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BUILDING
COMMUNITY SUPPORT
FOR EMERGENCY SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

A GUIDEBOOK FOR FIRE AND EMS ORGANIZATIONS

(10/19)

Building Community Support
for
Emergency Service Organizations

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This manual reaffirms three facts.

First, emergency service providers have an important and interesting history consisting of an essential mission, generosity, dedication, sacrifice and often bravery.

Second, combination emergency service providers, with a little guidance and a few tools, can tell their story in a compelling way.

And **third,** Americans are genuinely interested in hearing that story, understanding it and knowing how they can help their local member and combination department.

This original manual contains advice they received as they took a hard look at their need to tell their stories, planned and then implemented community relations programs. But, even more important than the advice they received, this manual includes the lessons they learned and then shared with us as these departments launched and evaluated their respective programs. And so we thank the men and women who worked so hard, made so much happen and taught us much about member Emergency Service Organizations and community relations. **They are:**

- **Chief Bill Bondshu** of the Mariposa, California, Public Utility District Fire Department
- **Chief Larry Cochran, President Paul Hymel, Secretary Doyle Veneralla and Treasurer Jeff Gohd** of the St. Rose, Louisiana, Member Fire Department
- **District Commissioners Lewis Conley and Tom Baxter, Chief Art Treon and President Charles Prendergast** of the Town Bank, New Jersey, Member Fire Company
- **Chief Terry Freed** of the Aspers, Pennsylvania, Fire Company
- **Chief Bill Jacobs and Captain Jay Johnson** of the Arendtsville, Pennsylvania, Fire Department
- **Deputy Chief Alan Headley** of Cowlitz 2 Fire and Rescue of Kelso, Washington
- **Chief Todd Martin** of the Heidlersburg, Pennsylvania, Fire Company
- **Chief Ron Parr** of the Buchanan Valley, Pennsylvania, Fire Department
- **Chief James Shenk and Beth Shenk** of the Biglerville, Pennsylvania, Fire Department
- **Chief David Taylor and EMS Captain Jeff Taylor** of the Bendersville, Pennsylvania, Fire Company
- **Chief Ken Weigle** of the York Springs, Pennsylvania, Member Fire Department
- **Captain Dawn Williams** of the Cashtown, Pennsylvania, Fire Department
- **Chief Goebel “Junior” Williams, Administrative Officer Bill Hertel, EMS Coordinator Becky Faber and Captain Craig Donaldson** of the Hamilton Township, Ohio, Division of Fire and Emergency Services
- **Chief Barry Wininger, Assistant Chief Ed Wininger, Safety Officer James Merritt and Fire Safety Educator Father John Hall** of the French Lick, Indiana, Fire Department
- **Chief Dennis Rubin** of the Upper Merion, Pennsylvania FIre & EMS Department
- **Chief Bob Drennen** of the Middletown Township, Pennsylvania, Emergency Management Department
- **Chief Daniel B.C. Gardiner (ret.)** of the Fairfield, Connecticut, Fire Department

We also are indebted to two Emergency Service Organizations’ officers whose excellent work in community relations helped in the earliest days of this program. They are **Chief James Davis** of the Woodinville, Washington, Fire and Life Safety District, and **Chief Paul Barth** of the McMahan Fire Protection District in Jefferson County, Kentucky.

They had the inspiration to help member Emergency Service Organizations tell their story. It should come as no surprise that the idea, much of the guidance and all of the funds to see it through came from **Glatfelter Insurance Group Chairman Art Glatfelter and his colleagues— President H. Lee Bainbridge, VFIS past President Louis Klein, former VFIS Director of Client Education Ray Hawkins** and the excellent team of regional managers and directors at VFIS. Why did they do it? Because they care about the future of member Emergency Service Organizations and this was the right thing to do.

Introduction

Imagine the people of a small town who appreciate their Emergency Service Organization so much that:

- Bond issues benefiting the department routinely pass with 70 percent of the vote.
- The department has no trouble recruiting members who are dedicated, physically fit and well suited for the demands of member firefighting.
- They invite firefighters to help address all of the problems of the community—virtually everything from teen pregnancy to traffic accidents.
- Civic clubs, Eagle Scouts, senior citizens centers, schools and charities are actively involved in fire and injury prevention activities.
- Local newspaper reporters help evaluate candidates for fire officer.
- Relations with the local police department are so good that a community relations officer for the police department shares fire department offices.
- Fire inspections are welcomed by most local businesses.
- When the department planned an “earthquake survival” course for 150 people, 450 showed up.
- Public praise routinely appears in news outlets and social media.

The residents of Woodinville, Washington, feel that way about their fire department. And they should. Over the past decade, the department has worked hard to build strong, positive working relationships with the families, businesses and institutions in this Seattle suburb of about 46,000 people.

Woodinville Fire Department is a combination department. About two-thirds of the department’s 92 slots are filled with union personnel, and the remainder are member positions. All firefighters are expected to meet the same high standards. There is a waiting list to fill both career and member jobs in the department.

People just want to be a part of the Woodinville Fire Department. Woodinville firefighters conduct their daily fitness training with school children, install smoke alarms (donated by a local charity) in senior citizens’ homes, develop fire prevention messages with high school drama classes, and regularly consult a citizen advisory committee to make sure that safety and health needs are being met. If something needs to be done, firefighters pitch in.

Chief Jim Davis says it took about eight years to make the transition to a department that takes its “customers” (that’s what he calls the public) seriously.

Is the Chief satisfied? No. Recently, the department commissioned a survey of its firefighters and identified some internal communications problems that needed to be resolved. The department then surveyed the community to identify issues in need of attention.

Your department’s situation may differ greatly from Woodinville’s. And what that department has accomplished may be “pie in the sky” for some other departments. But developing an effective community relations program is not as hard as you might think at first. In fact, it is easier than it looks.

There are some 36,000 counties, cities, towns, villages and townships in the United States, and about as many Emergency Service Organizations. Each one is different, with its own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, problems and needs.

Not every department can or will achieve all that has been accomplished in Woodinville. But every department has reason to try to reach this level of service.

Certainly, every department needs the support of its community to protect lives and property. But, even more fundamentally, every department must figure out ways to survive: by having enough people and enough money to ensure public safety.

Chances are, about this point you are saying, “The problem is, we have a unique situation here ... what they do not understand is ... the people here will never go for it ... we’ve tried all of that and it didn’t work.”

Well, we heard those excuses and more from departments in seven states that participated in a test of this manual. Guess what? When emergency service organizations tackle a job, the job gets done. It was not easy. Not everything worked. Not everyone in the community agreed to help. But every department that made an honest effort saw some real benefits.

You are reading this manual because you recognize the need to work more closely with your community and are willing to make the effort to do the job right.

With the help of this manual, members of your department will learn how to plan and implement an effective community relations program capable of tackling such challenges as:

- Attracting financial support;
- Enlisting the public in fire prevention activities;
- Increasing your department’s voice in government actions affecting the department and life safety; and
- Recruiting and retaining members. This program does not deal specifically with recruitment and retention problems. However, many departments find that if they do what it takes to improve their image with the community, one result is an increase in people who want to join a great organization. Another result is an increase in morale and teamwork among existing department members, leading to higher retention rates.

VFIS is providing these training materials as its gift to the fire service. All we ask from you, and your department, are two things in return:

First, know that if you try, you can succeed. This manual does not do the work for you—but it will help you develop the skills to do a great job. And second, once your program is really humming, we will want your help in teaching other departments how it’s done.

If we can count on you to help a few departments, and then they each help a few, and then each of them help a few, well, maybe some day we will be able to help all of America’s member and combination emergency service organizations to maintain the support needed to stay in businesses.

The Community Relations Team

Community relations is a big job; too big to tackle by yourself. This section deals with the jobs that need to be done, and choosing the people you need to help make sure the jobs get done. Of course, it starts with you. As project leader, you are responsible for:

- Recruiting people for your community relations team;
- Drafting and obtaining support for your department's first community relations plan;
- Coordinating training and assignments for the team; and
- Reporting to your department on the program's progress and needs.

Members of your team, including you, will be responsible for:

- Writing media releases, letters, speeches, reports and other documents;
- Conducting meetings with local business leaders, politicians, journalists and others in your community whose support is essential;
- Presentations to community groups; and
- Planning and conducting special department/community events.
- Using a variety of social media to communicate department activities

You will need at least two other members of your team to get started. You might find them within the department. Look for people who are willing to devote a few hours a week to community relations. Look for people whom you trust to get the job done, who have the enthusiasm and motivation to do a good job, and who have the best interests of the department at heart. Try to assemble a group that, as a team, represents a range of talents and skills, such as public speaking, writing, organizing, designing, computer work, etc. No one person needs to be able to do everything well, just one or two skills each. Consider members of the department with such skills, that no longer enter hot zone situations

Do not necessarily limit yourself to people within the department. Perhaps someone out there in the community does not want to fight fires but would be willing to help as a writer, a speaker or a typist. Look at stay-at-home moms or dads who might have some time available to help; or a retired schoolteacher who has good writing and thinking skills to contribute. Perhaps a high school or college student can get school credit for helping a few hours a week to help the department.

Once you have assembled your team which, depending on the particular project you are working on. You may want to augment with other people later on, you are ready to get started.

Getting Started

As you read through this manual, you and your team will learn the basic skills you will need to organize and run a great community relations program for your department.

If you already have some of these skills, terrific. If you do not, don't worry. Take it a chapter at a time. Don't try to become a community relations expert over night.

Each month or so, for the next several months, read a new chapter and learn a new skill. Once you have learned it, practice it. Incorporate the skill into your department's community relations program. Then work on the next skill. That way, you can build your overall program a step at a time.

For a rough idea of how it can work, see the month-by-month plan at the end of this chapter.

This manual follows a systematic plan that can be read in the order the chapters appear, or out of sequence as a particular skill is needed.

First, you should read the chapter on "Planning" to learn how to plan and keep track of the overall community relations program.

As your next project, it may be useful to have an information packet that describes things like the services of the department, its history, how the department is funded, what things cost, and whom people can call for more information. The elements of an information packet are covered in the chapter called, quite appropriately, "Putting Together a Emergency Service Organization Information Packet."

Then, you may want to learn how to write media releases and discuss other ways of obtaining positive media coverage for your department. For that, read the chapter called "Getting Effective/Positive Media Coverage."

Next, you may wish to write and practice a sppresentation about your department for use with groups like the local Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, PTAs, or the Chamber of Commerce. Read the chapter called "Making Presentations."

Once you're comfortable with presentation development, you may want to plan a special event or two: perhaps an open house for Fire Prevention Week or a seminar for member recruitment. That's covered in the chapter called "Conducting Special Events."

Next, it may be time to work on buying that new pumper or a fire safety trailer. Learn about approaching local businesses to contribute money and other resources to the department in the chapter called "Obtaining Resources."

Are the local political campaigns starting up? You may want to look over the chapter on "Becoming Politically Active."

Eventually, you'll cover all the skills. The order may vary depending on what your department needs most, or must respond to, at any given time.

Keeping "The Family" Informed

Anytime you embark on a new program or effort, and especially a community relations program, it is important to make sure that the Emergency Service Organization "family" is kept informed and involved from the very beginning.

So, before you take your message out to the community, and periodically after that, talk about what you are doing with department members, officers and your board of trustees or commissioners, if you have one. Ask them for advice. Ask them if they would like to help out with the program. Ask them for feedback on presentations and materials.

Make it clear that those members of the department, who are not directly active in community relations activities, will still be expected to be supportive of the effort, and to do their part to represent the department as professionally as possible. Members should be encouraged to accept those people into their department who have joined the organization to help out with the program in ways that do not involve emergency response. The attitude that “you’re not a member of this department unless you are fighting fires,” has no place in any department with a community relations program. Chief Larry Cochran of the St. Rose Fire Department in Louisiana puts it well when he says, “We welcome with open arms anybody who has anything to contribute to our department, and we will find a role for them no matter what they are capable of doing.”

Ultimately, the more the department “family” knows about what is going on, the more interested and supportive they will be of the effort, especially when the positive media coverage, contributions and new members start coming in as a result. Good community relations does wonders for department morale.

Downsides? Not Necessarily

Sound like a lot of work? It depends on you and your community relations team. Doing a little is better than doing nothing at all. The more you put into this program, the more you and your department, and ultimately your community, will benefit. Remember step by step.

On occasion, some of the departments that participated in the pilot program for this project discovered that undertaking a department community relations program did not always result in immediate positive results. In fact, at times the interim results were what some might consider downright undesirable, though you should look for these possibilities. Be aware of how to turn the “downsides” into “upsides.” For example:

- **Resentment from neighboring departments**. If your department begins to improve its own image and standing within the community, neighboring departments could perceive what you are doing as showing off, or one-upmanship.

Fire chiefs who have encountered this situation tell us they are often successful in improving their relationship with neighboring departments by working together on some projects, and teaching them community relations skills so that they can be successful. The eight member Emergency Service Organizations that make up the Upper Adams County Chiefs Association in Pennsylvania, decided that none of them could succeed individually unless they worked as a team, to tell their story to the community. Emergency Service Organizations that are generous in sharing their knowledge with neighboring departments find that resentment eventually turns into respect.

- **Being in a fishbowl**. If you are seeking more media coverage, or asking the community to become more aware of the department, you open yourself up to the possibility that some of the attention you get will be negative.

But don't kid yourself into thinking that a negative story in the paper or a town council member who is critical of the department happened because of your community relations efforts. Good community relations cannot make up for poor management, illegal behaviors or unsafe behaviors on the emergency scene.

Your new community relations activities, however, will have increased your chances of being in a much better position to respond to negative events because you will have developed alliances with reporters, business people, residents and other groups that could come to your rescue if needed.

- **Doing community relations right could mean more work for some people**. Accept the fact that, especially in the early going, you and your community relations team will have to spend some time on planning and carrying out your program. It won't happen without that effort.

The key is to make sure that the activities to which you are devoting the time and effort are helping to fulfill the mission of your department. If it doesn't make sense, don't waste your time on it. If it does make sense, give it all you've got. Once some projects are up and running, they may take a lot less time to maintain.

Given these so-called "downsides," none of the pilot departments regretted making the effort to improve their image within their community. The "upsides," as you will find when you do it yourself, will tip the scale overwhelmingly to the positive results. Go for it!

A Sample Month-by-Month Plan

In these months, you will learn...		So that you can build your departments community relations programs by...									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Writing a community relations plan		Keeping track of what how you are doing									
		Writing media releases, talking to reporters		Getting positive media coverage							
			Writing and making presentations		Showing your neighbors what it means to be a firefighter						
				Organization and running special events		Keeping key elected and appointed officials informed of and involved in department activities					
					Becoming politically active		Keeping key elected and appointed officials informed of and involved in department activities				
						Obtaining funding and other resources from local businesses		Encouraging your neighbors to support your department			

1: Planning

One way or another, everyone plans. Some plans are informal and pretty loosely defined. Others are formal and detailed.

The more people you have doing the same thing, especially if that thing is important, the more you need a well developed written plan.

Gather together your core community relations team to put together the basic plan. Also, involve those individuals, such as department officers, who you think should be involved in the planning process.

Here is a question with no clear answer: Should you involve people who are critical of your department? If someone is critical but constructive, the answer is yes. Listen with an open mind and heart. It is probably not wise to include those who are simply bitter and destructive. They have no incentive to help you do better, life is too short, and nothing you do or say will change their mind.

A Few Basic Questions

Every plan needs to answer a few questions:

1. *What* is going on now between your community and the department?
This is your starting point and it will take some time, and many of the right people, to take a long, hard, honest look at this question. Businesses sometimes call this the “situational analysis.”

At the end of this chapter is a list of questions we asked the departments in our program. Rarely did we get through all of them, but we always found a few important facts that told us what needed the most attention and which situations presented the greatest opportunities.

In some cases, the answers were obvious. For example, in two of our departments, members knew they had to overcome questions about how prior chiefs had spent money. Both departments had to regain voter support of their budgets. In other departments, the big question was attracting members. In yet others, the pressing challenge was letting the community know the department’s story because, until that was done, fundraising was impossible.

During the situational analysis, one department learned that one of its members lived next door to the editor of the local paper. Another realized that the local teachers association was dealing with similar budget issues and might be open to some joint projects. Maybe it’s the senior citizens who need to be reached most in your community, or perhaps the neighborhood associations can be educated.

2. *What* do you hope to achieve as a result of all your hard work?
Call it an *objective,* a *goal* or a *mission*—it does not really matter, except that it is easier if everyone agrees on a word. You need to write down a few sentences that describe what you want to achieve.

It only makes sense that each sentence, we will call them goals, describes something that is *desirable, achievable* and *measurable* (which means that you will know when you have achieved it).

Sometimes people write goals like this: *Media or online coverage of the department in February.*

Sorry, no good.

Media coverage may be *achievable* and it certainly is *measurable,* but there is a chance it will not be *desirable.* A goal has to describe something that will benefit you.

Remember the old saying, “Be careful what you ask for.” Planning begins with knowing what you need.

Here are some examples of goals:

- 10 new member recruits in annually.
- $5,000 raised from local businesses in November.
- 500 school children reached with fire safety messages per month.

No one ever won a 100-yard dash in 50 yards, but runners always check their times at various points of a race. Set benchmarks along the way.

If you have a goal of $5,000 by November, you may want to set a benchmark of $1,000 by March, $2,000 by June, and $4,000 by September. Benchmarks help keep you focused and let you know how you are doing along the way.

3. *How* are you going to do it?

We can call these statements—*strategies.* They describe generally *what* you plan to do or say. Often they explain *why* you intend to do something. You need at least one *strategy* for every *goal*, but since there is usually more than one way to attack a fire, one goal may have several corresponding strategies.

Here are some strategies:

- ***Conduct*** open houses so that we can demonstrate home fire safety techniques.
- ***Meet*** with the leadership of the local media to help them understand why we need a new pumper.
- ***Emphasize*** the various ways people can help the department.
- Note that these strategies begin with a verb, because they are the *actions* you will take to achieve your goals.

4. Then ... *who* is going to do *what,* and *when* are they going to do it?

You know what you want to achieve and you have said roughly how you are going to do it. Now for the nuts and bolts.

Let us say that your *goal* is to obtain favorable media coverage of the many ways your department serves your community, and your strategy is to communicate regularly with local reporters to get the message across. You do not want to put all of your eggs in one basket, so you write down several ways you plan to reach reporters. Each separate approach is a tactic. Some examples:

- Schedule monthly briefings of reporters by the chief. Each briefing should cover a different department service.
- Invite reporters to undergo limited training at the fire school; It doesn’t have to be live fire training.
- Distribute monthly media press releases.
- After major incidents, brief reporters on how each department service contributed to public safety.

Tactics usually contain more detail than goals and strategies. For each tactic you must answer three questions: *What* needs to be done? *Who* is going to do it? *When* are they going to do it?

Firefighters always hope for the best, but plan for the worst. In making assignments, make sure you have enough people helping and absolutely avoid the situation where “good old Marty, who always does everything,” ends up with all of the work again. Not fair. No good.

Chief Bill Bondshu of the Mariposa Public Utility District Fire Department in California knew he did not have enough personnel to run his program, so he asked for help from the local retired senior citizen community. He sent out the following ad with the town's water bill one month:

How To Fight Fires With Technology

It takes all kinds of people doing all kinds of things to prevent and fight fires.

Your fire department, the Mariposa Public Utility District Fire Department, needs members to help with our new community relations program.

- **If you know how, or would like to learn how, to write press releases, create and give speeches, organize special events, take photos, design, draw, run a computer, or put any skill you may have to good use ...**
- **If you are a teacher, journalist, artist, secretary, student or salesperson ...**
- **Whether you are retired, a student, or working full-time ...**
- **Whether you have a few hours a day or a few hours a month ...**

We need your help to let our community know more about our department, about fire prevention and about membering. Your participation will help you earn Associate Member status in our Emergency Service Organization.

CALL TODAY FOR MORE INFORMATION!

Chief Bill Bondshu
Mariposa Public Utility District
Fire Department
(Phone number)
••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••

Twelve people, many of them with the skills Chief Bondshu needed, responded.

Your Planning Checklist

- Do you know what is going on between your department and your community?
- Do you know which of your challenges is most in need of a solution? What is your goal? Is it something you truly want? Can you achieve it? Will you know when you do achieve it?
- Do you know what you need to do to get the job done? Do you have strategies?
- Do you know how you are going to do it? Do you know who is going to do what, when they are going to do it and in what order?

Who does what and when do they do it? One way of writing it all down			
Action	**Responsibility**	**Deadline**	**Status**
Write down major points for media releases	Bob	March 3	Complete
Pull together statistics to support each point	Susan and Ted	March 9	Mostly done. Don't have good numbers to support point two. Need to drop it.
Draft media release	Bob	March 12	
Get the Chief's okay	Bob, Lt. Franks, and Chief Smith	March 13	
Mail the release to the local media	Ted	March 14	

Some Planning Tips

1. Don't get carried away. Plan what you can do—nothing more.

2. Keep your eye on the ball. If some activity doesn't help you achieve your goal, should you be doing it?

3. Involve your team when you write your plan. People are more willing to help if they've had a say in the assignments.

Photocopy, cut out and stick it on your wall.

The response was so unexpected, he had a hard time finding jobs for them all, at first! Surely it is a problem more fire chiefs would like to have. As your program starts to move, be flexible. You would not dream of having just one way to fight a fire. Same here. As you get into the project, new facts and ideas will emerge. Stay focused on your goal, but stay fresh to new thinking.

A few months into the process, actively look for new ideas. Several of our pilot departments went to local business leaders and asked for independent assessments of how the program was going. Not only did they get some good thoughts, but they involved new and talented people.

The Planning Check List in this chapter can help you decide what needs to be done and when. It also contains a few friendly tips for getting the job done.

Check out the chart on the previous page. It shows you one way to write it all down in an organized way.

Finally, check out the sample “Community Relations Planner” at the end of this chapter. It summarizes an entire years worth of activities and may even give you some ideas for your program.

Planning Needs Assessment

One of the first steps in planning a emergency service organization community relations program is to take a good, hard look at current and future needs and situations that affect department operations. Though every department’s situation is different, we have found that the areas where fire departments, and member fire department’s in particular, tend to have the most community relations-type problems are in the areas of, to put it bluntly, money and people.

Following is a series of questions to provide guidance about the types of issues your community relations team should ask themselves as a way to start defining the challenges and opportunities the community relations program should address. The questions are grouped into three categories: 1) availability of resources, 2) internal department relationships and needs, and 3) external department relationships. If it helps, write the answers down. Spend more time exploring those areas that present the greatest challenges or opportunities for your department. Finally, do not hesitate to come up with additional questions or topic areas that may get at situations specific to your department.

Availability of Resources—financial and other:

- Where does the department’s budget come from? Break out the different sources (taxes, fees for service, donations, grants, etc.)
- What is the process for getting your budget approved? Have you had problems getting approval? If so, do you know why?
- If you receive grants—from where? For what purpose? Who writes the applications? Are you satisfied with the amount of grant money you are getting?
- Do you have organized fund drives? Do you conduct them by yourself or with other groups? Do you mail out solicitations, go door-to-door, make phone calls? Have your efforts been successful, or have they been more effort than they are worth?
- Do you have a program—an organized set of activities managed by an accountable person—for seeking resources? If so, does it seem to work? More specifically: what is done, by whom, how often, when, with what results? How long has it been in operation?
- If you do not have a program: How does the department go after resources? Who decides when, whom to approach, where, how much/what to ask for?
- How much funding is needed by the department this year to do everything you need/want to do? How about next year? Do you have an itemized budget request, with justifications?

- Does written justification exist for each new, major expenditure?
- Consider people and organizations in the community who have contributed to the department. How much do they give? How often do they give? Why do they give?
- Consider people and organizations in the community who say “no” to your requests for funding or resources. Why did they say no? Did they contribute in the past? If so, why did they stop?
- Consider others in the community who also raise money. Are they competitors for the same money and other resources as you? What do they do to raise their money? When do they do it? Are they successful?
- Consider those who may control or regulate department fund-raising, such as the Community’s Council, Manager, Mayor or Department Board. Are they supportive of your efforts? If not, why not? What laws and regulations apply to department fund-raising or use of contributions? Are there any other policies or guidelines you are required or urged to follow?
- Consider those who may oppose department seeking additional resources, e.g., taxpayer groups, former disgruntled firefighters, other local government officials who may compete for local dollars. Do these exist? If so, who are they and why do they oppose your efforts? How effective are they? Are there particular issues or personalities in need of attention? Are their criticisms valid? If so, how? Are they just poorly informed?

Internal department relationships and needs— including recruiting and retention:

- How many members are needed for you to be effective as a department? How many new members are needed to replace the typical loss of members in a year? What is the turnover rate of the department?
- How many members will you need to accommodate community growth next year? How about five years from now?
- Does the department have any policies, guidelines, standards or other rules which, in any way, exclude persons from membering?
- Is there a seasonal join/drop-out pattern?
- Consider **your newest recruits.** How old are they? What is their family background (for example, are they children of firefighters? Victims of fires?) What education levels and occupations do they have? Did they join with friends? If so, who and how many?
- Have you asked why they joined? If so, what did they say? Was there anything that almost discouraged them from joining? What do they expect to get out of the experience of being a member of the department? What concerns them most about membering—danger, amount of time?
- Do they participate in other community groups? If so, which ones and for how long?
- Are they new to the community, or have they been around awhile?
- Consider **people who recently left the department.** Who are they—age, occupation, family background—are they new to the community?
- How long did they serve?
- Did you ask them why they left the department? If so, why? If their leaving was related to time commitments, which department activities competed the most with their other responsibilities? Which activities were the least satisfying and interesting? Which activities will they miss most?
- When they joined, did they join as part of a group? If so, did others in the group drop out at about the same time? If not, was the individual ever accepted by others in the department? Does the department have “cliques” or other mechanisms that tend to exclude some people?
- Where do drop-outs go afterward? Do they stay in the area? Do they remain in the fire service somewhere else?

- Does the department have a recruiting program—an organized set of activities managed by an accountable person? If so, does it seem to work? More specifically: what is done, by whom, how often, when, with what results? How long has it been in operation?
- What do you say to potential members? What is your "hook" for getting them in the door, getting them to sign up?
- If you do not have a formal recruiting program: How does the department aquire members? Who decides when, whom to approach, where to advertise, how many are needed?
- Which kinds of people do you regard as your best prospects? What kind of people do you want most or want the least ?
- What is the reputation of the department, both within the department and within the community?
- Are there negative factions within the department that undermine unity among department members? If so, what kinds of things are being said and done?

Relationships with others in the community:

Following is a list of different groups within a typical community. For each, describe what kind of relationship, if any, you (as department members) have:

- Journalists, e.g., social media, newspaper, radio, TV reporters, editors, owners and social media
- Businesses and local business groups, e.g., Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Kiwanis, Jaycees, etc.
- Elected officials
- Other politicians, e.g., party workers
- Appointed government officials, e.g., town clerk, police chief, etc.
- School officials, teachers
- Neighborhood associations
- Ex-firefighters
- Firefighters from other communities who live in your community
- Firefighters in your department

Then ... for each of the above groups for which you have some relationship:

1. What was your best recent (within the last two years) experience?
2. What was your worst recent experience?
3. To whom, in the group, would you turn to first if you had a problem they might help you with? Why?
4. Whom would you never ask for help? Why?
5. Has the department recently provided emergency services to any of them?

Measuring Results

An effective plan will help you measure results. But planning itself needs to be evaluated from time to time.

Ask yourself:

- Were your starting assumptions correct?
- Were your goals realistic? Were they too hard or too easy to achieve?
- Was the plan logical and realistic? Did you write down the right steps in the right sequence? Did you forget some steps? Did you leave enough time for each step?
- Did people understand and pay attention to the plan once it was written? Did your team consult the plan regularly or did it sit on a shelf collecting dust?
- Did it work? Did you get the results that you wanted?

Sample Program

Community Relations Planner

Month/Theme	Media Release	Special Event	Meetings
January New Year's Resolution – be a volunteer	Feature on a volunteer: describe role, training, responsibility and importance	Volunteer recruitment open house	Briefings of five local business leaders on why it is important to allow employees to volunteer
February We are watching over your loved ones	The importance of smoke detectors	Encourage "special smoke alarm sale: by local retailers	Visit homes of senior and disabled citizens to install free detectors
March Lot of ways to fight fires	All of the roles of volunteers can play in the department; and specific needs within the department	Presentation on various volunteer department roles to local civic clubs	Interviews with prospective volunteer recruits
April Volunteer firefighter – the great tax	What it would cost to replace the volunteer department	Launch annual fund drive	Briefings of local elected and business officials on the importance of maintaining the volunteer department
May Spring cleaning	Checklist for safer homes	Offer of free home fire safety inspections by volunteers	
June Graduate to volunteering	The need for more volunteers	Volunteer recruitment open house	Meetings with prospects
July and August	None	None	None
September Our heroes	Feature on business that support the department	Dinner at the fire house for local business leaders	One on one meetings with business leaders not yet involved
October Fire Prevention Month	1. Fire incident data for the first nine months of the year 2. Focus on Fire Prevention theme from NFPA	Presentations to local schools and senior centers	
November and December Volunteering: Our gift to the community	Year-end review of the Volunteer department's contributions ot he community	Department Holiday Party with supporters invited	Install free smoke alarms in senior citizens' homes

2: Putting Together a Fire Department Information Packet

Firefighters and EMS personnel know the importance of having the right tools for the right job, and they know the importance of completing every job they tackle.

When it comes to tackling the job of community relations, an information packet about the Emergency Service Organization is nothing less than the right tool for the right job. It is essential in completing the community relations job.

What is an Information Packet?

Over the following pages we will show you what an information packet is. It contains well-organized, easy-to-understand, short answers to the questions people are likely to ask about your department (and the kind of information you'd like them to know): What do you do? Who are you? What do you cost me? What is that stuff you wear? Do you need all of those emergency vehicles? How do you know what to do? How can I help?

We want you to answer those kinds of questions in presentations, meetings and in the local news media. But even your most interested audience will forget details, and that is where information packets come in.

An information packet is something you hand to people after you have told them your story. It is something they can refer to, it is something they can share with others, it is something that may encourage them to call you with more questions or an offer of help. It is a reminder and a reference source. It is important for you to also post this information on your department website and social media sites.

Who appreciates them?

Let us start with journalists. Picture, and it shouldn't be hard, a major house fire in the middle of the night. A reporter shows up late, gets the basic facts from you and has to run back to their office to write the story for the morning's paper or post it on the 6 AM newscast. The reporter's editor wants the reporter to write three pages and they badly need more information. So, they turn to the information packet you provided them a month ago and is able to tell the readers about the equipment that responded and the number of fires you fought last year. Not only did you help by anticipating the reporter's need, but they didn't wake you up at 4 a.m. to ask more questions.

Another example: You've just met with the vice president of the local department store, who seemed impressed by your presentation. You have asked for a contribution and left an information packet behind. The next afternoon, the vice president meets with the store's president, recommends a contribution and is asked a few tough questions. To convince the boss, the vice president needs more information. Where does the vice president turn?

The packet has the facts the boss needs.

Want more examples? Easy. How about local officials arguing over competing budget needs? How about local civic club members deciding which service project to select? How about homeowners who have just suffered a fire and are genuinely interested in knowing more about you? How about potential new recruits? How about new residents to the community (in one of our pilot communities, the Welcome Wagon gave out Emergency Service Organization information)? How about members of your own department, who themselves may not have the "big picture" view of all that the department is and does?

Look at an information packet as the exclamation point at the end of a sentence. It makes you think about the sentence and says “this is important.”

We do not recommend that you mail an information packet to every resident in your town. That would be like putting the exclamation point at the beginning of the sentence before you’ve said anything; a waste of money.

But you will find that packets are the right tool for many of the community relations jobs you will tackle. Collect the pages together into a folder with pockets, and put a copy, in fact, put 50 copies, in your tool box. You will use them.

What to Include in an Information Packet

The following pages provide examples of the kind of things that can be included in a Emergency Service Organization information packet. Each fact sheet should be only a page or two long. Feel free to add to or subtract from this list to meet your own needs:

- **A letter from the chief** (or collectively, from the members of the Emergency Service Organization) to the reader. Print it out on department letterhead (if you don’t have official department letterhead, perhaps you can make up something attractive on the computer).
- **A history of the Department.** Try to show in what ways the department has developed from and is a part of the community. Show how the department grew as the town grew.
- **“Who we are”** a page that describes in general terms who the members of the department are and what they do both for the department and when they are not on duty. When describing what you do, show how a member’s average week breaks out: eat, sleep, family activities, job training, respond to emergencies, fill out paperwork, call bingo, maintain apparatus and equipment. You may scare some folks away from membering, but people need to know how very much you contribute, and that it is more than just responding to calls.
- **“What we do”** describes the services of the department. People often are not aware that many fire departments not only respond to fires, but also provide emergency medical and rescue services, not to mention other non-traditional services like youth counseling and recreation programs.

  Also, think about including information that shows how all responses, or certain types of responses, have increased over the last few years. This helps you to make a case about the department’s need for additional resources to keep pace with increased need.
- **“How we know what to do”** deals with the training that is required of every emergency responder. Few people know how much and how often firefighters train, and the different skills that must be learned. You also may want to mention costs associated with training, including charges for course materials, as well as for tuition, travel and lodging.
- **“How we get to the scene”** deals with response times and the different vehicles used by the department to respond based on the type of incident. Have a standard of response cover - response time (define it) is “less than 6 minutes” 90% of the time..

  When explaining how you get to emergencies, you may want to explain, if this is the case, that the department allows firefighters to go to the scene directly from home or work and how this policy helps response times. Your neighbors will appreciate the details.

  Most important, emphasize the concept of arriving at the scene safely. Especially in an emergency, people value safety, and firefighters must set the right example.
- **“What we wear to work”** gives the details about personal protective clothing and equipment. Do not pass up the opportunity to tell people how much each item costs, and provide the total cost for outfitting a firefighter. Consider adding a drawing or photograph of a firefighter in full turnout gear, with the parts labeled.

- **“Money: what we spend it on, where we get it”** provides key information about the emergency service organization’s budget and expenses. Tables, charts and graphs can be very useful tools when presenting this information. The key is not to provide pages of numbers, but rather to present the facts in a way that the average person can relate to them. Comparing a fire department’s annual budget to a typical household budget for your area is one way to do this.

  If your department has saved additional money for the community, by entering into group purchasing agreements or equipment sharing (auto-aid) arrangements, by purchasing used equipment and apparatus, or by building the new station with donated labor and materials, make special note of it on this fact sheet.

  Another idea is to break down annual fire department operations into a cost-per-person or per-household within your service area. Again, this helps put the cost of running the department into perspective and helps people to see what a bargain they are getting. Compare the per-household cost of running the fire department (for example, $8 per household per month) to the cost of a common entertainment item—such as cable TV, a movie, a large pizza.

  If you want to make a dramatic statement about the savings of a member or combination department to a community, compare it to what it would cost for an all-career department providing the same level of protection. Show people how their taxes would increase if they had to support a fully paid department.

- **“How you can help”** is a key piece that describes the many ways in which people can help the department. If your department provides benefits, such as member status, pension, length-of-service awards or workers’ compensation, mention these things as well.

  Also, encourage people to call the department if they want to contribute a talent or skill not listed on the fact sheet, as long as someone has something to contribute, you can figure out a way to use them.

- **“How you can get more information about us”** provides the list of key contact people and their phone numbers. We suggest organizing it by the kind of questions people might have about the department (regarding a specific fire, how to join the department, fire prevention, fundraising, etc.). Notes on when each contact person is easiest to reach is a nice touch and especially useful if they are members and not always reachable at the station. Put your website address everywhere!

  On that note, it might be useful to invest in an answering machine for the non-emergency number of the department, especially if there are times when nobody is around to answer the phone. Also, put a telephone message pad next to the phone, and dedicate a section of a bulletin board for posting phone messages. Even more frustrating than not being able to leave a message for someone is leaving a message that does not get delivered. Do not let it happen!

- **“Information on website and social media”** It is important to include information about how to access your web page and social media. information should be updated on a regular basis. PUT YOUR WEB SITE EVERYWHERE!

Final Thoughts about Information Packets

We have provided the following samples to help you develop your own information packet and, we hope, improve on our examples. When you produce your own packet, keep it direct, simple and free of fire service jargon. Make it easy to use and presentable. Nothing says more about your department than clean, accurate work.

Where possible, use illustrations, photos, charts and graphs to make the point. Show a firefighter in turnout gear. Show the apparatus you use or maybe a firefighter washing a vehicle. Make a piechart to show how a firefighter spends a typical day. Create a bar chart to show the increase in emergency medical calls over the last five years. It is worth learning how to make charts and graphs on the computer, or finding someone who knows how. You know what they say—a picture can be worth a thousand words.

Make it as easy as possible for people to get more information. At the bottom of each page of the packet, put a phone number or email for people to contact for more information. List cell phone numbers if you have them. Wherever appropriate, explain that government agencies and insurance companies require that you do and buy certain things. For example, insurance rating bureaus require departments to have certain pieces of apparatus and to meet certain standards. Complying with these requirements allow a department to keep the community's insurance rating down, which saves residents and businesses money on insurance premiums.

You may want to tailor the contents or presentation of the information packet depending on your audience. For example, business leaders may require more information about the financial aspects of the Department than the average homeowner would.

Finally, more and more Emergency Service Organizations are developing "websites" on the Internet. Consider using the information packet material on your website—and all social media.

3: Effective Media Coverage

Media coverage is a double-edged sword. It can build public support or destroy the reputation of your department. Fire officials often complain that the media “only wants to know who got hurt in the fire,” or gives the department coverage “only when we make mistakes.”Or they have a problem with the unhappy department member who complains “off the record” to journalists about how an incident was covered, only to find that his “off the record” comments were quoted in the papers the next day. Sound familiar?

As a fire official, you do not have much choice but to deal with the media. Face it, what you do is newsworthy, that is, the public wants to know what the Emergency Service Organization is up to, and journalists intend to find out.

In other words, you are going to get media coverage anyway, so you may as well do what you can to help ensure that the things you want covered, are covered, in the positive way that you want them to be covered. This section of your manual provides guidance on dealing with representatives of all media, reporters, editors and columnists employed by newspapers, magazines, radio, internet and television stations.

Preparing to Deal with the Media

You already may be dealing with the media in your community. But even if you are, you may want to take a step back and prepare to deal with them on better terms.

1. Have a formal policy for dealing with the media.

Every department should have a written policy about who may represent the department in dealings with the news media, and when and where they may do it. In some departments, only the chief is allowed to deal with reporters. In others, it is the highest ranking official at the scene when there is an incident, and the chief at all other times. Some departments have a designated public information officer (PIO) whose main responsibility is to deal with members of the media, convey all official department communications and try to get positive press for the department.

Though one spokesperson per department is best to avoid confusion, you may want to consider assigning separate spokespersons for the emergency scene and administrative aspects of department operations. For example, the chief may be the main spokesperson for the emergency scene operations, but a separate public information officer can work through the administrative president of the department and deal with department community activities such as spaghetti dinners and open houses.

Whatever you decide your policy is, it is important that the department speak with a consistent voice. All individuals who have responsibilities as a department spokesperson should communicate with one another frequently and coordinate their messages. And anyone in the department who deals with the media should be prepared with some basic skills for being interviewed, covered later in this chapter of the manual.

Let the other members of the department know who is authorized to speak officially for the department. If non-authorized department members are contacted by the media, they should be instructed to refer the call to the department spokesperson. Your policy should also address social media.

2. Putting together a Emergency Service Organization information packet.

We deal with how to put together a Emergency Service Organization information packet in the chapter called, appropriately, “Putting Together a Emergency Service Organization Information Packet.” An information packet can help reporters to better understand the Emergency Service Organization, and demonstrates that the Emergency Service Organization wants to make their job easier.

Imagine: a reporter is sitting at his or her computer at 2 a.m., trying to meet a 2:30 deadline. They need to fill a column of space on “local news.” It is too late to call anyone for an interview, and they are getting desperate. Wait! They remember, there is an information packet on the Emergency Service Organization in the file. Retrieving it, they find a page that talks about how much it costs to outfit a firefighter with protective clothing. Perfect. In it goes, almost word-for-word.

Look at how many purposes were served by that information packet: First, the article in the paper later that day educates the public about how their contributions or tax dollars are helping to keep firefighters safe. Second, the Emergency Service Organization had significant influence over the positive publicity it received. Third, the reporter was grateful to the department for having given her that packet the month before. A win-win-win situation!

That information packet will come in handy to reporters again and again, not just when they are looking to fill space in the paper, but also when they are thinking about topics for their next big story, when they are doing research before a vote on the department’s budget, and when they want to write a companion story to go along with their coverage of your latest response. So do not pass up the opportunity to give them this information before they really need it. Keep it up to date, include a publication date on the document.

Getting to Know the Media, and Getting Them to Know You

As fire officials, you certainly have every opportunity to get to know the news media. Taking the time to get to know reporters, editors, columnists and other members of the media who cover your activities can have a two-fold benefit:

- You will be more likely to get positive coverage, because you will be creating more opportunities to convey positive messages about the department; and
- Even if an uncomplimentary story is about to hit the media, a reporter may be more likely to ask for your side of the story, or even hold up the story for an extra day to allow you to provide more information.

If you have never tried to build relationships with the media before, or if you would like to get to know them better, here are a few tips.

First, find out which reporters cover the department. If you do not know from the bylines on the newspaper articles, call the paper to find out which reporters cover local community news and events. Depending on the size of the paper and whether it is produced weekly or daily, the reporter assigned to cover your activities might be covering everything else for the paper too, or might cover just fire and police activities. One reporter might cover your department responses, while a different reporter for the same paper might cover your community relations events.

At a radio station, you will want to locate the news director or the public affairs director. At a TV station (don’t forget the local cable TV station), the news editor or assignment editor would be the ones to call.
Once you have identified the name and number of the person who covers emergency service organization stories, give the reporter a call to introduce yourself (ask if it is a good time to talk, when reporters are “on deadline” they can not be interrupted, and so they may ask you to call back later). Invite him or her to the station to share your information packet and begin the education and relationship-building process.

It can be as easy as it sounds. Commissioner Lew Conley of the Town Bank Volunteer Fire Company in Lower Township, New Jersey, had a great deal of success in increasing positive media coverage for the department simply by asking local reporters to work with the fire department as it embarked on its new community relations program.

Educating reporters is a continuing process: there is often a lot of turnover on newspaper staffs, and reporters get reassigned to different “beats.” So be prepared to educate new reporters often.

Here are some additional ideas for reaching out to and educating the media:

- Hold a Press Day, in which reporters are invited to a training session. Put them in easy to access locations and (closely supervised) guide them in putting out a fire—or explain to them what is going on as they observe firefighters putting out fires. Not only will the reporters gain understanding that will help them to cover incidents in the future; they might even write an article about their own training experience.
- If you have an extra pager or other electronic device to spare, lend it to a reporter who is assigned to cover department responses. That way, the reporter will know about the call as soon as you do, and will get a good head start on the story.
- Is your local cable TV station looking for interesting programming? Can you get local college students to help with video projects for free or at cost? The Fire Chiefs Association of Jefferson County, Kentucky, works with its local cable station and skilled members (including a local TV news personality) to produce a one-hour program that interviews the chiefs on public safety topics of local interest. Every time a new episode is produced, the station shows it on the air several times—and it is one of the highest-rated programs on the station.
- Invite reporters into the fire station to show them what a “day in the life” of a firefighter is like. If you do this, make sure that department members are doing the kind of things you would want a reporter to write about. For example, if the alarm does not ring, are department members keeping busy cleaning the station, maintaining equipment, conducting inspections and filling out reports? Or are they sitting around watching TV and eating?
- If your attempts to develop a relationship with a reporter do not result in good press, do not be discouraged. There tends to be high turnover among reporters, and the nemesis reporter may get reassigned. Be patient.
- Citizens Fire Academy, where adults learn the duties of fire and EMS personnel first hand.

Being Interviewed

Whether at the scene of a fire or in your office, the following “interview rules of the road” should keep you on course.

1. Make reporters aware of the names and phone numbers of the designated spokesperson(s) for the department.

Give the reporters and other media representatives who cover department activities a list of names and phone numbers for the chief and any other people who are authorized to speak for the department.

Include the Emergency Service Organization number, day and evening phone numbers and email addresses, if possible. Someone who is authorized to speak for the department should be accessible at all times. Encourage reporters to call whenever they have a question or need information.

Find out how you can contact the reporters by phone, fax or electronic mail, as well as how to reach them quickly in an emergency, especially before and after regular business hours.

When a reporter calls you, try to return the call as soon as possible. A reporter “on deadline” does not have much time to complete a story. And a reporter may not be inclined to give the department positive coverage if you consistently do not return phone calls.

2. Be prepared.

Know what it is you want to say about your department and write down your main messages to help you remember them. If possible, put some statistics and anecdotes down on paper to back up your message. Look proactively at everything about an incident or a situation that could prompt tough questions by a reporter. Think about what you would say to a reporter if asked those questions. Being prepared with good answers in advance will help prevent your being put on the spot by a reporter later.

How are you supposed to know what questions will be asked at a fire? Think back. For the most part, reporters ask virtually the same questions, fire after fire.

If a reporter calls for an appointment, ask what the subject of the interview will be. That is all you are likely to learn. Most reporters will not share actual questions in advance. And don't even bother asking to see a copy of the article before it is made public.

If you request the interview, have your key points written down even before you call for an appointment.

3. Approach the interview with the right attitude.

Do not assume that the reporter is going to be hostile or that he or she will confuse the facts. If you know that the interview will be hostile, ask yourself a simple question. "Must I do it?" You may have no choice, but there is no law that says you have to talk to reporters.

4. Present your story from the public's viewpoint, not your own. Keep your story human and personal.

You are in the business of protecting the people of your community. Try to tell your story from the perspective of the people who rely on you. For example, rather than talking about how many features the department's new aerial truck has, talk instead about how having this new aerial truck will help rescue residents from the senior citizens' housing complex. And talk about how purchasing the aerial truck enabled the department to improve its insurance rating by a point—thus inproving insurance rates for homeowners and businesses in town.

5. If you don't want a statement quoted, don't make the statement!

What about "off-the-record" comments? Most reporters will honor "off-the-record" comments if the restriction is clear before the statement is made. But many people who deal with the media believe that there is really no such thing as an "off-the-record" comment. The safest bet is to keep your private thoughts to yourself.

6. Keep it simple and concise.

Begin with your most important point. Stick to your key arguments. Do not have too many key arguments—limit yourself to two or three at the most.

Remember your audience—avoid using technical jargon.

7. Make sure you understand the question being asked.

If you think you have been asked a "trick" question, repeat it in different words until you know precisely what is being asked. If you choose not to answer it, simply say so. If the reporter persists with the same question, end the interview.

8. Do not argue or interupt a reporter or become angry.

Reporters use a range of techniques to obtain the best possible story from you. Some will attempt to anger you, to "loosen you up." Do not fall for it. Keep your cool.

9. If a question contains offensive language or words you do not like, do not repeat them—even to deny them.

And be on the lookout for reporters who try to put words in your mouth. Reporters have been known to toss out an unsubstantiated charge, and then print your denial: For example, the President of Shell Oil was once asked if his profits were a "bonanza." He denied the charge angrily. The next day's headlines quoted him accurately enough: "Oil Profits No Bonanza, Executive Says."

10. If a reporter asks a direct question, provide a direct answer.

Evasive answers to direct questions often result in tougher, more direct questions, and make a reporter skeptical.

11. If you do not know the answer to a question, do not fake it. Offer to find out.

It is better to appear ignorant than dishonest. Again, do not fake it. Once you have the answer to the question, be sure to follow up with the reporter. If you are unable to find the answer in time for the reporter to meet a deadline, call back anyway and explain what steps you took to try to get the answer.
If you are asked a question you cannot answer, say so. Along these lines, think twice before answering a question about a victim. If you want to protect the privacy of victims and their families, explain this to the reporter. If there were injuries or a fatalitiy on the emergency scene, follow HIPPA regulations.

12. Tell the truth, even if it hurts.

You make a choice to be interviewed and so you assume the risk. If you think the risk is too great, don't do the interview. Lies are the fuel for big, ugly embarrassing stories.

13. Don't exaggerate.

To a reporter, an exaggeration is a lie and the lie may just become the story. Do not do it. Life is too short.

Reacting to Bad Media Coverage

If you or someone else in the department is misquoted, or if a news item appears that you believe is unfair or misrepresents a situation involving the department, you will need to decide whether to respond and, if so, how best to respond.

Sometimes, doing nothing is best. Though it is hard to accept at the time, you should think about whether by protesting the negative coverage, you are turning the issue from a one-day story into a story that drags out for days or even weeks.

You should evaluate whether the misinformation is something that can be corrected by educating the reporter. Try calling the reporter directly, and politely request a correction. If that does not work, try talking to the reporter's editor or news director. If all else fails, point out the error in a letter to the editor or station manager.
Then, be satisfied that you did everything you could to try to correct the mistake.

If legitimate points were not made in the story, try writing a letter to the editor for publication that does not criticize the original story, but rather adds your points in a positive way.

Consider that perhaps the department itself is not the best organization to respond. Will the mayor or another elected official come to your defense? Is a citizen willing to publicly call or write to the reporter to correct the misinformation?

If the media outlet consistently misrepresents department news, consider getting your position out to the public in some other way. Several of our pilot departments found that a series of presentations about the needs of the department, given to influential groups of citizens over several months, was a more effective way to reach people with a message that the department was better able to control and target.

An easy way to report a response: e.g via email or fax.

Reporters do not always have the time to respond to every fire. Recognizing this, Chief Bill Bondshu of the Mariposa Public Utility District Fire Department in California developed an easy-to-complete form on his computer to report fires via the fax machine or a PDF document via email to local media outlets. It has a fill-in-the-blank format that gives the details of the fire, and provides a contact name and number for the reporter to call for more information.

The completed form (a copy of which is reproduced at the end of this chapter) is then used by reporters to write an article. In this way, the reporters' lives are made easier, the department is not burdened with having to write its own articles on each response, and the result is an increase in media coverage for the department.

If you decide to use a fax cover page or email to report department responses, make sure you call the media outlet first to see that it is OK to do so. Some reporters do not like to receive unsolicited faxes or emails. Also, get the name of the person to whom the fax should be directed, sometimes, a fax or email that is not addressed to any particular person or an email that goes to a general in-box and doesn't get delivered anywhere, it just gets thrown out.

Sometimes you will want to do more than report a response. If you have some news about the department you would like to share, or want to get the word out about an upcoming event, a press release is a better way to go.

NOTE: Fax machines have been replaced in many ares through the use of email and other electronic methods. However, fax capabilitiy still exists and preferred by some.

Writing Media Releases

Media releases are a basic tool for letting publications know what is going on with your department. Maybe you've obtained a new piece of apparatus or initiated a cutting-edge training program. Perhaps you're planning an open house, a fundraising drive or a smoke alarm giveaway. It is worth learning how to write about these events so that they are more likely to be used by the media: all you need is a little training, common sense, elbow grease and practice.

There are two basic kinds of media releases: the news release and the feature release.

The news release generally tells people something brand new and important—much like the news you find on the front page of your local paper. The feature release provides background, like the stories you read in the "Home" or "Style" sections of your local paper.

Both kinds of releases answer seven basic questions:

- Who did it?
- What did they do?
- When did they do it?
- Where did they do it?
- Why did they do it?
- How did they do it?
- Who cares that they did it?

The Media Release

As the story goes: Back in the days of the telegraph, Morse Code operators learned to put all of the important facts in the first paragraph of their reports back to civilization because telegraph lines tended to fall down, with a little help from bandits, before reports were fully transmitted.

Supposedly, that practice led to the so-called “inverted pyramid” style of news writing. Read the stories on the front page of this morning’s paper and you will see what we mean. All the most important news gets crammed into the first paragraph, called the “lead.” In the lead, you will find answers to at least four, and perhaps all, of the seven questions.

See the example that follows:

> Chief Robert Smith today announced the appointment of Charles Jones as Fire Marshal of Wyattsville. “Charlie Jones’ knowledge of the fire codes makes him the very best person for the job,” the Chief said..

- Chief Robert Smith is the “***who***.” today is the “***when***.”
- Appointment of Charles Jones as Fire Marshal is the “***what***.”
- Wyattsville is the “***where***.”
- Knowledge of the fire codes makes him the very best person is the “***why***.”

Writing an informative, concise lead paragraph is the toughest part of the job. A good lead generally:

- Emphasizes the most important fact. Maybe the most important thing is “who,” or “what” or even “when.” Whatever it is, it should be the point you emphasize.
- Is about 30 words long, generally in a single paragraph. Do not count little words like “to”, “and” or “from.”
- Uses “tricks of the trade.” For example, in our sample lead paragraph we wrote “Chief Robert Smith today announced ...” People do not talk like that—but good leads find ways to get a lot of information in a small space.

Read half a dozen newspaper articles each day to pick up other “tricks.”

Once you have written the lead, the following paragraphs should provide the details, in priority order. For example, the next few paragraphs might read: Since the “who” and “what” are the most important points in the lead, the next two paragraphs tell us more about what Jones will do and who he is. Then the writer tells us why we should care. Finally, the writer returns to the question “when.”

Deciding what is most important, and what is next important and so forth is up to you. But remember: You want the release to be interesting first to a newspaper editor, who, after all, must decide to use it, and then it must be interesting to the public.

> In his new capacity, Jones, who was recently promoted to Lieutenant, will direct all fire prevention activities for the Wyattsville Department.
>
> A 1991 graduate of Wyattsville High, Jones has attended the Morris County, state and national fire academies. In 1994, he was named Firefighter of the Year for the county.
>
> “My goal will be to see a significant drop in the number of house fires in this town,” Jones said. “Wyattsville had 75 house fires last year and lost nearly $2 million in property. I know we can do better.”
>
> Jones will assume his new duties immediately.
>
> ###

By the way, the ### at the bottom of the release is to let editors know that they’ve reached the end. We will talk more about formatting your releases later..

The Feature Release

If the news release tells readers something new, the feature release tells them more about something they probably already know.

Feature releases can provide background to readers about such things as:

- People in the news. Did you know that Chief Smith has ten children, two of whom are astronauts? Learn how Captain Williams, a member with the Cashtown Fire Company, spends a typical week: side-by-side photographs that go along with the story show her in civilian garb at work, and suited up to respond to a fire call.
- Why things are done. Ever wonder why fire trucks are red? Why shouldn't homeowners overload circuits?
- What could happen. How, if the community supports our building program, we will able to reach every home in town in under four minutes.
- How things work. How a house fire spreads. How to become a member.
- What things cost. Did you know how much the emergency service organization has to pay for each piece of protective clothing and equipment firefighters are required to wear? How the expenses of running an emergency service organization compare with the expenses of running a household.

Feature releases cover the same bases. Readers still want to know who, what, when, where, how and so what. You just go about it at a friendlier pace.

Once again, the hard part is that first paragraph. Journalists tend to stick to a few standard approaches. Here are a few easy ones.

The question lead:

- *How could anyone give up a night's sleep, risk their life and feel good about it? Member firefighters do it all the time.*

The story-telling lead:

- *The radio wakes Bob Jones from a dead sleep. Ten minutes later, Bob rescues a four-year-old and a teddy bear from a burning home. Not bad for a middle-aged car salesman who is now in his third year as a member of the Wyattsville Member Fire Department.*

The quotation lead:

- *"The people of Wyattsville will decide for themselves the sort of fire protection they want." So said Chief Bob Jones last week in reviewing plans of the department's new facilities on Watson Road.*

The controversy lead:

- *Some Wyattsville residents think the new fire house should be nearer Main Street. But others argue that, with the construction of the past decade, Watson Road is now the center of town.*

Notice something? All of the rules of writing a news release can go out the window with a feature release.

The lead can be longer. It doesn't have to squeeze all of the who-what-where-when-why-how-so-whats into a 30-word paragraph. A feature lead can be more than one paragraph.
Feature leads tend to emphasize one element of the story. As with news releases, the feature lead sets the tone for the rest of the story.

What Media and Feature Releases Should Look Like

Follow these guidelines and editors will find it easier to read and use your feature and news releases:

- Your release should be typed and double-spaced. You can put it on your department's letterhead, but if your department does not have letterhead, it is OK to use plain, white paper and type the words MEDIA RELEASE or NEWS RELEASE at the top.

Leave about two inches of room at the top so the editor can jot down some notes.

- At the top of page one, write the date and the line: **For more information, contact <u>(name of department spokesperson)</u> at <u>(daytime phone number).</u>**
- Next, you will need a headline, just a few words summarizing your story. Headlines do not have to sound like Tarzan speaking to Jane. They simply need to make the single most important point in the story.

For example:

New Firehouse to Result in Faster Emergency Response

No Smoke Alarm May Mean No Escape

Sherwin Appointed Chief

- Your story comes next. If you want, begin it with a "dateline", the name of your community written in capital letters.

For example:

If your release is longer than one page:

- At the bottom of each page of your release, type the words:

WYATTSVILLE—Chief Russ Sherwin today announced the appointment of five new firefighters.

- more -

At the top of each of the next pages, type a short version of the headline and the page number like this:

Emergency response

2-2-2-2-2-2-2-2-2

And remember, at the end of your release, type the symbol:

###

So the editor will know you are finished. Few things are more irritating to a busy editor than looking for a next page that doesn't exist.

We have included a few sample media releases at the end of this section to show you what we mean.

Practice will never make perfect. Practice anyhow.

Sample Release Worksheet

The questions you need to answer...	Most important stuff for your lead...	Other facts you'll use later in the release...	What's most important and what's next...
What is being done?			
Who is doing it?			
How are they doing it?			
When are they doing it?			
Where are they doing it?			
Why are they doing it?			
Why should we care that they are doing it?			

Here is how we used the worksheet to help us write a letter:

The questions you need to answer...	Most important stuff for your lead...	Other facts you'll use later in the release...	What's most important and what's next...
What is being done?	Building a new firehouse	Firehouse will have three bays for two engines and rescue vehicle	1
Who is doing it?	Wyattsville Volunteer Fire Department	Not possible without support of the community	5
How are they doing it?	Have already raised $1.5 million in contributions and town will give most of remainder	Nothing else	6
When are they doing it?	Work should be complete by next June	Hope to start construction in October	7
Where are they doing it?	In Watson Road area	Use exact address	2
Why are they doing it?	Town is bigger, population has shifted west. Need new facility to ensure response	Use study of population shift	4
Why should we care that they are doing it?	Will mean more effective emergency response, less loss	Give example of how long it takes to get to Watson Road from firehouse #1	3

And here's the lead we wrote:

WYATTSVILLE - A new firehouse in the Watson Road area will mean prompter, more efficient emergency responses to the fast-growing western par of town, according to Chief Russ Sherwin of the Wyattsville Volunteer Fire Department

The $2 million structure is funded mostly from contributions and some from taxes. Construction should be completed by next June.

Here is what the Mariposa Public Utility District Fire Department in California uses to communicate information about fires to the media:

M.P.U.D. FIRE DEPARTMENT
NEWS RELEASE FAX/EMAIL

Mariposa Public Utility District Fire Department, P.O. Box 494, Mariposa, CA 95338

Phone: (209) 966-2515 • Fax: (209) 966-6615 • E-Mail: mpud@yosemite.net

....

Release Date: ____________________ Number of Pages: ________________________

Contact: _________________________ Incident #: ___________ MPUD#: __________

On _____________________________ At __________________ a.m./p.m. _________

Fire Location: ____

The cause of the fire is: ____

The fire also damaged: ____

____

____

Expected to be contained at _______________ controlled at ______________________

The fire was contained at __________________ controlled at ______________________

_______ MPUD firefighters responded to the incident with _______ engines,

_______ trucks, _______ squads.

They were assisted by firefighters and equipment from: __________________________________

____

The incident commander was: ____

Other Information: ____

____

____

Here are a few exercises to limber up your news and feature release skills.

- Read your local newspaper for style. That is, do not pay attention to the actual story, observe the way reporters write their headlines, leads and articles. You will begin seeing some of the techniques we have discussed and, no doubt, you will pick up others.
- Select one article a week and rewrite the lead three different ways. Take a lead that emphasizes the "who" and make it emphasize the "what" or the "why."
- If your department has sent out releases in the past, take a few and see what you like and do not like about them. Try rewriting a few.
- Pick a story you would like to tell in a news or feature release. Use the worksheet on the next page to lay out your facts. Once that is done, write the lead for a story.

Go back and decide what should go next, and then next and so forth. Start adding paragraphs. Because a release is more than a collection of facts, read your release to make sure it "flows." The paragraphs should follow each other logically and smoothly.

- Finally, stick with it. Writing a press release is a lot easier than putting out a fire.

Use the worksheet toward the end of this chapter to plan your news and feature releases.

Placing the Release

You can send media releases by regular mail to your list of media outlets, by fax (if you have permission—some media offices do not appreciate unsolicited faxes), by email or by in-person delivery. It's a good idea to address the release to a specific reporter or editor (if you're not sure who should get it, call the publications or stations, tell them what the topic of the release is, and get the name and title of the person to whom it should be addressed).

Update your mailing/faxing list regularly. Because reporters tend to get different assignments and change jobs often, and because phone numbers and addresses change on occasion, it is a good idea to take the time at least once a month to verify that the names, titles, addresses, and phone and fax numbers you have are still current.

When you are compiling a list of local media, remember to include newsletters of community organizations. Editors of these publications are always looking for information to share with their members.

Once you have sent the release out, relax. You've done what you can do. The decision to publish or broadcast your news is now out of your hands. Someone from the paper or station will contact you if they want more information. But if they do not want to use your news, you can't "make" them use it. If, after trying several times, you fail to get coverage, meet with the editor or station manager to educate them about the department and find out how to give them what they are looking for.

Measuring Results

A politician, probably one who did not last in office very long, is claimed to have said, "I don't care what you print about me, just spell my name right."

You should care what is printed in the newspaper or reported on radio or TV about you and your department. There is, after all, a very big difference between good and bad news media coverage. Get lots of good coverage, and lots of good things are likely to happen to your department. Contributions will increase, new members will appear. Lots of bad coverage? Well, we're not going to let that happen.
How are we going to keep track of your progress with the news media?

It is easier keeping track of newspaper articles, because you can cut them out and save them, as opposed to radio and television coverage, which can be taped, but only if you know to do it.
For each piece of coverage, you will want to consider four factors:

Factor 1. Overall, whether it is a favorable or unfavorable piece, do not worry about a negative sentence or two. Consider the headline and the first few paragraphs and then decide. If you like it a lot, give yourself five (5) points. If the article is an absolute disaster, give yourself minus five (-5) points. Most articles will be nice but not great, so give them a 2 or 3. You get the idea.

Rank all articles according to this +5 to -5 scale (don't use "0" because it will complicate or confuse you later).

Factor 2. Readers are more likely to notice the article if it is on the front page, or a televised story if it is early in the newscast. We call this factor "prominence." If the piece is buried on page 39 under the shoe store ad, give yourself 1 point. If it is the top story on page 1, give yourself 5 points. And again, most stories will fall someplace in between.

Factor 3. The next factor is size. A large article with a photograph is more likely to be seen than a small one without a photo. Give yourself 1 point if the story is very small, and 5 points if it takes up a whole page. Most stories will fall someplace in the middle. With radio and TV, the amount of time spent on the story is the deciding factor.

Factor 4. Finally, we want you to consider the newspaper, TV or radio station covering your story. Five points for the major media in your area, 1 point for very small outlets and the rest in between.

For each story or article you rate, you will combine these four factors in this way:

Step one: add factors 2, 3 and 4. This will give you an idea of how many people were likely to see or hear the story.

Step two: multiply the number you get from step one by factor 1. This will tell you how good or bad the story was.

For example, a highly favorable story (5 points) on page one (5 points)—covering most of the page (5 point) in a large newspaper (5 points) would give you 75 points (5+5+5=15X5=75)—a big score! A negative story in exactly the same place would produce -75 points.

The advantage of keeping score is to keep things in perspective and to see how you're doing over time. One bad article might upset you so much that you assume all coverage has been bad. This will help you see the forest for the trees.

It only takes a minute to do it, and as you progress with your media relations program, you will see the points add up. We are also willing to bet that you will begin to see what kinds of stories do best with the newspapers, radio and television stations in your area, which means you can try to promote those kinds of stories more often.

4: Making Presentations

Ever wonder why some public speakers have you on the edge of your seat, while others make you dream of a soft easy chair?

Basically, it comes down to three reasons:

- First, the effective speaker has given some thought to your interests, not just his or her own interests.
- Second, the effective speaker is knowledgeable, not just “shooting from the hip” (or shall we say, “shooting from the lip”?)
- And third, the effective speaker is well-organized and logical.

While there are some naturally talented talkers, most effective speakers took the time to learn and then practice a few basic skills. This section of the manual will give you the basics of developing and giving effective presentations.

Talking to the Community

Giving presentations to groups in the community is a good way to develop positive relationships, provide useful information and at the same time get the word out about the needs of the department.

The Hamilton Township Division of Fire and Emergency Services in Ohio used regular presentations about the needs and projected growth of the department to encourage citizens to vote in favor of a proposed levy. The St. Rose Member Fire Department in Louisiana put together two versions of a presentation about the need for donations to build a fire safety house, one to give to business executives, and the other to neighborhood associations.

Almost anyone in the community is a potential audience for a presentation. Members of the town council, church groups, senior citizen clubs, parent-teacher associations, church gatherings, service organizations, and the group that comes to the fire station every Wednesday night to play Bingo are just a few examples.

The size of the audience really does not matter. You may be talking to as many as several dozen, or as few as two or three. Take every opportunity to share information with people in the community. If even one more citizen understands the Emergency Service Organization better, it will have been worth the time.

Once you have an idea of what kind of presentations you want to give, you can let people know that you are available through word of mouth, an article in the local paper, or direct contact. If you deal with groups through some other Emergency Service Organization service (such as fire inspections), you may want to take the opportunity to let them know you are available to speak to their members. If your local Chamber of Commerce runs a speakers’ bureau, get on the list as a presenter. With those groups you want to be sure to reach, find out who puts together the agenda for their meetings, and contact that person directly, either with a phone call or a letter requesting time to address the group.

Know Your Audience

Politicians are often criticized for “telling voters only what they want to hear”. That is not our goal. We want your audiences, neighbors, prospective contributors, potential members, local officials and others, to learn something positive and important about your department. We want them to be glad they’ve heard it. It may be something they have never thought about. It may be something they disagree with right now. It may be something that will save their lives.

- **Who is your audience?**

Is it mostly older people, parents, school kids, business people, high school students? Will it be mixed?

Will you have to keep your points simple, or will your audience expect some detail? Does everyone speak English, or will you have to prepare some materials in another language? Is your audience especially interested in a particular topic?

In short, the more you know about your audience(s), the better you will be able to tailor your presentation to their needs and expectations.

- **Why do you think they will come to hear you speak?**

Some audiences, like classes of school children, may not have much choice. Others, like Rotary Clubs, meet regularly to hear speakers. Still others, for example, the neighbors of a family that has recently lost its home to fire, may be extremely interested in what you have to say.

In order to keep their interest, captive audiences may require more “gimmicks”, a subject we will discuss later.

- **Are there any physical limitations that will make it hard for your audience to appreciate your presentation?**

For example, is anyone hearing or vision impaired? If so, can you make arrangements to accommodate them, such as a sign language interpreter or handouts and slides in extra-large type?

- **Has anyone from the department spoken to this audience before?**

If so, what was said, how did it go? Were any questions left unanswered? If the presentation was for a specific purpose, seeking contributions, for example, did it work? If so, why did it seem to go well? If not, how come?

- **How much time will they give you to speak?**

As long as students watch clocks on the schoolhouse walls, parishioners glance at their watches during sermons and businesses give an hour for lunch, audiences will be aware of how long you are speaking.

Cardinal rule: Know how long they want you to speak, and stop a little early. If they beg you to keep talking, keep talking. If they do not, you’ve talked long enough.

There is a limit to how much information people can absorb. Twenty minutes generally is more than enough time to make your point, whatever it may be, without losing the attention of your audience. Effective speakers are considerate of an audience’s time.

Know Your Subject

In general, the better you know your subject, the better the presentation will go. So put in as much time as you need researching your topic, organizing your presentation, practicing it and anticipating questions your audience may have.

Depending on the needs of your audiences, you will probably want to prepare a few different presentations on different topics. For example, the chief may be the best person to talk to a group of local business owners about the department’s overall financial needs and operations. Your training officer may be the best one to speak to possible recruits. Your fire marshal may be the best person to discuss fire prevention with an audience of senior citizens. The trick is to have a team of people from the department ready, willing and able to make the presentations they are most qualified to give.

Look to those three words, ready, willing and able, to help you select people to speak on behalf of your department.

You have the right person if he or she ...

- Can devote the time and effort to prepare adequately, in other words, is ready.
- Is enthusiastic about the assignment, in other words, is willing.
- Is knowledgeable about department, passionate about the subject matter and reasonably articulate (but not necessarily a polished speaker), in other words, is able.

Try to have more than one person trained to give each presentation, so that if one person is unavailable, for example, if the fire alarm rings half an hour before a scheduled presentation, another one can step in with no trouble. (By the way, if you do not have a backup to fill in for you, and an emergency call takes you away from a presentation, do not be too concerned: People will understand your public safety obligations when duty calls, and you can always reschedule the talk.)

Be Well Organized

A well-organized speaker leads an audience, step-by-logical-step, to a conclusion.

It all begins with a fairly basic decision: What one or two things do you want the audience to know at the end of your presentation?

For example, you might want a group of high school seniors to know that:

- Serving as a member firefighter is a terrific way to establish themselves as responsible adults in the community, and that;
- Your department has opportunities for members.

Or, you might want a group of business people to know that:

- The cost of a used engine to protect the west side of town will be at least $450,000, and that;
- The department still needs $138,000 to buy the engine.

Or, you might want a class of second graders to know what to do in case of a fire:

- Crawl low under smoke;
- Get out of the house as quickly as possible, and;
- Go to your family's designated meeting place outside of the house.

Whatever it is you want your audience to know, start by writing it down in a sentence or two. These sentences are your conclusions.

To persuade the audience you are right, you will need to support each conclusion. You can do this in several ways.

1. You can use logic:

A new car today can cost $50,000, so it is not surprising that a new engine costs 10 times more. And it can take as long as 25 minutes to go from the east side of town to the west side. So doesn't it make sense to have a engine on both the east and the west sides of town?

2. You can use statistics:

Every time we enter a burning building, we need four firefighters. Right now, with three fire houses and three shifts to cover, we need a minimum of 36 members. We have just enough. But if someone gets sick or moves away, we are in trouble.

3. You can use stories to support your conclusions:

You all know Susie Smith. She knew the right thing to do when her home caught fire last summer. She rolled out of bed when she heard the smoke alarm and crawled out of her house. As soon as she got out, she went to the mailbox where her family said to meet if ever there was a fire. They all got out safe and sound.

The most effective approach often uses logic, statistics and stories together, to make and reinforce your most important points. An even more effective approach is to involve the audience, using stories about some of them, or statistics that describe the situation in ways that they can relate to (for example, “We could buy three 4-bedroom houses in this town for what it costs to purchase one pumper truck,” or “The water coming from this hose could fill your bathtub in 1.5 seconds,” or “To keep our member Emergency Service Organization running costs about $35 per household per month, that is what it costs to buy a ticket to the movies with popcorn.”)

Effective presentations also make an effort to communicate at the audience’s level, and not alienate them with unfamiliar technical jargon (believe it or not, words that you take for granted, like pumper, bay and SCBA, are jargon that many people do not understand unless you explain them).

Once you have jotted down your conclusions, and under each conclusion, a few supporting points, you have a rough outline and a very good start.

You are ready to draft your presentation.

Drafting Your Presentation

Some speakers prefer scripts, while others prefer working from “talking points,” paragraphs with key statements. Others work from a traditional outline. It does not matter which you use, as long as you are comfortable.

There are many, many ways to draft a presentation. Getting started is the most difficult thing for many people. We like the following simple formula, which has three parts.

Part I is your introduction. In it you can:

- Introduce yourself (unless someone already has introduced you) and thank your audience for the opportunity to speak.
- Tell them why you are there. State your conclusions, right off the bat. No sense in making people guess what you’re up to, this is not a murder mystery.

In Part II, the body of the presentation, you will use your rough outline by stating one conclusion at a time and supporting each one in more detail.

Finally, in Part III you will repeat your conclusions, and thank the audience.

Notice how the three parts of the presentation work together, to make and support a few important points. Using these talking points as a foundation, the speaker can add a few touches, emphasize some parts and play down others.

Talking points or an outline are used as a guide for the speaker. A script, on the other hand, is meant to be read exactly as it is written.

A script is just a more detailed version of talking points. It can have the same three parts, make the same points and use the same supporting information.

There are two basic differences. First, a script contains all of the information an audience will hear, while speakers often add to talking points as they go along. Second, a script includes transitions between the major points, to make the presentation as smooth as possible. Use the technique that makes you feel most comfortable and that allows you to come across most naturally. Whether you use an outline, talking points or a script, the key is to be well organized and logical.

Here is an example of a presentation to the members of a Chamber of Commerce, organized into talking points.

(Introduction)

- Thank you. It has been a few years since I last spoke to the Chamber of Commerce. I was not Chief of the Smithtown Member Fire Department then I was just a lieutenant assigned to an engine company.
- A lot of growth and construction has occurred over the last few years. Our firehouse is almost finished, and it will make a big difference to the people at the western edge of town. Right now they might have to wait 20 minutes for us to get there ... and fire can destroy a home in that much time.
- As you may know, we have been raising money for a engine to put in that new firehouse. We can buy a good used one for $150,000 ... but we still have nearly $40,000 to go. That is where we need your help.

(Body)

- Usually, folks want to know why government spends so much money. In this case, people asked us to build a firehouse and buy an engine. The people who live over on the west side were concerned, and I do not blame them. We lost a house a year ago and came close to losing another one this year. With all of the traffic, it is getting harder and harder to go from one side of town to the other.
- Is $150,000 a lot for a engine? Actually, no. Think about what your last car cost you. An engine is a whole lot more complicated and a lot bigger. It has to carry 1,500 gallons of water, it has to be able to pump 1,250 gallons a minute through as many as 6 hoses at a time. It has to carry up to 6 firefighters and all of their equipment. And it will have to last us a long time.
- Actually, $180,000 for a engine is a very good price. New ones can go for twice as much. We were lucky to find one in such good shape at this price.
- A lot of people in this town have been very generous—first in helping us build the new firehouse and now this. We are close, but not there yet. You are the leaders of this community and we are turning to you for help.
- If every organization in this room donated $500, we would reach our goal. Our new western operation could save you more than that in insurance costs over the next few years. But what it really will save are restless nights for the citizens of the west side.
- There were 83 fires in the western part of town last year. Our average response time was 18 minutes, which is good—considering how far we have to travel. But that was before they widened Morris Avenue and added the shopping center. That was before they built those homes on Redden Road.
- Eighteen minutes may be pretty good under the circumstances, but it is an eternity in a fire. It may be pretty good ... but our response really needs to be under six minutes. That’s how fast we get to the other parts of town ... and that’s how fast all of the other departments in the county get to fires.

(Conclusion)

- The bottom line is that the western part of town needs faster fire protection ... and with this engine, we can provide it.
- To get this job done, we need your help. We are close to our goal, but not close enough yet.
- Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

A Word About Gimmicks

Doesn't every effective speech begin with a joke? No. In fact, humor can work against you.

A really funny joke that has nothing at all to do with your subject can be a serious distraction and prevent an audience from ever hearing your points. An offensive joke may turn some people off. A joke no one gets, will be on you.

If you have a good joke, and it supports the point you are trying to make, do not waste it at the beginning of your presentation when you know you have your audience's attention. Use it about half way into your presentation when eyelids are beginning to droop and your audience needs some energy. Laughter can revitalize an audience, and anyone who missed it will be especially attentive for the rest of your talk.

What about audio-visual aids, like videos, PowerPoint,charts or handouts?

They can make your presentation more effective, but only if they make sense. A pie chart showing how much money you still need to raise, a graph showing response times to different parts of town, a list of the cost of standard items on a pumper, these are the sort of things you may want to show. Most computers come with software that will help you do a professional-looking job with charts (free chart making tools online).

It is better to have a few good images than too many. If you have lots of information to share, put some of it in handouts.

Make sure the type and graphics on your images are big enough and simple enough for the folks in the back of the room to see. When using sound, ensure the speakers are loud enough.

If you have a brief video (no longer than 10 minutes) about the department and its services, you may want to use it as an introduction to your presentation. Though the video should not be used in place of a presentation, it can allow you to cover more information in the time you have.

And remember Murphy's Law when using audio-visuals: If the equipment can break down just before or during your presentation, it will. So always be prepared to give your presentation without the audio-visual aids, just in case.

A Word About Questions from the Audience

Don't be afraid of them. Questions are a good sign that the audience is involved in your presentation. Chances are pretty good that you can guess, ahead of time, all of the questions you are likely to get. When you practice your presentation in front of family members and members of your department, see what kinds of questions they ask.

Write down the five or six questions you are most likely to receive, and think about how you will answer them. Try to anticipate difficult or embarrassing questions, and think about your answers to those as well. If you know your subject, you may not need to actually write down the answers, but if it helps you to prepare, go ahead and write them down.

By the way, it is OK to admit that you do not know the answer to a question. Tell the person who asked the question that you will try to get the information as soon as possible. Write his or her name and number down, along with the question. Then remember and take the time to follow up.

If the same questions come up again and again each time you give the presentation, consider developing a "frequently asked questions" handout. Keep a copy of your department budget, response times and other statistics on hand so that you are prepared in case someone asks a question.

If you have particular questions that you want asked because you want your audience to know the answers, "plant" those questions with people in the audience ahead of time. Just write the questions down on index cards, pick out a few friendly faces in the audience before the presentation, and ask them if they would mind raising the question on the card.

Finally, do not hesitate to ask questions of the people in your audience. You can learn as much from them as they can learn from you.

Making Eye Contact, and Other Speakers' Techniques

Whether you're a seasoned speaker or a first time presenter, we can all do things to improve upon our technique. So here are a few tips to help you shine in front of an audience.

- Practice, practice, practice. The more comfortable you are with the talk, the more natural you will feel when you present it. We strongly suggest that you practice your presentation first in front of fellow department members before taking it to outside audiences. Not only will they help you work out the bugs in the presentation, but you will be helping to keep them informed as well.
- Schedule presentations so that two people from the department can be there. While one does most of the talking, the other one can take notes, help answer questions and provide moral support. If two presenters take turns speaking, it helps to keep the presentation more dynamic. You may also want to bring a second person along to help train that person to give the presentation some day.
- Arrive early to set up your space, make sure the equipment works, and introduce yourself to early arriving audience members. Giving yourself some time to get comfortable with your surroundings and the people to whom you will be speaking can help you feel more relaxed.
- You can communicate authority to your audience not only by what you say, but also how you look. Wear your department uniform or something that identifies you as a member of your department. If your department does not have a uniform, dress nicely, regardless of how your audience is dressed. Also, dress comfortably—if your shoes and clothes do not fit well, your discomfort will distract you, and your audience, from what you have to say.
- Standing behind a lectern or a table is useful if you are speaking from notes or a prepared script. If you do not need talking points, step away from the lectern or table and move closer to your audience. This will help create a more personal bond between you and the audience.
- A little nervousness before a presentation isn't necessarily a bad thing; it is a normal response, and it can help keep you on your toes. But stage fright shouldn't be debilitating. Being prepared is your best defense against nervousness. Practice your presentation until you know it cold. Remember: You know more about your subject than your audience does, and your job is to tell them what you want them to know. Audiences prefer knowledgeable speakers to polished speakers.
- If you like to keep a drink at hand, in case your throat goes dry, make it a warm liquid instead of a cold one. Warm liquids relax the muscles that help you control your voice.
- Pauses are OK. Do not feel you need to fill up your entire time with an uninterrupted stream of words. Silence gives your audience a chance to absorb what you've said. Take a deep breath every so often, collect your thoughts and continue.
- You can help establish personal links with your audience by making eye contact. Eye contact will help you avoid relying too heavily on your notes or script, and allow for a more natural presentation. But rather than scanning the room continuously with your eyes, try focusing on one person at a time for each point

you make. After you make that point, look down to consult your notes, and then look up at someone in a different part of the room to make your next point.

- Use gestures and facial expressions to help you convey meaning. Practice your talk in front of a mirror to make sure that your gestures and expressions help support, rather than distract from, your messages.
- Plant one foot in front of the other if you tend to move from side to side while you speak.
- When not using your hands to gesture or arrange notes or audio-visual aids, hold onto the lectern or keep your hands at your sides. Avoid putting your hands in your pockets, to minimize unconscious key jangling and other distractions.

Measuring Results

You can measure the results of the presentations you make in two ways. One is informal, the other is formal. Both are reliable.

The Informal Way

The folks in your audience are watching and listening to you. You need to watch and listen to them. They will tell you how you are doing. Look and listen for:

- **How many people showed up, how many stayed?**

Do not be too tough on yourself: 50 people in a football stadium looks like no one came. 50 people in a classroom may violate the fire code.

Also, if you are the last speaker and the program is running late, do not be surprised if people leave while you are talking. But, in most cases, the size of the audience and their willingness to stay and listen are important factors.

- **Are they paying attention?**

Are the members of your audience focused on you? Or, are their eyes glazed over? Have some of them fallen asleep? (Note: WAKE THEM UP, people have been known to sustain head fractures from falls from chairs.) Are they talking among themselves? Few speakers are so good that audiences never wander, but judge for yourself.

Are they involved in your presentation?

The best presentations result in lots of good questions. Encourage people to ask them, and even plant a few questions with friends in the audience to break the ice. A handshake afterwards can be perceived as a positive.

The Formal Way

Some speakers use “evaluation forms” to discover how well they did. The forms, questionnaires actually, often include questions such as these:

- Did the speaker seem to know his/her material?
- Did the speaker seem well organized?
- Did the speaker make the subject interesting?
- What did you like best about the presentation? Least?
- Were the visual aids (graphs, etc.) effective in making the points the speaker presented?
- What were the key points the speaker made?
- Do you agree with the speaker, is there something else they should have covered?

If this is an approach you would like to take, give audience members the evaluation forms after the presentation and ask them to fill the forms out before they leave. Make sure you have enough pencils and hard surfaces, clipboards, for example, to go around.

Encourage everyone to complete a form, and collect them before the audience leaves the room.

These completed forms will give you guidance on what needs improvement and what is just fine.

5: Obtaining Resources

Most Emergency Service Organizations spend a lot of time and effort trying to raise funds for everything from a new fire station and air packs to a fire safety house and a mascot costume. Most Emergency Service Organizations are old hands at running pancake breakfasts, raffles and other community fundraisers. For departments that do not receive a share of tax revenue, their very survival can depend on how much they can raise on their own.

This chapter deals with a different kind of fundraising from what you may be used to: It involves learning how to ask business leaders in your community to contribute resources to your department.

Art Glatfelter, founder and former Chairman of the Glatfelter Insurance Group, strongly believed that the only way Emergency Service Organizations can remain stable into the 21st century is by tapping into the private business resources in and around their communities.

How can business leaders help your department? Here are some ways:

- Consider setting up a committee of business leaders who are charged with raising resources for the department.
- By donating special services, such as legal, accounting, public relations, data processing, management, whatever business they are in, or have access to.
- By recruiting other leaders to help the department. Leaders tend to know their peers in a community, and it is easier for the bank president to talk to the department store president than if you were to make the initial approach yourself.

Note that we are talking about contributions of "resources" rather than "money." Sometimes resources do take the form of dollars, but, just as often, resources can mean in-kind contributions (such as meeting space, a video projector, a set of turnout gear, or printing or legal services) and even human resources (for example, community leaders willing to serve on a committee to help the department achieve its fundraising goal).

Identifying Your Best "Recruits"

Asking for help from community leaders will work if you have the right people doing the right things. So you first must decide what kinds of resources you need and what kinds of things need to be done (for example, fundraising or public speaking), and then come up with a profile of the kinds of people who can fill those roles.

Do not compromise. Go to the very best people in the community and ask them to help. The services you provide are so important that you should not have to settle for second best. Also think about those people in the community who have offered to help the department. The fact that they already have expressed interest means you do not have to spend as much time getting them interested.

The best people are those with a lot of integrity, who are respected in the community. The last thing you need is someone whose reputation may be in question. Do not automatically assume that because someone is a "local celebrity" that person will be good for the department: A leader who is well known in the community is not always respected. Make sure that anyone you decide to approach is someone you would like to have associated with the department.

Be aware that anybody worth approaching for help will be busy. The same people who are business owners and managers also tend to be involved in many other professional and social activities around town, like youth organizations, local recreational leagues, corporate boards of directors, the Chamber of Commerce, their church. But even though their time is precious, effective people do manage to make time for worthwhile activities. Again, don't assume they're too busy; it never hurts to ask. And even if they are too busy, they may be able to suggest others who can help.

Why will these leaders remember to help the department? The best of them remember because they have a sincere interest in doing something good and important. Supporting the local member Emergency Service Organization fulfills both criteria.

Some community leaders will help as a way of expressing their appreciation to the department for having saved their homes or businesses from being destroyed by fire. Others understand the commitment that the member emergency responders make, and they want to give something in return. They also may acknowledge how much money the department saves the community, and want to help in that effort.

But let us not kid ourselves. Community leaders like recognition, and they deserve it as long as they make a contribution.

It is important to recognize that there are some people whose help you simply do not want or need. Stay away from the following types:

- The "resume builders": These are the ones who just want to be able to say, perhaps for political motives, that they sat on a committee for the Emergency Service Organization. They may show up a few times or not at all. They will do a lot of talking, but no real work.
- The "overextended": Some people are great in every other respect, but simply have no time. You are looking for effort, not just a name on a letterhead. You want people who are willing to be involved.
- The "take-over mentality": Some people do not want to be involved unless they can be in charge. Remember, this is your department, your show. You may need help in specific roles, but you need to maintain control. So look for people who can be good followers as well as leaders. Nobody's ego should be so large that they will not be able to do what they are asked to do.

Approaching Business Leaders with Requests for Resources

Asking business leaders for help in obtaining resources for the department is a lot like making a sale. Think of your candidates as prospects. Each one may require a different approach. Some may be best approached directly, others through third parties.

As always, doing your homework is essential. Research the company and the business leader you want to approach: say, for example, it is the chief executive officer of an insurance company in your town. Accompany your fire inspector to the business, and talk to the middle managers to get the "inside scoop" on the company. The local United Way can tell you the company's record of giving. Chamber of Commerce executives can tell you about the business leaders as individuals and give advice how they like to be approached. (By the way, if the Emergency Service Organization is not a member of the Chamber of Commerce, it should be.)

Know specifically what you want to ask for. The more business-like you are, the better. If you need help with a specific project, first write a letter to the business leader with a concise explanation of the project and a very specific request for assistance (for advice, see the section on "writing proposals" later in this chapter). Then make a follow-up call for an appointment.

If you have a nonspecific project, and are just seeking help, guidance, a corporate mentor, or a nice, warm relationship, you can call and make an appointment without sending a letter first.

In making the appointment, you must deal with the business leader's secretary. Who is the gatekeeper for the boss's calendar. The more pleasant you can be on the phone and in person with the secretary, the better.

Be specific about how much time you are asking for in the meeting. Then, show up on time and stick to your time limit. If you know you can not make your case in 15 minutes, do not accept a 15-minute appointment. If the business leader deliberately goes over the time limit, you will not get blamed—but if you take up more time than promised, you have given the business leader a reason for turning you down.

Do not be discouraged if you do not get an appointment right away. It might take a couple of calls to the business leader's secretary to get an appointment. Keep trying.

Consider taking someone along with you to the meeting who knows the business leader to help provide entree. Also bring a pamphlet or information packet about the Emergency Service Organization that you can leave behind after your visit (see the Building Blocks chapter called "Putting together a Emergency Service Organization information packet" for guidance).

If you are asking for money, the business leader may ask for financial information about the department. Business leaders want to make sure that you are a good investment. Be prepared to answer bottom-line questions with specific, detailed answers. Bring along charts, graphs and reports that illustrate the finances of the department.

If you are asking the business leader to serve on a committee for the department, be able to provide an organizational structure to let people know with whom they will be working, what the processes are, how roles are defined and relate to one another. Those who serve will also need to know what kind of staff support they will get—for example, who will set up meetings, who will write and distribute the minutes, etc. Also, be able to estimate how much time the business leader will have to spend on this effort. If you can't say for sure, at least have an idea of how often you will have meetings, and how long the meetings will last.

If you are asking for in-kind, non-financial assistance of some sort, be prepared to give the business leader some time to make it happen, but don't be surprised if it happens overnight. When people are doing something for you on their own time, you have to be ready to give them what they need to get the job done when they want to do it.

Do not try to get everything done in the first meeting, especially if it's just a "getting to know you" meeting. After the second or third meeting with the business leader, ask him or her to visit you in the department and take time to conduct a "private tour." This can go a long way toward cementing a relationship.

If you are going in to the business leader with just an idea for a project, spend just enough time in that first meeting to whet the business leader's appetite. Then, put together a detailed proposal and come back for a second meeting.

In your presentation, you definitely should address how the business leader's company will benefit from the relationship. But if the first question the business leader asks is, "What's in it for me?," gracefully bring the conversation to an end. Good community partners do not necessarily know that they are going to get a full return on their investment, and that is not a priority for them. They recognize the goal of being able to provide and improve public safety for the community is enough of a reason to help. If tangible and immediate benefits are the business leader's priority, you will never get what you need, and you will never satisfy that business leader's need for a "payback."

If you are asking for something specific, try to get a commitment from the business leader after the second meeting, or at least try to get a sense of whether you should continue discussions. Regardless of the answer, always remember to thank the business leader in writing for taking the time to meet with you.

Be aware that if the business leader hands your project over to someone else in the company to implement, this is not an insult, this person may be the best one to get the job done. And, you never know, that person may end up being the chief executive some day.

Preparing Proposals Requesting Resources

Many Emergency Service Organizations take what we call a “scattershot” approach to obtaining resources. A typical request letter, photocopied and mailed in batches of 100 or more at a time, goes like this:

> “Dear Sir/Madam: We are trying to build a new firehouse. Anything you can do to help will be greatly appreciated.”

This approach might be fine for a fundraising campaign with the residents of your community, but you give up your claim to the serious corporate donations unless you take the time and energy to tailor your request to a potential sponsor. In these days of dwindling budgets, Emergency Service Organizations need to be smart about seeking private sector generosity if they want to compete successfully with all the other worthy causes going after the same dollars.

The most successful departments know that obtaining outside assistance is a process that involves building relationships and trust. The process begins with research before you write the letter of request, and does not end until you reach your goals and report to your donors.

The following guidelines should help you think through the process for preparing any kind of request for assistance.

1. Before you prepare a request for resources, take the time to develop a *plan* for how you intend to use the resources you are requesting.

Decide what you want to do with your program and how you want to do it. For example, what fire problems in your community do you need to address? Who are the people in your community that will benefit most from the new aerial truck? How do you plan to reach your target audience with fire prevention messages? What resources do you need to accomplish the goals of your program? Will other departments in the area benefit from your program?

Find out if the organization you plan to approach has a special application that must be completed, and if there is a deadline for sending it in. If so, get the application and follow their rules exactly.

If you can show that you have done your homework, you will inspire confidence in potential contributors. You will also find it much easier to carry out your program when you do obtain the resources.

2. Identify five or six good *prospects* (for example, individuals, businesses or foundations), and start with those you think will be most likely to help.

The local Chamber of Commerce or the reference section of your local library can be a good source of leads on corporate giving. But do not stop there.

Ask around your department and at local community meetings for ideas about potential funders. Try to find companies or organizations with a particular interest in safety or community activities. Has anyone in the business community already offered to help in any way? Do you, or does someone in your department, family or neighborhood, have a contact within a organization whom you can approach? Your chances of success improve when you have a personal contact who can guide you through the process in his or her organization.

To help you decide on your best prospects, find out as much as possible about the priorities and charitable activities of each organization you wish to approach. Again, if there are specific guidelines for grant applications, get them and follow them carefully. If there are no guidelines, try to keep your proposal to a maximum of ten pages.

Begin cultivating a relationship with the person in a given organization who will decide the fate of your request (we discuss this step in detail earlier in this chapter). Find out the correct spelling of that person's name and title. Before sending the written request, you may want to talk directly with that person over the phone or in person to explain your program and generate interest in it. As a courtesy, let each prospect know what you are doing with other potential contributors.

3. Make your request as *specific* as it can be.

Knowing exactly what you want, and how much it will cost, will help you decide which organizations to approach for resources. Shop around for the best deals you can find on the goods and services you need when preparing your budget. Ask yourself if you really need all the bells and whistles that come with a top-of-the-line model, or if a less elaborate version of the same item will do just fine.

Be creative when deciding what to request. As we said earlier, money is only one form of charitable contribution, and it is not always the best kind. Donations to your department may not be tax-deductible or a cash contribution could be lost when deposited into general revenues. In-kind contributions—for example, new or used equipment, data analysis, photography, facilities for an event or members to help distribute brochures—might be a better way to go.

Another effective approach is to give your potential contributors choices. You may want to break down your "wish list" into several elements and propose that a sponsor contribute one item on the list. Or, divide your project into several phases and ask for help with a particular phase.

4. If you have a *track record*, brag about it in your proposal.

Private contributors like to know they are making a sound investment. Show from your work on other projects that you can get the job done while staying on schedule and within budget. Include references from officials within your city or state who are willing to testify to the good work you have done. "Saves" of lives or property that have been documented as a result of our department's programs are persuasive fundraising tools.

5. Set up a regular *reporting and evaluation* schedule.

Sponsors need to know how well you are using their contributions. In your proposal, describe the kinds of results you will be measuring to show that your program is working, and how often you will report results.

Even if the project does not go as well as hoped, be honest about the difficulties you face. Your sponsor will appreciate your candor, and may even be able to offer advice on redirecting your efforts.

6. Show your potential sponsor specific *benefits* of funding your project.

Contributors like to know that their generosity is appreciated and recognized.

Ask your sponsors what kind of recognition they prefer. It may be a credit line printed on the materials you produce, or an invitation to an event your department has planned. It may be offering your contributor a seat on your project advisory board, or sending out a press release announcing the partnership.

7. *Appearances* do count.

Every time you communicate with a potential sponsor, convey that you are a professional and that you take pride in your work. Are statistics you cite in your proposal accurate? Have you proofread the proposal carefully, checking for typos, spelling errors and grammatical mistakes?

Have you included a cover letter on department letterhead? Is it neatly typed on good paper? Remember, you are trying to impress; sloppiness and carelessness in the proposal cast doubt on your ability to run an effective program.

8. If possible, have the *chief, president,* or the highest ranking representative of your department, make the request.

This will show that your department is fully behind the proposal and has agreed to accept responsibility for seeing the project through. If the request is directed to a chief executive in a company, a request from his or her counterpart in the Emergency Service Organization will be more effective.

If the chief will not be running the project, however, make sure the project manager's name and phone number are noted in case the potential contributor needs more information.

9. Be *patient.*

It may take some time to hear from a prospect. Call your contact within the organization after a couple of weeks to check on the status of the request and find out if you need to provide more information. While you are waiting, follow up on leads for other potential supporters, conducting the same careful research with each.

10. Keep in mind that the resources you receive are not a gift, but an *obligation.*

Once you receive support of any amount, you should keep your sponsor involved and informed. Demonstrate that you are managing your project well, and report major successes and challenges. Your communication with a sponsor should not be limited to requests for help. Keeping up the relationship over time will make it easier to approach that same sponsor in the future.

Even if you do not receive help this time, keep the door open for future requests. Find out why your proposal was not accepted, and whether you should approach the organization differently next time. Send reports on the progress of your program even to those organizations that were not able to help but seemed interested.

Above all, do not let a few negative responses discourage you from continuing to seek the resources you need. You owe it to your department and your community to keep trying.

Heading Off Potential Problems

As you proceed with this crucial effort, be aware of some concerns that you may need to address before they turn into problems:

- Most Emergency Service Organizations have a board of directors, trustees or some governing body to which they report. By recruiting community leaders to help obtain resources for the department, you may raise questions about whether you are doing an end-run around the department's leadership. Don't step on any toes. You need to clarify your plans with the board before you start recruiting, and even enlist the ideas and assistance of the board in identifying and attracting other business leaders.
- Be aware of the danger involved in powerful, intelligent people coming in and trying to get involved in areas of the department's operations that they have no business being involved in, the "tail wagging the dog" problem. These leaders are there to help you, but only in ways that you need and ask for help. Do not let them overstep their boundaries of power.
- What if someone really wants to help you, but you do not want that person's help for whatever reason? You have to say "no" nicely but directly. Anticipate this, and recognize that the survival of the department is too important to sacrifice it for the feelings of one person.

Measuring Results

People and organizations either contribute or they do not. You either raise enough money and resources, or you do not. Measuring fundraising results is not particularly tough.

However, you may want to *keep track of your progress* in a few other ways:

- If you are making special proposals to specific business leaders, are they the people contributing the resources? If so, are they contributing the amounts you have requested? If so, your efforts have been worth it.

It is possible, however, that you are raising enough money—but not a dime from them. That tells you something too: perhaps the money/ resources just are not where you thought they would be; or maybe your presentation needs work.

- Are people giving each year? Or are people giving just once and not again?
- Are your resources being raised from just a few people or many? Your goal should be to have as broad a base as possible, because then you will not be sunk if any one source of support dries up.
- And, of course, are the annual contributions increasing or decreasing each year?
- Do you send thank you cards and letters as appropriate?

6: Conducting Special Events

If seeing is believing, then special events may be your most effective way of communicating with the public. Press releases and speeches tell your story, special events demonstrate it.

Two Kinds of Special Events

- With some special events, the public comes to you. For example: An open house where the community visits the department, views displays and demonstrations, and meets your members. A housing dedication. A fundraising dinner or a bingo game.
- With other programs, that you go to the public with . For example: A parade. Santa being driven around on the fire engine to all neighborhoods in the community. Department members in uniforms or turnout gear going to key intersections in the neighborhood on Halloween to help children cross the street and give out treats.

There is nothing to prevent you from combining the two types of events. For example, you might participate in a parade that ends at an open house at your department.

Regardless of what kind of special event you plan and conduct, the preparations are pretty much the same. But before we get into the specifics, we need to take some time on the basics.

What Makes for an Effective Special Event?

1. An effective special event has a clear purpose.

There is nothing wrong with just having your neighbors in to see your new apparatus. But the best special events are organized in support of at least one of your department's goals.

For example, if your biggest problem is not enough members, an open house can be an effective way of creating enthusiasm among prospects. If the public is grumbling because you always seem to be asking for contributions, a special event can be a good way of showing them what their money has bought.

The Town Bank Volunteer Fire Company in Lower Township, New Jersey, accomplished several goals when it held a 50th anniversary. The department/new building dedication celebration: the department celebrated a milestone in its history; it developed closer ties with the community through the events associated with the celebration; publicizing the event resulted in a better relationship with the local media; and pulling together to plan and conduct the event encouraged greater camaraderie among department members.

2. An effective special event involves the public.

The single greatest difference between a speech and a special event is that with a speech, your audience pretty much sits and listens. With a special event, the public has a chance to become involved.

For example, take the opportunity for some hands-on learning. Show them how to stop, drop and roll. Show them how to properly use a fire extinguisher. Have them fill out a safety quiz.

If you are creative, you do not need a lot of money to get the public involved and generate a lot of enthusiasm. Rather than purchasing an expensive mascot outfit, a member fire department in Louisiana hosted a “design the mascot” contest in the local school. Then the school's home economics class sewed a costume based on the winning design, and the new mascot participated in all department special events.

If a fire department member has a pet Dalmatian, bring it to your event. Pets are an excellent way to draw children (and their parents). Before you do, however, make sure the pet is gentle, has gotten all of its shots and doesn't mind being around a lot of people.

Or, offer a service to people who attend your event, such as a free smoke alarm, a blood-pressure check, or the opportunity to register to vote.

Do not forget to invite local elected officials and other VIPs in the community to attend your special event (for free, if possible). Assign members of the department to escort the VIPs during the event, to help answer their questions, and to convey key points to them about the department. Give the VIPs special recognition, perhaps the opportunity to say a few words of greeting to the public. After the event, send a follow-up thank you letter to the VIPs. They will appreciate the special attention, and the chance to interact with the public.

Finally, work with the local media to help publicize the event ahead of time and invite reporters to cover the event itself. Give them as much information about the event in writing as you can, to make their jobs easier. During the event, assign a department member to the reporter to answer questions. If a reporter is unable to attend the event, provide the newspaper with photos, captions and a press release with a report on the event (see the chapter called “Effective Media Coverage” elsewhere in this manual).

3. An effective special event tries to answer the questions the public is most likely to have.

You might enjoy talking about all of the bells and whistles on your new aerial truck, but your neighbors may be more curious about why you need an aerial truck in a town where no building is higher than three stories.

A special event should be planned to help the public better understand the department—not just to show off the department. So try to anticipate the kinds of information visitors would ask. Write up a department fact sheet or a “frequently asked questions” document, and distribute it to department members. That way, everyone will be able to answer questions “off the same page.”

During the event, assign members of the department to specifically answer questions from the public. Ask a retired member of the department to serve as the department “historian” and be on hand to answer questions and tell stories about the way the department and the community used to be.

4. An effective special event places your department's best foot forward.

Chances are that whether or not you are planning a special event, you are careful to maintain your apparatus, gear and facilities. And at any special event, department members should present a uniform appearance to the public. If you do not have uniforms, even the same color t-shirt and pants will do.

Several years ago, we attended a barbecue at a small member department. The place was a mess. Gear was tossed carelessly around. Apparatus was dirty. Some members were unshaven and wore soiled uniforms. And that is how we remember that department.

On the other hand, we have visited many, many departments where even the spots were spotless. And that is how we remember those departments. We can bet that the members of the clean departments felt better about themselves and their departments.

5. An effective special event addresses the morale of department members and others involved in putting on the event.

You will be more likely to have a successful event if you make sure your members have fun with and are recognized for their efforts. The person in charge of planning the 50th anniversary/building dedication for the

Town Bank Volunteer Fire Company in Lower Township, New Jersey, understood this, and did a few things to help create and maintain cooperation with and enthusiasm for the event.

- They held a party for department members and their spouses in the early planning stages, to explain the event to them and ask for their help.
- They kept all discussions about the event on a positive note.
- They divided the event into functions and put people in charge of each function who he knew would do a good job.
- Once people had their assignments, they gave them the authority to do their jobs and did not micromanage them.
- After the event, they held another party for all the members who helped, as a thank-you for giving their best effort.

6. An effective special event makes good use of resources available to the department.

It's usually the same four or five dedicated members who get tagged with doing all the work for every event. For your next special event, make a point of seeking out other sources of help. Here are some ideas:

- Inactive members of the department. A member fire chief in Pennsylvania found that inactive members were much more likely to participate in department events if they were asked personally to help out. The one-on-one approach is much more effective than the "notice to all" on the department's bulletin board, or a general announcement in a meeting.
- Retired and former members of the department. Again, a personal approach is always more effective.
- Spouses of department members.
- Local businesses who may be able to donate food or other products. Make sure a sign at the event acknowledges their contributions.

7. An effective special event avoids problems and plans for things that could go wrong.

Murphy's Law is alive and well when it comes to putting on special events. Plan for the worst, and do what you can to head off potential trouble before it starts. Here are some suggestions:

- Conduct dress rehearsals before the event, to make sure everything will flow smoothly and help work out the bugs. Write out speeches or talking points for people. Show them where they have to stand and to where they have to move.
- Make sure you have enough refreshments and handouts to go around. It is always better to have too much than not enough.
- Post signs directing people to restrooms. If you are holding an outdoor event with no restrooms in the area (and particularly if you are serving refreshments), rent a sufficient number of portable toilets.
- Arrange for EMS capabilities on-site, in case someone gets hurt.
- Have people who are not emergency responders on standby as backups to staff booths or fulfill other key roles at the event. If the fire alarm rings in the middle of the event, and the firefighters have to leave, you want to make sure the event runs uninterrupted.
- Assign people to trash detail after the event, and be prepared to repair any property damage that may have taken place as a result of the event, even if you were not directly responsible for it.
- If your event involves costumes, never let the public see anyone in partial costume. Little children could get upset if they see Smokey the Bear take his head off, for example.
- If something unanticipated does go wrong, be honest about it. Be prepared to handle the public relations consequences, and do not try to hide anything. The public will appreciate your being up-front about the situation.

As a matter of providing guidance on specific events, we will cover two different kinds of special events—one in which you go to the public, and the other in which the public comes to you.

Parades

We are not about to tell emergency service organizations how to run a parade, but we thought it might be useful to share some of the ideas and concerns we have learned from friends in the fire service over the years about the organization of parades.

Whether to worry about weather.

Parades depend on good weather. There's no sense in scheduling a parade if the weather in your part of the world is likely to be wet, very cold or very hot. Shoot for times of the year when you have a better than even chance of comfortable, dry conditions. And even then, have a rain date ready, just in case.

Clearances and clear sailing.

A parade without proper approvals is called "obstructing traffic." Follow your community's parade permitting processes, cooperate with local police and your parade route will be open and secure. Work with local officials to select the best parade route—one that has adequate, nearby parking, and that will not inconvenience those members of your community who are not watching the procession.

The parade route must start in a place where parade participants can assemble and wait their turn, and end in a place where they can easily disperse, so that the parade does not back up. Parade planners often design a circular route so that walking parading units automatically return to their cars and buses.

Plan your parade to be entertaining.

Your community may love to watch a parade of fire apparatus lights blazing and sirens roaring. But you don't want to test your neighbors' patience or damage their hearing. Go easy on the sirens or elimate their use.

By all means, feature the fire department. But invite other community groups to join in: high school bands, civic clubs, youth sports and scouting groups, antique car owners, horseback riding clubs—you get the picture.

Invite businesses along the parade route to hold "parade sales" or invite them to purchase advertising signs to display on the fire engine during the parade.

Hold a contest for the best decorated house along the parade route, as judged by the fire commissioners or other community officials.

Ask the mayor, or another high-ranking official in the community or the department, to be the Grand Marshal of the parade.

Plan the parade around a theme.

Create a parade theme. For example, "Stop a fire before it starts," "All of us working together to protect Smithville," or "The rewards of membering."

Require all parading units to work the theme into their routine. For example, high school bands would play only songs with the word "fire" in the title. Antique car clubs can use banners with the theme. A Little League baseball team might use a banner proclaiming that with the Smithville Fire Department, "We're all safe at home."

Don't forget to tell people ahead of time.

Some folks may just be in the right place at the right time to see your parade. But do not count on luck to attract a large audience. Elsewhere in this manual, we discuss press releases. Write one about your parade and send it out to local papers a month ahead of time, to enable people to make room on their calendars. Ask all parade units to get the word out. Even consider using posters in store windows along the intended parade route. Don't forget your social media contacts as well.

Nothing beats a well organized parade for creating excitement and enthusiasm. But for the most part, parades are not a particularly effective way of educating people. For that, open houses and demonstrations are far more useful.

Open Houses

Here are a few thoughts on planning and conducting open houses.

Picking a time.

The best open houses seem to be held when people have the most free time—Sunday afternoons, for example. Check your community calendar to see if any other organization is planning an event for the same time, and try to avoid major conflicts.

Choosing a theme.

Having a theme for your event (like "Serving the Community") helps to keep the event focused, because you can arrange for all presentations, speeches, decorations and demonstrations to conform to the theme.

Making it interesting.

Think of an open house as a "fair" with lots of things to see and do.

For starters, you will want to show off your apparatus. If weather permits, display fire apparatus outdoors where the public can stand back and fully see it. Some departments allow the public to climb aboard, probably a bad idea. Equipment may be damaged and, in a few cases, youngsters have been injured falling from fire trucks. Museums have a "look-don't-touch" policy, and you can, too.

If you can display your apparatus outdoors, your bay areas will have plenty of room for displays and demonstrations. Probably the best way of organizing displays and demonstrations is to assign subcommittees to handle each one.

Each display and demonstration should:

- Have adequate space—both in terms of the items displayed and room for guests to observe your exhibit
- Be clearly identified
- Be staffed with knowledgeable personnel for the entire open house
- Be neat and well-organized
- Most important of all, be safe for your personnel as well as guests

Here are some ideas:

- A display of home fire hazards and what to do about them.
- A display of equipment and turnout gear used by firefighters.
- A demonstration of the department's communications gear.
- Films on fire protection and prevention. Many are available through your state fire marshal, the National Fire Protection Association and perhaps even your local library.

- A demonstration of fire rescue techniques.
- A quiz on “Where is Maple Street?” Firefighters are expected to know how to reach every street address. How well do your neighbors know your town?
- Demonstrations of first aid techniques.
- Tours of the station. To help educate the public, put signs on apparatus and equipment telling the function of each piece and how much it costs.
- Display of scouting programs sponsored by your department.
- A demonstration of healthy fire house cooking and recipes. This can be tied into light refreshments offered for free or at a modest price to your guests.

One thing to avoid is having any one part of the event get bogged down. Keep things moving along by planning an agenda ahead of time and setting time limits for speakers and presentations.

Measuring Results

Much the same as with presentations (see Chapter 4), you can measure the results of a special event formally or informally.

For example, look around. If your open house is packed with the sort of people you hoped would attend—high school seniors attending a recruitment open house, for example—then life is good. If they crowd around displays, ask lots of questions and seem to have a good time, you have done your job well. If they drink your punch, eat your cookies and run—try again next year.

Sit down for a post-event review with the members of the department and others who helped with the event. Ask them what they thought about how the event was planned and run. Ask them what they might do differently next time. And take the opportunity to get them to commit to helping with next year’s event.

As with presentations, an evaluation form filled out by attendees also may help you measure results. You may want to ask questions such as these:

- Overall, are you glad you attended our event?
- What was the most important thing you learned?
- Is there anything you would have liked us to include, but did not?
- Was the event scheduled at a convenient time? If not, what would you have preferred?
- Was parking convenient?
- Were your questions answered satisfactorily?
- Were the displays interesting? Well organized? Neat?

7: Becoming Politically Active

A new proposed levy that would be earmarked for fire and emergency services will be put to the voters in November. The town council is exploring the prospect of doing away with the member system and establishing a career Emergency Service Organization. A candidate for the state assembly pledges to introduce legislation helpful to the fire service, if she is elected.

Would your Emergency Service Organization get involved in any of the hypothetical situations above?

We have heard many fire officials say they must remain "above" politics. They are dangerously wrong. Most, if not all, Emergency Service Organizations must report or answer to a higher power, whether it is a board of trustees or commissioners, a county, city or town council, or some other elected body. In many cases, Emergency Service Organizations must comply with laws and regulations issued by state and federal government. Even in departments that do not receive a penny in tax support, politics and government affect everything from what firefighters wear, to what they drive, how they prepare to respond, how they respond and how they report what they have done.

Departments that claim they are above politics tend to be those most under the thumb of politics, most vulnerable to the worst politics has to offer, and those most easily forgotten when politicians might be of greatest help. Too often, a department's only contact with politicians is when budgets are proposed, and if mistakes have been made.

But the fire service has the enormous political advantage of being viewed generally as a selfless group of people serving the community. You are the "white hats," almost the very last of the American heroes. It's easier to live up to a good reputation than to try to overcome a bad one.

In addition to discussing how to help gain support for political issues, this chapter focuses on establishing and building support with politicians—the local, county, district, state and federal elected officials who may have more to say about your department than you do. If you have done a good job building general public support, you will find it easier to build good working relationships with politicians. But read on—there is still much to be done.

Be Political, Not Partisan

Some in the fire service resist getting involved in political activity because they do not want to appear partisan. But there is a big difference between being political and being partisan. You are political if you choose to get involved in and make your position known about issues and decisions by elected and appointed officials that affect Emergency Service Organization operations. Being partisan involves supporting or promoting a particular political party, such as Republicans or Democrats.

Most fire officials choose not to play party politics. But it is possible, and advisable, to be political without being partisan. For example, why not support a candidate based on their willingness to support the department's important issues? "If a member of your town council supports your department's agenda, you owe it to that member to support his or her reelection," says a fire chief in a suburb of Cincinnati. However, be prepared if your candidate does not win.

You may want to stay informed about what the parties are doing, however. One state firefighter association asked those of their members who were partisan to attend political party meetings as citizens, not as association members. When you acting as a citizen it is advised that you do not wear fire department apperal or logos. Taking advantage of the partisanship of department members is a way to keep tabs on what the parties are doing, without committing the department itself to the support of one party or another.

The Nature of Politicians

As the old saying goes, all politics are local politics. That is because all votes are cast at polling places in fire houses, VFW halls, schools and court houses in neighborhoods from Bangor, Maine, to Calexico, California. Most politicians start in local government: on school boards, commissions and town councils. Some move on to county and state government. Others go all the way to Washington.

Most politicians, and maybe all politicians, are motivated by three things.

- **Public service.** One person's understanding of public service may conflict with another person's definition of the term. For example, one politician may want to cut taxes while another wants to improve police protection. Both want to do the right thing.
- **Ego.** Once in a great while, a truly modest person gets elected. But it takes ego to aggressively sell yourself to voters, and then to handle the personal attacks that have become an almost daily routine of politics. The flip side of ego is "fear of embarrassment." Publicly embarrass a politician, and you've made an enemy for life.
- **Re-election.** Getting elected is one of life's great honors. Getting tossed out of office is one of life's disgraces. It used to be that campaigns ran for a few months every couple of years. Today, political campaigns never end. Consequently, politicians tend to gravitate toward issues and groups they see as helping them to get re-elected.

The Ten Rules of Lobbying

You may consider it the "L" word, but lobbying is not only necessary; it can, and should, be honorable in every way. Like fire, lobbying can achieve great good and great evil. It is all in how you handle it.

1. Know what you are talking about. Be honest and fair.

You will always be consulted by politicians if they know that you can be trusted to provide accurate, complete and unbiased information. Do your homework. Provide background written materials. Never fake it.

2. Make choices and stick with them.

Know your options, study them and make choices. Politicians have a right to know where you stand, and they have a right to expect you to have enough courage to stand by your choices. Too often, fire service groups support legislation in concept, which means nothing. Take a clear, intelligent stand on every proposal. If you do not know whether or not you like a proposal, say so.

3. Focus on issues and facts, not personalities.

Politics is a constructive force when it is focused on real problems and solutions. Too often, politics turn nasty and personal. Avoid being lured into even private personal attacks.

The chief of a member fire department in Indiana told us about one county official who mounted a crusade to replace the member fire service with a career force. Rather than attack the official, the member chief took the pay scale of a fire department in a neighboring city and demonstrated what it would cost for the county to fund a career department. Seeing how much money they were saving with a member system, the County Council not only defeated the county official's proposal, but, once they realized what a bargain they were getting, allocated additional training money to the member department.

4. Be helpful. Suggest ways to improve legislative proposals.

If you do not like a legislative proposal, suggest ways of improving it. Be specific and helpful, and your chances of influencing the proposal are likely to be good. If you simply do not like the proposal and have no suggestions, do not be upset if your concerns are ignored.

Politicians can not read your mind. Be clear about what you need, what you do not need and how best to achieve it. And do not assume that the politician knows anything about fire protection. Put your positions in writing, as succinctly as possible (with supporting documentation ready if you are asked for more information), as a “leave behind” document to which the politician can refer later.

5. Be positive. Give politicians the benefit of the doubt.

“Our Mayor is a jerk. He will not listen to us.” Wrong. No matter whom you are dealing with, begin with the right attitude. Assume that the politician wants to help and is interested in your ideas. Even if you are right just one time in ten, you’ll be ahead of the game.

6. Be gracious. Do not expect to win every time. Don’t write off those who may have opposed you.

Politics is the art of compromise. Part of the art is knowing how to be a gracious loser and winner. If you lose a particular issue, or a candidate you supported loses an election, accept your loss gracefully and congratulate the winner. Be philosophical about it: Even if you lose an issue or an election, at least you got the opportunity to make your position known.

And if you win, be modest. Never leave your political opponents bleeding, outraged and determined to destroy you next time.

7. Be realistic. Do not demand 100 per cent support.

Expect to lose some political battles. Probably the biggest mistake in all of politics: attacking an official who supports you most of the time but was unable to help you last time. That is unfair, illogical and the quickest way of losing political friends. You just may need the support of that official on some completely different matter a few months from now.

Also, consider your timing when you ask a government official for something. You will not have much luck getting a budget increase if the local government has just suffered a big cutback.

8. Stay united.

“Come back and talk to me when you guys agree on this issue.” The fire service is politically effective when it is united—in support of or in opposition to a proposal. Too often, groups that may have the same general goals (like fire service organizations) are on opposite sides of a particular issue. You can not blame politicians for getting confused. First, make sure that your own department is united on an issue. Then, try to persuade other groups to join you. There is strength in numbers.

The Town Bank Volunteer Fire Company in Lower Township, New Jersey, asked the local teachers association to help gather support for its annual budget, which was up for a vote after being defeated the year before. In exchange, department officials promised to help the teachers get their budget passed a couple of months later. Smart move—both budgets passed.

9. Register to vote, and vote in every election.

Voting in elections are the best way to express your opinion about how government should be run, and whether they are primaries, school board elections, general elections, local elections or national elections, there is no such thing as an insignificant election.

Encourage the members of your department and their families to vote as well. Sometimes, an issue of importance to the Emergency Service Organization is won or lost on the basis of a few votes—and those votes may have been cast by department members.

10. Stay involved year round. Become part of the give-and-take of politics.

Do not show up only when you want something. Be in regular contact with politicians. Do not assume that they know what is going on in the department and your positions on various issues—tell them.

One department we know briefs all newly elected politicians to give them basic knowledge about the department, who serves, what it does (and doesn't) do, how it gets the job done and what things cost. Then they keep up the relationship periodically, through activities like special briefings and invitations (preferably with free tickets) to department functions.

Be aware that politics is a give-and-take proposition. Ask your officials how you can help them.

Now that we have discussed how to approach politics and politicians, we'll discuss how to be active.

How to Be Politically Active

Each department has to decide for itself what it can do and what it feels comfortable doing.

Here are some examples of political activities conducted by successful departments.

Many departments maintain regular contact with officials through such approaches as:

- Tours of the department to brief elected officials about department operations, costs, personnel, standards and management practices.
- Invitations to department meetings, dinners and other events. Because elected officials often have to purchase their own tickets to social events, they do appreciate getting free tickets for themselves and a guest. Note that if you invite one elected official, invite them all, playing favorites can lead to hard feelings.

  These events can be great opportunities to educate public officials. The French Lick Fire Department in Indiana puts on a media show at its annual banquet that showcases the department's activities and members.

  Emergency Service Organization officials in the Town Bank Fire Company in New Jersey invite all of the public officials to every event, but prohibit them from discussing politics. "They are there to socialize, not to give speeches," says Commissioner Lew Conley.
- Visits to training exercises to familiarize officials about the nature and scope of responses.
- Private briefings of officials on fire statistics, department operations, concerns and opportunities.
- Rapid notification of officials during all significant incidents.
- Post-incident briefings of officials.
- Meetings with officials to discuss long-range planning issues: projections of community need, resource requirements, etc.
- Attendance at regular town meetings, even if Emergency Service Organization issues are not on the agenda. Show that Emergency Service Organization members are concerned about the community beyond issues of life safety and fire protection.

Some departments become actively involved in campaigns, participating in such activities as:

- The selection and recruitment of political candidates.
- Personal or department endorsements of candidates. Check your tax-exempt status to see if this is permitted.

- Special briefings for candidates, including help in researching campaign issues.
- “Meet the candidate” night sponsorship.
- Letters-to-the editor supporting candidates.

Departments help promote issues that are important to them by working directly with residents in their community:

- Participating in voter registration drives.
- Handing out literature at community events or door-to-door, encouraging residents to vote a particular way on an issue.
- Helping a community group with a political issue important to that group (such as helping the local teachers’ association to get their budget passed), with the understanding that the group’s members will help gain support for your issue later on.
- Encouraging supportive citizens to attend key meetings of the department’s governing body, to help speak out in favor of a major expenditure.

Your Choice

You have a choice: Be part of the on-going process of politics, or play no part at all. If you choose to stand on the sidelines, do not be surprised if your ideas, concerns and complaints are ignored. Be an active and constructive part of the process, and you may be surprised about how often your ideas, concerns and complaints receive attention and action.

8: Building Blocks of Your Own

You have learned how to plan a community relations program, write media releases, be interviewed by a reporter, recruit members, make presentations, hold special events, obtain resources and get involved politically.

Use your new skills, and your department will likely be rewarded with favorable media coverage, new recruits and more resources. But most enduring of all, your department will have created a new partnership with the people and organizations of your community, that is, your customers. These relationships are the foundation of your community relations program.

Think back to what we said about the Woodinville, Washington, Fire Department in the introduction to this manual. We told you about the many ways that Woodinville firefighters work with their neighbors. They participate on committees to solve community problems like teenage pregnancy and traffic hazards. They work with the high school drama club to devise new ways of communicating fire safety messages. They even exercise with physical education classes at local schools.

In other words, the measure of the Woodinville Fire Department's success in community relations is much more than their ability to respond to emergencies—though they do that exceptionally well. It is also the extent to which they are involved in activities not traditionally performed by fire departments. The department looks for opportunities to position itself as part of the public service/public safety community.

And so can you.

Look around. Chances are, you are surrounded by community groups interested in being helped, and giving help.

Here are a few examples:

- **Business and professional groups.** In your community there may be a wide variety of organizations of businesspeople and professionals, many of them actively looking for service projects. They may include Kiwanis, Rotary, the Jaycees, Optimists and even the local Bar Association, Medical Society and Better Business Bureau.
- **Veterans groups.** Many communities are home to American Legion Posts, Veterans of Foreign Wars and related groups.
- **Church groups.** Men's and women's "circles" and groups, Sunday school classes, and clergy members are an excellent source of talent and ideas.
- **Social and service groups.** Groups such as the Elks, Moose, Masons, Junior League, Women's Club, Meals on Wheels, Visiting Nurse's Association and League of Women Voters are worth contacting.
- **Scouting organizations.** Scouts of all ages look for service projects and can be an exceptionally valuable resource.
- **Neighborhood associations.** Particularly in fast-growing communities, neighborhood organizations are taking hold. Also don't forget such groups as Welcome Wagon and Newcomers.
- **Large employers.** Some large employers recognize their civic duty and will lend executives, sometimes full-time, to worthy causes (for more on this subject, see the chapter entitled "Obtaining Resources").

We have barely scratched the surface. But even the longest list of names does not answer a key question: What are you going to do with your new "partners?"

Look at every prospective relationship as a two-way street. Sure, we know that you already provide fire protection and that is about as important a service as is provided in your community. And many of you teach fire safety in the schools—another key activity that you are well suited to provide.

But look beyond the obvious. Be opportunistic. You can look at every new relationship in at least three ways. They are:

1. Things that a group can do for you.

- For example, a community group could adopt your department and pay for a new piece of equipment.
- Properly trained, senior citizens could conduct home fire safety inspections, install smoke alarms, or flow-test hydrants.
- Recreation departments could help you identify good member recruits.
- Depending on their own goals and needs, some organizations, like the teachers or the libraries, can help you fight your budget battles—and you can do the same for them when the time comes.

2. Things that you and a community group could do together.

- Hold a joint open house and parade with a local veterans group.
- With local business associations, jointly sponsor a series of lectures on safety at workplaces in the community.
- Help another group with a project of their own, like parking cars at a school fair, or helping the graduating class build a float for Homecoming Day festivities.
- Work with the local hospital to give out bathtub thermometers to new mothers in the maternity ward.
- Set up an Explorer Post to teach high school students how to be emergency responders.
- Team up with the police department to teach a class on firearm safety or to set up a program to fingerprint and photograph neighborhood children.

3. Things that you could do to help a community group.

- Offer CPR classes.
- Conduct blood pressure screenings at local churches.
- Help wait on tables at the next banquet held by the Junior Women's Club.
- Provide travel assistance to elder members of a senior citizens group.
- Sing carols for hospital patients or shut-ins over the holidays.
- Offer the use of the fire station's community room for Boy Scout meetings.
- Set up a department speakers bureau to talk about public safety issues at meetings of local civic groups.
- Teach a babysitting safety course at the neighborhood community center.
- Teach swimming pool safety at community pools.
- Pick a neighborhood and spend a day cleaning up trash and graffiti.
- Paint the local community center.
- Offer the fire station to be used as a polling place come election day.
- On Halloween, post department members at busy intersections to help trick-or-treaters cross the street.

What does all of this have to do with running a Emergency Service Organization? Everything, if "running a department" means having the support of your community!

Woodinville firefighters have that support, because they recognize that they need that support to survive. They recognize that their importance to the community goes well beyond fire protection. They recognize that their neighbors want to help. And, as a result, Woodinville firefighters have all the members they need, more than adequate resources and many, many grateful neighbors. It may not be easy. But, by building your program a block at a time, it is easier than it looks.

List of Resources

Following is a select list of resources you may wish to consult to supplement information in this manual. The list is divided by topic area. Descriptions, prices and ordering procedures for each resource should be obtained by contacting the source directly.

Customer Service

- ***Essentials of Fire Department Service***, by Alan V. Brunacini, 1996. Fire Protection Publications, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078-8045.
- ***Positively Outrageous Service***, by T. Scott Gross, 1991. Product #66A1-210942, American Society of Association Executives Book Publishing Department, 1575 Eye St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005-1168.
- **Managing Volunteer & Combination Emergency Service Organizations**, by William Jenaway, PhD editor, VFIS, York, PA, 2006

Media Relations

- ***The Publicity Handbook: How to Maximize Publicity for Products, Services & Organizations***, by David R. Yale, 1991. Product #66A1-210788, American Society of Association Executives Book Publishing Department, 1575 Eye St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005-1168.
- ***Basic Public Information Officers Course***, a 3-day course covering the role of the PIO in emergency management, conducting awareness campaigns, news release writing, public speaking and television interviews. Emergency Management Institute non-resident course #G290. Contact your state office of emergency management to obtain dates of course offerings.
- ***Advance Public Information Officers Course***, a 4 1/2-day advanced course that focuses on PIO responsibilities in large-scale emergency situations. Emergency Management Institute resident course #E388, 16825 South Seton Ave., Emmitsburg, MD 21727.

Obtaining Resources

- ***A Guide to Funding Alternatives for Fire and Emergency Medical Services Departments***, U.S. Fire Administration, 1993. Federal Emergency Management Agency Publication #5-0344 FA 141: FEMA, P.O. Box 2012, Jessup, MD 20794-2012.
- ***Getting Funded: A Complete Guide to Proposal Writing, 3rd Edition***, by Mary Hall, 1988. Product #66A1-210190, American Society of Association Executives Book Publishing Department, 1575 Eye St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005-1168.

Planning

- ***Community Fire Protection: Master Planning***, Member Incentive Program Course #R802. Offers a 10-step process interweaving concepts of strategic planning, long-range planning and resource management to develop a master plan for a hypothetical city with many fire protection challenges. U.S. Fire Administration, Federal Emergency Management Agency. Information concerning application procedures can be obtained by contacting your state fire training agency or the National Fire Academy VIP Program Manager at (800)238-3358, ext. 1158 or (301)447-1158.
- ***The Executive Guide to Strategic Planning***, by Patrick J. Below, George L. Morrisey, & Betty L. Acomb, 1987. Product #66A1-210175, American Society of Association Executives Book Publishing Department, 1575 Eye St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005-1168.

Presentations and Public Speaking

- ***The Overnight Guide to Public Speaking***, by Ed Wohlmuth, 1990. Product #66A1-210831, American Society of Association Executives Book Publishing Department, 1575 Eye St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005-1168.
- ***Secrets of Successful Speakers***, by Lilly Walters, 1993. Product #66A1-210744, American Society of Association Executives Book Publishing Department, 1575 Eye St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005-1168.
- ***Talking to the Top: An Executive's Guide to Career-Making Presentations***, by Ray Anthony, 1995. Product #66A1-210712, American Society of Association Executives Book Publishing Department, 1575 Eye St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005-1168.

Political Involvement

- ***The Nonprofit Lobbying Guide: Advocating Your Cause and Getting Results***, by Bob Smucker, 1991. Product #66A1-210319, American Society of Association Executives Book Publishing Department, 1575 Eye St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005-1168.

Special Event Planning

- ***Black Tie Optional: The Ultimate Guide to Planning and Producing Successful Special Events***, by Harry A. Freedman, 1992. Product #66A1-210766, American Society of Association Executives Book Publishing Department, 1575 Eye St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005-1168.
- ***Special Events: The Art and Science of Celebration***, by Joe Jeff Goldblatt, 1990. Product #66A1-210490, American Society of Association Executives Book Publishing Department, 1575 Eye St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005-1168.

Member Recruitment and Retention

- ***Retention and Recruitment in the Member Fire Service: Problems and Solutions***, National Member Fire Council and the U.S. Fire Administration, 1993. Federal Emergency Management Agency Publication #5-0341, FA 138: FEMA, P.O. Box 2012, Jessup, MD 20794-2012.
- ***Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services***, 7FA-310, USFA, Emmitsburg, MD 2007.

Appendix 1

Here is a sample tool with which to recruit members for your department's community relations program. Use it as an ad in the newspaper; send it out with your annual fund-raising letter; post it around the community in supermarkets, local schools and senior citizen hangouts. And don't forget to add everything to your social media sites.

HOW TO FIGHT FIRES WITH A PEN

(... or a computer, or a camera ...)

It takes all kinds of people, doing all kinds of things, to prevent and fight fires.

Your Emergency Service Organization—the (Name) Emergency Service Organization—needs members to help with our new community relations program.

- If you know how, or would like to learn how, to write media releases, create and give presentations, organize special events, take photos, design, draw, run a computer, or put any skill you may have to good use ...
- If you are a teacher, journalist, artist, secretary, student or salesperson ...
- Whether you are retired, a student or working full-time ...
- Whether you have a few hours a day or a few hours a month ...

We need your help to let our community know more about our department, about fire prevention and about membering. Your participation will help you earn Associate Member status in our Emergency Service Organization.

CALL TODAY FOR MORE INFORMATION!

(Name), Chief

(Name) Emergency Service Organization

(phone number)

Appendix 2

Use this when people start responding to your ad for community relations members:

APPLICATION TO Member FOR

[add Emergency Service Organization Name]

COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAM

Name: ____

Address: ____

Telephone number: ____

I would like to contribute the following skills and talents to help the Emergency Service Organization with its community relations program. (Check as many as apply; we will supply any equipment you may need.)

___ secretarial skills

___ computer skills

___ photography

___ writing

___ public speaking

___ designing/art

___ organizing special events

___ producing audiovisual material

___ operating a video camera

___ other (please describe)

I have had the following experience in the skills/talents I checked above:_______________

____

The time I can spare to help the Emergency Service Organization is:

_____________hours a day   _____________ hours a week

_____________hours a month   _____________ Other

Please return completed form to (contact name, address, fax number). **THANK YOU!!!**

Appendix 3

This ad, written by the Auxiliary of the Town Bank Volunteer Fire Company of Lower Township Fire District #2 in New Jersey, ran in the local newspaper just days before a township-wide vote on the fire department's budget. According to department officials, it played a big role in the passage of the district budget. Could this work for your department?

Who can our kids look up to?

Our heros of yesterday have lost their luster.

Almost daily the headlines remind us of how unwise it is to put our faith in sports legends, movie stars, politicians or captains of industry. So where are the role models of today for our sons and daughters?

We have a suggestion.

There is group of people we tend to take for granted. There is no special day set aside in their honor that we know of. No TV series dedicated to their heroism, no organized national recognition of their importance to every community in the United States, big and small.

Without fanfare, they do their job. Sometimes putting their lives on the line in the process. There is much to admire about these men and women, from member, to the trainee, to demanding work, they have to be physically strong, dedicated, intelligent, resourceful, highly motivated and yes, unselfish. Because they're certainly not in it for the money.

At a time when many of us bemoan the lack of heros, we suggest all of us look down the street to the men and women who protect you and your neighborhood from the ever-present dangers of fire.

Those role models for our kids!
They've been there all along!
God Bless the Firefighters!

We, the members of the Auxiiary of the Town Bank Volunteer Fire Company, urge you to please come out and vote **YES** for the fire budget, so our firefighters will have the equipment and training to protect our community and return safely to our families.

Thank you, the Auxiliary of the Town Bank Volunteer Fire Company

Appendix 4

Sample Emergency Service Organization Information Packet

Letter from the Chief or Department (on department letterhead):

Dear Friend:

The Rocky Road Member Fire Department is dedicated to protecting and preserving your safety and that of your families and your property. We take pride in serving our community, in being a part of a team, and in doing an excellent and professional job in whatever we do.

But we do not always do a good job of telling people about who we are, the many things we do for the department, and the challenges that we face in keeping a member fire department going. Many times, when we tell people how much it costs to buy a fire engine, or how much time we spend training, or that we do not get paid for what we do, they shake their heads in amazement and say, "We just did not know."

We created this package of information about our department for a number of reasons:

- To answer questions many of you have about the department and its members: we have included fact sheets on the department history, what the department does, how members spend their time, what kind of training we get, what kinds of vehicles we use, what kinds of protective clothing we wear, how much things cost, and where we get our funding.
- To let you know how to get more information about any aspect of the department's operations, we put together a directory of department members to call for information about different aspects of what we do.
- To give you some ideas for how you can donate your skills and energy as a member. We need people who want to respond to emergencies, but we also need lots of help with non-emergency activities like fundraising, community relations, office work, maintenance and fire safety education.

Thank you for the support you have shown us in the past, and for taking more time to learn about our department. If you have any questions or want to know how you can help, please call me at our non-emergency number, (phone number), Monday - Friday 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM.

Sincerely,

Charlie Curtis

Fire Chief

Appendix 5

How We Got Started: Department History:

The Rocky Road Member Fire Department was organized on January 12, 1923, by a group of 12 concerned neighbors who gathered at the old Angler's Inn (now the Charter House Restaurant) on Main Street to put together a plan for starting a fire company. The first fire chief was Sidney Curtis, grandfather of our current chief, Charlie Curtis.

In 1925, we built our first fire house, which was located on North Ambler Avenue. The fire house was added to in 1953, and then remodeled in 1967 with the completion of a dining room. In 1970, we purchased the old Burdie Farm Supply building on South Warren Street and renovated it into a second fire station. We have since added to and improved on the original structure to keep up with the demands of our growing community.

Our first piece of firefighting equipment was an 1895 hand-drawn chemical cart with 500 feet of fire hose, which was purchased from our neighboring Sunny Side Fire Department for $200 and a mule. Department members also chipped in their own money to purchase a hand pump and two ladders, one 32 feet long and the other 12 feet long. In 1928 we purchased a 1924 REO Speed Wagon fire truck for $2,000, giving us our first motorized piece of equipment. The REO was restored by the company in 1975 and is now used for parades and open houses.

Rescue squad service to area residents became a reality in 1959, when High Point Fire Company donated a used ambulance to the department. We now have two ambulances in service, and emergency medical service calls make up about 80 percent of our responses.

In 1960, a Ladies' Auxiliary was organized to help with fundraising, was renamed "Spouse's Auxiliary" in 1977 and remains an important part of our department today. In 1978 a Junior Fire Company was organized to train high school students to serve on the fire department.

Currently, the department has 50 members, both men and women, who respond to more than 750 fires and other emergencies per year and help with other department activities. Fundraising activities include Wednesday night bingo, public suppers, the Apple Blossom Festival, raffles, the annual chicken barbecue, and the Summer Carnival, which is held in mid-August.

Appendix 6

Who we are

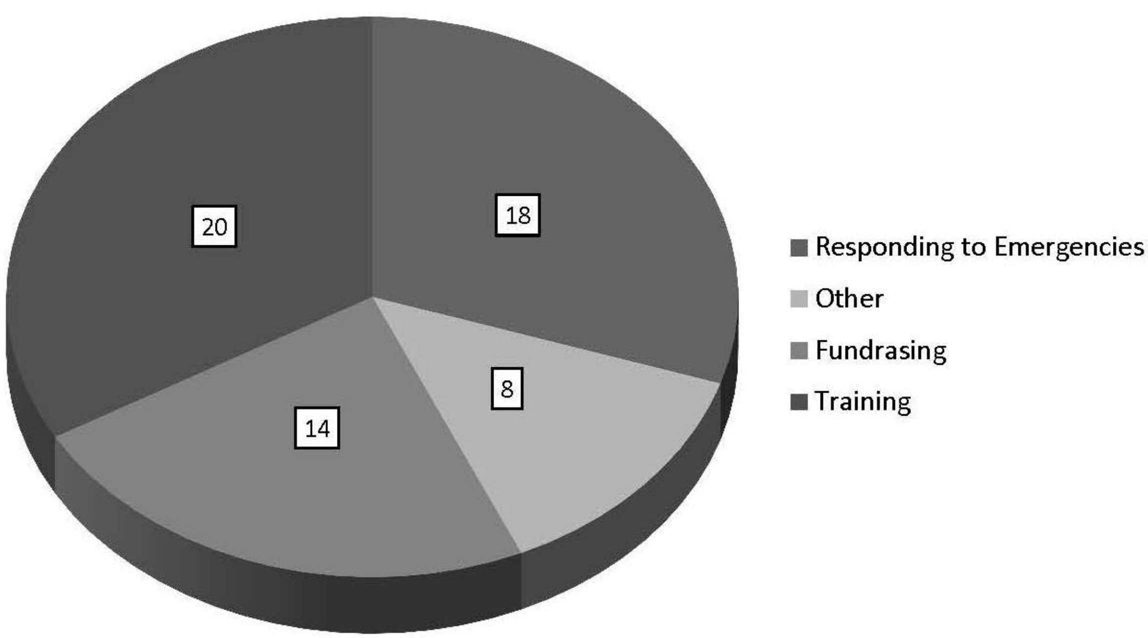
A few of us are career firefighters—paid with your tax dollars—to make sure that our town receives public safety services 24 hours of every day, even when members are not available to respond.

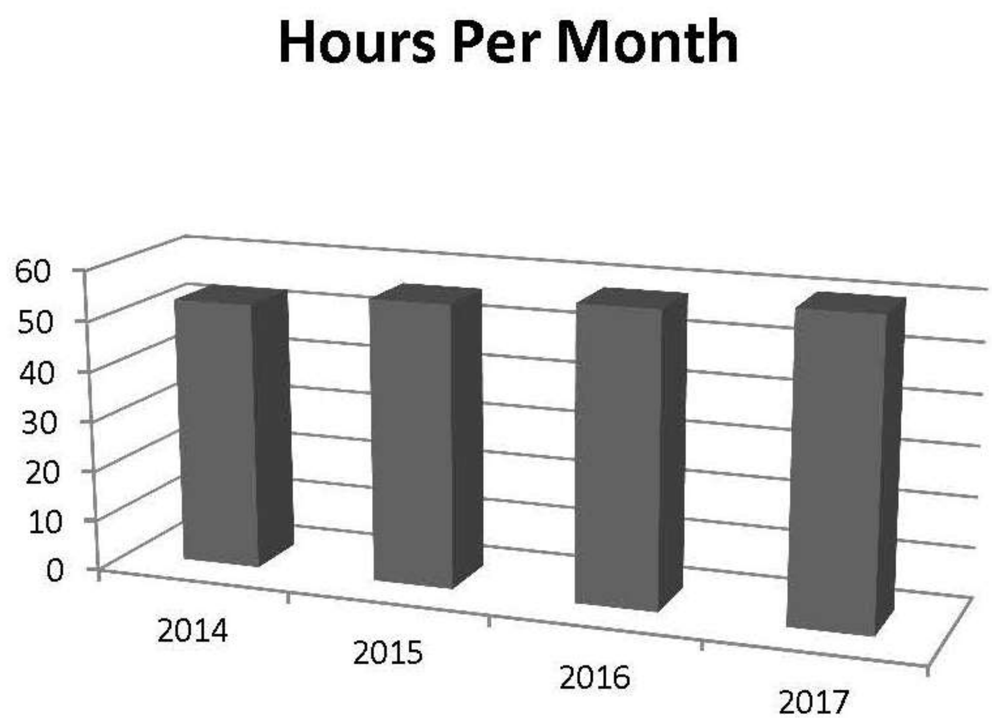
But most of us are volunteers—which means that when we are not volunteering for the fire department, some of us are students, some of us work and some of us are retired. Beneath our helmets, we are doctors, clerks, secretaries, lawyers, bankers, teachers, carpenters and plumbers, architects, guitar players, truck drivers and mechanics, high school and college students and cashiers. Some of us are between jobs. Many of us member for other organizations around town, also. We are your neighbors.

Some of us have been with the department just a short time. Some us have been here a long time. But when we are serving you, we work hard and we work as a team.

And because we member, our town not only receives excellent public safety services, but it avoids the cost of hiring more fire fighters.

Every month, each of us contributes an average of 60 hours to the department. This is how we use those hours:





But each year, it gets tougher, because your need for help increases while—at the same time—some of our members retire and not enough new members join. This chart shows the number of hours per month each of us has had to contribute in recent years:

For more information or if you simply would like to get to know us, call _____________, Monday - Friday 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM.

Appendix 7

What we do

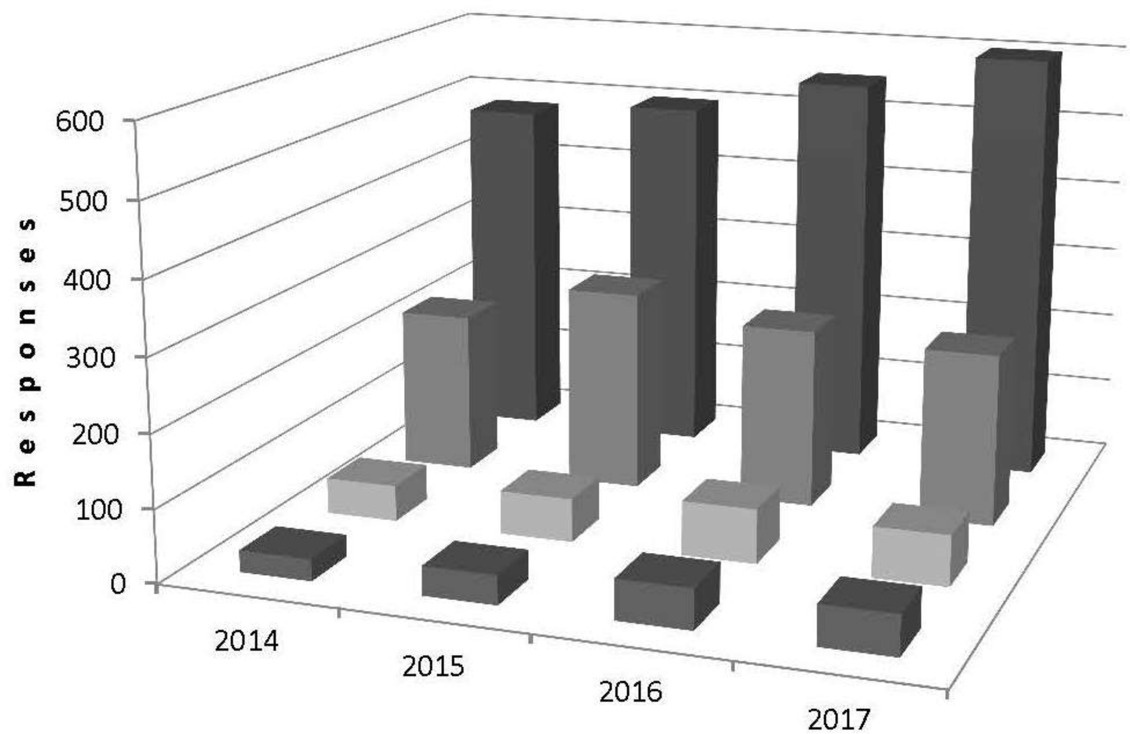
Unless you have called us for help, your only experience with our fire department may be pulling over to allow us to pass, or hearing our sirens and seeing our flashing lights. Ever wonder where we are going?

Some of the time, we are headed to a fire and, if we are, it probably will be at someone's home.

Often, we are headed to traffic accidents to rescue trapped victims, attend to injuries, and protect everyone from the possibility of a fire or explosion.

We may be headed to a river or lake to help a stranded boater. And if the rivers overflow or our area suffers a tornado or other natural disaster, we will be helping the victims. If someone gets trapped in a cave-in or a child falls down a well, we'll be there to help, too.

And a lot of the time, we are on our way to help someone who is ill or hurt. We are not just firefighters and rescuers. Many of us are trained to deliver emergency medical services. Here is a chart showing some of the ways we have served you in recent years:



If you have an emergency and need our help, call 911. If you simply want to know more about what we do, give us a call at _____________, Monday - Friday 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM.

Appendix 8

How we know what to do

We may be members, but we take our job seriously. To be able to deal quickly and effectively with house fires, heart attacks, cave-ins, chemical spills, floods and every other imaginable disaster ... to be able to put on protective gear, drive a fire truck, regulate the nozzle on a fire hose, decide on the right strategy to attack a large grass fire ... to be able to fill out a fire incident report, protect evidence at the scene of a possible arson ... in other words, to be a firefighter, emergency medical technician (EMT) or paramedic, you go through a lot of training. Hours and hours of training, testing, more training and more testing.

We do it because we have to be prepared when you need us. And we do it because a well-trained firefighter, EMT or paramedic is best prepared to stay safe in spite of the most dangerous surroundings. Here are some examples of what we learn and how long it takes:

What we must know	How we learn it
Basic firefighting skills and safety	[add name of course or training program, now many hours to complet, how often]
Safe operation of fire trucks	
Basic and advanced emergency medical skills	
Assessing and dealing with accidents involving hazardous materials	
Major rescues from cave-ins, flooding	
Commanding firefighters	

What does all of this training cost? In addition to the hundreds of hours we member, our annual investment per firefighter—in terms of instructors, manuals, equipment, tuition, travel and lodging—is $____.

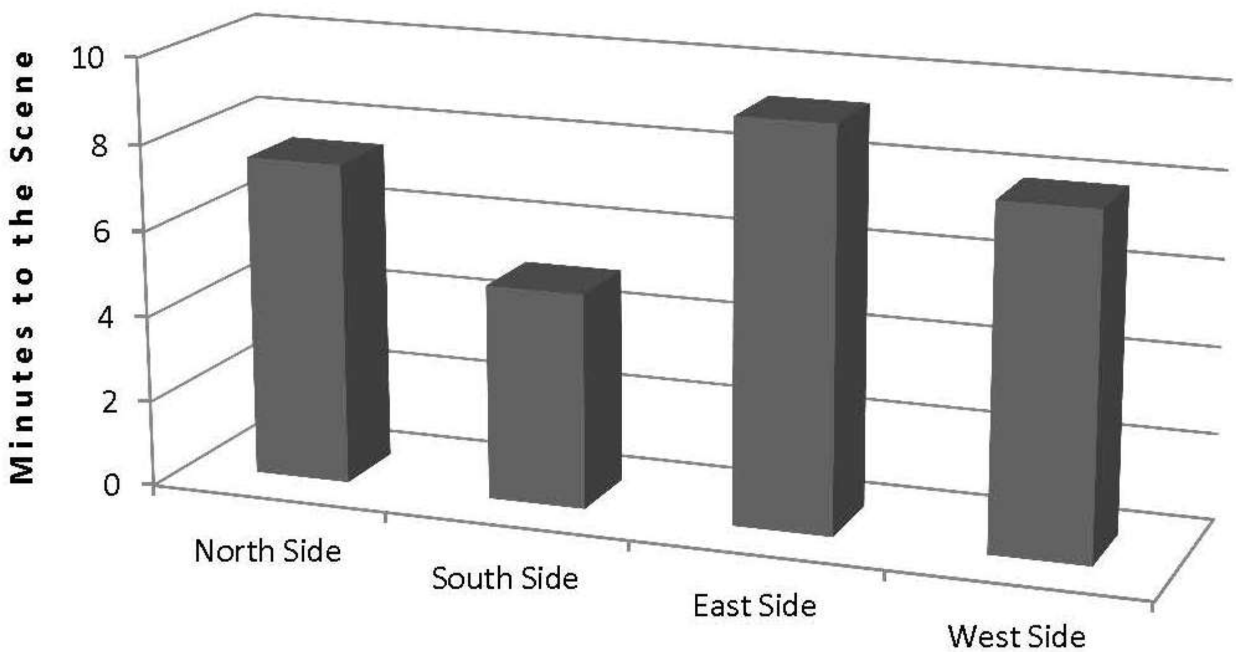
For more information about how we train, please call Training Officer ______________ at ______________.

Appendix 9

How we get to the scene

First of all, “the scene” may be your home or your place of business. If you need us, we want to get there with the right equipment just as fast as we can.

We arrive at the scene when we are needed and—most important of all–-we arrive safely. Here is a chart showing the average time it takes us—from the point you call to the time we arrive—from our Randolph Street station to the different sections of our community:



How do we get there?

To most people, we are just lights flashing and sirens sounding. There is a lot more to the story.

We use several types of vehicles. The people who determine how much you pay for property insurance often will suggest specific kinds of equipment. When we have the right equipment, your insurance premiums can actually go down! On the attached page is a list of the vehicles—we call them apparatus—we use. But first, here is a quick summary of what they are:

- **Engines**—also known as **pumper trucks**—carry fire hoses and pump water either from fire hydrants or ponds. They can also carry a lot of water—some of ours can haul about 500 to 1000 gallons—for use when water is not nearby. They also carry ladders, light rescue equipment, lights and tools to help us get to people in need.

- **Tanker trucks** are manufactured to carry water to a fire scene. Tankers can carry thousands of gallons of water or more, depending on the needs of the department.
- **Ladder trucks**—also known as aerial trucks—help us reach high places. Some use ladders, others use “cherry picker” platforms.
- **Rescue trucks** carry equipment to help us rescue people from cave-ins, floods, smashed cars and just about every other imaginable disaster.
- **Brush units** are specially equipped with tools and a water tank for fighting forest fires and brush fires. Brush units are all-terrain vehicles that can pump low volumes of water while the vehicle is moving.
- **Hazardous materials (“hazmat”) trucks** have special equipment to deal with chemical and other hazardous material spills and accidents.
- **Ambulances** are vehicles equipped for transporting the injured or sick. They contain medical supplies and equipment that can mobilize, revive and keep people alive during the trip to the hospital.
- **Service cars** do things like carry extra bottles of compressed air to a fire, pick up wet hose and bring it back to the station, and provide other types of support at the emergency scene.
- **Command vehicles** are for use by the incident commander—the highest ranking officer at an emergency. They contain maps, multi-frequency radios, telephones and other tools to help with logistics at the scene.

Here are the apparatus our department has:

Kind of vehicle it is	Year Made	Make and Model	What it can do	What else is interesting about it	How much it cost when we bought it
Engine #1	1984	Ford Darley	pumps 1,000 gallons per minute, holds 750 gallons	has a 6-person fully enclosed cab, 1300 feet of hose	$110,000 (used)
Squad Car		Chevrolet			

Appendix 10

What we wear to work

Most of the time, we wear dark blue shirts and trousers with our department's patch on our left shoulder and an American flag on our right shoulder. We take a lot of pride in how we look and letting you know we are member firefighters. But when we respond to a fire, chemical spill, cave-in or other emergency, most of the time we need to protect ourselves so we can protect you.

Here in [your state], it does not matter if you are a member or career (full-time) firefighter. The law requires us to wear specific articles of clothing and use equipment to keep us safe. Let us take it from the top.

- Our **helmets** are made from polycarbonate or thermoplastic and can withstand an impact of more than 200 pounds. They have a plexiglas visor to protect our eyes. New helmets cost $250 each.
- Our **"turnout" coats** are made from a fabric known as P.B.I. and have liners made of another fabric known as Goretex so that they protect us from high heat and keep us dry—not only from the water we discharge from hoses but from our own sweat. Each new coat costs $1,200.
- We also wear **"bunker pants"** to add to our overall protection. Each new pair costs $1,200.
- Our **gloves** protect our hands from heat as well as from handling sharp or rough objects. Made of lined leather with P.B.I., a new pair costs $50.
- Our **boots** are made of rubber and have steel toe guards and soles. Each new pair costs $200.
- In order to enter a burning building or get near any dangerous gas, we must wear **breathing apparatus** capable of providing us with clear air for at least 30 minutes. Each new breathing apparatus costs $7,000. And the equipment we use to refill the tanks cost us $500 a year to operate and maintain.
- Firefighters must also be equipped with a **pager** ($350) and a **portable radio** ($2,000) to allow them to communicate with others in the department before, during and after a fire.

And, though not part of what a firefighter wears, the cost of bringing a firefighter into the department also includes us to invest in things like a mandatory medical physical, minimum basic training, and a Hepatitis B vaccination. All told, the cost of preparing a fire fighter to fight fires can be upwards of $6,000.

Of course, whenever we can, we save money by purchasing used protective gear and breathing apparatus. But whatever we wear must meet very specific legal requirements. The more dangerous the substances we encounter, the more protective equipment we need—and the more it costs.

For more information or if you would simply like to try on a uniform, give us a call at ____________, Monday - Friday 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM.

Appendix 11

Money: Where we get it, how we spend it

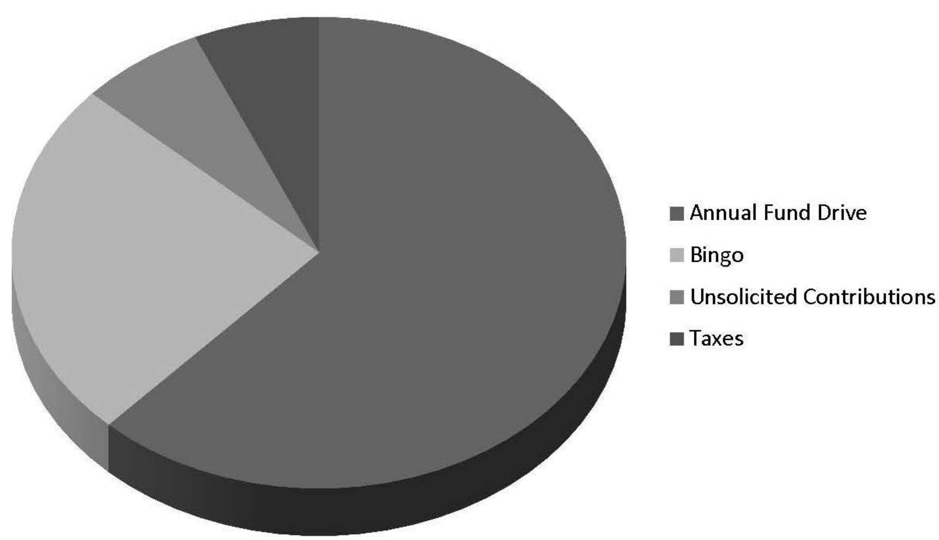
Some people think that because we are a fire department, we get things for free—things like electricity, fuel for our fire trucks, food, protective clothing and insurance. We only wish. Here is a comparison of our monthly budget and what could be your personal budget.

Budget Item	Annual Household Budget	Our Annual Budget
Mortgage	[average for your area]	
Car Payment/cost of our trucks	“	
Gas for your car/fuel for our trucks	“	
Utilities	“	
Property and casualty insurance	“	
Maintenance	“	
Clothing	“	

Even with all members, our annual budget is $________. Where do we get that much money? The following chart shows the main sources.

Per household, it’s not so much—just $8 per month. That is less than the cost of a movie and popcorn. Small price to pay for allowing us to protect you and your family in the event of a fire or medical emergency.

Want more information on where we get our funds and how we spend them? Call our treasurer, ____________, at _____________, Monday - Friday 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM.



Appendix 12

How you can help

We are proud to be able to help you. But we are not too proud to say that we need your help. There are so many, many ways for you to contribute—and most of them do not involve responding to a fire or medical emergency. Of course, a contribution of some item we need or money is always appreciated. But if given a choice, we would rather have your talents and time.

If you want to be a firefighter or paramedic:

If you are a good team member, and are physically fit and willing to make a commitment of time to your community, you may be eligible for this demanding program. Your contribution will be great. But the feeling you get when you save the life of a small child can't be beat. Meet our requirements, and we promise you a chance to have that feeling.

If you want to help maintain our apparatus, equipment and facilities:

If you are good at working with your hands and like the satisfaction of a smoothly humming engine, we could use a good mechanic to help keep our apparatus and other equipment in top working order. Even if you are all thumbs but would be willing to help keep our firehouse clean and orderly, you could be a star.

If you want to help in our office or with our fundraising efforts:

Every community has its computer whiz-kids. If that is you, we need your help with keeping records and statistics on what and how we are doing. If computers are not your thing, how about calling bingo or helping to cook hot dogs or park cars?

If you want to help with our community relations program:

We need members to help write press releases about our department for the local newspaper, take pictures at fires and other events, and help give presentations about the department to community groups. If you have creative talents or people skills to share, you've come to the right place.

If you want to help recruit other members:

Some people have a knack for encouraging others to help. If that is you, we can create a year-round member recruiting program with you as its director.

For more information about how you can help—or to run an idea by us on how you can contribute—give Ted Frankel, our member coordinator, a call at ____________________, Monday - Friday 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM..

Appendix 13

How to get more information about us

If you need us right now for an emergency of any sort, dial 9-1-1. Do not hesitate. If you think you or someone else is in trouble and needs help right away, we are willing to take the chance that you may be wrong. Chances are, you do need help—and that is why we are here.

But we also hope you will call one of our non-emergency numbers if you just have a question. You have a right—and we hope an interest—in knowing more about what we do, how we do it and how you can help. Here is an easy guide to help you find the right member of our department to answer your questions.

If you have a question about	Please contct me	My number is	When I am easiest reach
A specific fire: how it may have started, what happened, what might have been lost.	Assistant Chief Bill Smith	(555) 555-7890	If I'm not responding to an emergency call our dispatcher and he/she will find me. I'll get back to you as fast as I can.
How to prevent a fire	Fire Marshal Susan Richards	(555) 555-7009	I am at the department most Saturdays and just about every Wednesday evening.
What something costs	Bob Adams, Fire Department Treasurer	(555) 555-7000	You can reach me every Thursday from 8:30 until noon. Stop by. It easier to show you numbers than tell you about them.
Statistics	Linda Burke, our Office Manager	(555) 555-7000	I'm at my desk from 8:30 AM until at least 5 PM every work day.
Our history	Ken Fenton, Retired Chief	(555) 555-9876	I was one of the guys who founded the department and I'd enjoy tellin you about how far we've come
How to help the department	Chief Charlie Curtis or Volunteer Coordinator Ted Frankel	(555) 555-7000	If you want to help, I'll talk to you any time. Just have our dispatcher find me.

Appendix 14

Sample Presentation On Talking Points:

Use these as a guide for developing your own presentation.

(Introduction: Thank the audience; state your main point or points.)

- Thank you. It has been a few years since I last spoke to the Western Rotary Club. I was not Chief of the Smithtown Member Fire Department then, just a lieutenant.
- A lot of growth and construction has occurred over the last few years. The new firehouse is almost finished, and it will make a big difference to the people at the western edge of town. Right now they might have to wait 20 minutes for us to get there ... and fire can destroy a home in that much time.

(Body: State one main point at a time, and support each one in more detail.)

- Usually, people want to know why government must spend so much money. In this case, people asked us to build the firehouse and buy the pumper. The people who live over on the west side were concerned, and I do not blame them. We lost a house a year ago and came close to losing another one this year. With all of the traffic, it is getting harder and harder to go from one side to the other.
- Is $________ a lot for a used pumper? Actually, no. Think about what your last car cost you. A pumper is a whole lot more complicated and a lot bigger. It has to carry 1,000 gallons of water, it has to be able to pump 1,250 gallons a minute through as many as 6 hoses at a time. It has to carry up to 6 firefighters and all of their equipment. And it will have to last us a long time.
- Actually, $________ for a used pumper is a real good price. New ones can go for twice as much. We were lucky to find one in good shape at this price.
- A lot of people in this town have been real generous—first in helping us build the new firehouse and now this. We are close, but not there yet . You are the leaders of this community, and we are turning to you for help.
- If every organization in this room donated $500, we would reach our goal. Our new western operation will save you more than that in insurance costs over the next few years. But what it will really save are restless nights for the citizens of the west side.
- There were 83 fires in the western part of town last year. Our average response time was 18 minutes, which is pretty good—considering how far we have to travel. But that was before they widened Morris Avenue and added the shopping center. That was before they built those homes on Redden Road.
- Eighteen minutes may be pretty good under the circumstances, but it is an eternity in a fire. It may be pretty good ... but our response really needs to be under six minutes. That is how fast we get to the other parts of town ... and that is how fast all of the other departments in the county get to fires.

(Conclusion: Restate the main points, thank the audience.)

- The bottom line is that the western part of town needs faster fire protection ... and with this pumper, we can provide it.
- To get this job done, we need your help. We are close to our goal, but not close enough yet.
- Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

Appendix 15

Use this form to let local reporters know the details about an incident.

(NAME)Emergency Service Organization
NEWS RELEASE

(Name and address of Emergency Service Organization)

Phone: (   ) __________________Fax: (   ) ___________________ E-Mail:____________________

Release Date:________________________________Number of Pages:______________________

Contact:____(name and phone number)____   Incident #: _____________________________

On___(date)___at___(time)___AM/PM, _________(type of fire)_________

Fire Location:____

The cause of the fire was:____

The fire also damaged:____

Expected to be contained at______(time)______controlled at______(time)______

The fire was contained at______(time)______controlled at______(time)______

_________firefighters responded to the incident with_______engines,_______trucks,_______squads.

They were assisted by firefighters and equipment from:_______________________________________

The incident commander was:______________(name)______________

Other Information:____

____

____

Appendix 16

Media Releases "Highlighting" Members in Your Department

Introduction

The media release highlighting a Emergency Service Organization member should be an opportunity to do two things:

- First, to recognize individual members of the department (your theme might be "unsung heroes").
- Second, to highlight aspects of the department that you want the community—and prospective members, in particular—to be aware of (for example, camaraderie, training opportunities, professionalism).

We suggest that you talk to the editor(s) of your local paper(s)—or the editor of the section of the paper that covers local news—before embarking on this project. Let them know that you will be producing a series of profiles (one each month) as part of your community relations program, and ask for their cooperation in publishing the profiles. Ask if they have any suggestions for you about length, photos or other details.

In the absence of specific guidelines from the editor, we suggest that the release be no longer than 750 words (about 3 double-spaced pages). Include a black-and-white photo of the member, if possible wearing the department uniform or gear.

Information to collect for the media release

These are some things you should try to find out when interviewing the member you are profiling.

- What the volunteer does for the department
- What the volunteer does for a living/career
- Information about the volunteer's family: married? kids?
- How long the volunteer has been with the department
- Why the volunteer joined the department
- What the volunteer likes best about being a member of the department (for example, training opportunities, being part of a team, service to the community, helping neighbors)
- How much time the volunteer spends serving the department per week or per month, including training and other non-response activities

- Most memorable experience as a volunteer with the department
- Anything unusual/notable about the volunteer that would add “human interest” to the article (for example, hobbies, special assignments, disabilities)

Writing the Release

Follow the guidelines in the “Building Blocks” manual, Section 3 (Getting Good media Coverage) for information on how to prepare a feature media release. Because it is not a “hard news” story, your “lead” paragraph will not be in the typical who-what-where-when style. Feature releases might start with a quotation from the member, or an interesting fact that will draw the reader into the article.

Not all of the information that was collected for the release has to be included in the article; use your judgment about what to include when you see what you have got to work with. As you write, think about how you want readers to come away having learned two things:

- Something about the member that they did not know before;
- Something about the Emergency Service Organization that they did not know before.
- You also might want to get a quotation from the chief, talking about the member’s contribution to the department, or from the member’s employer, noting admiration for the member’s commitment to the community.

Let the member and the chief look at your draft profile before you submit it to the paper, to make sure it is accurate and that it is something they will be comfortable with.

Appendix 17

Sample PSA Announcements

Here are some sample public service announcements that the French Lick, Indiana, Fire Department wrote for its local radio station. Use this as a model to write your own PSAs.

ABC Fire Department

Audio Public Service Announcement

Subject: Recruiting Members

Contact: Barry Wininger, (phone)

Length: 30 seconds

Instructions	Script
Larry Bird (bouncing a ball in the backround as Bird starts talkin, and fades our after five seconds	Hi I'm Larry Bird. Being a volunteer firefighter is a lot like playing basketball. You have to be in the right place at the right time, and you have to know what to do when you get there.
Larry BIrd	It's time more of us showed up for our volunteer fire department. There's a lot for you to do when you get there.
Announcer	For more information, call the French Lick Fire Department at (tellephone number).

ABC Fire Department

Audio Public Service Announcement

Subject: Recruiting Members

Contact: Barry Wininger, (phone)

Length: 15 seconds

Instructions	Script
Larry Bird (bouncing a ball in the backround)	About half of basketball is being in the right place at the right time. The other half is knowing what to do when you get there.
(sirens in the backgrounc)	Here in ABC, we're lucky to have volunteer firefighters who are there when we need them...and who know what to do when they get there
(no background)	Maybe it's time more of us showed up when our volunteer fire department needs us. There's plenty to do --and not just fighting fires. Lets all so our part to help the ABC Fire Department.
Announcer	Thanks Larry...for doing your part. For information, call (tellephone number).

Appendix 18

Sample Media Release

Mariposa Public Utility District Fire Department

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: April 9, 2017

For more information, contact:
Bill Bondshu, Fire Chief - 996-3818

Location: Mariposa County High School front lawn Area.
Date Wednesday, April 10, 2017
Time photo opportunity at 12:45 p.m.
Subject: ROP Firefighting Class/MPUD Truck 22/Smoke Machine

GRIZZLIES FIRE DEPARTMENT RECEIVES LARGE DONATION

On Wednesday, April 10, 2017, at 12:45 p.m., the Mariposa Grizzlies Fire Department will be receiving a donation of $500.00 from the Mariposa Masonic Lodge #24, F&AM. Truck 22, a 50-foot aerial, will provide the backdrop for the students accepting this generous donation. The money was used to purchase a Roscoe-Hale smoke generator which will be used as a live smoke simulator.

Background/Information

The ROP (Regional Occupation Program) Firefighting Technology Program at Mariposa County High School began December 4, 2017, with the hiring of Phil Whitson as the instructor. With a class of 16 students, the first firefighting class began its program by learning about the fire service in general, the organizational structure and how Emergency Service Organizations function. The class then developed the “Grizzlies Fire Department”, as a department designed to protect the community of Mariposa High school and the 750+ “citizens” who inhabit the community. The Grizzlies Fire Department developed a mission statement complete with goals and objectives, a code of conduct which each firefighter (remainder of students) are filled by the firefighting students.

The goals of the ROP Firefighting program are to offer the opportunity for each student to learn about and understand what the fire service is all about, to have a better understanding of what it takes to become a firefighter, the requirements, expectations, qualifications, and to give them practical hands-on experiences related to the function and purpose of the fire service. Additionally, students may use this as a spring board into an almost unlimited career opportunity profession.

-more-

Grizzlies Receive Donation

This course is being presented as a “participative”, hands-on type of course, in that it offers the students a wide choice of learning experience. When time and equipment allow, each classroom session is followed by a practical training exercise thrusting the students right into firefighter “turnout” gear and into the smoke. The students are trained in subjects such as; fire extinguishers, ladder use, hose, nozzles, rescue, search procedures, ventilation, firefighter safety, the list goes on. The curriculum for the class was purchased by MPUD Fire Department and is the California State Fire Service Training and Education System (CSFTES) Firefighter I program. This course is a 250-hour course.

Since the ROP Firefighting Technology course began, the program, through the generosity of several organizations in Mariposa County, has received donations of equipment. Mariposa County Fire Department has donated safety equipment in the form of old helmets, turnout coats, pants, boots and gloves. MPUD Fire Department has donated safety equipment, as well as most generously allowing the class to utilize and train with the departments equipment and apparatus.

This donation of $500.00 by the Mariposa Masonic Lodge #24, F&AM, has made possible the purchase of the Roscoe-Hale smoker generator. This machine has already been used several times in the training of these students, and they anticipate a very busy and useful schedule for the “smoke machine”.

###

Appendix 19

Sample Slide Presentation and Talking Points

Helping each other

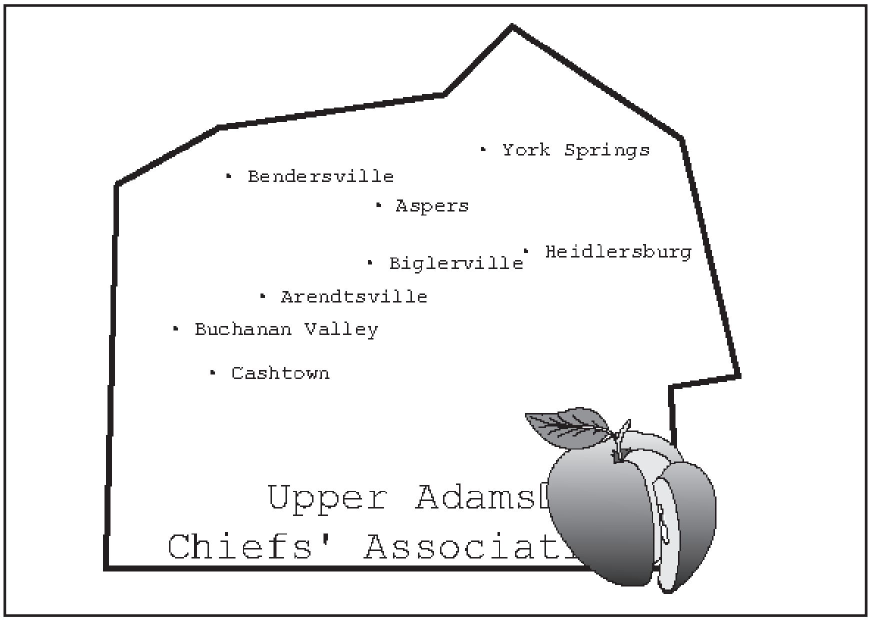
The community and the Anytown Fire Department

[This is a sample presentation developed by a County Chiefs' Association to educate their community about the member fire service. The notes below the slides are talking points. Use this as a model for presentations of your own.]

Please Understand ...

» **We serve you.**
» **What we do is important.**
» **We are members.**
» **Protecting you costs a lot more than our time.**
» **We can't do it alone.**
» **Here's how you can help.**

We haven't done a very good job of telling you who we are ... what we do ... why we do it ... or how you should help. But we know you'll forgive us. We save lives and property in our spare time.
This (evening) ... we want to make just five points ... and here they are.



We are the departments of the County Chiefs' Association. I am the____________________ and I serve as the_____________________of the__________________________ Fire Department.

What we do is important

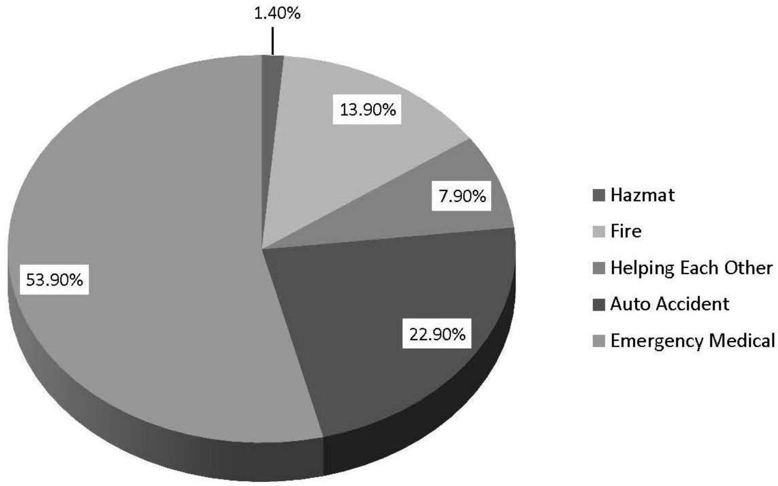
» **Fight fires where you live, work, play.**
» **Help families prevent fires.**
» **Help people with medical emergencies:**
  - **heart attacks,**
  - **assisting in delivering babies,**
  - **broken bones, etc.**

» **Rescue people from flood waters.**
» **Search for lost children.**
» **Rescue people trapped in car accidents.**
» **Protect residents from dangerous chemicals.**

Most people just see us flying by ... with our sirens and flashing lights. But unless you are the one we are going to help, you may not know all of the following things we do. Let me read a short list.

Just yesterday/in the last week, we ... (talk about a recent response).

What we do is important



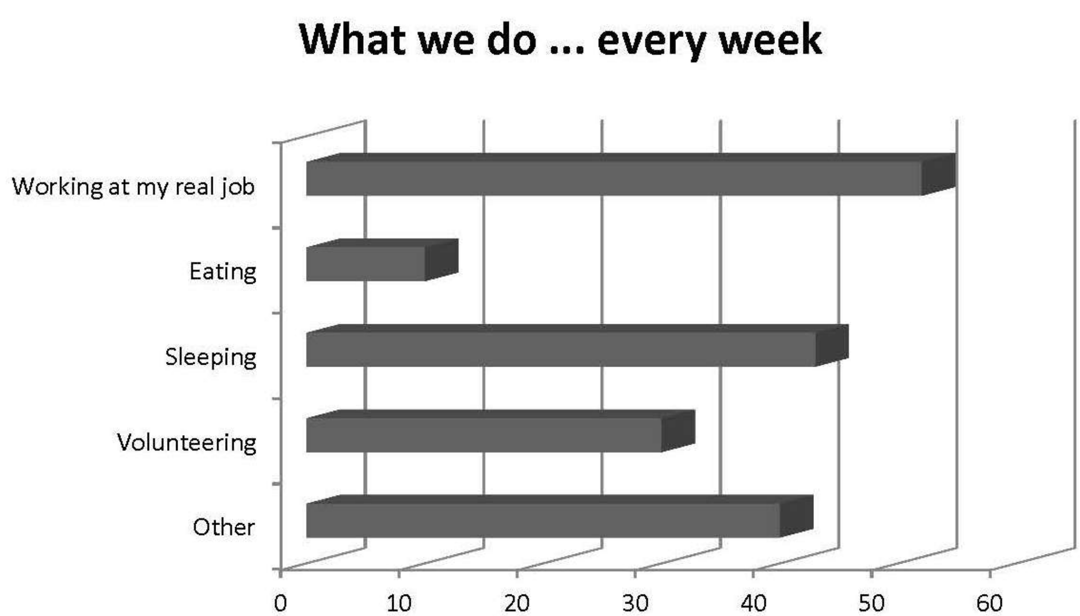
Here is a simpler way of looking at it.

A lot of our neighbors used to live in cities where firefighters are paid employees. They don't know about members ... who we are ... what we do ... how often we do it ... and why we do it.

We are members

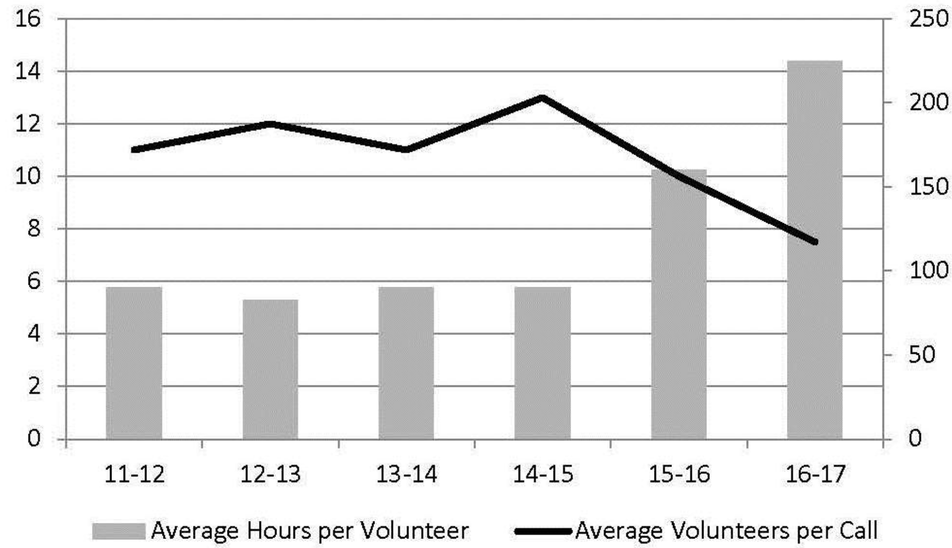
- » Factory workers
- » College professors
- » Clergy
- » Retired people
- » Secretaries
- » Construction Workers
- » Nurses
- » Farmers
- » Truck Drivers
- » Store Owners
- » Public Officials
- » Law Enforcement Officers

Who are we? We're people just like you ... your neighbors ... co-workers ... shop-keepers ... and maybe your family.



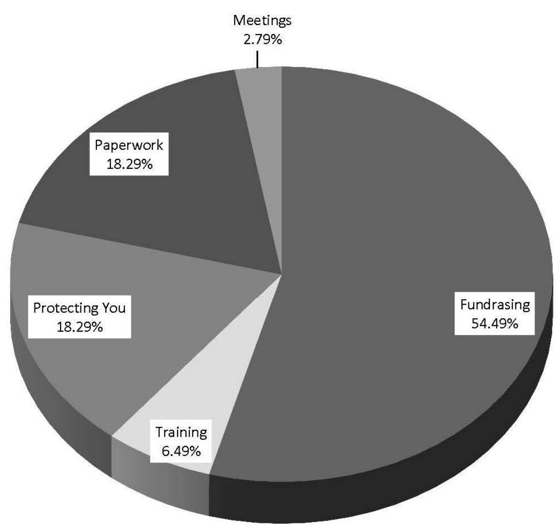
And each of us has made a commitment of time and energy ... and sometimes courage. Being a member firefighter takes a big part of my week.

In Anytown ... a few of us are being asked to do more



(OPTIONAL and DEPARTMENT SPECIFIC)
In Anytown, it has been tough. As this chart shows, there are fewer of us doing more. That's a big problem.

Out of every 100 hours I member ...

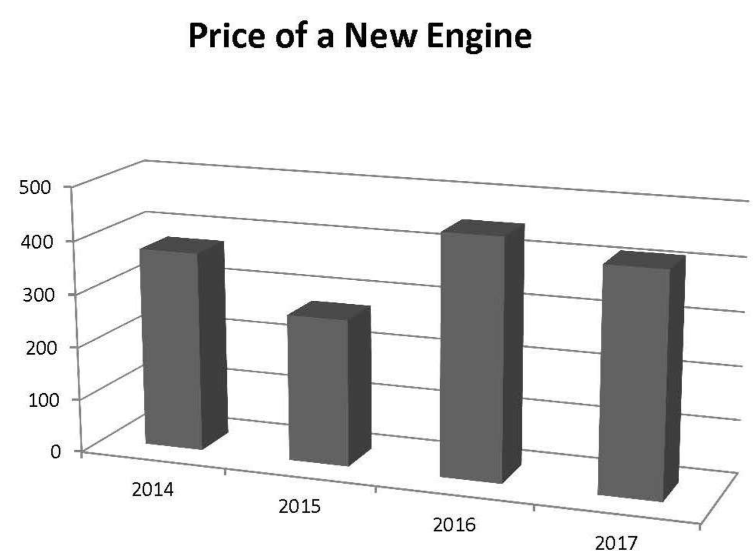


It's not all riding on fire trucks. We spend more than half of our time raising money to pay for those trucks, our equipment and the many other costs we must cover. Taxes pay less than_____% of our costs in the County ... and in Anytown, they pay just_____%.

Protecting you costs more than our time

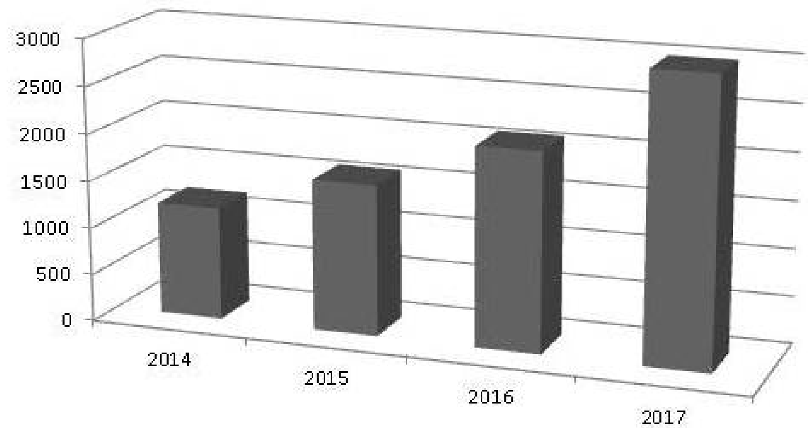
- » **The apparatus we ride.**
- » **The gear we wear.**
- » **The equipment we use: hoses, ladders, rescue tools, etc.**
- » **The fuel we use.**
- » **The insurance we need.**
- » **Our utility bills.**
- » **Medical supplies to treat people in need.**
- » **The training manuals we must have, and the classes we must take.**

Believe me ... running a Emergency Service Organization is expensive. There are fire departments ... luckily not around here ... that even have to pay for the water they use to fight fires. Here are just a few of the things we have to pay for.



A new pumper truck today costs more than twice what it did in 2000. If we're lucky enough to find a good used pumper ... we're still talking real money, and it gets more expensive every year.

Cost of Safely Outfitting One Firefighter



The same is true with the equipment we need ... the clothes we wear to fight fires. Many of us buy it ourselves. I paid $ _____ for my gear.

In Anytown ... this year we will pay ...

Examples	$'s
Vehicle Repairs	7,500
Utilities	9,400
Medical Supplies	2,500
Building	30,000
Radios	1,200
Insurance	11,000

But everything is expensive ... here are just a few examples of what we will need to buy this year in Anytown.

And so you are thinking ...

“Are they crazy? Why would anyone member that much time and put up with that much aggravation?”

Yes ... we’re a little crazy ... and we drive our families crazy when we run away from the dinner table every time someone needs help ... but we do it because it absolutely must be done by someone. Neighbors helping neighbors is what small towns are all about. And ... what if we weren’t crazy ... what if we didn’t member?

We can’t do it alone

- **Protecting 10 square miles ... 1,000 homes ... 25 businesses ... 7 places of worship ... 20 farms ... and 1 school.**
- **Conducting 8 major fundraisers a year with a net profit of only $34,000.**
- **Meeting all of the federal and state requirements for Emergency Service Organizations.**

We’re telling you this ... because we have learned the hard way that we can’t do it ourselves.

A lot of us live in small towns because people look after each other. We’ve been looking after you ... and now we need you to look after us.

Here's how you can help

Please help us ...

- » Fight fires and rescue people.
- » Respond to medical emergencies.
- » With paperwork and in our office.
- » Keep our aparatus running.
- » With bingo, dinners and at other fundraising events.
- » Tell our story to local leaders and residents.

There are lots of ways to help ... and we would appreciate any of them. Help us with one hour a month or three hours a day ... of anything in between.

If everyone gives a little ... this can work.

In summary ...

- » We serve you.
- » What we do is important.
- » We are members.
- » Protecting you costs a lot more than our time.
- » We can't do it alone.
- » Here's how you can help.

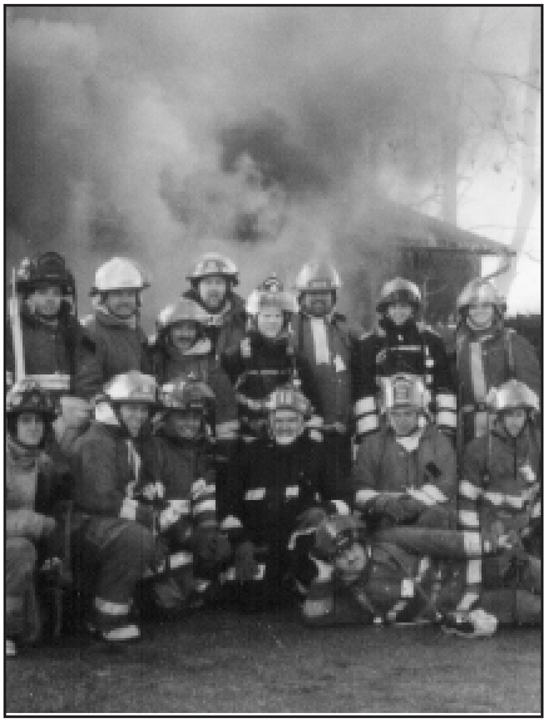
Like I said ... we want you to understand five things about us ... we hope you understand that we are here to help you ... and now we need your help.

We’d be happy to answer any of your questions ... and talk to any of you about ways you might help.

Thanks for your time and support.

Appendix 20

After every response, the Mariposa Utility District Fire Department in Mariposa, California, sends out a greeting card with a photo of department members on the front and the most appropriate of three interchangeable messages inside.



May you find comfort
in knowing
that others
understand and care.

MPUD
Fire Department

We are happy we were able
to serve you.
Please do not hesitate
to call us any time.

MPUD
Fire Department

Although words seem
so inadequate at
this time of sorrow,
may you find comfort
in knowing that others
understand and care.

MPUD
Fire Department

Appendix 21

Lydon Fire and Rescue in Louisville, Kentucky, distributes fire department “trading cards.” One side shows a scene of Emergency Service Organization members in action; the other side explains the scene and adds a safety message. (note: The explanations on the cards shown here are not intended to correspond with the scenes that are depicted.)

FRONT

THE “HOSIE”

A Fire Attack Team pushes forward attacking a structure fire. Firefighters assigned to engine companies are nicknamed “Hosies” because they work the hose lines. Aggressive tactics call for them to enter the burning structure to face the fire head on.

SAFETY MESSAGE

Be careful with your ashes! Make sure they have been cold for at least two days before cleaning out the fire place. Carry them away from any building in a metal container.

Interested in Membering? Contact:
Lyndon Fire and Rescue
8126 New La Grange Rd., Louisville, KY 40222
425-7474

BACK

FRONT

THE JAWS OF LIFE

The Jaws of Life Rescue Tool is used to free trapped victims. Firefighters train on one of three sets owned by Lyndon. Both rescue/engines and our truck company carry these lifesaving tools.

SAFETY MESSAGE

Be sure your number is up! Post your street address so it can be seen at least six inches tall and in a contrasting color to the background.

Interested in Membering? Contact:
Lyndon Fire and Rescue
8126 New La Grange Rd., Louisville, KY 40222
425-7474

BACK