunteer" page on their website; or some type of related reference on facebook or other social media to a single location that potential members can access to learn more about your organization and potentially join. The "page" **MUST** be one that encourages getting involved. It may well be that lynch-pin as to whether the person engages or not. Therefore, the "page" must be designed and function purposefully. The "page" must be built to spark action, to convert inquiries into volunteer commitments, and create engagement. You may well need assistance to make this happen.

Website designers advocate four key components[1] to a truly effective volunteer engagement page:

1. A strong "hero-image", header and sub-header
2. Components that "build trust"
3. "Nested" information to create an interest and a link to details
4. A very clear request to join or a "call to action" to be engaged

For these reasons alone, the use of professional web-design services may benefit your efforts at developing and implementing an effective recruitment or volunteer page on your website. While facebook may be a great way to begin engagement with interested persons, your website is your most powerful tool to actively bring the prospect into the organization.

An important consideration is the user experience, not necessarily what the organization's vision of what content should be. To make sure the right perspective is achieved, it may be valuable to engage members who recently joined, or non-members, to help identify and create an effective recruitment page on your website.

For those of you that already have a website that you believe is effective, please contact us via www.becomeapafirefighter.com to post your information on the site and possibly be focused in a future "Tip of the Month".

Credit: https://volpro.net/your-volunteer-webiste-2/

[1] https://volpro.net/your-volunteer-webiste-2/

Recruitment and Retention
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Your Digital Marketing Site

Once you have established your organization's presence on a website, facebook, Instagram or other social network, you have entered the world of digital marketing. Digital marketing is defines as the component of marketing that utilizes internet and online based digital technologies such as desktop computers, mobile phones and other digital media and platforms to promote products and services.[2]

The website or "landing page" is probably the most important marketing tool your organization has. The page becomes the focal point for all the reader "sees" about their potential involvement. They can either see themselves benefitting by being in your organization or not. For example, landing on the page and immediately being told the candidate will have to work three fundraisers a month and attend only training every other week (only held on Tuesday nights and is mandatory), and then having to fill out a 40-question application, may be a turnoff……yet such sites exist and wonder why they get no recruits.

Remember the world of communication with potential candidates has changed. Use your facebook page to get people to your website and to the volunteer/recruitment page. Even if you use traditional marketing techniques like fliers, posters, yard signs, etc., drive the readers to your website for next steps.

Also, linking your landing page to newsletters by your municipality, school district, local colleges, business groups….and the list goes on…….

All of this takes us to a concluding point for driving people to a highly functional website. If you want to meet potential volunteers in their environment, it MUST be via an on-line presence. Using as many social media and traditional sources as possible to create an interest and driving these candidates to a highly-engaging webpage may be you best bet in today's world to recruit new members.

Credit: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_marketing
https://volpro.net/your-volunteer-webiste-2/

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_marketing

Recruitment and Retention
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How Others Are Doing It

It's not stealing, it's not borrowing, it's not cheating…..it is collaboration. Seeing what others are doing to communicate in a virtual world and inserting your material into a similar format is an easy way to learn from other successful programs, will take less time than creating original approaches, and most importantly – gain success faster.

What are we talking about? Very simply, how are other fire departments using their virtual platforms to recruit and retain members. Let's look at some examples;

Fire departments have taken lessons from election candidates. Use banners, yard signs and similar advertising like politicians do, to seek members. You may even be able to post them where election candidates do at high visibility locations. Send articles, photos and videos to media outlets – be selfish, put your organization in the public eye.

Legacy recruiting (through your families and close friends) doesn't work anymore. Departments successful in recruiting are finding new friends in facebook, Instagram, their website and you-tube.

Finally, departments that have implemented community risk reduction programs need to access the public for complete success of their initiatives. In today's world gathering neighborhood groups together in a single location at a single time just doesn't work. To overcome this obstacle, departments have implemented Zoom (or other group video communication platforms they may have) to conduct neighborhood meetings. You can do the same with a fire prevention message, coupled with a short story highly one of your volunteers, coupled with a recruitment message. The beauty of this approach is that it can be viewed not just by the community group, homeowner association group, public service group, etc., but it can be recorded and accessed by anyone in the community.

Stay relevant, collaborate with other users (businesses and civic groups, and constantly recruit with and across all venues we discussed above.

Successes are evident, it takes you to initiate the program and achieve the success.

Recruitment and Retention
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Recruit Through Public Engagement

Since the Inception of the Firefighter's Association of the State of Pennsylvania SAFER Grant Recruitment and Retention project, we have helped fund and learned of many successful recruiting efforts through public engagement efforts.

Successful public engagement efforts in Pennsylvania have included the following:

- Opening the fire station to the public during fire prevention week, for visits
- Participating in Community Days with a table/booth/recruitment tent
- Attending high school and local college events with a table for recruitment
- Participating with other organizations at their sponsored events with a recruitment effort
- Going out into public venues to provide fire prevention programs, recruiting at the same time
- Working with local police departments on National Night Out events

Of course, there is also the social media route where options for engagement abound. The key is knowing which sites may produce results.

You are encouraged to visit www.becomeapafirefighter.com to learn more about successful efforts, but remember this: There are two key challenges to public engagement success (1) how do you make the public aware of the opportunities you offer, and (2) how do you impress upon them the value of their public service.

Public engagement works when trying to recruit new members. Public engagement efforts take time, resources, funds, and personal involvement. Many times you cannot do it with existing members, and the Chief can't take this added role on. Look outside your Successes are evident, it takes you to initiate the program and achieve the success.

Recruitment and Retention
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Recruitment and Retention are Local Problems

During February and March 0f 2021, the Fourth National Fire Research Agenda Symposium was held virtually. With key national fire service professionals and scientists engaged in the project, it was an excellent approach to gaining nation-wide insight into key areas of fire service operation and needed research. One domain dealt specifically with Hiring Recruitment and Advancement (a/k/a) Recruitment and Retention and the FASP SAFER Grant Project was able to have its program director on that domain.

When looking at the present and future of recruitment and retention, it is important to consider research that needs to be accomplished to keep pace with being able to effectively communicate with those that we reach out to as potential members or try to keep as members.

Our populations and demographics, in most communities, are changing. Are you able to communicate with a more diverse community? Does your organization look like your community (male/female, ethnic/cultural, age); and if not how will you move toward a more inclusive organization? Have you identified any barriers to recruitment? Are your messages effective? How does the community perceive the fire department? Are you still recruiting by waiting for people to come to you? If you have not addressed these issues, it may explain why your recruitment programs are not working. You MUST know your audience you are recruiting from.

When you look at your ability or lack of ability to retain members, have you identified barriers and facilitators to retention efforts, the role training and funding play in retention, as well as inclusiveness and mentorship as critical roles to keeping personnel in your organizations.

Finally, leadership (informal and formal) is critical to recruitment and retention success including motivating members, training members, and leading members for the betterment of the public's protection.

How does this relate to you locally…..these are global issues but also local. The most important factor to keep in mind in recruiting fire and EMS personnel is that:

Recruitment and retention are local problems. The needs, leadership, and challenges are all local.

Credit: Fourth National Fire Service Research Symposium, Virtual event, 2/15/21 – 3/8/21, Hiring, Recruitment and Advancement domain summary presentation 3/8/21.

Recruitment and Retention
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Learning from Others – IAFC Conference

At a recent International Association of Fire Chiefs conference, a non-Pennsylvania fire chief talked about his recruitment and retention successes and challenges. At the end of his presentation, it was clean the problems his department faced and the successes the department had, are no different than we face in Pennsylvania. But let's review his comments and a couple of summation points:

1. How is a person (recruit or long term member) a human resource to the department.
   - Understand how people will provide skills, resources and support the department
   - Determine needs of the organization and recruit members with skills to meet the needs
   - Calculate your turnover rate and forecast staffing needs (volunteer or career)
   - Attract your candidates by assessing marketing strategies, ensure marketing is clear, have open houses, define minimum requirements, have good job descriptions, have understandable policies and procedures, and ADVERTISE
2. Work force differences
   - Set expectations via job descriptions, periodic reviews, and having two-way conversations between senior officers and members.
   - Recognize that people today want and need and respond differently than two decades ago.
3. Needs of people
   - Don't assume. - Ask people what drives them, motivates them, meets their needs.
   - Today's expectations of members today are different. Know what the different expecations are and work with the members for long term success.

Systematically, it is important to understand you need to attract an effective workforce (recruit), develop an effective workforce (train), and maintain an effective workforce (meet the needs).

Your recruitment and retention plan should
- have goals for human resources acquisition, and
- understand and act on meeting the needs of people (the workforce) in order to properly develop and provide for the staff.

Credit: "Recruitment and Retention: How to Get Good People and Keep Them", FRI2021, Charlotte NC, July 30, 2021

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The Open House – A Practical Application

I recently had the opportunity to attend and participate in a fire company open house where the community was invited and attended.

Some of the key activities they were involved in, that made the event successful, were:

- Invite the public – use social media to its maximum benefit
- Send out invitations – if you want specific persons, elected officials, celebrities, don't just expect them to "show-up" – invite them formally!!!
- Have functions during the event – whatever makes sense for your residents and community
- Have a plan after the event to follow up with interested parties and publicize what you accomplished.
- Have something for all ages
    - games of chance,
    - food,
    - activities for the children,
    - ceremonies,
    - meet and greet to show off the equipment and station

A specific task is to create interest. You need to be bold, showing how to use equipment, the camaraderie of the members, and the family aspect. This always gathers interest from the public and possibly generates someone wanting to join.

Make the ask! There is an old saying……."*If you don't ask, you don't get*"

Don't be shy. Ask the interested party *"Would you like to join our fire department? Let me help get your application completed."*

Yes, you may indeed have to take the "candidate" by the hand and walk them through the process. Yes that will take some time – so what. You are making the investment in that person. You are creating a mentor/mentee relationship. You are building the future of the organization. And yes, it can start with an open house event.

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The "Plight"

Talking to several fire chiefs, presidents, and other officers, I hear some common "plights". (FYI a "plight" is a noun that means a difficult, dangerous, or otherwise unfortunate situation"). These included:

- I can't get any volunteers
- The young people have all moved away
- Training takes too much time
- Young people don't want to volunteer
- New members don't want to fundraise
- I don't have time to recruit people

Frankly, I've heard these for over 20 years now. List yours. Are they any different?

Maybe it's time to turn the page as, ***the next generation of the fire service will NOT be the same as yesterday's (or today's) fire service.***

So what do we do about it?

The current officers of the fire department represent leadership and your job as the leadership is to enable those who would follow you, to be successful.

Maybe regionalization, paying per call or stipend personnel, finding others to do the fundraising, etc. are options to look at.

Take each plight you have listed for yourself and find a solution or find someone who will resolve, even if it is a stretch for your organization and members; because complaining, making excuses and doing nothing is NOT the solution.

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Social Media Resources and Tools

We have talked about social media uses in prior tips. However talking to a specialist, performing social media work everyday in the fire service can open our eyes to those activities that work and those that don't. Such was the case recently at a conference where I spoke with a county fire department communication specialist who shared some tools that may be helpful in fire department social media activities.

Resources and Tools to consider, assess and use as appropriate include:

- Buffer (Social media scheduling assistance)
- Hootsuite (Social media scheduling assistance)
- Bit.ly (link shortening and tracking)
- Canva (Online graphic design tool)
- Crello (Online graphic design tool)
- Eventbrite (Event scheduling, registration and promoting program)
- Pixabay (Free creative commons photo site)
- Members
- Graphic Designer
- Marketers
- Photographers
- Camera/Smartphone

Credit-
https://99designs.com/blog/marketing-advertising/brand-voice/

Jennifer Bragiel, Bragiel Global Consultants, Managing Social Media Part 1:
Leveraging Social Media

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Social Media Top Tips

We have talked about social media uses in prior tips. However talking to a specialist, performing social media work everyday in the fire service can open our eyes to those activities that work and those that don't. Such was the case recently at a conference where I spoke with a county fire department communication specialist who shared some thoughts and tips,

Top Tips for Social Media

1. The Fire Chief should set the expectations and processes for posting, but others should be responsible for the posting and daily upkeep
2. Be true to your brand and voice
3. Share and be an important resource for your community
4. Be consistent
5. Experiment and have fun
6. Use images and videos
7. Have a Social Media Policy
8. Remember to tag when possible
9. #Dont #Over #Hashtag #DontOverHashtag
10. Be sensitive and aware to what is happening in the world
11. Make sure your content, about and links are up to date
12. Share a variety of content

Credit – Jennifer Bragiel, Bragiel Global Consultants, Managing Social Media Part 1: Leveraging Social Media for Recruitment and Retention

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Website

The Firefighters' Association of the State of Pennsylvania's SAFER Grant Local-Level Grant Program has funded several departments to create and implement, or upgrade their website to better advertise, promote, and solicit members to join the organization. We should take the time to recognize they agencies for their work, and provide them as examples of websites being used to successfully recruit new members. The departments and their websites, for you to review, include:

LaMott Volunteer Fire Company

https://www.lamottfire.com/content/volunteer/

Crescent Township VFD

https://crescenttwpvfd.org/join-our-team/

Spring Mill Volunteer Fire Company

https://springmillfire.com/join-smfc/

Mocanaqua Volunteer Fire Company

https://118fire.weebly.com/recruitment.html

Silver Spring Ambulance & rescue Association

http://www.silverspringambulance.com/volunteer

Take the time to look at each of these sites to see what has been done and can be done to enhance your on-line presence to market to and recruit members.

In a future "Tip" we will review specific considerations in successful website applications to date.

Recruitment and Retention
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Recruiting via the Website

In the last "Tip of the Month" we reviewed the website locations of organizations who have implemented or upgraded their websites with recruitment related content and tools. If you are contemplating an upgrade or new site, here are six key areas to consider implementing.

1. Have a "button" on your website, of a unique color, possibly even flashing, that says "join now", or something like that, to attract the candidate's attention and direct them to the right page.
2. Have a dedicated "recruitment page" that provides information for the candidate. Remember you are selling to them, you want to gain their interest to learn more and apply or inquire for more information. Anything you place on your social media page should also be provided here, related to recruiting a member.
3. Have a mechanism to accept inquiries, such as a fillable short form inquiry tab, that the candidate can complete on line which includes multiple ways to contact the person (address, phone, email)
4. Have an application page that the candidate can complete and submit on line. It saves time in the candidate making the commitment and the organization receiving and acting on the application. MAKE IT EASY FOR THE CANDIDATE TO APPLY.
5. Make the site visual. Pictures are worth a thousand words and the more the candidate can see what the organization does, the social engagement, the helping of the public, seeing their friends, the interaction with the community, the more likely they are to apply quicker, rather than thinking about it.
6. Ask the reader to join. It's a fundamental part of selling….ask to complete the sale!!

Finally, don't forget to advertise your website on everything you do; Apparatus, Letterhead, Fire and Injury prevention materials, ….and the list goes on.

There are more that you provide, but these key items are proven website value aspects.

Recruitment and Retention
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Best Practices in Recruitment in Pennsylvania

A document in the resources section of the becomeapafirefighter.com website is entitled "Best Practices in Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention" *prepared by the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Committee.* Here is an excerpt on:

Recruitment Tips

Create partnerships with school districts and other fire departments to offer firefighter and EMS programming to high school students (e.g. Highlands Emergency Services Alliance)

Market to the "millennials" - they want to help, but they want their experience to be meaningful, they want to feel valued, and they want a friendly and non-bureaucratic work environment

Be aware of and advertise programs like CCAC's FireVEST, which offers two years of community college free to volunteer firefighters, regardless of their majors

Make joining the fire department "user-friendly" by shortening applications and following up with applicants within hours after they apply

Start a "Citizens Fire Academy" to increase interest and awareness in the community

Credit: University of Pittsburgh, Institute of Politics
710 Alumni Hall 4227 Fifth Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15222;
412-624-1837
Email: iopadmin@pitt.edu

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #29 of 50

Best Practices in Retention in Pennsylvania

A document in the resources section of the becomeapafirefighter.com website is entitled "Best Practices in Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention" *prepared by the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Committee.* Here is an excerpt on:

Retention Tips

Use selective paging to reduce unnecessary runs

Administer climate and exit surveys to determine the needs of current members and explain why others leave service

Create a rewards system for years of service, hours of training attended, or responses to calls, where volunteers get recognized at an awards ceremony, receive a pin, or gift cards at Christmas

Offer online training, and customize all training to individual departments

Encourage the development of leadership by supporting or financing volunteers who attend leadership training

Reduce "bureaucracy" as much as possible: this could include unnecessary paperwork, procedures, or processes; make being a volunteer less time-consuming

Credit: University of Pittsburgh, Institute of Politics
710 Alumni Hall 4227 Fifth Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15222;
412-624-1837
Email: iopadmin@pitt.edu

Recruitment and Retention
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Best Practices in Community Engagement in Pennsylvania

A document in the resources section of the becomeapafirefighter.com website is entitled "Best Practices in Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention" *prepared by the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Committee*. Effectively engaging community leaders is a key part of volunteer recruitment and retention. Some helpful ideas include these:

Community Engagement Tips

Build relationships with elected officials and influential community groups before you need to ask for their help. Ways to do this include offering department tours and ride-alongs.

Reach out to community members for nonfirefighting volunteers to do accounting, fundraising, grant-writing, and other activities.

Post specific volunteer opportunities available in your department.

Get your "fiscal house" in order before approaching elected officials about funding.

Be prepared to talk about the gap between the funds you receive from the community and what you need to provide an acceptable level of service.

Credit: University of Pittsburgh, Institute of Politics
710 Alumni Hall 4227 Fifth Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15222;
412-624-1837
Email: iopadmin@pitt.edu

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #31 of 50

State Legislation Ideas from SR60

In 2004, the Senate requested a report on legislation that could be passed at the state level that would benefit volunteer fire departments. The report contained several recommendations for legislative changes relating to recruitment and retention.

While some have been passed into law, others are still awaiting action. They include:

Legislation that would authorize "cradle to grave" financial incentives to volunteers in the form of tax and tuition breaks, student loan forgiveness, health insurance and/or retirement benefits

Establishing a regional support network to address information technology needs, administration and accounting

Raising the tax on foreign fire insurance by half a percent to help cover training costs

Restructuring the Volunteer Loan Assistance Program, which provides low interest loans to fire departments for equipment and capital expenditures

These were reviewed and refreshed in SR 6, which is discussed in a future "Tip".

Credit: University of Pittsburgh, Institute of Politics
710 Alumni Hall 4227 Fifth Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15222;
412-624-1837
Email: iopadmin@pitt.edu

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #32 of 50

State Legislation Ideas from SR 6

The greatness and diversity of Pennsylvania is reflected in the fire and emergency medical services organizations across the state. The issues and concerns of these service providers vary by location, funding, and community uniqueness. Therefore, a single approach solution will not benefit all organizations. Thus, this report uses a cafeteria style solution approach, allowing each organization the ability to select solutions best able to solve their particular issues or concerns.

Recognizing this situation, members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly directed a group known as the "Senate Resolution 6 (SR 6) Commission" to "develop legislation to provide direct and indirect assistance for improving the delivery of emergency services in this Commonwealth." For purposes of this report, the term “first responders” will be used to refer to firefighter and EMS providers. The following is extracted from the SR6 report.

RECOMMENDATION 1.

EXPAND, MODERNIZE, AND INCENTIVIZE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION EFFORTS

Issue - There have been numerous media reports on the lack of and reduction of volunteer fire service personnel in Pennsylvania. All such reports suggest a significant exodus of members and the inability to effectively recruit. Despite efforts by multiple groups, the trend continues. This is exacerbated by the fact that EMS personnel are experiencing burnout, and paid staff of both fire and EMS are “jumping” organizations for improved salary, benefits, or working conditions, creating turnover, training, and performance problems. The reality is fewer trained personnel are responding to requests for emergency service, thus challenging overall system performance.

Problem Statement - This is not a new problem or phenomenon. It was recognized as far back as 2004 in the “Pennsylvania Senate Resolution 60 Report,” again in 2007 in the USFA document “Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services,” and as recently as the 2012 “Firemen’s Association of the State of Pennsylvania Recruitment and Retention Strategic Plan.”

The documents made the following critical observations:

1. Recruitment and Retention is a local issue; the needs, leadership and challenges are all local.
2. Recruitment is marketing, and you must market all of the time; and a needs assessment is critical to making sure you invest your time appropriately.
3. You need to know what your members want as benefits (incentives) before you choose and implement them.

4. Leadership is key to success in recruiting and retaining personnel. If there is no champion to conduct and manage the recruitment and retention processes locally, the efforts will fail.

These observations hold true today.

Resolution - The following items are identified to address this issue:

- Word of mouth is still the most effective way to recruit individuals.
- Legislation already in place needs to be "tweaked:"
  - Tax credit expansion to 100 percent option.
  - Include school district and county taxes, etc.
  - PSATS recommends considerations on tax deductions, workers compensation, volunteer relief association programs, taxation and fee assessment restrictions.
- Career and technical education training should be implemented in each county to have Public Safety programs as "trade/career" preparatory program, placed in educational system.
- Alternative Funding for organizations that provide state approved first responder training in order to reduce the burden on volunteer systems and rural communities.
- All departments with colleges in their communities should explore live-in programs.
- All departments should explore junior/explorer programs.
- Training requirements are chasing candidates away, particularly in rural areas implement risk based training requirements versus minimum of Firefighter I Certification.
- Implement blended training for first responders.
- Call members who have left to determine why they have left the organization and "re-recruit" them and correct failure.
- A cafeteria plan should be established in each organization to meet the incentive expectations of all members of an organization. Promote the idea of cafeteria plans as recruitment and retention tools.
- A recruitment and retention plan should be implemented to cross calendar/fiscal periods to assure member needs and expectations are being met.
- Length of Service Award Programs (LOSAP) need approval under relief association payment (legislation required) and short-term service award programs need to be funded for "non-life" members.
- An elected official training program should be developed and implemented to enable improved understanding and relationships of first responders as public safety community infrastructure and responsibility of local government.

- Training on leadership and recruiting is needed. Can include best practices from throughout the state.
- Review NY State Recruiting Program with Convenience Stores and develop a mirror program.
- Develop a single state wide recruiting tool, video/PSA, ad, and website.
- High School Training – gain consensus that training high school personnel to be first responders is a life skill as well as a potential community service, as well as a potential job. Work with Department of Education and Department of Labor & Industry to engrain and maintain this into all high schools (Co-op program).
- College level program – credit bearing where students volunteer and receive credit for research or activity performed as community service.
- Meet with Universities (Pitt, Penn State, and Temple) to have a competitive program to develop marketing tools and program to recruit first responder personnel for use in Pennsylvania, with top programs receiving recognition of some form.
- Address negative impacts of: - Required time involvement - Extensive minimum training requirements - Government/FC/EMS conflicts remain challenging (joint municipal/VFC leadership training) - Leadership/cliques
- Offer a college loan forgiveness program, details to be defined.

Recruitment and Retention
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Logo Apparel as a Recruitment & Retention Tool

Investing in logo apparel can have advantages for your organization, both for department personnel as recognition for membership or achievement and as a way to make the public aware of the organization and promote your department image

A distinctive, quality designed organization logo, prominently displayed on clothing makes a statement for your department. Here are several reasons why

- **Professional "team" look** – Logo wear keeps your organization on display. It portrays a positive image to the public and says we are a quality organization, a team.

- **Fosters teamwork and positive spirit** - Having a standardized, uniform style with your brand and logo can create a trustworthy and lasting impression among potential customers. Use the logo not just on clothing, but everything you do or present, for a consistent message.

- **Create a memorable impression** - Attractive apparel items proudly display your organization's logo and will create a lasting impression that makes your logo/brand memorable. People will remember the logo long after they've seen it.

- **Low-cost and convenient form of marketing** – Want more people to find out about the department? Have every member wear an item of logo wear, every time they are in public. People will see it, you will develop greater brand recognition via a simple, yet effective, marketing tactic you don't even have to think about. People will want to wear it, but to do that, they have to join!

- **Member satisfaction and retention** - Ask members what type of product they want. Long sleeve or short sleeve shirts, t-shirts, job shirts, jackets; it doesn't matter. Giving them what they want supports retention efforts, builds department loyalty, AND tells others, we are a team – come join us!

Obviously, a professional firm, specializing in logo design/redesign can help.

Credit:
https://www.deluxe.com/blog/power-placing-your-logo-promotional-products/
https://business.landsend.com/articles/top-6-reasons-why-you-should-invest-in-logo-apparel

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #34 of 50

Citizen's Fire Academy

Citizen Fire Academies have ben in place for many years, but are not widely used in Pennsylvania as either a fire prevention OR RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION TOOL. Yet, the programs have just that capability to improve recruitment and help with retention of personnel.

The Citizen Fire Academy is designed to increase understanding of fire and emergency operations and to promote citizen interaction with the men and women of the fire department. In many cases there have been transitions of participants of the academy into functioning roles in the fire department. Regardless of the number of sessions and course content, participants leave the academy with some specific understanding of the job that fire and EMS personnel do on a daily basis, with some hands on experience. There are several keys to engagement, contact and follow-up that must occur for these programs to successfully support recruitment and retention efforts.

- Widely market your Academy, the more people who are aware of the program will result in more attendees.
- Have members of your organization with expertise in teaching and salesmanship be the leaders and instructors
- Participants will express interest and instructors can capture the attention of the candidate for possible recruitment
- Participation in these programs, many times, has a juvenile who has interest in the fire department and you may be able to recruit the juvenile as a junior member AND the parent.
- Some programs require participation after the academy is over, to help the fire department for some period of times (number of hours).

Once the session is over, have someone from the organization follow-up with each participant, not only to see if they have questions, but to see if they are interested in joining the organization in some capacity. This is an outreach program to the community, what better way to educate the public AND recruit new candidates, while using current staff to conduct the training, keeping those good instructors in the organization.

Recruitment and Retention
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Interviewing Prospective Volunteers

You might first ask, why should I interview prospective members? We need bodies, let's get them in the organization! Not so fast, please!

The interview is a necessary component of the recruiting and screening process; enabling you to learn more about the interests and potential expertise that the individual can provide to the organization. This helps to assure a good fit of the person to the organization. The interview allows you to learn more about how the public becomes aware of the department, its services and opportunities.

However, before you conduct the interview, two key tasks should be accomplished.

First, have the candidate complete an application which should indicate the individual's competency, knowledge, skills, and interest level. This will assist in determining optional ways the individual can help the organization.

Secondly, a background check should be conducted, as presented in a previous "Tip". Even if you have known an individual their entire life, a background check can be enlightening sometimes and create questions to ask in the mind of the interviewers.

Once you have approved the application and background check, your organization is ready to move ahead with the interview.

Remember that volunteering/joining a new organization may not be for everyone and that preparing for an interview may be a challenge for a candidate. This means your communication with the candidate should be upbeat and open, encouraging the candidate to come to the meeting to engage with the interviewer, not be "interrogated" by the interviewing team. The interview needs to be open, positive and proactive.

Recruitment and Retention
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Conducting an Interview

The interview direction and success depends upon your goals for the interview, what you look to obtain from the candidate, and hoping to learn from the candidate. The interview will also help you evaluate if the candidate's values align with your organization; if the candidate's skills ability can help your organization; the candidate's background and personality are a fit; and if the candidate's interests are aligned with your organization.

The interview should be conducted by a group (maximum three) as determined by the leadership of the organization. The interview team should be trained in the basic concepts of conducting interviews (there are many such short programs available on-line). The interview should be conducted in a room away from general activities and people congregating. The interviewee MUST feel comfortable in the setting and with the interviewers to have an effective discussion.

After you define the goals of the interview to the candidate, some key questions, you can use to ask prospective members during the interviewing process are:

- How did you learn about _____organization_____?
- Why are you interested in joining our organization?
- After describing your organization, ask the candidate what type of other organizations they have volunteered for and their positive and negative experiences.
- We provided you a job description, do you have any questions about the job description? (If you don't have one to give the candidate, you should create one to let them know the expectations of the role and helps set the mindset and attitude).
- For you personally, what do you perceive as the most challenging aspect of joining our organization?
- What questions do you have for us?

Don't wait, take the necessary actions and complete the needed tasks to conduct effective interviews

Recruitment and Retention
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Conducting Exit Interviews

Exit interviews are widely conducted in business, however the fire service tends to look the other way when someone departs.

The exit interview is important because it offers a deeper look into the culture of the workplace, the processes and operations of the organization, member/employee morale, as well as the problem identification and solution implementation. The objective of the exit interview is to understand the overall experience the individual had while serving the organization. This will help you understand positive and negative situation, as well as the determining improvement opportunities for recruitment, retention, and engagement.

Here are some reasons why exit interviews are important.

- Employees/members leaving the organization are more willing to talk than current personnel
- The employee/member provides constructive feedback and leaves on an upbeat
- The employee/member will provide a candid assessment of the department
- The individual will provide feedback and insight to assist in recruiting, on-boarding, mentoring, and training
- The individual will provide insight into how to help with retaining members
- The feedback provided will help you understand open issues that may exist that you may or may not be aware of. This in turn will help you take immediate action if needed and possibly reduce risk and exposures to the organization.
- The learning opportunities for management include improving the management development, succession planning, and supervisory needs.
- Finally, you will find out why the person departed

This activity will help you understand how the leadership team handles workplace issues and whether this encourages personnel to leave or stay in the organization.

Don’t wait, take the necessary actions and complete the needed tasks to conduct effective interviews

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The Exit Questionnaire

The exit interview can simply begin with a questionnaire – once you know what drivers moved the person to leave, you can focus on those issues regarding what can be done to improve the situation AND why were these issues not raised, BEFORE you resigned. Here are some items to include on the questionnaire:

Why did you leave the organization:

___ Lack of leadership
___ No time to volunteer
___ Other interests
___ Conflicts in the organization
___ Organizational leadership created adverse leadership
___ Too much training
___ Attitude of existing personnel to newcomers
___ Criticism received from officers/older members
___ Don't understand the organization/expectations
___ Expectations not convenient
___ Friends/families non longer members (fraternalism)
___ Individual bias
___ Lack of camaraderie
___ Poor organization image
___ Feel taken advantage of
___ Afraid of lawsuits
___ Costs
___ Family responsibilities
___ Can't afford to live in district
___ Move from volunteers to paid
___ Working 2 jobs
___ Move from area
___ _____

You don't know if you don't ask!

Recruitment and Retention
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The Exit Questionnaire – Part 2

One of the tools to effective methods of retention of fire and EMS members has been identified as an incentive program. But, what is an incentive program and how do you structure such a program.

There are several key practices that help you assure a successful program. These include

- Define the criteria of the program and what you will be rewarding – not every position or activity has to be rewarded.
- Make the rules and rewards easy for you to manage – the who, what, when and what to reward.
- Separate recognition practices from reward programs - they are different and need to be treated as such.
- Consider the frequency to consider for behaviors/actions to be evaluated. – behavior needs to be consistent.
- Determine the impact on others they serve – pro and con.
- Next consider the extent of the impact on others - pro and con.
- Consider performance results – do the results meet goals and are they successful.
- Determine strategic significance – do they meet organizational goals & objectives.
- Consider all impacts of a program – if multiple impacts occur, multiple rewards are justified.
- Ensure values and ethical behavior – do the right thing, for the right reason, and be rewarded.

Credit: "10 Tips for Structuring an Incentive Program", Roy Saunderson, MA, CRP, Incentive, October 14, 2019
You don't know if you don't ask!

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The Incentive Questionnaire

The best way to fully understand an effective retention item in your incentive program is to ask your members/employees. Here are some items to consider, which you can integrate into a cafeteria plan to incent your members/employees. Remember, you don't know, if you don't ask!

What might you be interested in as an incentive:

___ Logo wear
___ Uniform (Describe _____)
___ Cash cards/Gift cards
___ Banquet, dinner, meals, picnic (Describe _____)
___ Stipend program
___ State/Local tax credits
___ Length of service award program from fire company/municipality (similar to retirement annuity)
___ Tuition/credit reduction
___ Regular purchase of new fire apparatus
___ Friends/family also members (fraternizing)
___ Access to group health insurance programs
___ Praise
___ Frequent social activities
___ Cash per call responded to
___ Group rates for auto and home insurance
___ Access to group dental insurance programs
___ Savings on automobiles and related services
___ Special discounts on fire-rescue related products
___ Savings on computers, software and accessories
___ Mortgage services
___ Ability to purchase additional life insurance through group program
___ Length of service award (Life insurance based only)
___ Savings on entertainment including movie and amusement parks
___ Personal contribution to a length of service award/pension program
___ Complete home related value added services and discount programs
___ Eyeglass insurance program
___ Special credit card program
___ Cash back on real estate services
___ Pre-paid/free legal services
___ (Other describe) _____

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The Cafeteria Plan Approach to Recruiting & Retaining Members

Businesses regularly implement options for employees to choose from as benefits. A typical example is health care where you may be given two or three options to choose from to meet your specific needs. The goal of benefit plans is to help recruit and retain members/employees by giving options that meet the needs of individuals. The same type program can be of benefit to the fire service. Obviously they must be non-discriminatory and meet appropriate regulatory/legal requirements. However, the types of programs available to and desired by fire and EMS personnel fit nicely into the incentive cafeteria plan concept.

There are some considerations you need to make from a global perspective. These include:

- What members/employees are eligible to participate?
- What items should be included in a cafeteria plan?
- How is the plan managed?
- How frequently should the plan be updated.
- How do I fund the program?

All of these questions are easily answered by a recruitment and retention committee taking them one by one and finding the appropriate solution, leader, and funding. However, the key to success lies in knowing what members want. This means you have to ask them periodically (this is not a one and done task), and modify the plan on a periodic basis.

Successful plans have found that different “wants” exist by age, time in life (single, married, children, retired), personal perspective and needs. An example of a cafeteria plan concept will be provided in a separate “Tip”, but it starts with asking your members/employees what they want as a benefit/incentive.

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Example of Cafeteria Plan Concept

Age Range 15-21 - Logo wear (attire) , FD license plate, decal, etc. - Fellowship - Cash items (gift card, gas card) – maximum $500 - Learn a skill or knowledge (pay for class) - Live in program - Others as deemed appropriate locally
Age Range 22-35 - Logo wear (attire) , FD license plate, decal, etc. - Fellowship - Cash items (gift card, gas card) – maximum $500 - Scholarship/Tuition - Accident and Sickness Insurance - Investment Program or LOSAP (Length of Service Award Program) - Live in program - Others as deemed appropriate locally – (e.g. gear, equipment, etc. as earned awards)
Age Range 36-50 - Logo wear (attire) , FD license plate, decal, etc. - Accident and Sickness Insurance - Investment Program or LOSAP (Length of Service Award Program) - Tax Rebates - Cash items (gift card, gas card) – maximum $500 - Learn a skill or knowledge (pay for class) - Live in program - Others as deemed appropriate locally
Age Range 51-65 - Logo wear (attire) , FD license plate, decal, etc. - Accident and Sickness Insurance - Investment Program or LOSAP (Length of Service Award Program) - Tax Rebates - Cash items (gift card, gas card) – maximum $500 - Recognition - Others as deemed appropriate locally
Age Range 66+ - Logo wear (attire) , FD license plate, decal, etc. - Accident and Sickness Insurance - Investment Program or LOSAP (Length of Service Award Program) - Tax Rebates - Cash items (gift card, gas card) – maximum $500 - Recognition - Annual banquet, picnic, etc. - Others as deemed appropriate locally

Recruitment and Retention
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Tips to Attract More Applicants

Without a doubt, it is more difficult than ever to attract, recruit, and on-board new members. There are many reasons for this, but you can make it easier to attract more applicants. Here are some tips that businesses and emergency service organizations have used to attract the interest of people.

- Job wording – have an outsider (non-firefighter) rewrite recruitment language, job descriptions, etc. to be more attractive/interesting to readers.
- Sponsor activities – high school activities, sports teams, etc. for candidates to see your organization is interested in them and can bring benefits or opportunities to them.
- Use social media – create a facebook and twitter site to engage people in your activities, they love to know where the fire trucks are responding to.
- Reach out to the community at public events, news articles, etc.
- Don't be afraid to place recruitment posters, banners – even a billboard – in locations where potential members will see it.
- Engage with the high school and private schools if they are present, to work with the leadership on teaching life skills, providing intern opportunities, and gaining skills and knowledge that can used for decades to come.
- Have an ambassador or "everyone get one" program where members receive an incentive if they recruit a new member.
- Engage with colleges in the area. Don't be hesitant to recruit college students from other communities. They are already trained and would probably enjoy the engagement locally.
- Make the on-boarding process easy. Have a simple preliminary application to attract interested parties, make it simple to complete and submit (preferably on-line), and reset them to engage as simply as possible
- Leverage influencers. There are many influencers that can help you promote your organization mission, vision and opportunities for engagement. Seek them out and use them.

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #44 of 50

Integrate Your Members In

Recruitment and Retention Efforts

Over the years, members continue to be A “key” if not “THE” key to recruiting and retaining personnel in your organization. The interpersonal communication members provide is an important component of the social connection many volunteers are seeking. If members are open, welcoming, engaging, and embracing new members or prospective members, there is greater likelihood the “recruit” will perceive the organization as one they want to belong to. If members are not engaging, create barriers and roadblocks, do not provide interaction or rebuff the candidate, you may never see them after the first meeting.

Make sure your members are all aware that they are needed to:

- Help build a relationship with the candidate
- Help build confidence in the candidate to join or to continue to participate, even if they are struggling with skill and knowledge aspects of the role
- Help teach, mentor and support the candidate
- Control situations and intervene when necessary
- Stop any demeaning, hazing, conflicting, harassing situations observed…including cliques

The mentor assigned to a new recruit also plays a significant part in the indoctrination, performance, growth, and engagement in the organization. If the assigned mentor is not maintaining the contact needed with the candidate, officers may need to be more involved.

The communication between members and with a candidate can be the make or break decision point for someone looking to join or stay with the organization.

Most importantly, have your members ask a potential candidate to join, and if someone is thinking of leaving the organization, have your members reach out to find out why and ask they to stay or, at least, talk to the officers about their concerns and their options.

Recruitment and Retention
Tip #45 of 50

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Recruitment and Retention
Tip #46 of 50

Plan Your Recruitment Activities Based on Why People Join

Effective recruitment can start with knowing why your current members have joined the organization. If you have not asked this question when conducting interviews for new members, and are tracking the answers to determine trends and opportunities, the you may need to simply ask. The following chart provides a simple set of reasons why people join, the answers will provide insight into why they joined and enable you to determine which items are more attractive than others, and enable you to exploit those most responded to and lessen the emphasis on those not drawing new members.

___ respond to emergencies
___ helping neighbors
___ family tradition
___ be part of a team
___ social opportunities with members
___ develop experience dealing with fire/rescue/medical situations
___ career development
___ fuel needed
___ personal skill and knowledge development
___ responsibility change
___ need for affiliation
___ hobby
___ associate with success
___ feel safe
___ follow a leader
___ experience building
___ need for feedback
___ relaxation/relieve stress
___ other (_____)

Recruitment and Retention
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Junior Programs

Junior firefighter programs have historically provided a method of recruiting members when they are younger and developing an interest in fire and emergency medical service activities as either an avocation or vocation, many times as part of a family or social activity. Historically, members who join at a young age continue in the service, in some fashion, as they grow older, some for a lifetime.

While there are clearly more opportunities for juniors to engage in than there were just a decade ago, the fire and emergency medical opportunity provides not just social activities, but life-skills, development of knowledge and skills for job opportunities, and the ability to develop relationships that can last a life-time.

However, understanding the necessary laws, regulations, policies and procedures is critical to effective recruitment and retention of these individuals. Two excellent sources for your review can be found later in this "TIP".

Successful recruitment of juniors in Pennsylvania has occurred from the following specific activities: asking the junior about their interests and asking them to join; offering some type of recognition that can be used for building a resume; target marketing for them in school job fairs, and so on. However, it takes a leader to direct and implement these types of programs.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has guidelines and limitations on what "juniors" can do regarding fire and EMS activities. You are encouraged to review their materials to assure compliance. Their reference info can be found in the link below. One of the best examples and guidance source for Junior Programs is from the National Volunteer Fire Council. Their website is listed below.

References:

https://www.osfc.pa.gov/SiteCollectionDocuments/Junior%20Emergency%20Services%20Program%20Compliance%20Manual.pdf

https://www.nvfc.org/programs/national-junior-firefighter-program/

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Live-In Programs

"Live-in" programs have long been a staple of volunteer and combination department practice to have members in the station and ready to respond at a moment's notice, particularly during overnight hours. Originally found at a number of college towns, it was a way for departments to recruit members, live in the fire station for low or no rent, in exchange for responding to calls. The number of rooms/members available was dependent only on space and costs associated with the program. Some departments found that it was not only good for recruiting college students but younger members found it appealing as well. In almost every community that has implemented such a program, they have been successful. However, they require specific management tasks to achieve that success.

1. There must me active leadership oversight of the recruitment, mentoring, supervision, and management of the program. It does not manage itself, and oversight is mandatory.
2. Standard Operating Guidelines must be implemented and reviewed with the "live-ins" to assure they understand the rules. This includes a signature sheet for the "live-in" to acknowledge their responsibilities.
3. Minimum training requirements must be established and fulfilled by the "live-in" and a probationary status/period should be implemented to assure success.
4. A mentor is necessary to assure the "live-in" is successful in their training and performance
5. House rules MUST be followed, particularly regarding cleanliness, response to calls, educational requirements if a student, and meetings/trainings of the department consistent with the Live-In Rules.
6. A visitation policy is necessary to manage guests in the station
7. Leadership must manage the challenges posed by members, as no doubt some members will find a "live in" program an invasion of their space.
8. You should review your SOG/policy with both your department legal counsel and accountant to assure you meet legal and IRS related reporting criteria

The work effort is worth it. Live In programs provide personnel at a time when recruitment and retention is a significant challenge in the fire service.

Recruitment and Retention
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The Secret to Success in Recruiting and Retaining Volunteer First Responders

The true secret to success in recruiting and retaining volunteer first responders lies within your current membership base. They need to be engaged in working with your community to recruit and retain personnel. In the time FASP has engaged in recruitment and retention efforts there are some clear signals about success and failure in getting and keeping people. Here are five key points.

Your leadership must adopt an approach to recruiting and retaining people. Someone needs to be put in charge of the efforts and work toward success with funds and resources allocated to the effort. Remember that without people, the apparatus and station are useless.

Your leadership and members know the type of people you need to run the organization. Target the types of people you need and reach out, asking them to join.

Your members know what they want for incentives. Ask them on a regular basis; “what is of value to you to keep you volunteering”? Then you can plan accordingly.

Members need to mentor other members, especially new members. The fact that someone takes an interest in the success of the new member generally brings out the best in both the mentor and the mentee. Collaboration and working together breeds success.

Watch for signs that members are creating an unwelcome or uninviting environment. Hazing, exclusion, harassment, etc. cannot be tolerated. This will create an unwelcome environment and could lend to charges of harassment or hostile work environment – yes even for volunteer organizations. But more importantly these reasons, coupled with leadership not caring and doing anything about unwelcome workplaces, will cause a person to leave faster than anything.

Your members are key to organizational recruitment and retention success.

Recruitment and Retention
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FASP SAFER Grant Success Stories to Consider Locally

During the length of the FASP SAFER Grant program, it has been found that some recruitment techniques work and some don't, with the key to success being:

- That all recruitment efforts are local
- That recruitment is marketing and you must market all the time
- That you need to know what incentives are wanted by members/prospective members, before they become true needs, and
- Leadership is the most critical success factor.

The following tools and efforts used in 27 counties where grants were provided,

were found to have various levels of success depending on leadership efforts and local opportunities:

- Mailers and post cars direct to residents
- Public event participation
- Open House activities
- Website & Social media use including videos, facebook, etc.
- High school and local college outreach
- Live in programs
- Yard signs, pole banners, posters, placemats in restaurants
- Digital message boards and static message boards
- Graphic wrappings on vehicles and trailers
- Canopy tents and table covers for use at events

Limited success was found through the use of non-responsive social media efforts were candidates were not contacted or could not speak to someone, billboards, and newspaper ads.

Again, the key is you, locally determining how to access the types of members you need & recruit them.

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