New York State Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Taskforce

Existing Recruitment and Retention Programs in Other States Subcommittee

Presentation Points

03/04/2022

- Arthur Hunsinger will be the presenter for this subcommittee
- Report on research areas
  - Many states reviewed seemed to be focused at the moment on some type of High School, Technical School, BOCES or Community College level program as a recruitment tool
  - Connecticut
    - State of Connecticut has produced a recruitment video portraying firefighters with their regular job and their job as a Volunteer Firefighter
    - Greenwich Fire Department
      - Recruitment and Retention Program since 1998
      - Provides discounted healthcare to active members
      - Quarterly Gas Stipends
      - Training Funding – Pays members to attend initial training
      - Tuition Reimbursement program
    - Woodbridge Fire Department Program
      - Bond incentive
      - Tax incentives
      - Custom gym and comradery for members
  - Florida
    - Southwest Florida Public Service Academy
      - Provides training with placement opportunities for Firefighters, Law Enforcement and Corrections
  - Pennsylvania
    - Excellent recruitment and retention website https://www.becomeapafirefighter.com/
    - Several ideas via their website
    - State Grants
    - Federal Grant assistance
  - National Volunteer Fire Council
    - Take advantage of the Fire Corps program as well as other resource tools offered by the NVFC

- Other potential concepts
  - Potential for a system for the fire service, like that of the National Guard where employers are required to allow members time to attend training and possibly have the state give incentives to those participating employers
  - Potential item, could the State provide a two-week version of FF 1 at the State Fire Academy with employer reimbursement for their time so that the Firefighters can come back prepared to go to work
  - Potential to focus the Community Service Program requirements for High School students to work with their fire departments
  - Possibly attend career days at local schools
  - Potential for a paid per call/training session basis or stipend for fuel reimbursement (i.e., $ 2.00 per call attended to cover the cost of motor fuel for responders)
  - Pandemic impact
    - Emergency services on front line may detract from desire to join
    - Attitude of departments/leadership related to pandemic measures can have significant impact, what is the public perception of the department based on social media posts or statements from organizational leaders, either pro or anti response measures
  - Volunteer
    - Do our community members understand the opportunities that exist?
      - Do we promote that we are volunteer?
    - Transient population especially due to pandemic displacement
      - Are they aware of how their public safety services are provided?
    - Do community members, especially younger generations understand what volunteerism is and means
    - Greater need to determine what is occurring in other community service organizations and faith-based institutions to gage what is occurring in the community
    - Greater need to provide mentorship to new members to better welcome them to the organization
      - Potentially allow new members to engage in selected activities on incident scenes when safe to do so, show them what members do and why – helps with training comprehension
      - Identify a position that a new member may be able to do under supervision on an incident, such as assist the apparatus operator
    - Does the fire department promote a welcoming environment?
      - Staffing at fire stations during key times to engage community members who may be interested
      - Engage older members to support and guide new members
      - Provide orientation and points of contact for new members

- After school programs
  - Exploring/Adventure program
  - Youth/Junior programs
- Participate in career fairs or other community programs
  - School events/guidance offices may provide an opportunity
- Provide displays and recruitment information at community

- Recommendations
  - Any potential benefit to be provided must have some level of accountability to prevent abuse of taxpayer funds
- Challenges
  - There is no magic single solution that will work for all departments, develop a tool kit for departments as they navigate individual challenges
  - Many incentive programs do not provide benefits to Renters
  - Public schools often do not want to allow volunteer fire departments to have access to students as they would have to allow the same time to other recruiters
  - Retention is a bigger challenge than Recruitment in some areas
    - Lack of employment opportunities
    - Cost of living