

OPENING NEW DOORS

THE SILVER RIBBON REPORT

GUIDELINES AND BEST PRACTICES FOR A
SUCCESSFUL YOUTH FIRE SERVICE PROGRAM



Officers Section

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GUIDELINES AND BEST PRACTICES FOR A SUCCESSFUL YOUTH FIRE SERVICE PROGRAM

Who Wants to Be a Firefighter?

By Anonymous

Several people have asked me why I became a firefighter, and they even wonder why anyone would want to be a firefighter. I find it hard to explain to them the reasons because so many things make up a firefighter.

When I first thought about becoming a firefighter, my mind recalled memories from my childhood. Whenever I heard a siren, I would run out into the front yard and down the street. You could see people coming from everywhere out into their yards looking for what they knew was coming. The siren could be heard long before anything came into sight. You could hear it in the distance, building from a low wail, slowly climbing, until finally reaching its crescendo. There was never a doubt what that sound was coming from. Then it would finally come into sight, rounding the curve at the top of the hill. Motor roaring, the fire engine would come streaking red down the hill.

As the engine roared by me, I would be filled with excitement and exhilaration, knowing that these men and women were heading somewhere they were needed. Boy, how I wished that I could go with those firefighters, ride that big red truck and be part of what they were heading to accomplish.

Before joining the fire department, I had no idea of all the things a firefighter is responsible for knowing. All that I had seen of firefighting was the glamorous, dramatic part of the job: the fire engines racing to an emergency, the fire scene where the firefighters raced to conquer the blaze that was trying to consume this house or that building. These were the only symbols I could associate with firefighting.

After starting my training, I soon saw that to become a firefighter takes a lot of studying and hard practical work. I covered more material and acquired more knowledge of more subjects in a short amount of time than ever before in my life. There was no time for goofing off. There was no leniency. You either did the job and made it or you did not. There weren't any dramatics or glamour in the classroom. Working in the drill yard was harder than any construction work I had ever done. After a day of practicing firefighting techniques in the smoke lab, working with the ladders or sliding down rope

from the drill tower, I would feel drained of all my energy and wonder if I would be able to go back the next day.

But still that excitement was there inside me. Going home, covered in black from head to toe, with soot lingering in my nostrils and throat, I would still feel that excitement and exhilaration just like when I saw the fire engines go by me as a child. Only now the excitement came from knowing I was learning the skills of firefighting, and that soon I would be one of those firefighters riding that truck. I would soon be a part of that group going to save someone's life and property from fire.

Now that I have been on the line several years, I can see that there is a dark side to this job that only a firefighter knows. The frustration that builds inside when someone criticizes my job because I have different work hours than they do. The hurt when people belittle the importance of my job, knowing the people who criticize are the ones who have never had the need to call on my services, having to stand by and watch the flames licking from the windows as their home burns to the ground. Those people who criticize have probably never experienced the physical beating my body takes at a large working fire. Those people have probably never experienced the empty, helpless feeling I felt upon seeing my first fire death: the burned, charred, wasted body of a 7-month-old baby. These are the things known only to a firefighter.

But there are also other things that are known only to a firefighter as well. The teamwork, closeness and loyalty that develop between the brothers and sisters in our profession. The faith and confidence that is developed in each other by having to place our lives in one another's hands on every fire call. The feeling of real camaraderie with my fellow firefighters after putting out totally, side by side on a fire. And the pure joy of saving a stranger's life and delivering him back to his family.

The excitement is still there inside of me. I feel it spark every time the alarm sounds. I believe—and this comes from observing the real veterans—that this excitement will always be there. Who wants to be a firefighter? I will always want to be a firefighter!

Opening New Doors
The Silver Ribbon Report
Guidelines and Best Practices for a Successful Youth Fire Service Program

Authors

Chief Timothy S. Wall
North Farms Volunteer Fire Dept
Wallingford, Conn.
firewallco7@sbcglobal.net

Chief J. Dan Eggleston, EFO, CFO
Albemarle County Dept. of Fire Rescue
Charlottesville, Va.
deggleston@albemarle.org

Captain Mike Jaffa
Santa Fe County Fire-EMS
Santa Fe, N.M.
mjaffa1@msn.com

Deputy Chief Kevin J. Kowalski, Fire Marshal
Simsbury Fire District
Simsbury, Conn.
kkowalski@simsburyfd.org

Battalion Chief John Madson
SeaTac Fire Department
SeaTac, Wash.
jmadson@ci.seatac.wa.us

Michael Walton
Crozet Volunteer Fire Department
Crozet, Va.
michael_walton@boarsheadinn.com

Cliff Takawana, Director of Public Safety
Learning for Life/Fire Exploring
Irving, Texas
cliff.takawana@flmail.org

Mike Macdonald, Assistant Publisher
National Fire & Rescue
Raleigh, N.C.
mike@nfrmag.com



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS

Resolution 2008-7

Resolution Title: Junior Firefighters

Resolution Description: Support the creation of an IAFC policy statement detailing training, operational activities and recommended requirements for junior firefighters

Submitted by: Southwestern Division

Contact Person: Fire Chief Earl Foster

Phone number: (940) 761-7901

WHEREAS, the fire service is a hazardous occupation and,

WHEREAS, it is the fire service responsibility to assure safe operating conditions, and

WHEREAS, there is a need to recommend guidelines and requirements for junior firefighters to provide a meaningful experience and protect them from harm, and

WHEREAS, each state has different laws and regulations governing the activities of personnel under the age of eighteen,

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the members of the IAFC support the formation of a Task Force, under the sponsorship of the VCOS, which shall develop a best practices document by November 2009 via a VCOS Ribbon Report recommending and encouraging fire departments implement suggested operating guidelines and requirements for junior firefighters under the age of eighteen

FINANCIAL IMPACT STATEMENT: Staff Time

(IAFC Office Use Only)

Recommendations:

IAFC CBR: Support
IAFC Board of Directors: Support

Action:

IAFC Membership: Support
Date: August 16, 2008
Location: Denver, Colorado
Future Action:
Expiration Date: August 2011

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Dear Friends and Colleagues,

When you take an overall look at the American Fire Service, more than 1 million brothers and sisters working out of around 30,000 departments, you will find that, collectively, all involved are exceedingly dedicated to two fundamental objectives: protecting the lives and property of those they serve, and ensuring that at the end of the day they, and those around them, are able to go home. How departments go about satisfying those goals, however, is a different story.

Departments differ so drastically, ranging in size, pay structure, location, services offered, and on and on and on. Despite budget cuts, recruiting shortages, equipment needs and a thousand other challenges, the bottom line is that every day each one of those departments finds a way to get the job done.

One means that the fire service has traditionally leaned on—to assist with tasks today and help prepare for incidents tomorrow—is through youth programs (whether they're called juniors, cadets, explorers or what have you). Well-run youth programs go beyond simple fireground skills and teach young adults about discipline, leadership and the value of community service, while at the same time promoting the fire service as a worthwhile and lifelong career—whether they'll get paid or not.

The problem, however, is that there are no national standards that govern youth fire programs, and departments are left to sort through federal, state and local regulations and piece together different sections from each to make one departmental standard. Thus, departments in neighboring counties could be operating two programs with conflicting rules. With that, the Southwestern Division of the International Association of Fire Chiefs valiantly went to the IAFC board of directors and urged the organization to take the lead in rectifying this problem. The IAFC leadership then turned to the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section to create a “best-practices document” (the request is on page 6) that will help alleviate some confusion and make for a more unified, safer fire service for all.

The request specifically said there is a “need to recommend guidelines and requirements,” which directly led to the biggest question the authors of this document faced: How far should we go? We know some states are conservative about the use of minors within the fire service, while others are much more liberal. In fact, the authors of this report themselves have differing opinions on what age youths should be allowed to receive advanced training and respond to live incidents. The general consensus is that we would prefer that age limit to be 16; however, if you live in a state that allows 15-year-olds to do so, and they are mature and well trained, then we shouldn't stop you from utilizing them.

That being said, however, we do feel as though we need more consistency throughout the industry. The authors of this document have a tremendous amount of experience working with youth groups in the fire service and have reached out to departments and other experts from coast to coast for input in composing this report. The recommendations we now put forth are based on best-practice models that we have found to work well en masse and are not meant to estrange any individual departments or their existing programs. We simply offer this report as a resource to help promote safety and uniformity and to move the fire service forward.

We hope you will find the included information useful and will take the recommendations under consideration and ultimately find a way to incorporate them into your organization so we can all help to recruit, educate, protect and encourage the future members of our fire service, and to keep them safe while doing so.



Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy S. Wall".

Chief Timothy S. Wall
VCOS Chair



International Association of Fire Chiefs

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Letter to the Fire Service

I think it is fitting that this fifth in the series of invaluable reports issued by the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section (VCOS) of the IAFC is subtitled: "Opening New Doors," as that is what we in the fire-EMS service intend to do for our youth. We want to find young people who are drawn to public and community service and provide them with an experience that is rewarding, educational, and fun in a safe environment. If we accomplish this, we hope that the door will stay open for them to walk through it into a volunteer membership or a career in the fire-EMS service when they are of age.

For those among you who have been running a youth program, we encourage you to review this document—it provides step-by-step guidance so you can compare your program with this model, ensuring that you haven't missed anything which could raise problems for you somewhere down the road. For those of you who have never designed a program but have always wanted to—here's your blueprint so you get it right the first time.

This report will guide you in selecting appropriate program leaders and will give you a code of ethics for those leaders. It gives you information on risk management and liability, training and education, and it sets out appropriate activities/tasks for the different age groups involved in youth programs. More than just the fundamentals, it lays out the important issues you need to know to run a successful program.

My congratulations to the authors of this report and to the board and members of the VCOS; you continue to provide great value not only to your members but to the fire-EMS service as a whole. This document is really the first to cover this topic so definitively; not only is it timely but it's long overdue.

Sincerely,

Chief Jeffrey D. Johnson, EFO, CFO, MIFireE
IAFC President and Chairman of the Board

“Business people like to say we’re driven by the bottom line. The real bottom line is the future, and we owe it to our youth to prepare them for that.”—Ted Turner

Introduction

More than any other occupation, the desire to become a member of the fire/rescue/EMS delivery system is something that can often be identified at a young age—as they frequently say, it is something that is “in your blood.” You could also make a case for saying that it is in people’s genes as well, as often multiple generations choose to follow older relatives’ footsteps and become first responders. Whatever the reason, the fire service and emergency services sector as a whole tends to attract people at a younger age than most other occupations. As a result, many departments have formed programs for these youths—programs that teach skills, leadership and discipline to the participants, while at the same time helping the department meet some of its needs and grooming potential members for future service.

The problem many departments face in dealing with these programs, however, is that there are no “official,” formal national standards to follow regarding youth participation. The waters are further muddied by the fact that the federal government regulates “child labor” and the presence of minors in the workplace and individual states (and sometimes counties, cities and municipalities) also enact their own additional standards regulating minors in the workplace. Thus, most departments are left to decipher these often confusing—sometimes conflicting—statutes and regulations on their own.

The most challenging aspect of putting this guide together is the request for it to be all things for all people. The fact of the matter is, because departments vary so greatly in size, membership, budget, leadership, call volume, etc., it is impossible for anyone to create one set of rules that will be a perfect fit for every department. For example, even if the general consensus is that a certain age is too young to participate in a certain task, the fact may be that the state law in your area allows you to utilize those young members, and if you’ve successfully managed them in the past and come to rely on their participation, then it is difficult for an outside force to dictate that you can no longer do something that technically does not violate any state or federal laws nor any nationally recognized standards.

Therefore, it is not the intent of this report to dictate what you can and cannot do, but rather to offer suggestions and guidance that come from the general consensus of numerous fire service leaders from around the country, each with significant experience, covering an array of departments from large to small and from coast to coast. The intent of this report is to offer guidance in the creation, promotion and administration of youth programs within the emergency sector, and to present best-practice suggestions that will promote education, character, values, leadership and community involvement with the youth in your area. By providing learning materials and training opportunities that follow proven best practices, you allow the youth of your community to enhance their education, contribute to society, explore potential career paths and expand their own aspirations under the safest operating conditions possible. Simultaneously, youth involvement lays the groundwork for recruiting and retention within your organization and strengthens the fire service at large by investing in the development of its future leadership.





There are several national organizations that offer guidance in terms of operating programs that involve minors, but it is up to the individual department or jurisdiction to determine which leadership organization they would like to partner with, if any. It doesn't matter if you call the members of your program Fire Explorers, cadets, juniors or anything else; **for the purposes of this report we will refer to any department member age 14 to 18 who is not a certified frontline responder as a youth** (some youth programs even extend to those who have not yet turned 21).

Included in this report will be examples and recommendations for implementing guidelines and requirements for your youth program, along with data and statistics that were gathered during research. The onus, however, to do due diligence and ensure that your department is following all local, state and federal laws as they pertain to minors and child labor lies with the individual department.



Mission Statement

To provide guidance to fire and emergency service organizations in their endeavors to encourage youth participation in the fire service while operating in a safe, meaningful and effective learning environment and promoting positive community involvement.

Vision Statement

The authors of this document have examined the landscape of the American fire service and understand that youth involvement runs the gamut—from a social club to essential, operational responders. It is our goal to have each department that deals with youths fully examine the realities of each situation and make informed decisions that protect the participants, present the fire service as an appealing lifelong pursuit and help bring a renewed sense of unity and fervor to the department.



The eagle highlights information of particular importance throughout the document.

“In the successful organization, no detail is too small to escape close attention.”—Lou Holtz

Chapter 1: Administration

The administration of a youth program in the fire service has the potential to become a daunting task if it's not managed properly, which is why it is crucial to have the program's objectives clearly defined and its guidelines plainly laid out as early in the process as possible. Before beginning—or in some cases, reorganizing or adjusting—such a program, you must first take the time to develop a well-thought-out plan that considers the needs of the department, the community and, not least, the youth members themselves.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide some basic starting points for the administration of youth groups within fire and emergency services organizations. In order to begin—or reorganize—a program, you will first need to consider the logistics of such an undertaking and its potential impact on your department. One of the first considerations needed before beginning a youth program will be the availability and commitment of quality adult leadership from within your department—consider who you want running the program and who will be able to support/assist that person or persons.

An adult committee or council should be formed to act as a governing board (advisors) for the program. This committee will select the adult leader/leaders of the program, and together, all will be responsible for examining the safety and legal issues that will govern the program, as well as developing the policies and guidelines that it will follow.

Some of the questions that arise early can be answered in house, while others will require considerable research. Examples of questions that need to be answered before proceeding will range from simple logistical issues such as access to meeting areas and identifying equipment that will be utilized, to more complex topics that include legal issues such as any liability insurance that may be required, the use of minors by the fire department to perform some tasks previously performed by adults, parental consent issues and/or the review/approval process for the program that may be required by the department's attorneys.

As initial concerns are addressed and questions answered, it is important that policies, procedures and bylaws be extracted and developed, establishing the requirements that will be maintained throughout the program. There are numerous considerations that must be addressed before the program is developed, and making the correct choices early will increase the success of your program and the safety of its participants.

The Golden Rule

In the introduction of this document, we said we had no interest in dictating what your individual department can and cannot do by setting up regulations that we expect you to follow. The closest we will come to making an exception to that statement is this:

We steadfastly believe that a noncertified youth member should *never* be used to replace a certified firefighter or emergency medical practitioner on the frontlines of an emergency incident.





The No. 1 priority of any youth program is to protect its members from harm, and a noncertified youth member lacks the training—and, generally, the life experience that assists in making good decisions in stressful situations—to keep himself/herself safe in emergency situations.



Youth members should be given the opportunity to serve their community and department in a safe, comfortable and nurturing environment without the pressure to perform at levels above their training or maturity. They should also be provided an exciting and meaningful experience that includes the ability to observe operations and the opportunity to be mentored and coached by qualified personnel. Done properly and delivered in a safe and welcoming environment, this opportunity will help build leadership skills, self-esteem, a commitment to teamwork and general overall life skills that will bring forth the positive character traits of the individual participants and lead to the success of the program.

Organizational Model Options

In putting a youth program together, there are plenty of youth organizations already in existence to use as models, one of the more popular being Fire Exploring. In addition to what outside entities have to offer, you must integrate the values and mission of your own organization, incorporating department guidelines, standard operating procedures and bylaws. When starting a youth program it is extremely important that policies and procedures are developed, communicated, implemented and enforced, clearly outlining specific rules and laying out the dos and don'ts of the program.

In addition to researching national youth groups, it may also be worth your time to contact the local and state boards of education to see if you can partner with them and create a work experience program. Doing so may require that your program give up some freedom in terms of structure, training plans and curriculum; however, the benefits would be more than worth the sacrifice as members of your organization would have the opportunity to earn high school—or in some cases college—credits, which would make it significantly easier to recruit new members.

Official Offerings

Based on a review of best practices, we recommend the utilization of the following documents, services and/or considerations for the safe and successful administration of your youth program:

1. Adult Leadership

One commonly overlooked component of a successful program is the presence of energetic and confident adult leadership. In order to foster the desired program leadership, opportunities must be made available to department members who routinely step up to the plate, will commit the time and are capable of working as advisors/mentors for the youth program. Ideally, involvement for the adult member will be voluntary, not mandated, but once he/she commits to a leadership position, attendance at all program events—even though he/she is volunteering his/her time—will then become mandatory.

The program's adult leaders should have a clear understanding of the department's policies, procedures, rules (better known as standard operating procedures/guidelines) and expectations. Before they assume a leadership role within the youth program, they should be familiar with/have access to:

- The department's policies, procedures and bylaws governing the youth program
- Emergency and nonemergency training opportunities
- Youth protection training
- Mentor/coaching training
- The department's performance management and discipline process

2. Program Application Packet

An important early step toward a successful program is the development of a process by which young people can express their interest in your program while simultaneously ensuring the department gathers the information it needs. Application packets should be easy for the youth to read and understand, and thorough enough so that the applicant and his/her parents or guardians appreciate the level of commitment and potential benefits of the member's participation in the program, as well as the potential risks that are inherent in being part of the emergency services. All of the information gathered by the department should be maintained in compliance with state public records laws and applicable federal laws.

The application packet should include:

- An introduction to the department and the youth program, including general information on the expectations you place on youth members, such as time commitments, attendance policy, dress code, acceptable behavior, etc. Follow that with an information sheet that lists everything that will be present in the application packet, as well as instructions for filling out the required forms.
- A membership application that will be filled out and returned to the department, gathering basic information about the applicant and his/her parents/guardians such as names, addresses, phone numbers and other general information that you believe is important. Do not request social security numbers.
- A liability waiver, release and indemnity agreement that includes a parental/guardian consent and release form, as well as a consent form to provide medical treatment if the youth is injured. It is important to ensure that both the parent/guardian and the prospective member understand the possible hazards and risks associated with becoming involved with the fire service. All departments should consult with their risk management advisors and/or attorney for specific guidance, especially concerning whether the waiver/release/indemnity is enforceable under their state's laws. Regardless of enforceability, however, waivers should always be used—at the least, they put the participants and their parents or guardians on notice of the program's intent and requirements.
- A separate emergency contact form that includes the names and contact information for the parents/guardians of the prospective member as well as any pertinent school contact information. It should also include an alternate contact person in the event the parents/guardians cannot be reached.



- A medical waiver and information form that provides a brief medical history of the applicant and clearly lists all physical limitations that may be present (this information is confidential under federal laws and may be accessible only to the proper program administrators). This form should also include all medical contact information in case the youth member needs to be treated in the event of a medical emergency or traumatic injury. It is especially important to have these medical contacts readily available if there is a history of health conditions or physical limitations. The medical release form should clearly explain the physical and medical demands of the program, and the reasons the department needs access to the youth member's medical history and must be signed by both the youth and his/her parents/guardians.



3. Acceptance Process

Although these young people are not full-fledged, certified members of the department until they meet both age and training requirements, you will want to ensure that both the applicant and the department/program are on the same page when it comes to the rules, regulations and/or performance expectations from the very beginning.

One of the best ways to accomplish this is through a well-designed acceptance process. This step is important as you are evaluating potential youth program members and welcoming new members to your department. The hope is that not only will he/she have a safe and rewarding experience as a youth program member, but also that he/she will continue on in the fire service as an adult volunteer or career firefighter/EMT. It is well documented that many youth program members have continued on to serve the fire service and, oftentimes, remain with the department they began with long into adulthood in numerous capacities, ranging from simply supporting the department's endeavors as a civilian to remaining active in the department and rising to chief officer status.

Prospective youth program members whose documentation is on file should be allowed to attend two meetings or events in order to observe the activities and thus make an informed decision on whether or not to pursue membership in the youth program. By having the application on file and not allowing "unlimited" access to a nonmember, the department *should* be covered by its insurance if any issues arise involving a nonmember. Check with your department's attorney and/or insurance carrier to ensure this is the case. The acceptance process should consist of an interview, a general written aptitude test, a background reference check, a basic physical ability test and a medical clearance review, as follows:

Interview Process—Following the initial application process, prospective youth program members should receive a face-to-face interview that requires their parents/guardians to be present. (Youth program members' parents/guardians should be encouraged to be active in the department themselves if they aren't already.) From the department's perspective, the interview board should consist of two or three members (no one-on-one interviews) that includes at least one of the adult leaders and one of the program's board members. Once you have a youth program in place, one of the youth leaders from the program should be present at the interview as well. The department should prepare a list of questions that will be administered to all prospective youth program members in a consistent manner. This interview should also include a frank discussion that incorporates both the youth's and department's expectations of each other, the repercussions for not meeting those expectations and an explanation of the potential risk involved with the membership in the youth program of an emergency services organization. At the conclusion of the interview process, the interviewers, youth and his/her parent/guardian should all feel comfortable and confident about this potential partnership.

Aptitude Test—The department should administer a general written (unless precluded by a learning disability) aptitude test that is not designed to determine a prospective youth member’s knowledge of the fire service but instead is utilized as a tool to assist the program personnel. This test will assist the program’s leaders in developing a sound learning environment for that individual and will be a reference point for that member’s learning abilities. It is important to remember that this youth program is neither boot camp nor fire school, and adolescents in these age groups still process information very differently from adults and one another, so it’s important that adult leaders are sensitive to individuals with various aptitudes and abilities. If a youth with special needs wishes to join, the program leaders should talk to the parents/guardians to find out what the youth can and cannot do and to decide if the department/program is capable of accommodating those needs.

Background Check—Trust and honesty are paramount in the fire service and must begin from day one. A background/reference check will be a solid step in developing that initial trust. (If you come across a potential member with a juvenile record that is sealed, obviously you won’t have access to those files; however, the youth may wish to be forthcoming during the interview.) Youth program members may be placed in any number of situations where trust is imperative, and so departments must make a reasonable effort to perform basic background checks with due diligence in order to protect the program, the department and the community. Previous acts that would preclude someone from joining need to be identified beforehand in concert with department policies and local laws.

Physical Ability Test—Prospective youth program members should complete a basic physical ability test. While not designed to test a prospective youth program member’s ability to perform every function they may ever be called on to undertake during their time in the fire service youth program, it is important for departments to have an initial understanding of each applicant’s physical strengths and weaknesses. This not only allows the department to make appropriate assignments but helps in the development of an overall physical fitness program for the youth program—if so desired.

Medical Clearance Review—The department should require a medical clearance form from the youth’s physician. Even though a medical waiver was obtained from the youth and his/her parents/guardians in the application process, it is important to follow up with the youth’s physician for a medical clearance. Again, it is critical that the examining physician have a clear understanding of the physical and medical demands of the program. This allows the department to set limitations on the activities of individual youth program members as indicated by their own physicians.

4. Probationary Period and Process

Between the prospective member’s initial acceptance into the youth program and full-fledged membership, he/she should be required to serve as a probationary member. This probationary period should take anywhere from one to six months to complete. The probationary member should be given a packet of information that clearly lays out the steps that need to be taken to successfully complete the probationary period. (A sample is on the next page.)

Your department should design a checklist so the member can keep track of assigned tasks or completed learning experiences and check them off as the task is completed or the learning experience is achieved. For example, tasks to be completed could include the proper way to roll hose and stock a medical bag, and learning experiences could pertain to station locations, apparatus types and department guidelines.

After successful completion of this packet, the member would be issued—or allowed to purchase—a program uniform.

Sample Probationary Progress Chart

Check-off process of basic tasks

Level 1 (14 to 15 years old): Basic tasks

- Apparatus and equipment familiarization
- Fire Operations Awareness
- Fire extinguisher operations
- First aid/CPR
- Rehab training/vital signs
- SCBA operations (care and maintenance)
- Safe apparatus procedures (if age applicable)

After completion of level 1, the youth program member is eligible to respond to callouts for rehab purposes.

Level 2 (16 to 18 years old): Advanced tasks

- Ladder and hose operations
- Blood-borne pathogens
- Advanced first aid
- HazMat awareness training
- HIPAA laws (for agencies that transport)
- Highway traffic safety course
- Safe apparatus response procedures
- Fire operations
- SCBA donning and doffing

Ride-Along Activities

After completion of level 2, the youth program member should be eligible to participate in ride-along activities. Your department should develop written guidelines regarding youth member participation on ride-along activities, to include:

Department guidelines regarding ride-along operations should include:

1. Purpose of the ride-along
2. Authorization to ride
3. Rules and hours of duty
4. Mandatory seatbelt use
5. Participation at emergencies
6. Station activities
7. Insurance release
8. An evaluation/checklist that documents the activities performed

Organizational Structure

While the youth program is operated under the direction of adult advisors/mentors, departments should consider leadership opportunities for the youth program members within the program itself based on a traditional fire department promotional process. Such opportunities provide an ongoing challenge and should encourage continued growth and education throughout the youth program member's time in the program. Care should be taken to ensure that the promotional process is based on an identifiable and attainable set of criteria and is administered fairly within the youth program.

The youth program will have a hierarchical command system similar to that of the regular department. The department chief will be the ultimate authority, followed by members of the program's committee and then the program's adult leadership. Following that will be the program's youth program commanders. The program command structure will consist of youth program members holding authoritative rank along with the dual position that goes with it. Youth program officers will serve one-year terms, subject to reappointment. If deemed necessary by the adult leadership, youth program officers will be demoted and replaced.

Youth Program Officer duties:

Program Chief (president)—The Program Chief will serve as the leader of the youth program. It will be the Program Chief's job to ensure that other officers are carrying out their duties and to assign special projects as necessary. The Program Chief is responsible for all activities within the youth program and will present an annual report of the organization's accomplishments to the program members and department hierarchy. It is up to the Program Chief to set an example for others and present a positive attitude.

Program Deputy Chief (treasurer)—The Program Deputy Chief will fill in for the Program Chief in his/her absence. He/she will also be responsible for keeping the financial records and maintaining the program's budget, as well as collecting and distributing program funds.

Program Captain (secretary)—The Program Captain serves as the communications officer and manages all the information and publicity for the program. He/she will maintain program membership and attendance records and will handle program correspondence and meeting minutes. He/she assumes responsibility of higher-ranking officers in their absence.

Program Lieutenants—Program Lieutenants can split duties, with one acting in an administrative role where he/she leads recruiting, organizes and recognizes program members, and conducts the opening and closing ceremonies for program events. Another lieutenant can serve as the program officer, arranging the planning process, collecting activity files and keeping track of the program's inventory.



The Payoff

While establishing some of these topics may seem cumbersome, the benefits of a safe and successful youth program far outweigh the challenges. Many departments have successfully utilized their youth program membership for such activities as:

- Firefighter rehab staffing at emergency scenes and training events
- Hose and equipment cleanup at the fireground
- Assistance at emergency operations centers
- Staffing for numerous community events
- Assisting in public education/fire safety events within the community
- Participating as “victims” in firefighter/EMS training events

Age Matrix

In researching the *Silver Ribbon Report*, the authors put out several requests through different sources in order to gauge the ages in which youths were allowed to participate in various activities within a youth fire service program. We share several of the responses we received here as anecdotal evidence of the differing policies you will find in place. We plan to have a more complete, updatable version of this matrix on the VCOS website when this report becomes available digitally. Keep in mind, the ages listed below were reported to us and are not necessarily official. Please check with your state officials for more accurate information.

The following are the ages they can:

State	Participate		Ride-along	Drive Apparatus	Be certified as		Program Controlled by
	Min.	Max.			FFs	EMTs	
Alabama	14	21	16	18	18	14	Dept. of Labor
Alaska	16 ¹	18	18	18	18	16	State Fire Marshal
Colorado	16	21	16	18	18	18	Dept. of Labor
Connecticut	14	18	16	16 ³	18	16	Dept. of Labor
Idaho	AHJ	AHJ	18 ²	18 ²	18	18	Dept. of Labor
Illinois	14	20	n/a	n/a	n/a	18	State Fire Marshal
Indiana	15 ²	19	16	17	18	18	Dept. of Labor
Kansas	AHJ	AHJ	18 ²	18 ²	18	17	Dept. of Labor
Montana	AHJ	AHJ	18 ²	18 ²	21 ²	18	Dept. of Labor
New Jersey	16	18	16	18	18	n/a	Dept. of Labor
New York	14	18	16	18	16	16	Dept. of Labor
Texas	16	18	16	17	18	n/a	n/a
Virginia	16	AHJ	16	AHJ	16	16	Dept. of Labor

1—Can be 14 under Learning for Life or other national program

2—This is the state-recommended age, but can vary by department

3—Vehicle less than 10,000 GVWR, in nonemergency mode after proper training

AHJ = Authority Having Jurisdiction

Chapter 2: Legal Issues

Legal considerations are an important component of any youth program in the fire service, as many states have differing definitions and regulations that will ultimately affect your program. Your department should consult its legal counsel to outline exactly who the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) will be as it pertains to federal, state or local regulations. Some of the points legal counsel can help address include age requirements, child labor laws, hours of participation, limits of what members can and cannot do, minimum training requirements, emergency response liability and many more.

A successful youth program relies on establishing partnerships and collaborating with other organizations as well as with both youth and adult community members. Establishing partnerships helps to create and maintain a consistent message about the program’s policies, procedures and expectations. When it comes to developing the legal framework that is going to support your youth program, it is advisable to establish a committee made up of some or all of the following:

- **Chief or Chief Executive Officer**—The department’s chief or chief executive officer is one of the most vital partners for any youth program. The chief will want to ensure that the youth program is an asset that does not cause risk for the department.
- **Parents/Guardians**—Parents and guardians must have confidence that the youth program will be a safe environment in which their child will grow, learn and enjoy his/her experience. Parents and guardians need to understand the details of the program, especially the types of activities their child will be participating in as well as who will be supervising the program. Therefore, it is important to have an outside parent/guardian as part of an oversight or advisory committee.
- **Attorney**—There are specific state and federal laws that restrict youth participation in certain activities. For example, there are applicable federal and state child labor laws that will partially restrict youth firefighting activities. Therefore, it is recommended that any oversight committee meet with an attorney who is familiar with child labor laws, as well as other applicable laws, such as tort liability, HIPAA and educational records confidentiality.
- **Risk management/insurance**—Given the potential risk even during “normal” firefighting activities, questions relating to insurance coverage for injury/illness, general liability and property need to be addressed. Whether the current policies are amended or new policies are drafted, it is recommended that an experienced risk manager or insurance carrier participate on an oversight or advisory committee.
- **Experienced youth leader**—There is no better advisor than one who has experienced the challenges associated with starting a youth program. Seek out experienced youth leaders from other departments and ask for their assistance in providing guidance and advice on legal issues and similar processes. It may also be advantageous to look beyond the fire service and seek assistance from an experienced youth leader from other programs such as social services or mentor programs.

Choosing Program Leaders

Adults can be mentors, teachers, role models, advisors and trusted friends for youths. Helping a youth program member mature into a responsible adult—and finding a potential career path in the fire service—can be a meaningful and rewarding experience for the adult that benefits the member for a lifetime. While it is important that adults be capable of establishing meaningful friendships with the young people they are working with, it is even more critical to have adults who will exercise good judgment in dealing with them. Adult leaders have to understand that they will have influence over these young adults and accept that for the huge responsibility it is. Young people are often in a vulnerable position when dealing with adults and may find it difficult to speak out about inappropriate behavior they encounter.

The important attributes needed for the leader of a youth program include good communication skills, awareness of self and others, sensitivity, problem-solving abilities, good decisionmaking skills and a positive attitude. Additionally, adult youth program leaders should have a social network outside of the department where their own needs for friendship, affirmation and self-esteem can be met (so they don't feel as though they need to get those things from the youth), and they must be willing and able to seek assistance from colleagues and professionals when they realize a situation requires outside help or intervention.

It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire organization, not just those in leadership positions, to create and maintain a climate that supports the growth, safety and welfare of youth program participants. With that said, the adults who will be working with the youth program must adhere to a code of ethics.



Code of Ethics

Adults and older youth in leadership roles are in a position of stewardship and play a key role in fostering the spiritual and emotional development of individuals and the community at large. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the special nurturing, care and support that will enable young adults to develop a positive sense of self and spirit, independence and responsibility. The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect if the positive potential of the relationship is to be realized.

Adults play a key role in assisting youth in growing emotionally and developing healthy self-esteem. Therefore, leaders will refrain from any inappropriate behavior that includes sexual harassment or anything that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse. Leaders shall be informed of this code of ethics and agree to it before assuming their role. In cases where this code is violated, appropriate legal action *must* be taken.



Since the ages of those in the youth programs can be so close to those of young firefighters and emergency responders, it is imperative that strict fraternization discipline be maintained. For example, dating between youth program members and adult department members is not permitted.

Training and Education

Youth programs must provide initial and ongoing training not only for their members but for the adult leaders as well. For the adults involved with the program, training and education on general policies that incorporate related state and federal laws are essential. Following are several policy and legal topics that should be considered during initial and ongoing youth leader training:



- **General policy overview** —Administrators and youth leaders should receive training on general policies that incorporate state and federal laws and provide for the overall governance of the youth program. Many departments have created a youth program handbook that incorporates the overall scope of the program, including guidelines and policies.
- **State and federal child labor laws** —The goal of a youth firefighter program is to allow members to learn about firefighting, train with experienced firefighters and, in some cases, assist at emergency scenes. It is important to balance the desire to encourage the educational efforts of the youth with the need to protect them from potentially dangerous situations. Therefore, it is important for the administrators and youth leaders to have an overall understanding of the state and federal child labor laws and how those laws affect your youth program.

Child labor laws that prohibit minors from engaging in hazardous work and place limitations on work hours may apply to these youth programs. Even though the youth members are volunteers, they, like adult volunteers, may be considered employees of the volunteer fire department for purposes of liability and workers' compensation. The most direct federal law that restricts the employment and abuse of child workers is the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Child labor provisions under the FLSA are designed to protect the educational opportunities of youth and prohibit their employment in jobs that are detrimental to their health and safety. The FLSA restricts the hours that youth younger than 16 years of age can work and lists hazardous occupations with tasks considered too dangerous for young workers. Enforcement of the FLSA's child labor provisions is handled by the Wage and Hour Division of the Department of Labor's Employment Standards Administration. The Wage and Hour Division has an easily accessible web presence (www.dol.gov/ESA/WHD) and includes local and regional office contact information.

Many state labor departments, however, have issued laws or guidelines that specifically pertain to loosening restrictions for youth firefighters at various ages. For example, the state of Virginia authorizes a county, city or town to allow 16-year-old members of a volunteer fire company—with parental/guardian approval—to “seek certification under National Fire Protection Association 1001, level one, firefighter standards” and to “work with or participate fully in all activities of such a volunteer fire company.”

- **Health, Medical and HIPAA**—Some states require that youths participating in a youth fire service program shall be provided with the same health insurance coverage as any other volunteers in the department. It is important to review your state laws and discuss this issue with your insurance carrier for further clarification.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 is a federal mandate that is specific to protecting the confidentiality of a volunteer’s medical information. The law is clear about specific medical information that may be shared with others and states that departments must have internal controls for all medical records. For example, a firefighter’s medical records must be kept separately from his/her personnel file. Youth program leaders must be cognizant of these regulations as they will be dealing with medical information during the application and approval processes. In addition, program leaders must introduce the members to HIPAA regulations in the event they ever become privy to a patient’s medical information.

Any injuries sustained while members are participating in the program will also likely have to be documented under HIPAA regulations, and other state statutes and administrative regulations may also apply, so it’s advisable to contact your legal counsel for more information regarding these topics.

- **Photo Release**—There are times when you may want to use a photograph that includes a youth program member for your marketing and recruitment materials. To avoid any conflicts, including potential legal action, it’s best to include a “model release” statement in the application process that is signed by the youth member’s parents/guardians.

- **Retention of Records**—Volunteer departments are required by various state and federal regulations to retain specific records for varying amounts of time. Youth program leaders and those administering the program should become familiar with the department’s record retention policy.

Protecting All Parties

All youth activity leaders must go through a standardized screening procedure, overseen by the department’s board of directors, that will verify that person’s information regarding his/her background and legal history, as well as check for any incidents that involved minors. A local, state and/or national criminal history check must be conducted not only for all the adult program leaders, but also for those working with the program in other capacities, such as running a training class. No one convicted of criminal sexual behavior or physical abuse will be allowed to participate with the youth program in any capacity.



Approved program leaders should be required to sign a contract acknowledging that they have received proper training and understand that they are obligated to follow the highest moral standards possible. Rules that they should faithfully follow include:

- **Youth Protection Training for Adults**—Youth protection training is provided by Fire Exploring and other youth-serving agencies and exists for the safety of all youth members and for the protection of adult advisors. The training is a guide for adult leaders to guard against all possible forms of abuse: physical, sexual and emotional, as well as abuse by neglect. Youth protection training can be accessed through the Fire Exploring website at www.learningforlife.org. Youth program leaders should receive yearly refresher training as well.

- **Youth Protection Training for Youth**—Although child abuse is preconceived as a problem related to young children, it is not unusual for adolescents to be victims as well. Therefore it is imperative that youth program members be educated in youth protection training as well as their adult leaders. Several youth-serving agencies have training materials that will help to educate the youth in this area of responsibility. A Fire Exploring video, “Personal Safety Awareness,” trains youth in such areas as Internet safety, pornography, date rape, peer sexual harassment and suicide and depression.

- **Two-deep Leadership**—Two adult leaders must be present at each activity involving youth members. Exceptions must be approved on a case-by-case basis by the chief. It is advisable that youth activities be held in facilities and rooms that allow as much open access and visibility as possible. All activities are subject to monitoring by staff or appointed personnel.

- **Individual Consultation**—Consultation between adults and youth must be done within the two-deep framework. In situations that require personal conferences, mentoring or counseling, it should be conducted in facilities and rooms that allow as much open access and visibility as possible, with at least one other approved leader present in the area. As a rule, the counseling should be as public as possible without sacrificing effectiveness. Unplanned individual contact on outings (such as for counseling purposes) must be done in view of another adult or group of youths. Planned individual contact outside the department’s building must occur only in public places and with the prior consent of the youth and the parent/guardian.

- **Respect of Privacy**—Adult leaders need to respect the privacy of youth program members in situations such as use of restrooms, changing uniforms or taking showers after training or on overnight outings. They should only intrude insofar as someone’s health or safety is at stake. They also need to protect their own privacy in similar situations.

- **Separate Accommodations**—In case of an overnight activity, a minimum of two adults must be present as supervisors. If both male and female youth program members are present, there should be both male and female adult supervisors as well. If these conditions cannot be met, the event cannot take place. When staying at overnight accommodations, every effort should be made to avoid having an adult share a room with youth program members (unless that adult is a parent/guardian), and there should be no occasion where one adult and one youth program member share a room.

- **Secret Activities**—There shall be no “secret” activities. All aspects of the department’s program are open to observation by parents/guardians and other department members. Confidentiality or secrecy is not a privilege of adult leaders while participating in activities involving youth.

- **Hazing Prohibited**—Physical hazing and/or initiations are strictly prohibited and shall be banned from any department activity. A zero-tolerance policy must be enacted beforehand that defines specific acts that are dangerous, lewd or otherwise illegal, the commission of which will be cause for immediate dismissal from the program and possible legal actions.

- **Sexual Harassment**—Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. There should be a zero-tolerance policy put in place to ensure that it does not take place in your youth program. By definition, “Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual’s employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.” In short, any behavior or conduct that discriminates on the basis of gender is sexual harassment.



Sexual harassment can occur in a variety of circumstances, including but not limited to the following:

- o The victim as well as the harasser may be a woman or a man. The victim does not have to be of the opposite sex.
- o The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, an agent of the employer, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker or a non-employee.
- o The victim does not have to be the person harassed but could be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.
- o Unlawful sexual harassment may occur without economic injury to or discharge of the victim.
- o The harasser's conduct must be unwelcome.

It is helpful for the victim to inform the harasser directly that the conduct is unwelcome and must stop. The victim should use any department complaint mechanism or grievance system available.

- **Reporting of Violations**—Persons covered by these rules are required to notify the department chief or president if they witness any violations of these rules.

Risk Management

Risk management is a concern for all firefighters, youth program members and certified senior members alike. The fire service in general cannot put enough focus on the need for safe practices to be used during training and emergency situations. Youth program members bring new challenges to risk management because of issues such as their age, lack of experience and energy, which can sometimes run ahead of their thought processes.

Liability Associated with Injury or Death

Keeping members safe is the highest priority for all departments, yet even with training and practice, people are still injured and killed while performing firefighting duties. This requires each department to be prepared for how these incidents will be handled and, preferably, avoided.

Each department needs to establish guidelines that outline activities youth program members can be involved in. Some states do not allow youth program members to participate in operational activities, while others allow minors (legally defined as those younger than 18) to become certified to Firefighter I (NFPA 1001).

Departments also must clearly consider emergency response protocols and outline what youth program members are and are not allowed to do. First, youth program members should never respond in their personal vehicles in what is typically referred to as “emergency mode.” That is, the vehicles they are driving or riding in should not be utilizing emergency lights or sirens and must obey all the laws to their fullest, including speed limits, stop signs and traffic lights.

When it comes to responding to incidents, your program will have to decide on other important questions, including: Can youth program members respond straight to the scene or do they report to the station? Are they driving themselves or being driven? Due to the high number of firefighters who are injured or killed in vehicle crashes each year, this is a critical topic. People not involved in the fire service do not understand the risks involved in driving to a scene, such as where it is safe to go, where to park and where responding vehicles may be coming from. Youth members who are going to drive themselves and/or anyone who may drive a youth member to an emergency scene or to the station during an emergency incident must receive proper response training. There must be no exceptions to this rule. It protects the members, civilians and your responding firefighters.



For youth program members who live close to the station, alternate transportation becomes another factor program leaders and department officials will have to examine. A youth member could respond via bicycle, moped, scooter or by walking. In doing so, they become vulnerable as others respond (for example, a youth member riding his/her bike across the parking lot as volunteers are arriving in personal vehicles to catch a rig). Thus it is vital that overall response guidelines are updated to account for youth program members and that everyone involved in the department become familiar with them.

An attorney and/or insurance provider will help your department develop SOPs for dealing with these incidents. They can provide guidance in documentation of an injury or death, coverage your department will need to carry, waivers with full disclosure of activities and risks, proof of insurance for youth members, notifications, investigations and working with the families of the youth program member after an incident. NOTE: In some states, these waivers have been held *not enforceable*, so it's essential that the department obtain legal counsel on this issue.



Parents or guardians should read and understand the policies and procedures that outline the activities of the youth program members. The parents/guardians should fully understand the risks involved with training, motor vehicle accidents, medical calls and general firefighting/emergency response. The parents/guardians should sign a document that outlines the areas of discussion they have had with the department's chief, officers, board of directors and/or youth program leaders, and acknowledge that they have given permission for their son/daughter to participate.

“It is wonderful how much may be done if we are always doing.” –Thomas Jefferson

Chapter 3: Recruitment, Retention and Marketing

In today’s society, many fire departments and EMT organizations—both volunteer and career alike—are forced to concern themselves with recruiting new members, retaining existing members and marketing the department as a whole. Therefore, the good news for those looking to start or revamp a youth program within their own department is that there are already plenty of resources available, along with proven examples that others have used successfully in general recruiting and retention that can be adjusted to meet your own needs. Likewise, there are other helpful groups outside of the fire service that concentrate on the recruitment, retention and marketing of youths in the same age demographic that you are targeting. So by combining the two, you should have plenty of resources to lean on in your efforts.

Gathering Resources

There are a number of national organizations that provide recruitment, retention and marketing resources for youth programs. Resources can range from ready-made artwork for advertising to full-service programs complete with planning and execution material. Listed below are several organizations engaged in youth programs that may be of interest:

- **International Association of Fire Chiefs/Volunteer & Combination Officers Section**

Working with a wide range of volunteer and combination fire service leaders, the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section (VCOS; one of eight sections of the International Association of Fire Chiefs) has published an array of ribbon reports (such as the one you are currently reading) that address the issues facing volunteer and combination departments. Many of the reports, especially the *White Ribbon Report: Keeping the Lights On, the Trucks Running and the Volunteers Responding*, have specific information about recruitment, retention and marketing programs. The others, the *Orange Ribbon Report: Leading and Managing EMS in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments*, the *Blue Ribbon Report: Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service* and the *Red Ribbon Report: Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments*, may also be of interest. All of these reports are available on the VCOS’ website at www.iafc.org/vcos.

- **Fire Exploring Program**

Exploring is a worksite-based program that is established for young men and women ages 15 (14 with the completion of eighth grade) to 20 years old that has a dedicated discipline just for Fire Service Exploring. Exploring’s purpose is to provide experiences that help young people mature and to prepare them to become responsible and caring adults. Explorers are encouraged to be ready to investigate the meaning of interdependence in their personal relationships and in their communities.

Exploring is based on a unique and dynamic relationship between youth and the organizations in their communities. Local community organizations establish a specific Explorer Post by matching their volunteers and program resources to the interests of young people in the community. The result is a program of activities that helps youth pursue their special interests, grow and develop. Exploring programs are based on five areas of emphasis: career opportunities, life skills, citizenship, character education and leadership experience. To learn more about Fire Exploring, visit www.learningforlife.org or www.learningforlife.org/exploring/fire.

- **International Association of Fire Chiefs Foundation**

The IAFC Foundation provides increased opportunities to support the educational needs of first responders and offers scholarships that make it possible for first responders to access advanced learning opportunities. As part of that mission, the foundation offers educational scholarships to Fire Exploring (see description above) thanks to the support of the Reed Elsevier Foundation. For more information, visit www.iafcf.org.

- **State Chiefs' Associations and Fire Academies**

Many state chiefs' associations and state fire academies offer resources for youth programs. For example, many associations offer annual scholarships that are targeted for youth and adult fire service members. Associations and academies often offer educational sessions for youth programs and are a wealth of information pertaining to initial and continuing education for youth and adult leaders. Associations and academies are also a good point of contact for references to other departments that have established youth programs.

- **Volunteer Firemen's Insurance Services**

VFIS offers a recently revised resource to assist organizations that might be considering a new youth program. This resource can help organizations decide whether a program is right for them, what kind of program best meets their needs, how to organize a program and how to keep track of the program throughout the years. Included within are descriptions of model programs, an introduction to legal and liability issues applicable to youth programs and a review of resources available to departments seeking guidance in establishing a youth program. Visit www.vfis.com/resources.htm.

- **National Volunteer Fire Council/National Junior Firefighter Program**

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) partnered with Dunkin' Brands Community Foundation and Spartan Motors Inc. to create a national program where departments and youth can find the resources, tools and information they need to help develop, grow, enhance, promote and participate in local junior firefighter programs. Youth and youth leaders can use the NVFC site—www.nvfc.org—to track hours of service and to receive national recognition and rewards.

- **Workforce Commissions (state level)**

Workforce commissions are state government agencies that are charged with overseeing and providing workforce development services to employers and job seekers. Many commissions offer recruiting, retention and training services. Some commissions, such as the Texas Workforce Commission, also provide links to a wide range of resources, tools and guides to assist in youth development.

- **Federal Emergency Management Agency**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has a wealth of information—including training programs for adult leaders related to youth programs—to aid in disaster mitigation, planning, response and recovery efforts. Under FEMA's authority, the United States Fire Administration/National Fire Academy has a wide range of youth educational information, including books, manuals and formal research that is available through its Learning Resource Center (LRC). For more information, visit www.fema.gov.

- **American Red Cross/National Youth Council**

The National Youth Council, part of the American Red Cross, is a youth program that promotes youth and youth/adult involvement. The council sets an example and encourages all Red Cross volunteers and staff to involve America's youth in the organization as service providers interested in making a difference.

The National Youth Council has a wide range of information on how to market youth programs by connecting with youth in innovative ways. For example, the council has taken advantage of social networking programs on the Internet as a means to connect with youth and has created scholarships and contests to establish and maintain the excitement about the program. For more information, visit www.redcrossyouth.org.



Creating Partnerships

A successful youth program likely cannot achieve its full potential on its own. In order to make the most of your program, it's best to establish partnerships and collaborate with other similar organizations, as well as with government and community members, interacting with both youths and adults. Establishing partnerships with those around you will give you a better opportunity to deliver a consistent message and reach youth through multiple channels. It will also provide opportunities to share resources, develop joint goals and objectives and learn from each other.



Research prior to seeking a partnership is a vital step. If possible, read third-party written articles (a newspaper, for example) about the potential partner's activities. Also be sure to visit the organization's website, read its annual reports, network with friends/acquaintances familiar with the organization and conduct informal interviews. If there is a potential for a partnership, determine who at the organization you should talk with and set up a meeting. Plan your conversation beforehand and consider relevant topics of interest to the potential partner and consider how that interest can be parlayed into help for your youth program.

To begin with, look at the following resources for assistance in establishing collaborative relationships:

- **Department chief or chief executive officer**—Probably the most important partnership in any youth program in the emergency services is the relationship with the department's chief or its chief executive officer. A full, written commitment from the chief to provide resources and support is a vital step toward creating a successful program. Without the chief's support, a youth program certainly will not enjoy the advantages it otherwise could and most likely will find it difficult to succeed over time.

- **Department leadership and membership**—Getting buy-in from the department's leadership and its members is vital, so work to get them involved early. Some may be concerned about youth being present at your facility and attending events. It is important to seek support and trust for the program by assuring department membership that the program will promote safety first and ultimately will help to improve the overall operation of your organization/department in its primary mission to protect and serve the community.

- **Community leaders**—Beyond what a community leader can do for your program individually, he/she can also help open other doors. Community partnerships exist in established coalitions and community groups. For example, existing community partnerships may already be in place between heads of community groups and associations such as faith-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, local government and business leaders. Therefore connecting with one may help clear the path to work with others.

- **Local professionals**—You'll never know exactly who is in your community unless you make the effort to find out. It may turn out you have a professional grant writer or marketing professional (active or retired) right under your nose who is willing to help your cause. Take advantage of the local experts who may be able to help with logistical concerns (such as funding strategies) and could help connect you with state and local government agencies, community foundations, hospitals, colleges, service organizations and amiable businesses.

Establishing Marketing Objectives

The initial step to marketing a youth program is to define your goals internally, which will in turn help you identify the target audience and the best way to appeal to them. For example, if you determine many local youths are concerned about future employment, structure the program so they are prepared to get state certifications as soon as they are old enough. Provide young adults with potential opportunities for a career in the fire service through a comprehensive program of training, service and practical experiences. Stress leadership and show a realistic path they can take toward becoming an officer. In addition to the job skills, youths will have the opportunity to develop their character, physical fitness and citizenry along with their awareness of the purpose, mission and objectives of fire service agencies. Example program objectives may include the following:

- To provide a program of training that educates young adults on the purpose, mission and objectives of fire service agencies.
- To provide an opportunity for service, practical experiences and recreation.
- To help prepare youths to become better citizens and community members through character development, physical fitness, good citizenship and patriotism.

What's in it for Them?

The benefits that result from being involved in the fire service are endless. However, the benefits must be tangible and meaningful in order to be valued by the youth. We must show the value of the experience that will be realized through the relationship among the youth, the department and the community. The Learning for Life organization has done an excellent job of covering this in its Exploring program, emphasizing five areas where the youth will receive direct benefits: career opportunities, life skills, citizenship, character education and leadership experience.

- **Career opportunities**—Besides looking good on a young job-seeker's resume, being part of the fire service allows him/her to develop potential contacts with government officials and civic leaders that he/she might not otherwise get. This should help broaden employment options, not just in the areas of fire service and public safety, but in other areas such as community leadership and the private sector. This experience in the fire service also will help boost the self-confidence of the youth program member, which usually leads to better performance at school, work and home, helping one to further stand out above other job candidates.

- **Life skills**—The fire service certainly offers the opportunity to develop important physical skills and fitness; however, the mental aspect is even more important. The fire service stresses mental toughness and discipline and teaches decisionmaking and leadership. In all, it offers the youth a chance for positive social interaction with both peers and adults and prepares them for future success in the workplace.

- **Citizenship**—A good youth program in the fire service will encourage the desire and ability to help others. Youth program members will acquire skills that benefit the community and gain a keen respect for the basic rights of others, a sense of community and a feeling of responsibility to help others in need. The American fire service is the best example of volunteerism and selflessness in the world.

- **Character education**—In a world that could use more good role models, you can positively impact the youth by surrounding them with strong, compassionate, honest and honorable emergency responders. This will help teach youth program members about moral excellence and inner strength, help them make ethical choices and make them want to fulfill their responsibility to serve society and the community in a constructive manner.

- **Leadership experience**—There are many different styles of leadership, but at the heart of every good leader is someone who has developed self-confidence through experience. The fire service rewards those who are willing to step up and meet challenges and who show initiative. In this controlled setting, young program members will quickly learn which types of leadership work and which do not.

Young adults involved in a fire service youth program should gain practical knowledge of—and experience in—a career. They engage in a program of activities that is centered around career opportunities, life skills, citizenship, character development and leadership experience, all of which combine to encourage the development of the whole person.

They also get opportunities to take on leadership roles and have a chance to learn and grow in a supportive, challenging, caring and enjoyable environment.

Creating Publicity for the Program

The best way to generate interest from the community about your youth program—or any department activities for that matter—is to create a “buzz” and let the citizens spread the word themselves. Since most people don’t think of the emergency services unless they have an immediate need for them, the challenge you face is getting your program “top of mind.” This is not a one-time deal. You have to constantly and consistently feed the public information, and you have to do so in various platforms for it to take hold. One of the most effective ways to get the message out is by participating in speaking engagements. Go out and speak at local civic organizations, community meetings and especially at the schools—elementary, middle and high schools. In the schools, go in to talk about safety and fire education and work your new youth program into the speech, giving them a short, high-energy program that specifically highlights the benefits they will receive by becoming part of your program. (Obviously adjust the message based on the age group you are addressing.)

Since the youth you are most actively targeting are high school age, not only should you have recruitment materials available on campus for the teachers and students, but you should also be partnering directly with guidance and/or career counselors to help communicate the benefits of being an emergency responder. If you manage to establish yourself in such a way at the school, the next time they have a career fair you’ll already have a foot in the door and be ready to go.

If you can send these children and young adults home at the end of the day talking about the fire service, it will help your message resonate not only with them, but also with their parents as you continue to approach the adults for their overall support.

Utilize whatever methods of communication are readily available. (Do you have access to a changeable sign to put in front of the station?) If you have newspapers or local magazines willing to work with you, come up with some public service announcements. The same goes for local radio and television stations. Come up with some PSAs to run in empty commercial spots, and also see if they'll let you make a live appearance on a talk show. After that you can try other methods such as flyers, faxes, direct mail pieces and even theater marquees.

If you choose to use printed materials, make sure you have a clear understanding of the audience you are targeting—taking into account age and ethnicity (making bilingual materials may be helpful). Check with local businesses and see which are willing to put your flyer in their store window and see if they have other ways to help disseminate your information.

Assess the Level of Interest

Once you've given the information enough time to begin taking hold, and you have partnerships established and goals and objectives in place, you need to get some feedback and see how much interest you are generating—and find out what's working and what's not.

One idea for assessing the level of interest is to hold a regular monthly meeting or event for prospective youth program participants. The meeting could include a basic overview of the program and the associated training plan, as well as a demonstration of a sample activity from the world of firefighting or EMS in which the youth could participate.

If your department is already participating in scheduled events such as incident operations activities (based on state law and department policy), parades, open houses, fundraisers, training and/or fire safety/prevention classes, that is the perfect time to piggy back and disseminate information about your youth program and bring potential members in through the doors.

Conclusion

A successful youth program will require a strong, consistent recruitment, retention and marketing program. Although the initial time commitment may seem overwhelming, it is important to establish a strong foundation. Fostering partnerships early in the process will help alleviate some of the burden, and establishing that buzz through varied yet consistent mediums will help keep your program more top of mind. Before you know it, the program will be up, running and growing.

With that, we would like to call your attention to other fire service organizations that deal with recruiting diversity and inclusiveness, such as Fire 20/20 (www.fire2020.org) and the IAFC's Human Relations Committee. The general goal of such organizations is to help departments connect with their multicultural communities to increase the reach and effectiveness of prevention and recruitment programs. In short, your department should reflect its community ethnically and welcome female membership. We encourage you to use the resources of such organizations to recruit members not only for your youth program, but for your entire department as well.



“There is more than one way to look at a problem, and they all may be right!”—Gen. Norman Schwartzkopf

Chapter 4: Safety

This topic is arguably the most important and the most complex. Trying to be all encompassing and satisfy federal laws, national standards, youth organizations, local needs, tradition and the individual variations of all 50 states at once (not to mention foreign countries that work with the IAFC) ... it’s kind of like trying to herd cats.

Safety is the most important topic that we deal with today in the fire service, and that is even more true when it comes to protecting the members of a youth program. Regardless of whether or not you are affiliated with a credible program renowned for setting guidelines that deal with youth organizations, it is up to the individual fire department to review, understand and comply with the laws and regulations—federal and state—regarding working with youth.

Typically youth-based programs in the industry are designed as a learning curriculum to groom future firefighters, not prepare them for immediate action. It was stated earlier in this report but bears repeating: Members of a youth program should not be positioned as replacements for regular firefighters performing frontline duties. This line can get blurry, though, when members of youth programs are allowed to engage in actual hands-on operations in training. For example, the commonwealth of Virginia allows 16-year-olds to be trained to the Firefighter I level. Once certified, despite their age, they should be transferred to regular firefighter status and no longer be considered part of the youth program.

In the absence of any state or local laws, specific abilities and maturity should be considered when allowing youth to actively participate in the fire service youth programs. In examining programs from around the country, from a best-practices approach, it is the recommendation of the authors of this report that no one under the age of 14 be allowed to participate in a department’s youth program, and no one under the age of 16 be allowed to participate in emergency responses, “ride-along” activities or otherwise actively fight fire. A ride-along may seem harmless enough, but vehicle crashes are consistently the second-leading cause of injury and death in the fire service.



Setting Age Limitations

There are two very separate issues that a department needs to look at: the first is safety during training operations, and the second is safety during response operations.

While suggesting universal age limitations is the only option of this document (unfortunately we cannot consult with each department on a case-by-case basis), the overall goal is to severely minimize the potential injury to all responders, and to create the mindset that *no* preventable injuries to members of a fire department—*especially* those in a youth fire service program—will be tolerated. Therefore it is the official recommendation of the International Association of Fire Chiefs’ Board of Directors—with the support of the authors of this report—that no one younger than the age of 18 be allowed in the hazard zone unless specifically identified by exception to individual state law. The department’s youth program can utilize NFPA 1521 to properly employ the following guide to establish compliance, utilizing three control zones (similar to hazardous material incidents) that 1. identify the hazard, 2. ensure members are trained for the task at hand and 3. ensure members are wearing the proper PPE specific to the hazard.



The participation of youth program members in or around a hazardous environment at any live incident or training event should be strictly regulated. It is ultimately the responsibility of the incident commander to decide how to involve members responding to an incident or attending a training activity so that the safety of everyone is maintained.

We recommend that 14- and 15-year-olds be allowed to join your youth program beginning as probationary members. As they attend regularly scheduled meetings and complete their checklist objectives described in Chapter 1, their probationary status can be dropped and they can become full-fledged members of the youth program. At this point they can be given more responsibilities and taught more advanced skills. This process should take another six months to a year to complete, depending on the type of knowledge and skills required during the probationary period.

The general consensus from around the fire service is that 16-year-olds should be allowed to participate in more active roles such as advanced training and ride-alongs. This, of course, is based on the assumption that such actions are allowed by state laws as well as those of your department, and that the individual has successfully completed the proper training and conditions of the youth program and is deemed “ready” by the program’s leadership. If these conditions are all met, youth program members should be allowed to attend “call-out responses” as observers, work in nonhazardous duties such as rehab and/or participate in “job-shadowing” opportunities where they are assigned a firefighter to trail outside of hazardous duties.



National Safety Standards

By this point, the leadership of your youth program should have already identified the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) and have a clear understanding of how department rules, state laws and federal regulations will impact the youth program. With that knowledge in place, it is time to look toward recognized national safety standards as you set the parameters for both training and response safety.

A recognized standard should be the basis for all training and operations not only for your youth program, but for your department in general. NFPA 1001, “Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications” is a good place to start. This standard identifies the minimum job performance requirements (JPRs) for career and volunteer firefighters whose duties are primarily structural in nature and can be used in excerpt or in entirety for your youth program. It is up to the department/AHJ to determine the age necessary to participate; however, certain JPRs may not be allowed because they are superseded by state child labor laws. If this is the case, you can institute a “building block” approach where child labor laws are not broken, but the youth is allowed to move forward and is prepared to complete the task at hand once the age requirement is met.

The youth program should also be guided by the department’s health and safety program, likely falling under NFPA 1500, “Standard of Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Programs,” which lists the minimum requirements for an occupational safety and health program.



Some topics will take more time to sort through than others. For example, some states allow “training only” use of a respirator, which means anyone can use a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) without having to be fit tested or go through medical qualifications if it’s only going to be used during drills. We, however, recommend that if youth are going to be allowed to train with SCBA, you follow the respiratory protection standard as it is laid out in OSHA 29 CFR-1910-134, which says a fit test and a medical qualification are required to wear a respirator. As youth members progress through your program, the fit test and medical competency will be required anyway.



Before youth program members are allowed to participate in advanced activities, they should be trained in various standards such as those regarding hazardous materials awareness, blood-borne pathogens, EMS PPE, basic HIPAA law guidelines (for agencies that provide emergency medical services), OSHA and HazCom.

Training Operations

Before beginning any training, be sure to consult local, state and federal laws and regulations in order to develop guidelines and decide what members of the youth program can and cannot do, and what tools and equipment they can and cannot use. Before training begins make sure each member is properly equipped with personal protective equipment, such as boots, gloves, helmets and turnout gear as appropriate. A department representative who is properly trained in both fire service skills and dealing with young adults should be present and lead the training activities. Other adults who have been approved to work with the youth group also should be present to assist as instructors. We recommended that the student-to-instructor ratio during skill drills be no more than 5-to-1.

Response Protocols and Operational Authority

Careful consideration must be given when determining the guidelines surrounding the protocols of youth program members in regard to responding to incidents and when training at operational activities. The authors of this report, from their own experiences and in discussing these topics with others from around the fire service, would collectively make the following recommendations regarding youth program members who are responding to live emergency incidents or participating in operational training activities:

1. The most stringent federal and state laws and regulations become those of the authority having jurisdiction, and reign over all others.
2. Program members younger than 16 should not be allowed to respond to live incidents, and careful consideration should be given in deciding the types of operational training in which they can participate. Beyond the physical age, all youth program members should be evaluated on their maturity level by program leaders before they are allowed to participate in department events.
3. Specific training should be provided and skills, knowledge and abilities should be evaluated before a youth is allowed to advance to higher levels and/or respond to a live incident. Parents/guardians of youth members should be encouraged to become actively involved with the department/youth program. Parents/guardians not involved should receive regular briefings on the youth's progress and operational activities. The parent/guardian should be informed and educated on the department's emergency response protocols if his or her child is allowed to respond to incidents.
4. Under no circumstances should a youth be driving a personal or departmental vehicle in "emergency response mode."
5. Youth members present at operational activities, such as "live fire training," should not be regarded as full-fledged firefighters. They are there for learning purposes only. As youths should not be counted as frontline firefighters at emergency scenes, neither should they be counted on to do anything more than simply participate during firefighting drills. They should not be asked to run any drills, maintain any equipment or be responsible for anyone's safety.
6. Mop-up should not be completed by a youth unless the environment has been determined to be safe for operation without a SCBA. A safety officer and air-monitoring device(s) should be used to determine a safe atmosphere.
7. The use of hydraulic/power equipment may not be suitable for youth program members. Training with such equipment should be conducted on a case-by-case basis, under careful monitoring and with complete personal protective equipment in place. The use of such equipment at a live scene is prohibited for youth program members.
8. Ladders should be operated with extreme caution, and youth program members should utilize appropriate personal protective equipment including fall protection when operating on ladders. Youths should not climb ladders above 28 feet without the use of advanced fall protection such as a ladder belt and safety line.
9. Hoselines larger than 2½ inches and portable master streams should not be used by youth program members. An exception can be made with pre-plumbed devices under careful supervision.

Response Protocols

The second-leading cause of line-of-duty injuries and deaths in the fire service—after heart attacks—consistently is vehicle crashes. It affects both career and volunteer departments, riding in personal and departmental vehicles, both responding to and returning from incidents. There are far too many variables for this report to try and create a one-size-fits-all guideline for your department as it pertains to youth members responding, but given the gravity of this topic, we strenuously implore you to give this issue careful consideration.

When it comes to emergency response of youth members, we recommend:

- No one under the age of 16 be allowed to respond
- Youth members shall not drive vehicles in emergency response mode
- Seatbelts shall be worn at all times, whether in personal or departmental vehicles
- Responding youth shall be under the supervision of a trained department representative

Beyond that, it is up to your department to decide on a reasonable and safe response protocol. Points to consider include whether the youth are allowed to report directly to the scene or if they need to go to the fire station first (neither of these should be in “emergency mode”), whether they are allowed to ride on apparatus and/or whether they should report to the station to be driven to the scene en masse in nonemergency conditions by a department representative. Again, these are some of the most important questions you will face with this youth program, and we ask that you give them serious consideration.

Once on scene, youth members should be treated like other responders in terms of requiring accountability tags and personal protective equipment (PPE). Both the tags and PPE, however, should be uniquely color-coded or otherwise easily identifiable. Some states and organizations have moved to utilizing blue helmets to identify “non-combat” members who are on scene.

Youth should not be allowed in hazardous environments as identified in 29 CFR 1910, including HazMat incidents and freeway response where high-speed traffic may cause danger.

“A dream doesn’t become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work.”

—Gen. Colin Powell

Chapter 5: Education/Training

The fire service offers many different training and career opportunities. Individuals can choose various career paths including but not limited to the “typical” firefighter role, or they can move into more specialized disciplines such as being a driver, pump operator or aerial operator. Other career paths could include becoming an EMT, paramedic, fire marshal, fire investigator or many other valuable positions within the fire service. More than just about any other occupation, the fire service has a strong tradition of mentorship, where experienced members provide a system of support and encouragement to newer members as their knowledge and expertise grows.

This tradition of mentorship extends to those who are just getting started in the profession as members of youth programs. Ideally, in addition to just garnering interest, youth programs are designed to provide a system and method of learning for their members. While learning basic skills such as firefighting techniques, emergency medical care and other “traditional” fire service duties is expected and important, youth programs should have more meaning. Youth programs should focus training efforts on such topics as leadership, teamwork, community service and respect for others as the cornerstone for all we do. Establishing this type of philosophy highlights the importance of choosing the right leaders for your program. Youth leaders are the mentors who not only provide youth with a solid foundation of firefighting skills, but also personal and professional skills that they will use for the rest of their lives.

As you prepare the official training regimen for the youth program, it is important to consider the authority having jurisdiction and how their policies are going to impact your training program. (Mainly, some states are fairly restrictive when it comes to the utilization of youths in the fire service and will hardly allow them to do anything until they are 18, while others allow a much wider range of freedom. You need to have a firm understanding of what will and will not be allowed in terms of training.) Great care must be taken to ensure that all legal requirements are understood and applied before any youth training program is finalized.

Once the legal aspects are clearly understood, it is your responsibility to incorporate your department’s procedures, ideals and resources when developing a youth training program. In doing so, keep in mind that the training needs to be delivered in a safe, structured manner that utilizes qualified adult leadership and presents the materials in a fun and exciting atmosphere.

Meeting Their Needs

The training classes offered will invariably vary when compared to other youth programs. Even departments in the same area that are governed by the same state requirements and local regulations will differ based on the departments’ resources and the number of members involved in each youth program. Beyond that, the youth training program should be adjusted based on the individual youth’s physical and emotional limitations. In designing the training, remember that this is simply not a “one-size-fits-all” undertaking. For example, it may not be in the best interest of the department or the youth to have a 14-year-old youth program member doing the exact same training as a group of 17-year-olds. And it’s especially important to have these guidelines established and understood by all in advance, because once training begins, it may be difficult for the leader to hold that younger youth program member back in the heat of the moment once everyone’s adrenaline is flowing. Having the parameters known and agreed to beforehand will help keep everyone safe and on task.

Youth Training

The training you are able to offer your youth members is going to vary by state/department/age/etc. guidelines, and while there are many character traits that we'll want to help these young adults develop, the bottom line is that the youth program members have likely been drawn to your program because of the grandeur that is associated with the profession—the thrill, danger, heroism, etc. So while tasks such as shining an engine and rolling hose are duties they should learn to do, and learn to do well, the bottom line is you're going to need to introduce them to some of the more “glamorous” parts of the job early in training lest you risk losing their interest.

The following list certainly is not all-inclusive of the classes you should offer but are simply some suggestions that you can incorporate and/or build your training around. In each case, make sure the participating youth program members are physically and mentally ready for the task and are wearing the appropriate safety equipment, and that all age requirements are satisfied. We are not suggesting youth program members be provided with each class in the entirety that would be required for certification in each discipline, but that they be introduced to different skills and concepts so they get at least a working knowledge of each and a basic understanding of what will be required if they are to continue on in the fire service.

1. Firefighting

- **Orientation**—Each department should develop a brief class that establishes the direction for the program and clearly defines the expectations put on each new member.
- **Introduction to fire and emergency services**—A class that focuses on the basic safety considerations and essential information that is required of fire department members before they respond to an incident. It should provide an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the fire service at its basic level and the department's SOGs.
- **Basic personal protective equipment**—Begin with using “universal precautions” including a helmet, boots, gloves and turnout gear, as well as other topics such as eye and ear protection.
- **Basic skill development**—Begin this course in the classroom and teach basic firefighting operations and department procedures. Youth program members should learn about the equipment used to complete different tasks as well as specific safety considerations for each. Classroom instruction will then lead into more hands-on learning.
- **Fire attack**—Set up scenarios where the youth program members advance charged hoselines into a structure in order to attack an interior “fire.” Lessons learned will include teamwork, the demonstration of safety practices and familiarity of wearing safety gear, including SCBA.
- **HazMat awareness and operations**—This course should explain what hazardous materials incidents are and help youth program members detect them. It will instruct them to operate in a defensive manner when they first arrive on scene and teach them how HazMat incidents are classified, how to understand the risks associated with them and the proper notification procedures when they are detected.
- **Introduction to wildland fire behavior**—This course should provide basic instruction on the primary factors that affect the start and spread of wildfires and recognition of potentially hazardous situations. Topics should include basic concepts of wildland fire, fuel, topography, weather and fire behavior.
- **Emergency vehicle operations course**—This class should promote safe-driving habits and practices through a combination of classroom presentations and hands-on techniques. Youth program members should be taught proper response techniques for personal vehicles and can be introduced to department-owned vehicles. The end result should be a dedication to departmental driving procedures and total response safety.
- **Incident management**—Youth program members should be introduced to the incident command system (ICS), including its history, features, principles and organizational structure, as well as its relationship to the National Incident Management System (NIMS).



- **Fire extinguishers**—Since many fires do not require large quantities of water to extinguish, youth program members should be properly trained in various alternative extinguishment options involving portable fire extinguishers. They should be able to identify the type of fire they are dealing with (class A, B, C or D), choose the appropriate agent to extinguish it and use safe operations to extinguish the fire, training with a fire extinguisher burn pan.

- **Firefighter I**—The completion of Firefighter I for adult members usually leads to certification that permits that person to operate as a full-fledged firefighter. After completing this class, your youth program members should be well versed in departmental procedures and operational responsibilities and should be able to perform basic firefighting skills and first aid, be familiar with fire behavior and have a working knowledge of NFPA safety standards.

2. Emergency Medical Services

- **EMS orientation**—Have an orientation class for the youth program members, offering them an overview of the EMS field and introducing them to some of the skills they will need to learn and incidents they may be asked to respond to as EMS professionals.

- **CPR for the first responder/healthcare professional**—This class should go beyond basic civilian training and cover removing airway obstructions for adults, infants and children, as well as AEDs (automated external defibrillators), ventilation devices, barriers for performing rescue breathing and two-person CPR techniques.

- **Basic first aid**—Begin with using “universal precautions” such as gloves and eye protection for the safety of both victims and rescuers. Cover topics such as burns, stopping bleeding and treating broken bones.

- **First responder/medical rescue technician**—The goal of this course is to provide youth program members with the core knowledge, skills and attitudes to function in the capacity as the first person on scene to an incident. The first responder uses a limited amount of equipment to perform initial assessment and intervention and is trained to assist other EMS providers.

- **EMT**—After First Responder, the next nationally recognized level of EMS training is Emergency Medical Technician, with the levels including basic, intermediate and paramedic. A youth program should introduce its members to the skills that will be required to provide ambulance transport, such as administering oxygen, basic patient assessments, cardiac monitoring and whatever else you deem appropriate.

3. Leadership Development for Youth

- **National programs**—National programs such as Fire Exploring offer templates for leadership development programs that can be used as best-practice examples.
- **Mentorship programs**—Youth program members can be paired with adults and/or senior youth program members who will serve as mentors.
- **Mentorship training**—This would include coaching the youths and training them so they can become mentors to new youth program members. The training should include teaching them the traits and skills necessary to act as a trusted friend/counselor who will advise others and serve as an example of the right way to do things.
- **Youth peer performance**—Stress teamwork and challenge each youth member to be a shining example for the others. Teach them that if one person fails to perform properly, the entire group fails.
- **Opportunities to develop professionalism**—Offer youth program members the chance to step up and become leaders. Give them challenges to show off their intestinal fortitude, such as accomplishing tasks where they will have to make decisions or teaching a class where they demonstrate knowledge. Be careful, however, not to set them up for failure. For example, if a member is deathly afraid of speaking in public, don't just send him/her in front of the group to talk unprepared. Work up to that point over a period of time, and make sure that he/she is comfortable with the subject matter.
- **Community service performance**—This is an opportunity for youth program members to go out in the community and work as “real” firefighters. They can help prepare for and participate in parades and community festivals and can assist at fire safety and public education events, promoting fire and life safety issues through instruction and helping to eliminate loss and injuries through prevention. Not only do they gain experience and confidence, but the department gets much-needed manpower.



Educational Partnership Opportunities

Many opportunities exist for partnership when it comes to educating youth members. Most communities have a number of social groups, high schools and/or colleges that would be more than willing to provide support to departments with structured and safe youth programs. Other areas of support that remain mostly untapped, however, are the retired educators and retired fire service professionals in your area. In many cases these individuals would be more than willing to help your program if you ask them. It is important to note, though, that even these experienced individuals will require some training prior to meeting with the youths themselves.

Some examples of educational partnership opportunities that exist are:

- Nonoperational fire and emergency service clubs
- High schools
 - Community service hours
 - Career councilors
 - Culminating project (senior project/senior portfolio)
- College
 - Application process enhancement
 - Credits toward degree
 - Technical preparatory credits
- Local fire training offices and state fire academy
 - Certification
 - Summer academy
- Learning for Life
 - Fire Exploring
- Civic organizations
 - Leadership development
 - Community involvement
 - Scholarship opportunities

4. Adult Leader Training and Orientation

Equally as important in providing a quality training program for the youth members of the department is providing a sound training program for the adult leadership of that program as well. A sound training program in this area will cover numerous topics in significant detail to allow for the safe, fun and legal administration of the program. Well in advance of having actual contact with the youth program members, adult leaders need to be made aware of the expectations for the program and for their involvement in it.

Adults leaders should be personable, approachable, well-versed in the fire service, upbeat and always prepared. Some of the training they need to receive should cover:

- An orientation and explanation of the expectations that are being placed in them
- Basic leadership training
- Diversity training
- Sexual harassment training
- Personal behavior training
- The Americans with Disabilities Act
- Federal, state and local statutes for working with youths
- A refresher on the bylaws, SOPs, procedures and guidelines of the department
- Mentoring and coaching development
- Translating their experience to understandable teachings

Conclusion

As we recognized at the beginning of this report, there are so many departments out there, with so many variances among them, that it is impossible to come up with one set of standards that will be all encompassing and satisfy everyone's needs in one fell swoop. That's why—built right into the title—we have told you that this report is a series of suggested guidelines and best practices that we hope you will find useful. If you are acting within the laws of your AHJ, we are in no position to tell you what you can and cannot do.

What we will say, however, is that in whatever you are doing, keep safety at the forefront of your thoughts and actions. That means the physical (and psychological) safety of both the youth and adult members of your department, and that also means the safety of your members and the department as a whole as it pertains to legal and libel issues. It is stated throughout this report, but we will say it one more time: Know the local, state and federal laws and understand how they pertain to your youth program.

Starting a youth program within your department is an opportunity to increase enthusiasm and morale (bringing in new enthusiasm with the youths and rekindling it with the veterans), connect with the youths in the community, better serve those you protect and positively contribute to the overall future of the department. So many of today's first responders and fire service leaders began their careers as youth members at their local departments. Bringing youths in and utilizing their time and effort in return for training and structure is one of the many great traditions that helps make the fire service what it is today.

We thank you for your time and interest in reviewing this report and hope you found it helpful. If you have any questions or would like to contact one of the authors, you can do so by going through the contact section available at www.iafc.org/vcos. The information contained in this document is meant for you to use and will be made available online for download where you can customize it to fit your particular needs.

We wish you all the best as you go forward with your youth program, and we thank you for helping shape our fire service leaders of tomorrow.

Best wishes, and stay safe!

The VCOS Board of Directors and the authors of the *Silver Ribbon Report*

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Pledge to My Peers

We are colleagues with a common mission. I pledge to meet my commitment to you as a team member of this department and expect you will meet your commitment to me. I will practice and model the Key Principles listed below in my relationship with you and all other department members:

Maintain and enhance self-esteem
Listen and respond with empathy
Ask for help in solving the problem

I accept my individual and our collective responsibility to solve the problem; it is not important to assign blame.

I accept that all decisions are not perfect, and if I disagree, I will do so openly and present possible alternatives to an ultimate decision in a group or a one-on-one situation. Once a decision is made I will try to make it work. If I disagree or find that a decision is not workable, I will work through the appropriate decisionmakers and/or decisionmaking channels to have it modified or rescinded.

I will ensure, as a leader of a decisionmaking group, that appropriate communication during the decisionmaking process and about the final decision is given to all affected parties, and I will also communicate the “why” behind such decisions.

I will accept you as you are today.
I will talk to you promptly if I have a problem with your decisions, behavior or actions, and I will not talk to others, including your boss, about a problem without talking to you first.

I will remind you not to “attack” another team member; if I hear you doing so, I will ask you to talk to that person.

I will ask you for feedback about my behavior and respond openly to your request for feedback.

I will seek opportunities to compliment you for contributions you have made.

I will hold other members of the team accountable for fulfilling the above agreements, remembering first my commitment to you and others within our department.

Signature

Date

Appendix A

Below is a sample that you may use in full or in part as an introduction to your program. A downloadable, customizable, digital version is available at www.iafc.org/vcos.

INTRODUCTION

This youth program is designed for qualified individuals between the ages of 14 and 18 and is intended to provide an introduction to the fire and emergency services. It is meant to expose and educate its members on the varied procedures and skills required of emergency responders and present the fire/rescue field as a possible career path. By participating, you will become a representative of this department and be taught the value of discipline, leadership, honor and community service.

Much of the focus of the program will consist of learning about emergency operational methods and techniques as they pertain to firefighting, fire prevention and emergency medical services, and how the process of mastering these skills makes for a well-rounded young adult. Program members will be allowed to participate in basic training classes and will perform routine duties such as caring for departmental equipment and apparatus. As they progress and demonstrate competency, they will be given more responsibility.

REQUIREMENTS

Potential members must meet all departmental guidelines and be capable of reading and understanding assigned materials. Members must be in good physical health and capable of doing strenuous activities. Each member must remain in school (unless otherwise graduated), maintain at least a C average and have no truancies on his/her record.

After filling out an application, the potential member—with a guardian present—will go through an oral interview process. There will also be a background check and references will be contacted. A medical release form must be signed by the youth's parent/guardian and personal physician. He/she must also pass a department physical.

Accepted applicants will participate in the youth program as probationary members for at least six months and will need to pass a series of physical and written tests before becoming full members of the youth program.

Members will be dismissed from the program if they are caught possessing or are under the influence of drugs or alcohol at any time, take part in any illegal activities or participate in any actions or behaviors that are judged to be unbecoming of public safety personnel.

Appendix B

Below is a sample that you may use in full or in part as an application to your program. A downloadable, customizable, digital version is available at www.iafc.org/vcos.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Name _____ Phone _____
Address _____
E-mail address _____ Date of birth _____
2. Do you have your parents'/guardians' permission to apply to this fire service program?
Yes No (circle one)
3. Name of parent/guardian _____ Phone _____
Address _____

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

4. Name _____ Phone _____
Alternate contact _____ Phone _____

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

(A background check will be done. Those convicted of felonies are prohibited from joining.)

5. Have you ever been arrested or ticketed? (Felonies, misdemeanors, traffic violations, etc.?)
Yes No (circle one)
If yes, list the dates and charges.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (use another sheet of paper if needed)

6. What interests you most about becoming a member of our youth fire service program?

7. Please list other activities, in detail, that you are involved in (sports, church, volunteer work, etc.)

Applicant signature and date

Parent/guardian signature and date

Fire Chief approval _____

Appendix C

Below is a sample that you may use as a parental consent form for your program. A downloadable, customizable, digital version is available at www.iafc.org/vcos.

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT

My son/daughter, _____, has my permission to join the youth program for this fire department. I, _____, give my consent to allow him/her to be part of the program and do not hold the department, its members or the town responsible for any injuries or actions that occur under reasonable circumstances as part of this program.

Applicant signature and date

Parent/guardian signature and date

CONTRACT OF UNDERSTANDING

My son/daughter and I have read all the guidelines, protocols and rules regarding the department's youth program and understand that youth program members will serve in support roles for the department as they learn and train for possible future service. My son/daughter and I understand that members of the youth program are to follow instructions from superiors and follow department safety protocols at all times. We also understand that he/she will represent the department and act in a professional manner that is courteous and respectful at all times. We understand that there is a "zero tolerance policy" regarding the use of alcohol and drugs while attending any department events. My son/daughter and I understand that in signing this Contract of Understanding, we are declaring that any violation of the program's/department's bylaws or standard operating procedures/guidelines will be dealt with by the program's leaders and/or department officers and may be grounds for immediate dismissal. Any acts that violate state or federal laws will be referred to the proper law enforcement agency.

Youth firefighter signature and date

Parent/guardian signature and date

I acknowledge that the parties above received a copy of the department's youth firefighter program guidelines.

Fire Chief signature and date

Appendix D

Below is a sample of rules that you may use in full or in part for your program. A downloadable, customizable, digital version is available at www.iafc.org/vcos.

RULES OF CONDUCT

As a member of this youth program, you are officially a representative of this department and must act accordingly. We have worked hard to build trust and respect within the community, and actions that damage our reputation are taken very seriously. Any violations of the rules of the program or the overall department will be met with disciplinary action and/or expulsion from the program.

1. Members will not violate any laws or regulations of the city, state or country. Members will also abide by the rules of the department and bylaws of the program.
2. Members will not disrupt any meetings or ceremonies and will obey the orders of superiors. They will control their tempers and exercise patience and discretion.
3. Members will refrain from vulgar, violent, profane, insolent and threatening language.
4. Members who attend program events under the influence of drugs or alcohol will be dismissed immediately.
5. Members are expected to speak the truth at all times and under all circumstances.
6. Members shall notify the proper authorities if they gain information about a crime or accident.
7. Members shall treat their superior officers and peers with respect.
8. Members shall not be publicly critical or derogatory of orders, instructions, policies or decisions made by superiors. All complaints shall be brought privately to the issuing party and resolved immediately.
9. Any documentation or information that you become privy to shall be treated as completely confidential. Revealing private information is a serious offense and shall be treated accordingly.
10. Members shall not accept any money, rewards or gifts meant as compensation, unless it is being donated to the program as a whole.
11. Members are responsible for the proper care of the department's equipment and property. Any damage that is done by, observed by or found by a program member must be reported immediately.
12. Members are prohibited from smoking while in uniform or at any program function or event.
13. Members are not allowed to respond directly to any emergency scene in their own personal vehicle. Members cannot utilize any form of sirens or emergency lighting in their personal vehicles.
14. Members will not participate in any training or response that they have not been approved for by the program leaders.
15. Once certified to be present at an emergency scene, members shall participate only in the manners and functions that they have been certified for. They will act strictly under the control of their on-scene adult leaders as specified in the program's policy.
16. When at the scene of a live incident or training, members are responsible for wearing full protective gear at all times, unless directly specified by their adult leader.
17. Members shall not walk off an emergency scene without being dismissed by their adult leader.

Appendix E

The Silver Ribbon Report Official List of Recommended Best Practices

All youth firefighters must:

1. Be enrolled in school or otherwise have graduated high school
2. Must maintain a minimum grade point average in school
3. Be equipped with proper personal protective equipment appropriate to the activity being performed
4. Be mobilized as a unit, not as individual on-call firefighters. If you show up on-scene in a personal vehicle, you are present as a citizen and are not allowed to participate
5. Wear seatbelts at all times when in personal vehicles or departmental apparatus
6. Attend all meetings and training regarding safety awareness
7. Conform to and abide by all department rules

All youth firefighters are prohibited from:

1. Driving any vehicle, personal or departmental, in “emergency mode”
2. Performing fire suppression inside structures, on vehicles or in wildland fires
3. Entering a confined space as defined by federal regulations
4. Responding to incidents that potentially contain hazardous materials (excluding personal vehicles with fuel leaks)
5. Using power tools on scene (except for a fan in rehab purposes)
6. Operating a personal vehicle with aftermarket “emergency” lights
7. Performing ice rescue operations
8. Performing an activity that involves the risk of falling 6 feet or more
9. Substituting for trained firefighters
10. Responding to incidents while school is in session

Members of youth firefighting programs ages 14 and 15 may:

1. Participate in nonemergency events between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m.
2. Receive training and instruction that does not involve fire, smoke (except theatrical or latex smoke), toxic gas or hazardous materials
3. Wear protective equipment that readily identifies them as youths

Members of youth firefighting programs who are 16 and older may do what 14- and 15-year-olds may do, plus:

1. Respond to emergency incidents as observers with proper supervision
2. Respond to emergency incidents between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. If already on-scene, they may stay until 10 p.m.
3. Take part in more advanced training
4. Respond to emergency incidents on departmental vehicles
5. Participate in search and rescue operations away from structural fires
6. Enter a structure after the fire is out and it is declared safe by the incident commander
7. Perform traffic control duties, after proper training
8. Drive departmental vehicles less than 10,000 pounds in “nonemergency” mode after proper training
9. Pick up hoses and clean fire scenes after the incident commander declares the area safe
10. Participate in rehab operations
11. Use power tools during training
12. Operate certain pumps at the fire scene
13. Handle charged hose lines up to 1¾ inch diameter

VCOS Board of Directors 2010

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North Farms Volunteer Fire Dept.
P.O. Box 4337
Yalesville Station
Wallingford, CT 06492-7562

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205 E. Main Street
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8001 River Road
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Fire Chief
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5082 Bullion Street
Mariposa, CA 95338

Staff Liaison

Joelle Fishkin
International Assn. of Fire Chiefs
4025 Fair Ridge Drive
Fairfax, VA 22033

About the VCOS

The Volunteer & Combination Officers Section is the largest and most active of the International Association of Fire Chiefs' eight sections. Established in 1994, this section's board of directors and members have consistently worked to further the progress, success and professionalism of each and every member of the emergency services.

Some of our most successful endeavors have included a series of industry-changing ribbon reports (including the one you are currently reading), an annual leadership symposium that has become a "can't-miss event" with chief officers and a traveling educational opportunity called Beyond Hoses and Helmets, which brings National Fire Academy level instructors to your department.

If you would like to learn more about the VCOS and/or the IAFC, find online resources or get information about joining the section, visit www.iafc.org/vcos.



VCOS Mission Statement

The mission of the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section of the IAFC is to provide chief officers who manage volunteers within a volunteer or combination fire, rescue or EMS delivery system with information, education, services and representation to enhance their professionalism.

VCOS Vision Statement

The vision of the VCOS is to represent the interests of all volunteer and combination fire/rescue/EMS agencies. We will be a dynamic organization, characterized by our integrity, customer focus and membership development, with value placed on people and the superior utilization of technology. We will excel by creating educational programs, through unrivaled networking and by helping VCOS members further their success and reach their potential.

THE WORK OF THE VCOS IS MADE POSSIBLE IN PART
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