

Fire Service Recruitment and Retention



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

Issue

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

Impact Areas

Local communities are facing numerous challenges when it comes to staffing local fire departments. Civil unrest, active shooter, and mass casualty events, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have all contributed to recruitment and retention challenges for career and volunteer fire departments. In addition, increasing emergency call volumes, greater time demands, time-consuming training requirements, aging communities, and the physical risks of the occupation create further challenges to fire departments struggling to maintain sufficient staffing levels.

In addition to general staffing concerns, the fire service also struggles to recruit and retain women and people of color. The most recent data from the NFPA's U.S. Fire Department Profile, 2020, reported that 11.6% of career firefighters were Hispanic or Latino, 8.5% were African American, and 1.3% were Asian-Pacific Islanders. Women represent 11% of volunteer firefighters and 5% of career firefighters, according to the NFPA's 2022 "U.S. Fire Department Profile" report based on 2020 data.¹

The creation of new initiatives and support for existing incentives would assist local communities in addressing the shortage of firefighters in all department types and help make the fire service become a more diverse and inclusive vocation. This includes initiatives like apprenticeship, cadet, internship, and supplemental education programs, as well as tax, housing, and other incentives.

¹ <https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/Emergency-Responders/US-fire-department-profile>

Figure 1. Number of Career Firefighters and Rate per 1,000 People

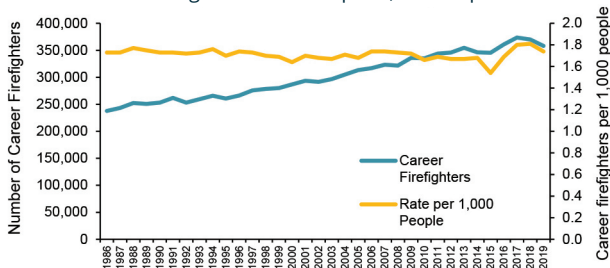
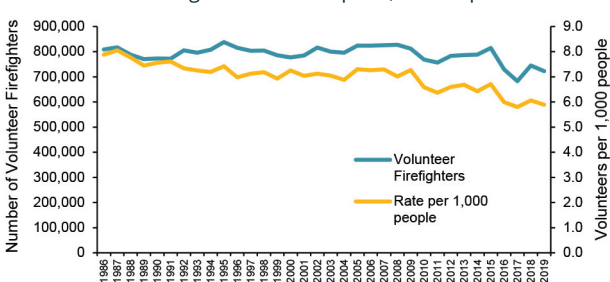


Figure 2. Number of Volunteer Firefighters and Rate per 1,000 People



NFPA. US Fire Department Profile 2019 Rita Fahy, Ben Evarts and Gary P. Stein, December 2021. <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/News-and-Research/Fire-statistics-and-reports/Emergency-responders/osfdprofile.pdf>

More Information ▶

