



ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

OF RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PRACTICES AMONG VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS



Prepared by
Volunteer Alberta

For: the
Alberta Fire Chiefs Association

Final Report submitted:
November 20, 2009

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY 3

ADDRESSING BARRIERS: PRACTICES IDENTIFIED 4

EMPLOYER-RELATED 6

FAMILY-RELATED 9

AVAILABILITY OF PEOPLE 12

PERCEPTIONS AND PUBLIC IMAGE 19

STRUCTURAL ISSUES..... 23

LITERATURE SOURCES..... 24

APPENDIX A 25

APPENDIX B 28

APPENDIX C 32

APPENDIX D 34





INTRODUCTION

Volunteer Alberta was retained by the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association to undertake an environmental scan of recruitment and retention practices in Alberta and other jurisdictions. This involved developing an understanding and familiarization of key recruitment and retention barriers, and interviewing key contacts at fire departments in a mix of communities.

The intention of the scan is to identify strategies and practices that are currently being utilized by fire departments to overcome recruitment and retention barriers, and which are finding success in improving recruitment and retention efforts. It is expected that there are opportunities for Alberta fire departments to share knowledge about existing practices that are effective, rather than reinventing the wheel. The results of the scan can also be utilized to identify aspects of recruitment and retention where best practices are minimal or nonexistent, and must be developed.

The scope of the scan is limited to identifying a general sense of the kinds of practices that are currently being undertaken. It does not articulate or brainstorm novel practices that go beyond those discovered in the environmental scan.

This report summarizes the major findings of the environmental scan. It summarizes the best practices identified by fire departments as successful in recruitment and retention. These practices are organized into strategic areas aimed at overcoming known barriers to recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

Overall, the fire departments interviewed in this environmental scan articulated were positive about the process. They appreciated the opportunity to provide their views and perspectives on what practices are most effective. Many suggested that ways should be found of formally sharing this kind of knowledge on an ongoing basis.

The scan reveals some general impressions about recruitment and retention success:

- The most successful departments are those that have been willing to adapt and change to the realities of a new kind of volunteer and evolving expectations about volunteering. They have undertaken strategies aimed at introducing greater flexibility for volunteers; targeting volunteer roles to match the demands and interests of volunteers; and ensuring respect of volunteers' busy time. They also utilize modern volunteer management methods to build a high-calibre bench strength of volunteers. This includes practices such as volunteer screening, peer monitoring, leadership reviews and structural assessments.
- The more successful departments have also been willing to go beyond their core fire-related roles and engage communities in broader, sustained ways with the objective of presenting as strong community leaders. They work to build an image of professionalism; work to improve public awareness about the role and importance of the department; maintain robust political contact with municipal and provincial decision-makers; network with other community organizations and assist those organizations with their activities; and engage high school students in





interesting ways such as Junior Firefighter Programs. Successful fire departments portray their volunteer firefighters as “local heroes”; they treat them like local heroes; and they conduct their operations in a manner befitting heroes.

- There are opportunities for fire departments to leverage one of the most powerful and compelling resources they have: their existing volunteers. The scan revealed that departments recognize that word-of-mouth “advertising” is among the most powerful methods of recruiting new volunteers. However, there appears to be a dearth of deliberate practices aimed at capitalizing on this.
- Smaller departments had the most trouble identifying successful practices. These departments appear to feel trapped in a vicious cycle. Since they have limited manpower, they feel they do not have the ability to pursue certain practices. (For example, screening volunteers or allowing greater flexibility in terms of time commitment.) They feel every hand is needed on deck every hour of every day, and they cannot afford to say allow time off or say no to anyone. This makes their departments less attractive to potential new volunteers, and in fact results in an erosion of their existing volunteers. The experiences of other departments and literature suggest that breaking this vicious cycle may require smaller departments to engage in practices which appear counterintuitive to their manpower situation, but which could be quite successful.





PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

As a foundation for the environmental scan, Volunteer Alberta reviewed the findings of facilitated regional recruitment and retention meetings that were held in fall 2008. These meetings engaged volunteer fire personnel and solicited their views and perspectives regarding the reasons individuals choose to become volunteer firefighters and perceived barriers to recruitment and retention.

From these findings, Volunteer Alberta compiled a list of identified barriers to recruitment and retention (attached as *Appendix A*), which was reviewed and approved by the Recruitment and Retention Working Group. Based on the list of identified barriers, a set of interview questions were crafted for the interview scan phase (attached as *Appendix B*) which were also reviewed and approved by the Recruitment and Retention Working Group.

The interview scan questions were designed to probe interviewees about known recruitment and retention barriers, rather than asking for their general impressions. This was important for discovering what practices fire departments are undertaking to overcome these barriers, and which practices are finding success. The questions were aimed at identifying tactics and strategies that have emerged as best practices.

A total of 35 interviewees were successfully contacted and interviewed. These included key contacts at fire departments from within Alberta and from other provinces and states. The Alberta interviewees represented fire departments from communities located across the province (north, east, south and west), and ranging in population.

Most interviews were conducted via telephone. The length of interviews was dependent on the amount of time the interviewee was able and willing to provide. Interviews were conducted at pre-arranged time out of respect for the busy nature of the interviewees' schedules; when necessary (such as in the event of a fire call), interviews were rescheduled. While interview times varied, the average interview lasted approximately one hour, with many exceeding this time.

Four interviewees submitted their responses via email, as this was more convenient for them than a telephone interview.

Each telephone interview commenced with a brief overview of the purpose of the interview. To facilitate an organized conversation with the interviewee, the questions were grouped into subject areas relating to the major categories of recruitment and retention barriers identified. (For example, issues relating to employers, issues relating to family, etc.) Each group of questions were preceded by a brief preamble to set the context. This allowed the interview to flow as a conversation, rather than a very restrictive interrogative format.

Interviewers took an adaptive approach in conducting the interviews, recognizing that some interviewees might interpret questions in unexpected ways or provide perfunctory answers. Where necessary, the interview reframed questions to help clarify the question for the interviewee and get at the necessary subject matter. Interviewers also probed with supplementary questions where appropriate, to elicit more detail in situations





where interviewees provided very generic responses without offering explanation (e.g. “Yes, we do some activities in that area.”)

The combination of transcripts and notes taken from interviews were reviewed and analyzed.

In addition to the interview responses, Volunteer Alberta conducted a literature scan on recruitment and retention issues in volunteer fire service. This assisted in identifying and confirming recurring themes in the interview scan. Interview responses were reviewed and coded to facilitate analysis of the responses. This coding methodology helped standardize the responses and enabled identification of the most frequently mentioned responses as best practices.

Note the quantified data in our report was extrapolated from a qualitative questionnaire, resulting in variances, dependent on researcher. Interviews identified trends, confirming and identifying regional anomalies in existing recruitment and retention literature. The relative sample size of interviewees from in and out of province, and the difficulty of many fire departments to speak directly to the identified barriers, also contributes to the data variance and its ability to precisely represent the wider population of fire departments. Further, quantifying the data necessitated that Volunteer Alberta generalize some nuanced responses to fit the data set. Finally, the interviews were not a random sample, but were selected based on their size, location and recommendation. For these reasons, the statistical evidence outlined in the report should be used to indicate trends that are helpful in interpreting relative success of the various identified approaches.

ADDRESSING BARRIERS: PRACTICES IDENTIFIED

This report identifies practices that were described by interviewees as ones used by their fire department in recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters.

Unless otherwise noted, these practices were regarded by interviewees as “successful” practices, meaning the interviewee felt that they were important for recruiting and retaining volunteers. Many practices articulated in this scan are being employed by multiple departments, although in some cases tailored to meet their local needs and to address the attitudes and orientations of their local communities.

Related best practices are grouped into strategy areas. While different practices might be employed between fire departments, they were undertaken as part of a similar strategy. (Essentially, there are many ways of reaching the same goal.) A striking finding from the interviews is the consistency of the overall strategies that successful fire departments are pursuing to overcome recruitment and retention barriers.

This report is organized in line with the structure of the interviews and the foundational list of identified recruitment and retention barriers and issues:

- Employer-related
- Family-related
- Availability of people





- Time commitment
- Perceptions and public image
- Structural issues





EMPLOYER-RELATED

Employer-related issues represent some of the most significant barriers to recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Most volunteer firefighters work full-time or part-time, and may need to leave work if called upon during work hours. The support of employers is therefore an important factor in successfully recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters.

Issues relating to employers elicited the strongest responses from interviewees, and they frequently confirmed that employers continue to be a primary barrier. Interviewees made it clear that any successful recruitment and retention strategy required fire halls to engage local employers and persuade them of the benefits of volunteer firefighting in the community. They cited a number of areas of practice with which they are having success.

Maintaining direct, consistent communication between the hall and local employers.

- Of Albertan fire departments who spoke to employee-related barriers, those who cited proactive, ongoing engagement of employers spoke very highly of the strategy. They also had the highest rates of success in recruitment and retention. Over 50% of all interviewees reported experiencing moderate to severe difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers. Of those who reported regular, direct communication with employers, only 8% indicated moderate to severe difficulty with recruitment and retention.
- Those apparently realizing the greatest success indicated that their Fire Chiefs spoke directly with local employers on a regular, incremental basis. This involved grassroots visitations and meetings with local employers to:
 - Explain the importance of volunteer firefighting to the community.
 - Explain the role of the volunteer fire department and the role of volunteer firefighters.
 - Notifying employers about community events with which the fire department was involved and upcoming training dates.
- Securing support from employers appears should involve direct, clear and honest communication with local employers. Successful approaches include:
 - Addressing and debunking myths about volunteer firefighter service.
 - Recognizing, respecting and responding to the concerns of local employers, especially small business. (Don't get defensive, but be constructive.)
 - Being upfront and clear about the expectations of volunteer firefighters, to assuage concerns about time away from work, etc.
 - Providing statistics on frequency of calls (if available) on a per-month basis, to help employers understand the commitment is not unreasonable.
 - Outlining the training volunteer firefighters receive and helping employers see how that training translates into better employees with additional skills sets.
 - Positioning volunteer firefighting as a service that results in young employees establishing firmer roots in the community, reducing the likelihood that they will leave the community and the employer.
 - Engaging in Q&A sessions with employers to respond to concerns openly and frankly.





- Some Albertan fire departments go so far as to have volunteer firefighters obtain support from their employers in the form of a signed, mandatory letter of commitment, in which the employer acknowledges and pledges to support them in their voluntary capacity.
- Despite the apparent significance of employer engagement, less than 50% of all Albertan interviewees who spoke to employer-related barriers identified this as an important strategy for neutralizing barriers. (Whereas 88% of out-of-province interviewees cite its importance.) This suggests Alberta fire departments have room to improve their awareness of and appreciation for the effectiveness of proactive and regular employer engagement.

Providing regular public recognition of supportive employers.

- Every community with a strong employer recognition program reported greater employer supportiveness; less difficulty dealing with volunteer firefighter time away from work; and fewer issues relating to recruitment and retention in general.
- About 50% of interviewed fire departments indicate they regularly recognize supportive community employers through advertisements in local newspapers or bulletins. Of note, several communities have brokered deals with local papers to provide free coverage thanking supportive employers on a regular basis, often annually or semi-annually. Every department who had employed this strategy found it had a positive impact on the supportiveness of the employers, facilitating recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.
- Various other approaches are also employed by fire departments, all with the key purpose of helping and benefiting supportive employers.
 - One fire department, during its yearly recruitment week, hangs banners in key locations around town. The banners identify both supportive businesses and the names of their supervisors. This fire department reported receiving calls from other employers asking how they could help support the program and requesting information to actually pass along to their employees, thereby becoming agents for recruitment and retention, as opposed to barriers.
 - Several communities provide plaques to hang at volunteer firefighters' businesses recognizing their support of the volunteer fire service. These are sometimes made by the fire departments themselves, and other times supplied by local groups or the municipality.
 - Several fire departments put out calendars and recognize key businesses on each monthly page.

Establishing flexible, targeted shift work for volunteer firefighters.

- Of those Albertan fire departments who spoke to their volunteer schedules, 60% indicated the use of volunteer shift work, while the remaining 40% employed a traditional system whereby every firefighter is called upon to respond to every call as able. The interviews





revealed a positive correlation between the establishment of flexible and targeted shift work for volunteer firefighters, and success in recruitment and retention.

- Shift work was the favoured method for most large departments, as it allowed for a more flexible, more limited commitment. This avoids volunteer burnout and alleviates and mitigates barriers relating to time away from work and other pursuits.
- For volunteers who are employed out-of-town or in inflexible work environments, shift work enables them to be supplemented by a wider base of volunteers and reportedly increases their likelihood to stay involved.
- Shift work is more problematic in smaller departments, where often every volunteer is needed. Several Fire Chiefs noted this creates a vicious cycle: the smaller the volunteer base, the less flexible the shifts and the greater the likelihood of burnout.
- Interestingly, the solution appears to be counter-intuitive. Some fire departments that are in smaller communities, but which have a moderately higher-than-needed volunteer base, have established more flexible response protocols and have found it easier to recruit and retain volunteers.

Additional perspectives:

- Numerous interviewees indicated that providing paid training or an increase in stipend would help increase the department's available volunteer base. This would enable firefighters to use unpaid leaves of absence from work, or to cut back on necessary work hours, while still bringing in some income for themselves and their families. Most available literature appears to confirm this perspective.
- Interestingly, out-of-province departments cited most of the same employer-related strategies as successful in enhancing and advancing recruitment and retention. Other jurisdictions, however, reported centralized provincial/state programs and resources to encourage volunteer firefighting. Centralized support includes elements such as:
 - Jurisdiction-wide marketing campaigns
 - Tools to aid in local recruitment (e.g. form letters to employers, checklists, how-to guides, key messages)
 - Supplementary financial support for local marketing
 - A recruitment hotline (reported very successful in the state of New York).





FAMILY-RELATED

Interviewees confirmed family-related issues as another significant barrier to recruitment and retention. The nature of the volunteer firefighting commitment will frequently result in time away from spouses and children. The support of family members is therefore very important for succeeding in recruitment and retention.

Fire departments offered strategies in a number of areas that are finding success in their communities. All of these strategies are, in one way or another, designed to secure and maintain the support of volunteer firefighters' families. Many involve embracing and pulling in family members to be a meaningful part of the 'extended family' that is the fire department.

Facilitating child care and child care planning.

- Interviewed Albertan departments generally claimed that a child care plan was important for retaining volunteers, although most cited firefighters' spouses as the "primary" plan for childcare.
- Several Albertan fire departments encourage pre-arranging alternative backup plans for firefighters with children. Such plans include:
 - Child care provided by the department.
 - A support network formed of fellow volunteer firefighter families and/or their neighbours.
 - A community support model involving a local community organization, such as a religious group, providing the service.
- About 50% of the interviewed Albertan departments who identified childcare as a barrier stated that they allowed children to be brought to the department and watched by other volunteers or employees. Of these departments, about 70% indicated this occurred only in "worst case scenarios," while 30% indicated it was a regular and sanctioned occurrence.

Seriously and meaningfully addressing safety concerns.

- A primary concern of many interviewed Albertan departments was ensuring that spouses were comfortable and reassured about the safety and security of their volunteer firefighting partners. Methods of helping achieve this include:
 - Providing information (brochures, etc.) about volunteer fire fighting.
 - Providing information to spouses about all fire department policies relating to training and safety.
 - Giving tours to all spouses of the fire department, equipment, elements relating to personnel safety, etc.
 - Having a real "open door" policy for immediate family members of volunteer firefighters. This policy enables family members to visit the fire hall anytime and speak with the Fire Chief about concerns, issues, etc.
 - Spouse support networks, whereby spouses of longer-serving volunteer firefighters convey assurances and provide support to spouses of younger and new members.





Meaningfully engaging spouses and family members within the department.

- Every fire department, Albertan and otherwise, made at least some effort to meaningfully engage spouses and family members of volunteer firefighters within the fire department. Many interviewees stated multiple stated benefits to engaging spouses, family and significant others, including improvements in recruitment and retention.
- Over 90% of all interviewed Albertan departments claimed that family social events were important to retaining volunteers. This includes different varieties of ceremonies, parties, social gatherings and events in which family members are included. Most interviewees indicate these events are “important” or “very important” to the longevity of the fire department.
- Other strategies at encouraging family engagement and support include:
 - Fifteen percent (15%) of departments have found that gimmicky items such as “I’m married to a firefighter” T-shirts are effective ways of encouraging familial support.
 - Approximately one third of interviewed departments indicate they provide optional work for spouses that are interested in supporting the department, such as administration jobs, fundraising and formal childcare provision.
 - Approximately 20% of interviewed departments indicated they have established formal committees for volunteer firefighters’ spouses; most of these committees were related to fundraising.
- Successful, meaningful engagement of spouses and family members reportedly assists on both the recruitment and retention sides. Retention is improved through securing the support and understanding of spouses and other family members. Supportive spouses can also effectively become aids in recruitment efforts, by engaging, reassuring and encouraging spouses of potential volunteer recruits.
- Liability was cited as a large concern for family members in Alberta. It is interesting and encouraging to note this issue is being addressed by the Alberta government.

Covering incidental or “access” costs.

- Most interviewed departments indicated they provide money to help cover incidental and “access costs” associated with volunteering. (For example, reimbursing gas or providing a mileage fee.) They indicate this approach helps justify the time commitment to spouses.
- Most departments also claim a yearly stipend helps to cover incidental costs associated with volunteering, and encourages volunteers to stay with the fire department.

Providing greater flexibility for familial obligations.

- Most interviewed departments lack a formal policy regarding family obligations such as death, illness, religious obligations and holidays. However, nearly all interviewed departments employ informal quid-pro-quo systems to help ensure volunteers are able to balance their family lives.





- Only 8% of total interviewees indicated their fire departments do not make efforts to “allow” time off from calls for any reason. Lack of volunteers was cited as the reason. However, these respondents indicate their departments recognize that volunteers will sometimes be unable to respond to calls.
- An apparent correlation found through the interview scan is that those fire departments with the lowest levels of flexibility are also having a great deal of difficulty with recruitment and retention. This appears to be a cyclical problem. The departments do not allow, and feel unable to allow, greater flexibility due to a lack of volunteer manpower; however this has the effect of undermining their volunteer retention (since people simply quit due to a lack of flexibility), and presenting a barrier to recruiting new volunteers (since a lack of flexibility is not a selling point).





AVAILABILITY OF PEOPLE

The interviews reveal that overcoming issues relating to the availability of people seems to require strategies on both external and internal fronts. Fire departments reporting success in recruitment and retention share the attribute of placing importance on sustained engagement of the community through a number of external activities. They also report undertaking management strategies that maximize their volunteer resources. Interviewees described strategies in a number of key areas.

Use of general advertising.

- Over 75% of interviewed departments identified as engaging in some form of general advertising as part of their recruitment activities (although this is likely a low-ball statistic if one assumes a more broad definition of “general advertising”). This is done through various types of media, including pamphlets, brochures, or community postings/newsletters.
- Approximately 50% of interviewees reported that their fire departments find newspaper advertising useful. These advertisements were generally run separate and apart from advertisements recognizing supportive local employers and volunteers. Although these departments indicated newspaper advertising is “something they’ve always done” they were reluctant or unable to describe the degree to which the advertisements impacted their success in recruitment.

Active community engagement and public awareness.

- The majority of interviewed departments indicated the importance of community engagement as both a direct and indirect recruitment strategy. Approximately 85% of fire departments reported that they were engaged in various community events, and there was a direct correlation between high levels of community engagement and a self-reported healthy volunteer base.
- Interviewees noted that engaging the community helps local residents put a face on the fire department, presents volunteer firefighters as positive role models and full community members. This raises awareness about volunteer firefighting, enhancing recruitment. Some community engagement activities also offer the opportunity to make direct recruitment appeals, which is used as a valuable tool for these departments.
- Most interviewees indicated that their fire departments engage in some form of events to raise awareness among the general public, and that these activities were highly useful. These include:
 - Publicizing and holding “open house” events at the fire department.
 - Providing tours of the fire hall.
 - Holding or hosting community events, or meetings of other community organizations, at the hall.
- A number of departments also reported attending trade fairs. These departments spoke highly of the strategy and identified it as highly important for





recruiting and retaining volunteers. It also had the extra benefit of developing general awareness of the department in the community. The type and quality of trade fair booths, and the material distributed, varied greatly between fire departments. Those who reported the greatest benefits from trade fairs were those who reported using more professional approaches and resources.

- The use of Fire Prevention Week was reported by most interviewees as an important community engagement tool that was used by their departments to effectively advance their recruitment. Attending and speaking with schools, community groups, and the general public about the importance of fire prevention provides a way of raising awareness about the fire department generally. It also facilitates “soft promotion” of volunteer firefighting in the context of helping promote and enhance community safety.
- In addition to Fire Prevention Week, regular and sustained engagement of group and organizations in the community was reported as important in aiding recruitment. The following groups were cited as particularly significant and fruitful to engage:
 - Schools – Interviewees reported that engagement opportunities with schools enable the department to raise awareness and also lend themselves to direct recruitment appeals. Engagement of high schools facilitates the involvement of young people in Junior Firefighter Programs, cited as a major success. Establishing awareness and excitement among high school students also leads some young people to join as volunteer firefighters once they turn 18.
 - Rotaries – These were cited as effective for “getting the word out” about the importance of the fire departments role and work in the community, and the need for volunteers.
 - Religious groups – Religious groups tend to be comprised of very community-minded individuals and as such the fire department’s message resonates with these groups.
 - Volunteer centres – These were cited by interviewees as good places to engage as they act as resources that help direct interested volunteers to the fire department. Also a good way of spreading awareness about the fire department throughout the community as a unique volunteer option.

Sharing resources, training and people between regions.

- A number of departments cited success with the strategy of building networks to share resources between regions.
- Agreements to share resources and training were cited as helpful in providing additional support in the event of major emergencies, and in training volunteer firefighters. Smaller departments in particular found the strategy valuable in decreasing overall costs of running the department while maintaining service.
- Encouraging transferable training and synthesized practices was seen by many interviewees an effective way of maintaining volunteers within the overall Albertan framework. As volunteers transfer regions, some departments report that they are diligent about providing transfer information, which encourages volunteers to become involved in their new locations. There would appear to be an opportunity to





establish a province-wide referral and maintenance system to help ensure volunteer firefighters who move are not “lost”.

Engaging in targeted recruitment of volunteers.

- The majority of interviewed departments stated that they do “general” recruitment, without any specific candidates in mind.
- Interestingly, approximately 15% of interviewed departments who actively recruit volunteers reported that they target “busy people”, and said they have a high level of success in recruiting and retaining these individuals. These departments said they have found people who volunteer their time in various capacities are better at juggling commitments, and ironically, more responsive to volunteering their time even when already working for other commitments. Though counterintuitive, it has proven very successful. **(See Appendix 3, 1)**
- A small number of interviewees indicated their fire departments had made a concerted effort to specifically target under-represented groups for volunteers, such as immigrant populations or native populations. Those who did so reported mixed success. Approximately half of these interviewees said they had found immigrant populations in particular were unresponsive, often due to language or cultural barriers and/or work commitments; the other half said they had found immigrant populations easy to engage. (Interestingly, some departments noted that by incorporating a couple members of an immigrant population, others from that same ethnic group were much more likely to follow as volunteers.) **(See Appendix 3, 2)**
- Approximately 50% of interviewees indicate their fire departments have made some attempts to specifically recruit women, particularly stay-at-home mothers. The success of this endeavour has varied by department. Successful recruitment approaches targeting stay-at-home mothers all included some form of childcare strategy (similar the those identified in “Family Related Barriers, Page 8), with care organized by the department, or by an affiliated group such as a community organization or a neighbourhood support group.
- Although fire departments did not always strategically target younger volunteers, all interviewees stated that younger volunteers were important for the sustainability and physical capacity of the department. Some interviewees said their departments worked directly with high schools in some form of Junior Firefighter Program. These interviewees indicated that nearly 100% of junior firefighters who remained in the community upon completion of high school stayed with the department as regular volunteer firefighters.
- Targeted recruitment seemed to be a greater challenge for fire departments in smaller communities. However, these communities reported some success in targeted recruitment to supplement daytime hours (i.e. the peak employment period) when many volunteers are at work and often away from the community. Approximately 50% of small fire departments who reported difficulty with recruiting and retaining daytime volunteers found this strategy effective and useful. Typically this included:





- targeting stay-at-home mothers to supplement the volunteer force during daytime hours
- engaging stay-at-home mothers in other non-fire capacities around the fire hall during daytime hours, thereby freeing up other labour resources
- partnering with local high schools to engage high school students in assistance around the fire hall during peak employment periods.

Word-of-mouth recruitment

- Sixty-five percent (65%) of interviewees indicated their fire department considers their existing volunteer firefighters as the “most important” recruitment tool within the department.
- Happy, supported volunteers who felt they were making a significant and valued contribution were likely to spread that experience and to bring more fire fighters into the department.
- It does not appear from interviews, however, that fire departments engage in deliberate strategies to leverage this powerful resource. Interviewees indicated the process was more organic, with current volunteers gradually conveying their experiences by word-of-mouth to friends and colleagues and eventually pulling them in.
- These findings suggest that there is room to more deliberately and aggressively utilize current volunteer firefighters to actively recruit new volunteers.





TIME COMMITMENT

A key barrier to recruitment and retention is in respect of time commitment. Individuals have increasing demands on their time and have a much wider range of options available for how they choose to spend their time. Volunteer firefighting takes time away from family and other pursuits.

Fire departments indicated strategies in a number of areas that are aimed at positioning volunteer firefighting as a stand out from the 'rest of the crowd' and adapting to the demands of an evolving volunteer pool. Successful strategies appear to mitigate the perceived "drawbacks" of volunteering and use degrees of excitement, engagement and flexibility to enhance recruitment and retention.

Branding volunteer firefighters as "Public Heroes".

- Several fire departments commented on the importance of making volunteer fire fighters "feel like heroes", and reported success in branding volunteer firefighting this way to enhance recruitment and retention.
- The "Public Heroes" positioning of volunteer firefighting enables the opportunity to stand out as amongst other volunteer opportunities in the community. This public image also effectively presents volunteer firefighting as a worthwhile and dynamic use of free time, helping it stand out against other non-family and non-work pursuits (e.g. Why pretend to be a hero by playing a video game when you can be a real hero to your community by volunteer firefighting.)
- Importantly, departments that employed this approach noted the need to "live" the image in their departments, that way volunteers recruited through the approach are not disappointed. This was a very positive finding. A common hazard encountered by some organizations is that their promotion of an opportunity is not representative of reality; this often results in recruited individuals being disappointed and departing the organization. The interview findings suggest that departments are inherently mindful of the need to "back up the brand" by living it.

Emphasizing uniqueness and personal development.

- In addition to the "Public Heroes" forms of positioning, fire departments reported success with approaches that emphasized the uniqueness of the opportunity in relation to personal development. Successful messages and positions used in recruitment included, for example:
 - The opportunity to build new and diverse skills.
 - The opportunities for personal development, including facing and rising to new and demanding challenges.
 - The opportunity to contribute to community in a meaningful way.
 - The opportunity to help improve the safety and security of family members, neighbours, friends and the community at large.
 - The opportunity to be a respected and appreciated community leader.





Using social activities to improve retention.

- Interviewees also noted that social activities and events were successful in improving recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. They indicated that the same kinds of social events that were effective in building and maintaining the support of spouses and family members (see “Family-Related” section) had the additional effect of establishing a sense of community within the fire department.
- Approximately half of the interviewed departments reported finding that their volunteer firefighters were more likely to continue volunteering their time, and to volunteer additional time, if they felt a sense of community within the department.

Clearly communicating time expectations upfront.

- Approximately 70% of interviewees who cited time commitment as a barrier stated that clear, direct up-front communication around time commitment and expectations was important for improving recruitment and retention of volunteers.
- Clear communication about expectations avoided situations where volunteers sour on the department and quit when they find the time commitment is more demanding than they were led to believe. Clear communication of expectations also was found to aid in recruitment of new volunteers, where it helped debunk myths about the degree of the time commitment.

Effective management of volunteer firefighters’ time.

- In recognition that the perception of ‘onerous time commitment’ is a real barrier to recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters, many departments have engaged in strategies to optimize volunteers’ time. Departments reporting higher success in recruiting and retaining were those that were mindful of volunteers’ use of time and were taking steps to avoid wasting time.
- Approximately 60% of interviewed departments felt that efficient and effective use of time in training sessions was crucial in retaining volunteers. They noted that the importance of core training for volunteer firefighters that directly relates to fire service and emergency response. Training that was perceived as redundant or unnecessary was said to “discourage” or “annoy” volunteers, who are busy with numerous other commitments.
- Similarly, approximately 60% of interviewees stated that efficient in-house work was important in ensuring volunteers were satisfied with their voluntary experience. Having meaningful tasks for volunteers to keep them preoccupied whenever they were volunteering was cited as a necessary strategy for effective retention.
- Fire departments also cited success with the use of volunteer recognition. Publishing pictures of volunteer fire fighters in the local newspaper allow them to gain recognition in the community as local heroes and community leaders. Often





this is undertaken by fire departments in conjunction with employer recognition (see “Employer-Related” section.)

- Customizing volunteer opportunities is also a strategy used by fire departments to maximize the experience of volunteers. Approximately 80% of interviewees who engaged in strategic volunteer time analysis indicated their departments customize the roles for volunteer firefighters as they age or are injured. This enables them to continue volunteering in the department, which in turn enables the department to dedicate the time of other volunteers to core fire and emergency services.
- Most interviewed departments indicate that they accept volunteers of any physical ability, even reduced mobility. They indicated they find meaningful tasks for these volunteers that fit within their interests, from the array of duties at the fire department. This can range from administrative tasks to cooking duties.
- About half of interviewees indicated their departments utilized a rotating task list that equitably distributed duties among volunteers. The other half indicated their departments attempt to modify tasks assigned to volunteers based on the volunteers’ interests. Interestingly, fire departments claimed their respective approaches helped them recruit and retain volunteers: the former because everyone felt that they were equals and part of a team, and the latter because people knew they could contribute in ways that were specifically meaningful to them. Regardless of which approach was utilized, successful departments have structured their volunteer systems in a way that makes their local volunteers feel that their time is being efficiently and effectively utilized.





PERCEPTIONS AND PUBLIC IMAGE

The facilitated regional sessions revealed that perceptions in the community about the fire department and volunteer firefighting can act as a barrier to recruitment. Volunteers may not understand what the volunteer firefighter role, or may join with erroneous preconceptions of what the experience will be like. Some volunteers are not prepared for what they may see when responding to a call, and quit the department following a difficult experience.

Fire departments articulated strategies they are employing in several areas to address issues related to perceptions and the public image of the department. It became clear through the interviews that departments who self-report greater success in recruitment and retention are those that have incorporated elements and mechanisms that are commonly found in professional-run organizations.

Establishing effective volunteer screening process.

- Every interviewed department reported some degree of volunteer screening. All interviewed departments conducted some form of interview with potential volunteers. Those reporting the highest success were those with rigorous, consistent and clearly identified processes for interviewing candidates.
- Practices for screening volunteers included:
 - Interviews with the Fire chief;
 - Interviews with the entire fire department,;
 - Letters of recommendation;
 - Criminal record checks;
 - Signing waivers;
 - Written tests, physical tests, or some combination of these methods.
- Several interviewees indicated their departments require communication with, or commitment of support from, the employers of applicants before the applicants are accepted as volunteer firefighters. This provides a good mechanism for laying a solid foundation for securing long-term support from employers. This also helps directly address a commonly encountered recruitment and retention barrier.
- Interviews revealed a correlation between a non-rigorous volunteer screening process and an unhealthy volunteer base. This was often the case with smaller fire departments; interviewees from these departments indicated their departments feel limited in their capacity to rigorously screen and potentially turn away volunteers. Literature suggests that this should not be the case, and that departments will have greater long-term success in recruiting and retaining a solid volunteer base if they are “choosy” about their volunteers, ensuring the reputation of the department for professionalism.





Providing effective psychological support to volunteers.

- After traumatic calls, many fire departments have formal, mandatory briefing sessions to address any distress among volunteers or lingering issues. This helps the department come together and support each other, and helps mitigate volunteer departures.
- Every interviewed department indicated that having available psychological support professionals was important for retention, although access to these professionals was sometimes limited. Practices engaged in included:
 - Pre-emptively briefing and attempting to prepare volunteers, giving them a clear sense of what to expect before going out on call;
 - Providing counselling services on an on-call basis;
 - Establishing a formal volunteer program with psychological counsellors in their community or region who provide voluntary care;
 - Some Fire Chiefs (and in some departments, several members of the fire hall) are trained as “debriefers” for helping to cope with trauma after incidents;
 - Most Fire Chiefs who had good recruitment/ retention strategies have an “open-door policy” for fire fighters who need to talk

Promoting a professional culture and high-performance work environment.

- Departments reporting success in recruitment and retention were also those tending to have established practices aimed at promoting and achieving a professional, high-performance work environment.
- About half of interviewees indicated their fire departments have established formal mechanisms for monitoring and quality control. These were reported to be “highly effective” in maintaining the quality of the volunteer experience and retaining volunteer firefighters. Methods for monitoring volunteers generally were of two forms: the Fire Chief monitoring volunteers, or members of the department monitoring and self-policing each other. Responses from Interviewees suggest that the latter approach is more effective.
- Several interviewees indicated their departments have had success in assigning a fire department mentor to new volunteers. Literature confirms this is a highly effective approach in integrating new members.
- Literature also suggests the best way to avoid “low quality” service from festering or spreading is to confront ‘toxic’ individuals immediately and privately. This was confirmed by several departments as the chosen method for eliminating negative influences within the department in order to maintain a high performance environment.
- Successful departments tended to be those with strong leadership and established formal and informal leadership review processes. These processes involve volunteer firefighters reviewing and evaluating the performance and leadership of the Fire Chief.
- Fire departments also indicated that a key to retention was to ensure smooth transitions in department leadership in situations where there was a leadership





change. This was particularly the case if the new leadership was from an outside department, sector or community. Abrupt changes damage morale and have resulted in the past in a departure of volunteers. Interviewees citing this practice noted the need to:

- continually communicating with and apprising volunteers about the process of transition;
 - create opportunities for the departing leadership and new leadership to engage volunteers together in structured settings;
 - ensuring a climate of openness throughout the leadership transition;
 - inviting and addressing concerns of volunteers in professional ways.
- Several interviewed departments alluded to organizational cultural as either a challenge or a solution in recruiting and retaining volunteers.
 - Some fire departments claimed a “club” mentality helped them to retain their existing volunteers, but created an external perception that the “club” was hard to join, thereby discouraging new volunteers from joining.
 - Departments who reported little to no problems recruiting and retaining volunteers all indicated having an organizational “culture” that:
 - is open, inclusive, professional;
 - provides and establishes a sense of community without being insular;
 - welcomes all volunteers;
 - promotes pride in their work;
 - is self-policed for discipline and integrity through a group sense of obligation.

Bolstering professional image in the community.

- Maintaining a professional image in the community was also cited as an effective strategy for improving community perceptions about the fire department. Interviewees indicate that a positive community perception of the fire department as a professional force translates into better success in recruiting.
- Fire departments regarded as professional were more successful in recruiting and retaining more committed and “desirable” volunteers, who are looking for a high quality volunteer experience.
- Proactive community engagement was cited by interviewees as the best approach for bolstering a professional image. Approaches such as:
 - Speaking engagements with community groups;
 - Attending community organization events, block parties, municipal events;
 - Offering tours to municipal officials, community organizations, and members of the general public;
 - Hosting meetings of community organizations;
 - Assisting other community groups, religious groups and charitable organizations in their community service endeavours;
 - Utilizing Fire Prevention Week as an opportunity to polish the department’s image.





Communicating the importance of the fire department to the community.

- A number of interviewees from departments outside Alberta indicated their departments had experienced great difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers in their small communities. It was felt that residents in the community did not appreciate the importance of the fire department and of volunteer firefighters. Ultimately their small departments were closed to due a lack of manpower.
- Upon closure of the departments, residents in those communities experienced severe hikes in insurance premiums. Interviewees indicated that communities then keenly recognized the importance of sustaining the fire department, became supportive of its reopening and got involved.
- Interviewees stated that the important lesson from the experience was that fire departments must continually work at demonstrating and articulating the importance of having volunteers and maintaining the department.





STRUCTURAL ISSUES

Successful fire departments have engaged in a few strategies to address structural barriers to recruitment and retention. The goal in these cases is to alleviate other issues that consume labour, resources and time that could otherwise be used to enhance recruitment and retention.

Financial support from governments is one of the key issues. Departments that face fiscal capacity challenges are not as strongly placed to engage in successful recruitment and retention. Strategies in a few areas were cited by interviewees, but this is an area in which many interviewed departments are citing challenges.

Maintaining regular and robust political contact.

- Albertan interviewees indicated that fire departments must have the time and resources to attend local municipal Council meetings and other government sessions to effectively represent their groups.
- Some departments delegate some of the Fire Chief's administrative duties to other volunteers, where practical to do so. This frees up time for the Fire Chief to engage with Council members and government officials to represent the fire department on key issues. Maintaining this political contact helps maintain funding.
- Several departments indicate they speak regularly with their MLAs. This was cited as an effective mechanism of ensuring consistent financial support. Some departments said their MLA has been very helpful in using community connections to make up shortfalls in the fire department budget. Departments who engaged their MLA appeared to be more successful than those who confined their political communications to their local government.

Ongoing assessment of departmental structures

- Forty-five percent (45%) of interviewed Albertan departments who engaged in assessment of departmental structures reported ongoing day-to-day assessment -- that is, identifying opportunities to continuously improve the operations of the department to maximize time, streamline administration and avoid burnout of volunteers. Twenty percent (20%) reported regular periodic assessments.
- Those who reported no assessment mechanisms were more likely to report structural challenges within their department acting as barriers for recruiting and retaining volunteers.





LITERATURE SOURCES

Carter, Harry R. "Member Retention in the Volunteer Fire Service: An Analysis of the Impact of Leadership." Capella University, 2006. Retrieved from ProQuest Information and Learning Company. Web. July 28, 2009.

Cobb, Gregory T. "Why do Volunteers Volunteer: A Functional Approach For The Effective Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters" A Dissertation Submitted To The Faculty Of The School of Education at Spalding University, Louisville, Kentucky. April 26, 2005. Retrieved from ProQuest Information and Learning Company. Web. July 28, 2009.

Cowley, Paul. "Province Backs Volunteer Fire Fighters." Red Deer Advocate, June 3, 2009.

D'Intino, Robert S. "Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention in Rural Pennsylvania." Pennsylvania State University Schuylkill. May 2006.

National Volunteer Fire Council (USA). "Retention & Recruitment Resources." Web. July 28, 2009.

Office of the Fire Marshall. "Volunteer Recruitment and Retention files." Government of Ontario. November 22, 2006. Web. July 28, 2009.

Pillsworth, Tim. "Paid Two Week Training Spurs Recruitment and Retention": ProQuest Science Journals. *Fire Engineering*; Jun 2007; P. 18. Retrieved from ProQuest Science Journals. Web. July 28, 2009.

"Volunteer Fire Fighters Seek Equality": The Mirror online. May 6, 2009.

"Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Fire Fighters 2009": Newfoundland and Labrador, the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and the Professional Municipal Administrators





APPENDIX A IDENTIFIED RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ISSUES





ISSUES AND BARRIERS RELATING TO RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Consultations were held in fall 2008 to examine the issues and barriers relating to recruitment and retention of volunteer fire personnel. The following is a summary of the major issues and barriers identified.

These issues will be used to inform the development of questions that we will ask fire departments in Alberta and other jurisdictions. The questions will seek to identify strategies and approaches that are finding success in overcoming these issues.

- Issues relating to employers
 - Employers are concerned about how much time employees who volunteer in fire service will be away from their jobs. When call volumes go up, employer support falls quickly.
 - An employee who is a senior volunteer firefighter is also likely to be a senior or essential employee, making it difficult for them to leave work.
 - Employers are concerned about the number of false alarms.
 - Chain store employers tend to be less accommodating and less supportive than local businesses; may not feel the same community connection.
 - Employers are facing higher operating costs and difficulty finding staff; they feel that employees leaving for volunteer fire service undermine their profitability.
 - Some employers feel they're already paying taxes, so why should they also need to support giving employees time off work to do volunteer fire service.
- Issues relating to family
 - Higher living costs mean that many families depend on income. Volunteer fire service is at unpredictable times, which can impact work schedules and income.
 - Personal expenses to the volunteer are a barrier, especially when the volunteer has family expenses to deal with.
 - Unpredictable call times are hard on the family – you're even on call at Christmas and other holidays; hard on volunteer and on the spouse/family.
 - People have a fear of being injured, which would affect their day job/career and in turn affect their family.
 - Being a volunteer firefighter causes stress in families.
 - Family dynamics changes; a new baby or a marriage changes things and the volunteer can't commit as much as they used to.
- Issues regarding availability of people
 - Many community members work outside the community during the day (sometimes hours away in forestry, oil, etc.); impractical for them to respond to calls.
 - Typical guys who are in volunteer fire service are "too busy" with work to volunteer or to respond to calls.
 - Increasingly hard to find young people who work locally; tend to work out of town.
 - Many young people move away from rural communities.
 - People might join as a volunteer, but then have career changes in a couple years and move or work out of town, or become too busy.





- Greater upward mobility in work nowadays, and circumstances change quickly for people. They might not be able to devote the time they once could.
- Transient populations are more common nowadays; people move into the town, work for a couple years and then move on. Makes it hard to keep volunteers.
- Younger guys who can physically do the hard work are sometimes scarce; older guys may be around but can't do the same stuff they used to do.
- Issues around time commitment
 - There are lots of other choices/other ways to volunteer, that are much less dangerous or stressful.
 - Lots of other entertainment options now for people to spend their free time, rather than fire service or volunteering at all.
 - People want to spend time with kids and family, not as interested or don't see the value as much anymore.
 - It's starting to feel like a trade job, which puts some people off.
 - To maintain standard you need things like codes of practice and discipline actions for missing training, but these are put-offs, especially when there are so many other things people could do with their time.
 - Guys don't want to spend their free time doing "non-fire" service, and leave.
- Issues around community perceptions / public image
 - People think the volunteer fire department is an "old boys club".
 - The reputation of some departments isn't great; some existing members are problems or the department looks intimidating.
 - People misunderstand the role, or have different expectations than what it turns out to be, and then leave.
 - People join for the wrong reasons and just don't work out.
 - Concerns and fear about liability and risk are deterrents to people joining or staying.
 - People aren't prepared for what they see on the first couple calls (e.g. gruesome or graphic things), and they say they just can't do it.
 - The role of volunteer firefighter is tantamount to a professional versus a volunteer, with added expectations that people aren't ready for, or which they didn't expect.
- Issues relating to structural challenges
 - Municipality / Council expectations are too demanding or unrealistic.
 - Some Councils see volunteer fire departments as "just volunteers" and don't give them much (or any) funding, but they expect all fires put out quickly.
 - Can't meet all training needs of our volunteers because of a lack of funds.
 - Volunteer firefighters get hired away by professional fire industry into paid positions.
 - Lots more administration and non-fire stuff to do; takes up time that takes away from recruitment/retention efforts.
 - Burnout and on-call impact is leading to high turnovers.
 - Volunteer departments are having to spend time fundraising for equipment or a fire truck, let alone have the time/capacity to recruit and retain.
 - There are big turnovers when there is a change of leadership.
 - Call volume can be too demanding and that causes people to leave or just not show.
 - Conversely, call volumes that are too light cause people to lose interest and leave.





APPENDIX B INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE





Volunteer Firefighter E-Scan

General Interview structure:

1. Contact interviewee a day or more in advance. Provide information about the subject to allow for reflection.
2. Contact interviewee at designated time. Re-introduce name, organization, and general purpose of interview.
3. Track date, time, speakers, and answers to questions.

Notes:

Questions are constructed to mirror barriers demonstrated in fall 2008 consultations, in order to determine provincial best practices to address these pre-identified barriers. If questions are unclear or if interviewees require further information, the questions can be clarified in direct context of these barriers.

Issues relating to employers:

Preface: We know that some fire departments have challenges recruiting volunteers relating to employment issues and getting the support of their employer.

1. What **successful** strategies do you have that help you gain and maintain employers' support in allowing their employees to take time away from work for volunteer fire fighting?
2. Do you take into account volunteers' schedules while doing on-call work? Is there a method for contacting volunteers based on their schedules?
3. Some communities face the challenge of folks living in town, but working outside the community. Is this a challenge for you and how do you get around this challenge?
4. How have you changed your recruitment approaches or recruitment targets to try and find new pools of volunteers?
5. What kinds of things do you do to recognize, compensate or benefit for companies who are supportive of employee volunteer firefighters? Is this helpful?

Issues relating to family:

We know group of barriers relates to family.

9. Do you find individual expenses to volunteer, such as loss of income or childcare expenses, to be a barrier; and if so, how do you get around this?
10. How do you help reassure potential volunteers and their families about safety and training?
11. How do you provide flexibility for fire fighters based on family obligations (holidays, birthdays, childcare, etc.) and changes (births, deaths, etc.)?
12. Have you found any approaches to be particularly successful in helping families remain supportive of their family member being a volunteer fire fighter?





Issues regarding availability of people:

Availability of people is a real barrier in some communities. We want to explore ways in which you've had success in getting around that challenge.

13. How do you engage the fire department within the community to build reputation? How successful is this?
14. How have you adapted the structure of your department to attract and retain a younger demographic (i.e. mentor programs)?
15. When volunteers leave, what transitional process ensures their knowledge is maintained and their responsibilities passed on?
16. Have you tried to engage non-traditional demographics in order to obtain more volunteers that work in the community?
17. How do you engage with different community networks? For example, do you work with churches, schools, rotary clubs, immigrant communities, parent support groups, youth social clubs, volunteer centers, temporary foreign workers, etc. to find volunteers?
18. How transferable is the training between departments? If fire fighters are moving, do you encourage and/ or facilitate their transfer to another fire department?
19. Do you share resources or training with other fire departments?
20. How do you address physical demands within the job when people are no longer able to perform certain tasks (i.e. age, injury, etc.)? Does the department have ways of adapting work based on changing skill sets and abilities?

Issues around time commitment:

We know that there aren't regular hours and calls can come at any time of day, even holidays. And we know people are busier and have lots of options of how they want to spend free time. We want to talk about how you have managed to get around these realities and still find success in recruiting.

21. How do you make the position of volunteer firefighter appealing to people in your community?
22. How do you involve family members in the department through other types of volunteer work, fire department updates or recognition events?
23. How do you make the most efficient use of the volunteers' time when they are training or on the job?
- 23a. How do you ensure volunteers work primarily based on their interests and/or abilities?
24. How do you make the position of volunteer firefighter appealing to people in your community?
25. How do you maintain discipline and professionalism without alienating volunteers when a correction needs to be made?





Issues around community perception/ public image:

We know people are hesitant to volunteer at a fire hall if there's a negative community perception of the hall. We want to explore this.

26. How do you work within your community to maintain and improve the public image of the fire department and volunteer firefighters?
27. What community activities, events and groups does your fire department take part in? Is that useful to your fire department in recruiting?
28. How do you separate toxic or negative volunteers and what do you do to restore public perception after?
29. How do you clearly communicate to potential volunteers what the roles and expectations are of the volunteer firefighter position?
30. What emotional or psychological support do you provide to cope with injury, death, fear or other difficult realities of the position?
31. Do you pre-screen volunteers in any way? If so, how?

Issues relating to structural challenges:

We've heard that red tape and administration can get in the way of recruiting and make it hard for people to volunteer. We want to explore how your fire hall has gotten around this issue.

32. How do you simplify red tape or administration related to volunteering?
33. How do you maintain and raise the political profile of the fire department in order to ensure adequate funding? How do you communicate to the government and community the economy of supporting volunteer fire fighters?
34. How do you address funding shortages?
35. How do you ensure time for recruitment is built into the administrative capacity of the fire department?
36. Have you used marketing tools or campaigns to recruit new volunteers? If so, what has been most successful?
37. How often do you assess the structure of the fire department to ensure that it is conducive to a positive volunteer environment?
38. Before a turnover in leadership, are there processes to ensure the volunteers are comfortable with and confident in the new management?

Do you have any other questions, concerns, or thoughts?
Thank you for your time.





APPENDIX C CONTEXT FOR VOLUNTEER-RELATED DATA





Volunteer Alberta has some context to help to clarify these trends in terms of overall volunteering statistics as provided in the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (CSGVP).

1. With regards to targeting “busy people,” an identified strategy by some fire departments, there is evidence to suggest why this seemingly counter-intuitive strategy has been effective. As of 2007, CSGVP identified that 25% of total volunteers contribute over 78% of total cross-sector volunteer work. Thus, those likely to volunteer in one capacity are also likely to be further engaged in other capacities as well.
2. The CSGVP further suggests an analysis for disparate successes in recruiting immigrant populations between departments. Immigrants have a lower overall volunteer rate across Canada (40% of immigrants volunteer, compared to 49% of the general population), and further, are very unlikely to be engaged in the Social Services volunteer sub-sector, to which fire fighting belongs (at only 8% of immigrants participating). Immigrants are very unlikely to be successful volunteer recruits in their first few years in Canada, as this represents the “settlement stage” during which their primary consideration is meeting basic needs. However, if immigrant populations are engaged after this stage, their likelihood to volunteer is similar to average levels across Canada. In other words, timing is important.

Further, Volunteer Alberta’s work with “Intersections: supporting rural nonprofit organizations to better engage immigrant volunteers” noted trends similar to those identified by fire departments in terms of “breaking in” to immigrant communities’ untapped volunteer resources. When an immigrant from a cultural or ethnic group becomes highly engaged in any volunteer activity, they are likely to draw in other members of this community to that same volunteer activity. Any ethnic or cultural group is more responsive to being recruited as volunteers if at least one member of their group is already actively engaged in a specific voluntary capacity.





APPENDIX D OUT-OF-PROVINCE CONTEXT





Volunteer Alberta spoke to various administrators, fire chiefs and/ or office personal responsible for fire safety efforts from North American communities outside of Alberta, and/ or drew from their web resources to provide context to our survey. The following umbrella groups or community fire departments were used for this context:

- Cariboo Region, British Columbia
- Greenie Lake, British Columbia
- Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs
- Fire Chiefs' Association of British Columbia
- Buffalo, Kansas
- Overland, Kansas
- Banksville Independent, New York
- Baldwin, New York
- Sierra Madre, California

