

Recruitment and Retention from USFA and NVFC

Without volunteers, the fire service would be unable to protect community infrastructure at innumerable locations throughout the nation. Without volunteers, it would be impossible for too many fire departments to be “response-able.” And, without volunteers, risks to personnel, the most critical of infrastructures, would increase during response operations.

Therefore, to assist volunteer fire organizations with their two biggest challenges — recruitment and retention — the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) and National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) released the second edition of *Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services: Challenges and Solutions*.

“Volunteer firefighters comprise two-thirds of the estimated 1.2 million firefighters in this country,” said Acting Assistant Administrator Charlie Dickinson. “Maintaining these front-line responders through retention and recruitment is paramount to America’s safety and security.”

Among the challenges identified and addressed in the new guide are issues the emergency services face in the 21st century: time demands, training requirements, increasing call volume, changes in the “nature of the business,” changes in sociological conditions, leadership expectations, federal legislation, internal conflict, higher cost of housing, aging communities, and the effects of the decline in volunteers. The text examines each issue and provides examples of solutions that have worked in volunteer organizations across the nation. The guide’s appendix contains study results, statistics, sample documents, references, and additional resources.

Dr. William Jenaway, project manager for the guide, explained that the research conducted for the second edition resulted in three key findings that he stressed must be understood before approaching the issue of recruitment and retention:

- The needs, leadership, and challenges of recruitment and retention are all local. Volunteer organizations should reflect the interests and values of the entire community.
- Recruitment is marketing and needs to be continuous. A needs assessment is critical to make sure that time devoted to marketing is invested appropriately.
- Benefit programs require an understanding of what members want before they can become incentives.

A new curriculum based on the guide is being developed for retention and recruitment seminars that will be offered by the NVFC at state association conferences across the U.S. To view and download the guide, visit <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/fa-310.pdf>. Hard copies can be ordered online from the USFA Publications Center at: <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/applications/publications>.



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