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# U.S. Fire Administrator's Summit on Fire Prevention and Control

National Emergency Training Center  
October 11, 2022



U.S. Fire  
Administration





# **Data Informed Insights on Recruitment and Retention**

**Chief John Oates**

**U.S. Fire Administrator's Summit on Fire Prevention and Control**

# WHAT THE DATA SAYS ON WHERE WE ARE NOW AND WHERE WE STRUGGLE, AND WHERE WE CAN GO

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- Traditionally, the fire service has not been required to actively recruit or actively endeavor to ensure members stay in the department
- Career fire departments today:
  - Unprecedented low application numbers
  - Struggle to ensure a diverse workforce
- Volunteer fire departments today:
  - Low incumbent membership
  - Low number of applicants
  - Increased service delivery demand



# WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN? WHY DO PEOPLE STAY?

**Table 10. Volunteer Firefighter Tenure Period by Number and Percentage: 2019**

Tenure Active	Number	Percentage
Less than one year	66,900	9%
1–5 years	195,200	27%
6–10 years	157,100	22%
More than 10 years	303,600	42%
Total	722,800	100%

Sums may not equal totals due to rounding errors.

Source: NFPA's *Survey of Fire Departments for US Fire Experience During 2019*.



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# WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN? WHY DO PEOPLE STAY?

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A large majority of fire departments across the United States (US) depend on volunteer firefighters for emergency responses. Over the last decade, suburban and rural populations have soared, while the numbers of volunteer firefighters have fallen by over 10%, suggesting that improvements in recruitment and retention are necessary to counteract that trend. This article presents the results of a mixed methods research design that evaluates volunteer firefighters' motives to join, their expectations to continue service, and their contemporary satisfaction with service. The project evaluates how these different factors affect volunteers' prospective service length. Results suggest that a values orientation is the most prevalent influence affecting firefighters' commitment to the volunteer fire service, but that personal enhancement and understanding goals were best able to systematically explain variance in the prospective service period. The findings presented here are used to outline recommendations to improve recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters and reduce levels of insularity in recruitment networks.

*Dr. David A. Greene, Deputy Chief, Colleton County (SC) Fire-Rescue*

*Dr. Marcus E. Hendershot, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Schreiner University (TX)*



# IS THE PROBLEM RECRUITMENT OR PROCESS?

Filled out preliminary background application and met minimum requirements	13,236
Took and passed written test	6,504
Submitted CPAT certification within time window	966
Scheduled and passed oral interview	622
Filled out questionnaire and passed Initial Panel Review	446
Passed in-depth background check and Final Panel Review	205
Passed medical and psychological evaluations	187

**1.4% success rate**

Rand Corporation, 2014



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# CASE STUDY

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## Females and Minority Racial/Ethnic Groups Remain Underrepresented in Emergency Medical Services: A Ten-Year Assessment, 2008-2017

- The study population included 588,337 EMTs and 105,356 paramedics.
- The proportion of females earning initial EMT certification **rose from 28% in 2008 to 35% in 2017.**
- Throughout the study period, **less than one-fourth** of newly certified paramedics were female (range: 20-23%).
- The proportion of EMS professionals identifying as Black **remained near 5% among EMTs and 3% among paramedics.**
- The proportion of newly-certified Hispanic EMS professionals **rose from 10% to 13% among EMTs and from 6% to 10% among paramedics**



# CONTACT INFORMATION

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# **Recruitment Challenges for Career Departments Focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

**Chief John S. Butler**

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# WHAT WE TRIED AND DIDN'T WORK

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- Stricter *Selection and Denial* policies
  - Limited applicant pool
  - Updated; now reflective of current culture
- Limited appointments for written test and CPAT
  - Attendance challenges
  - Now offering additional opportunities
- Communication
  - Not remaining engaged with applicants
  - Now engaging with applicants throughout on various communication platforms



# WHAT'S WORKED/CURRENTLY WORKING

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- Updated *Selection and Denial* criteria
  - Viewing applicants - “whole person” approach
- Recruitment marketing appealing to all demographics
  - Diverse team of recruiters
  - Diversity in advertising
  - Increased access and exposure
- Development of infrastructure for data analysis
  - Applicant demographics
  - Comparative measures on applicants



# WHAT WE INTEND TO EXPLORE MOVING FORWARD

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- Increase data collection and analytics
  - Learn more about applicants
  - Data-informed decisions
- Increase in-person presence
  - Recruit in our own backyard
  - Schools, faith-based organizations, local events
- Evaluate online marketing and recruitment companies
  - Increase Internet-based outreach
  - Improve website/end-user interface



# CONTACT INFORMATION

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# **Recruitment Challenges for Volunteer Fire Departments**

**Chief Brita Horn**

**U.S. Fire Administrator's Summit on Fire Prevention and Control**

# RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

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- General
  - Societal changes: widespread decline in volunteerism
  - Pace of life
  - Risks of firefighting for serving communities
- Fire Service
  - Insularity
  - Lack of expansion of recruiting outside of existing networks
  - Department pressures: dwindling budgets, expanded response requirements
  - Safer work environments



# APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

*Registered apprenticeship programs enable employers to develop and train their future workforce while offering career seekers affordable paths to secure quality, high-paying jobs.*

Source: Department of Labor, [www.apprenticeship.gov](http://www.apprenticeship.gov)

**APPRENTICESHIPUSA**  
**Explore Registered Apprenticeship**

Workforce strategies, like Registered Apprenticeship help ensure a strong and equitable post-pandemic economic recovery by connecting Americans to good quality jobs in priority industry sectors, including critical supply chain industries and among populations disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Registered Apprenticeship programs enable employers to develop paths to secure quality jobs.

**WHAT IS REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP?**  
Registered Apprenticeship is a quality career path that prepares workers for high-demand jobs. Apprentices can obtain paid wage increases, portable, national Apprenticeships are validated by the U.S. Department of Labor. It's different from other training programs.

- Industry Led standards and curriculum
- Paid Job - Apprentices are paid while they learn
- Structured Learning - Apprentices prepare for a career
- Supplemental Education - Apprentices receive classroom instruction
- Diversity - Apprenticeships are open to all
- Quality & Safety - Apprentices receive training to ensure safety
- Credentials - Apprentices earn industry-recognized credentials

The length of a Registered Apprenticeship varies by industry and the complexity of the job.

**Did You Know?**  
Registered Apprenticeship has a proven track record of producing strong results for both employers and workers. Apprenticeship programs offer access to hundreds of occupations, in high-growth and emerging industries.

- \$77K**  
Average Starting Salary  
Average starting salary after an apprentice completes an apprenticeship program.
- 93%**  
Employment Retention  
Percentage of apprentices who retain employment after apprenticeship completion.
- 800,000+**  
Apprentices Annually Across the Nation
- \$300K+**  
Lifetime Earning Advantage  
Apprentice graduates earn more over their lifetime compared to peers who don't.

**APPRENTICESHIPUSA** [www.apprenticeship.gov](http://www.apprenticeship.gov)



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# APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

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- Built on many of the same tenets valued by the fire service:
  - Industry-led
  - Structured on-the-job learning
  - Supplemental education
  - Quality and safety
  - Credentials
- Incorporating solutions to challenges fire departments are facing by building on various diversity models
- Improved data access and capture
- Resources for cancer prevention, healthy lifestyles and behavioral health support



# CONTACT INFORMATION

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Rock Creek Volunteer Fire Department



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