

## **PUBLIC FIRE SAFETY GUIDELINE CONSULTATION**

### **PFSG 04-84-13**

#### **Volunteer Fire Service Personnel Recruitment and Retention**

PFSG 04-84-13 and the accompanying resource book will be posted on the Ontario Fire Marshal's public website for 30 days for public consultation.

**The deadline for submission of comments is November 5, 2006.**

Upon review of the comments and feedback, final revisions will be made to the resource package prior to distribution.

It is anticipated that the completed resource package will be distributed in November 2006.

#### **To Provide Comment:**

Should you wish to comment on the PFSG, or accompanying resource book, complete the: **Form For Proposals On OFM Public Fire Safety Guidelines.**  
<http://www.ofm.gov.on.ca/english/FireProtection/munguide/proposal.asp>

Mail to:

Attention Cynthia Hammond  
Office of the Fire Marshal  
2284 Nursery Road  
Midhurst, ON L0L 1X0

To complete this form electronically, it is a print out version (ONLY). Please complete (online) and email the [PDF version](#) to:  
[cynthia.hammond@jus.gov.on.ca](mailto:cynthia.hammond@jus.gov.on.ca)

#### **INFORMATION REGARDING THE RESOURCE BOOK**

This resource describes effective practices and strategies for recruitment and retention of volunteer fire service personnel. It also provides a compilation of tools and templates that can be used to practically apply the concepts discussed.

At this time, the tools and templates are not linked to the book, however, are listed in each section. They will be available in the completed publication of the resource package.



# VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

STRATEGIES & TOOLS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM



**OFFICE OF THE FIRE MARSHAL**  
MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

# **Guideline for Volunteer Recruitment & Retention**

**Strategies & Tools for a Successful Program**



Office of the Fire Marshal

Ministry Of Community Safety and Correctional Services



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*A Message from Bernard A. Mayle  
Fire Marshal of Ontario*

*Without a strong and vibrant volunteer fire service, many communities would not be able to receive the customary level of fire prevention and protection services expected from their fire department. It is therefore vital that fire departments, particularly those in smaller communities and rural areas, be able to recruit and retain volunteers so that they can continue to protect their residents effectively from fire and other related hazards. It is also important to recognize the contributions made by the men and women of the volunteer service, their families and friends, and the business community in support of the delivery of fire protection services.*

*With these goals in mind, the Office of the Fire Marshal, with the assistance of stakeholder groups, has developed this resource package. It contains guidance, strategies and tools to help fire departments to implement an effective volunteer recruitment and retention program. This resource package will help fire department leaders communicate what is expected of the recruit and what impact volunteering will have on families, friends and the business community.*

*To retain the volunteers they have, fire departments must give them encouragement, training, tools and recognition. In return, fire departments will have the services of men and women who derive great satisfaction in protecting their community and who, with the experience they gain over the years, become an increasingly valuable resource.*

*New recruits are very impressionable. With the guidance this resource package offers, fire departments can give them a great start and a path to a rewarding future.*



# Acknowledgements

In the early stages of this project, it was identified that stakeholder consultation was imperative in order to truly reflect the knowledge, experiences and perspectives of the fire service across Ontario. As a result, when launched in early 2006, this project brought together representatives from every region of the province, from different sizes and composition of fire departments and from municipal as well as fire service viewpoints. During meetings, teleconferences and email correspondence, these stakeholders contributed their opinions, ideas, resources and skills to shape this reference package.

The Office of the Fire Marshal gratefully acknowledges the support and input from the following organizations and individuals.

## **Organization Stakeholders**

Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC)  
Fire Fighters' Association of Ontario (FFAO)  
Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)  
Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA)

## **Individual Stakeholders**

Pete Barbour	Fire Chief, Malahide (O AFC rep)
Brad Bigrigg	Fire Chief, Caledon
Bill Bowman	Fire Chief, Temiskaming Shores
Aurele Constantineau	District Chief, The Nation
Ted Droog	Mount Forest, (FFAO rep)
Gord Hall	Fire Chief, Estaire – Wanup
Mike Horan	Fire Chief, Oliver Paipoonge
John Uptegrove	Puslinch (FFAO rep)
Bill Smirle	Deputy Mayor, Township Of North Dundas (ROMA)

## **Office of the Fire Marshal**

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Ted Wieclawek, Operations Manager

## **Posters and Pictures**

As part of this resource package, recruitment posters and brochures were produced. We would like to thank all those individuals from across Ontario who agreed to have their photographs shown in these publications. In particular, thank you to the class of the August 22, 2006 Volunteer Fire Fighter Module B course at the Ontario Fire College, for your comments about the Volunteer fire service and your cooperation with the photography.



# About The Resource

## Scope and Application

This resource package includes Public Fire Safety Guideline 04-84-13 – Volunteer Fire Fighter Recruitment and Retention, a resource book that discusses effective practices, strategies, tool and templates, a CD version of the resource book and web page information.

According to the Fire Protection and Prevention Act 1997, a volunteer firefighter is defined as “a firefighter who provides fire protection services either voluntarily or for a nominal consideration, honorarium, training or activity allowance. (“pompier volontaire”) 1997, c. 4, s. 1 (1); 2001, c. 25, s. 475 (1).”

There are many factors that contribute to the success of a volunteer recruitment and retention program. These include implementing organized marketing, recruitment, selection, hiring, training and retention programs.

This guideline provides municipal officials and fire chiefs of volunteer and composite fire services with a general overview of principles to consider in the recruitment and retention of volunteers. It was developed to assist individuals responsible for the recruitment and retention of volunteer fire service personnel. The stakeholders who have developed this package have done research and had discussions to identify effective strategies and practices for volunteer recruitment and retention efforts. The end result is this comprehensive, flexible and convenient collection of strategies and tools.

This package provides strategies and tools that you may need to implement a volunteer recruitment and retention program. This does not mean that every fire service must use every tool and template. You are free to use and modify the information based on your needs and the amount of time you can invest in the program.

## Time

*Time is what we want most, but what we use worst. William Penn*

Without doubt, human resources, particularly volunteers, are the fire service’s most valuable assets. Time is also valuable. Unfortunately, both have limits. There are so many demands on time within a volunteer or composite fire department that the leadership may not have enough of it to focus on maintaining a solid volunteer recruitment and retention program. This can impact on that other valuable commodity - having enough volunteers who will enjoy and continue to do the job well.

It is anticipated that by using some of the tools developed in this resource package, fire chiefs and other leaders may be able to spend more time in their leadership role, rather than spending time developing a form or document from scratch.



## **Instructions for Using the Paper Copy of the Resource**

We suggest you begin by taking a moment to reflect on your current practices. Conduct the self-assessment to identify your fire service's strengths and practices to consider in relation to recruitment and retention. Once you have identified the information you need, you can then go to that specific section of the book.

The tools and templates for each component of the recruitment and retention program are listed at the end of each section of the book.

The actual tools and templates are located in the back of the resource book. They can be removed from the book and photocopied as required.

## **Instructions for Using the CD Version of the Resource**

The CD contains four files.

### **Instructions**

How to use the CD.

### **The Public Fire Safety Guideline**

A copy of the Public Fire Safety Guideline. Note that you can also access it by clicking on the pfsg link.


### **Tools and Templates**

This folder contained all the tools and templates listed in the resource book. They are organized by the different components of the recruitment and retention program. You can access them through this file, or you can access them from the resource book by clicking on the relevant link.

### **The Resource Book**

Once you open this file, you can read the book electronically. Within the book there are numerous links that are described below.

We suggest you begin by taking a moment to reflect on your current practices. Conduct the self-assessment to identify your fire service's strengths and practices to consider in relation to recruitment and retention. Once you have identified the information you need, you can then click on the word highlighted to the right, and go to that specific section of the book.

You can also review the document through the Table of Contents. If you click on the title, it will take you directly to that page. To find tools and templates, in the Table of Contents, click on the ✂ icon. Click on the back arrow  in the tool bar at the top right hand corner of the page to take you back to previously read pages.



For easy editing and printing, the tools and templates are provided in Word format to allow for compatibility with most word processing systems. Click on the tool that you would like to view and it will take you to the correct screen.

Once the document is open, you may edit as required. You will have to save your edits and revisions onto your computer.

When you are done with the tool, click the back button on the toolbar at the top right hand corner of the page to take you back to the most recent page. Note that the tool template is still open at the bottom of your screen. To close it, simply open it up and click on the **X** at the top right of the screen.



# Take a Moment to Reflect

The following assessment is based on the Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement. It provides you with an overview of effective practices for volunteer recruitment and retention. It will identify the strengths of your program and provide you with ideas on how you can improve your efforts.

Effective Practices	Click to find out more
Overall Program	
<p>Does your department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have an individual(s) responsible for recruiting?</li> <li>• Follow an annual recruitment and retention plan?</li> <li>• Use other resources to assist in recruitment and retention efforts (and thank them for their help)?</li> <li>• Evaluate and revise recruitment and retention efforts, at least annually?</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Program</a>
Pre Recruitment	
<p>Before recruiting, does your department conduct assessments to determine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why your fire department is recruiting,</li> <li>• How many individuals you require,</li> <li>• Who you are going to recruit?</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Pre-Recruitment Strategies</a>
Recruitment	
<p>Does your department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistently communicate expectations, role descriptions and other relevant information?</li> <li>• Develop communication strategies to target different demographics and different roles?</li> <li>• Use a variety of marketing and communication methods for recruitment?</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Recruitment Strategies</a>
Selection and Hiring	
<p>Does your department have selection and hiring processes that reflect legislative requirements and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screening tools such as application forms, minimum requirements, interviews, physical and agility testing, written or oral testing, criminal background checks, medical certificates, reference checks and driver's abstracts,</li> <li>• Consideration for family, employer and significant others,</li> <li>• Provision of offer letters, declining letters and waiting lists?</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Selection and Hiring</a>
Orientation, Probation And Advancement	
<p>Does your department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a formal orientation for new recruits?</li> <li>• At a minimum does it include induction paperwork, mission and values, schedules, overview of program, applicable policies and operating guidelines?</li> <li>• Have a probationary and advancement process?</li> <li>• Does it include milestones such as orientation, recruit training, recognition as a regular member of the fire department and progressive responsibilities and assignments based on skills, knowledge and experience?</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Orientation, Probation and Advancement</a>



Effective Practices	Click to find out more
Ongoing Retention Efforts	
<p>Does your department:</p> <p>Have proactive and ethical leadership practices such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involving your membership in developing and fulfilling the mission, goals and objectives and ensuring these are communicated,</li> <li>• Resolving conflict and addressing ideas or concerns from the ranks,</li> <li>• Competent, fair and equitable supervision, performance evaluation and promotion?</li> </ul> <p>Develop and use operational strategies that allow volunteers to contribute to the department in a meaningful and productive way such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assigning tasks and duties fairly,</li> <li>• Assigning tasks that are “out of the hot zone” for those who prefer or are capable of logistical and support tasks during an incident,</li> <li>• Offering a variety of non-traditional tasks such as public education, prevention, and administration to those who are not interested in emergency response,</li> <li>• Establishing and communicating attendance expectations,</li> <li>• Using availability lists or other strategies to ensure sufficient response?</li> </ul> <p>Offer a training program that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has attendance expectations,</li> <li>• Is stimulating and fun,</li> <li>• Is relevant and realistic,</li> <li>• Is diverse and varied,</li> <li>• Is scheduled in advance throughout the year,</li> <li>• Is based on an accepted industry standard or curriculum?</li> </ul> <p>Use a recognition program that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies the type of behaviour that you would like to reward and includes all members,</li> <li>• Establishes criteria for the performance or contribution that constitutes recognizable behaviour,</li> <li>• Are understandable to the volunteer and defensible for management,</li> <li>• Are planned to be a one-time event, or a sustainable program,</li> <li>• Recognizes the support and encouragement of significant others, families and employers?</li> </ul> <p>Support members in coping with the stressors and expectations by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involving and educating family, significant others and employers,</li> <li>• Offering volunteer assistance programs,</li> <li>• Offering critical incident stress management?</li> </ul> <p>Provide training, accommodation and processes that support a diverse population?</p>	<p><a href="#">Leadership</a></p> <p><a href="#">Empowerment, Involvement and Delegation</a></p> <p><a href="#">Training and Meetings</a></p> <p><a href="#">Recognition, Rewards and Incentives</a></p> <p><a href="#">Support and Assistance</a></p> <p><a href="#">Fostering Diversity</a></p>
Exit Processes	
<p>Does your department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have an exit process that includes the following:</li> <li>• A fair process and policy regarding departure from the department,</li> <li>• Exit interviews and using the information to better the department,</li> <li>• Offer of a letter of thanks for contributed service,</li> <li>• Letters of reference,</li> <li>• Connecting the individual to a potential subsequent fire department?</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Exit Process</a></p>

If you have identified that any of these practices are strengths in your department, give your leadership credit for the quality of its volunteer management efforts. Share your successful strategies with others. If you have identified that there are opportunities for improvement, identify priorities and continue to develop your program.



# Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Program

*Always have a plan and believe in it. Nothing happens by accident. Chuck Knox*

Establishing and using a recruitment and retention program will increase the likelihood of finding and keeping the right people, for the right tasks, at the right time.

Components of a volunteer recruitment and retention program include documentation and processes that support the following:

- An annual recruitment and retention plan,
- Pre-recruitment strategies,
- Recruitment strategies,
- Recruit training and advancement,
- Ongoing retention efforts including leadership and recognition practices,
- Exit process and;
- Ongoing evaluation and revision.

## **The Benefits**

A coordinated, organized program demonstrates:

- How seriously you take the service you provide and the individuals who provide that service,
- Sound risk management principles,
- Proactive vs. reactive leadership within your department, and;
- Your commitment to recognize volunteers, families and employers.

It will help you to identify:

- Shortfalls and availability of volunteers in the community and;
- The number, type and quality of volunteers needed now and in the future.

It will also allow you to plan for:

- Recruitment and selection,
- Retention and succession, and;
- Training and development of volunteers.

## **Responsibility for Recruitment**

*Anybody could do it, everybody thought somebody would do it, and so nobody did it. Anonymous*

Leaders in the fire service face many competing priorities. If responsibility for recruitment and retention is not assigned to an individual or group, the program could fall to the wayside. This may lead to reduced membership, reduced emergency response capabilities, reduced fire prevention, inspection and public education activities and a diminished pool of candidates to draw from.

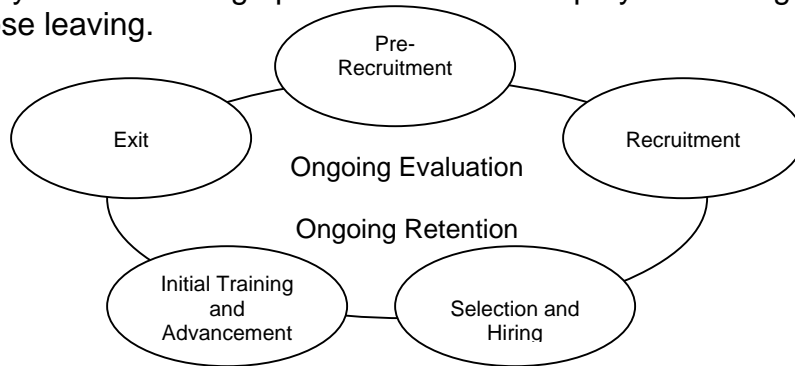
Recruiting and retaining volunteers does take effort. Creating a committee, training them and assigning specific tasks can alleviate some of the pressure on the leadership to complete all of these tasks, as well as creating opportunities for others to contribute to the growth of the department.



## The Annual Plan

*Good plans make good decisions. Lester R. Bettel*

An annual recruitment and retention plan is a cyclic, ongoing process that will assist you in planning and focusing your efforts. It should be a logical consideration of the time of the year, changing commitments throughout the seasons, weather, and psychological impact of seasons, milestones in the department, annual events and other trends. This will prevent you from coming up short in membership by not having good candidates to replace those leaving.



## Other Resources

I use not only all of the brains I have, but all I can borrow. Woodrow Wilson.

Members of your community rely on the fire department to help them; they can do the same for you. There are many individuals in the community that, while not able to commit to long-term volunteerism, may want to share skills and knowledge that can be useful to the recruitment and retention program.

Create a list of individuals in your community that could help with short-term tasks. This list is limitless, but may include:

- Human resource professionals to develop or review your policies and related documentation and processes,
- Members of the media, graphic designers, printers for marketing and communication strategies,
- Doctors, Occupational Health and Safety Specialists, Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists to develop a physical demands analysis for screening, or to conduct the screening,
- Other departments within your mutual aid system to share documents, information and costs,
- Local volunteer centers, employment centers and other community groups to share their recruitment and retention information and;
- Local employers to pursue employer supported volunteerism.

In order to draw from these resources, it is important to develop positive and collaborative relationships and maintain regular communications. Demonstrate the value and benefits of becoming involved with the fire department and encourage their contributions to the community. Most importantly, remember to thank them for their efforts personally and publicly.



## **Evaluation**

Evaluation of your recruitment and retention program is necessary to identify strengths and areas to improve. It provides useful feedback regarding your efforts and identifies what you've done well, and where you would like to improve. Don't save your evaluation for the end of the year. It should be an ongoing process, which is built into all the components of your program.

When developing your evaluation, consider not only your department's needs, but also those of the volunteers and the community. Questions could probe:

- The image of the department and if the department is meeting expectations,
- If the individuals volunteering are the right fit,
- If membership reflects the community,
- If the department's leadership supports and encourages individuals to remain,
- The effectiveness of promotion practices and succession planning;
- The retention rate; and,
- The success of specific components in the program or specific strategies.

Methods for evaluation could include; SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), community stakeholder consultation, volunteer satisfaction surveys and exit interviews.

## **Policies and Guidelines**

Your fire service would benefit from having the necessary policies, procedures and guidelines to ensure a safe, lawful, organized, empowering, nondiscriminatory environment for its volunteers. No matter how large or small your department, they are essential management tools, as they set the standard for conduct and provide guidance.

Policies, procedures and guidelines establish your expectations, prevent problems and boost morale. In order to be consistent, it is recommended that you follow existing human resource policies that have been developed by your municipality, if available.

Policies should be developed and implemented only with full consideration of your own fire department's specific needs and after consulting qualified legal advice. A broad range of policies and practices reflective of accepted human resource management principles and relevant legislation that would contribute to a successful program may include the following topics:

- Recruitment,
- Selection and hiring,
- Performance management,
- Promotion and advancement,
- Conflict resolution or complaints,
- Harassment,
- Progressive discipline and dismissal, and;
- Code of Conduct.

Equally important is that these policies are communicated and practiced consistently.



## **Records Management**

The management of records involves organizing and controlling documents to ensure that they are quickly and easily accessible, protected for confidentiality, accessed by only those with authority and are archived or disposed of when not necessary. Seek guidance from your municipal human resource expert on existing policies to determine your records management practices.

To this end, identify records that must be maintained, where they are located and who has access to them. The following information garnered during selection, hiring and ongoing tenure may be kept in the volunteer's personnel file:

- Application,
- Screening results,
- Interview records,
- Offer letter,
- Orientation checklist,
- Initial training checklists and assessments,
- Equipment inventory,
- Graduation certificate,
- Oath of commitment, pledge of service or other induction paperwork,
- Training records,
- Supervision notes,
- Performance Evaluations, and;
- A record to track recognition so it is not repeated for the same goal.

If the individual was put on a waiting list, you may consider keeping the following:

- Application,
- Screening results,
- Interview records,
- Notification to unsuccessful applicant and;
- Notification that the application is still on file (every 3 months).

## **Support From Your Municipal Council**

An important consideration in your review and development of a volunteer recruitment and retention program is the support of council. Providing these decision makers with relevant information will assist them in making an informed decision to support your recruitment and retention efforts.

Council may be required to support or endorse any number of strategies put forth by your fire service including: providing resources or expertise for policy development, determining the maximum number of volunteers retained by your department, financing recruitment strategies, promoting employer supported volunteerism, financing initial and ongoing training, and financing recognition programs or incentives for volunteers and employers.



In order to demonstrate the benefits of current or proposed strategies, you may need to build a business case to illustrate the public safety, social and economic value of volunteerism.

The value of your fire service's contribution to public safety can be demonstrated through benchmarks such as inspection statistics, public education program evaluations, and post incident analysis from emergency responses. You can use this information to demonstrate how current volunteers are meeting the public safety goals of the department and how these can be enhanced through new or alternative membership.

The social value of volunteerism can be demonstrated through qualitative measurement, such as annual volunteer satisfaction surveys. Providing a profile of your department that describes how you have promoted and supported diversity can illustrate how you have drawn on the talents available in your community to meet the community's unique needs. You can also demonstrate how you have encouraged and promoted personal and professional development within your fire service.

The economic value of volunteerism can be calculated by assigning a dollar value to the hours that are contributed by your volunteers. You can then demonstrate how these volunteer contributions have extended the fire service's budget, activities and service delivery. For more information on calculating the economic value of volunteer activity, access the Knowledge Development Canada website and work through the volunteer value calculator at <http://www.kdc-cdc.ca/vvc/eng/>.

For instance, in some communities council has, with input from the fire chief, determined the maximum number of fire fighters that they wish to have. The reason may stem from economic issues, as there may be considerations such as WSIB, life insurance and health taxes that must be budgeted for. It is important to build a strong business case in which you demonstrate logical reasons for expanding your volunteer force to include roles beyond traditional fire suppression and rescue.

In other communities, daytime response is a challenge. One strategy to overcome this may be to encourage local employers to release volunteer employees to respond to emergencies. In this instance, you may need to solicit council's agreement to provide incentives or recognition to employers who support this initiative. In doing so, you may need to provide information such as day time response statistics, projected enhancement to day time responses if employers allow employee volunteers to leave, relevant policies, agreements and practices regarding employer supported volunteerism, and proposed recognition or incentive programs.

Regardless of the reasons, providing council with relevant statistics and information will assist them to make informed decisions and contribute to good communications and relations between your fire service and your council.



## **✂ Related Tools and Templates for the Overall Program**

- 2 Year Recruitment and Retention Plan
- Recruitment Team Responsibilities
- Policy Template
- Satisfaction Surveys
- SWOT Analysis
- Personnel Records Audit Sheet
- Business Case Template for Council



## Pre-Recruitment Strategies

In order to be successful in recruiting the right people, for the right job, at the right time, there are two questions to ask before you begin to recruit. **Why** are we recruiting? **Who** are we recruiting? Asking yourself these questions will prepare you to focus your recruitment efforts and spend your time wisely.

### Why?

Conduct an assessment to determine the needs of your fire department.

In simple terms, it answers the question, “Why?”

1. Take a look at the needs of your community, your municipality’s responsibilities and legislative responsibilities.
2. Then take a look at your department and its existing membership. What are its capabilities?
3. If you have conducted a community risk profile using such tools as the Simplified Risk Assessment, Rural Workbook, Municipal Review, Comprehensive Fire Safety Effectiveness Model or Master Fire Plan in the past, you may already have some of this information available.
4. Does your department’s capabilities meet the needs identified?
5. If not, then this is the need.
6. Focus your recruitment efforts to address that need.

When conducting your assessment, look beyond the traditional “fire suppression” perspective. The following roles (and many others) not only contribute to a fire department’s broader mission through better administration and logistical support, they can also enhance response capabilities, inspection programs and public education activities. This approach puts to use the rich resources that are available in your community.

- Firefighting and Rescue
- Emergency Medical Response
- Public Education, Teaching and Training
- Public and Media Relations
- Photography, Graphic Arts and Publishing
- Emergency Vehicle Drivers and Operators
- Fire Safety Inspections
- Office Duties and Administration
- Radio and Telephone Communications and Dispatch
- Mechanics and Maintenance
- Human Resource
- On Scene Rehabilitation and Support to Responders
- Information Technology
- Fundraising and Events Coordination

In order to be clear regarding roles and the skills and knowledge that you are recruiting for develop a role description for each of them.



## Who?

In order to answer this question, you may need to know and understand the availability and characteristics of potential volunteers in your community. You also need to know some facts about volunteers in general.

The following statistics garnered from the 2004 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating\* provides the following profile of Canadian volunteers.

Completing a similar profile of your community will help you define the composition of your community and those most likely to volunteer. It can also provide insight regarding your fire department's success in attracting, using that potential and maintaining commitment from your volunteers.

For instance, over 55% of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years old volunteer. Look at your department, how many members fit into this category? Is there a role within your department for youth?

Consider as well the expectations of your department regarding hours. The average number of hours contributed annually range from 139 to 245. How many hours is the average volunteer expected to contribute to your department? If you do training once per week for 3 hours, that's 156 hours annually. This doesn't include expectations for calls, public education events or other requirements. Are there individuals in your community who can commit to those requirements? How can your fire department assist members to meet these expectations?

This information about the members of your community will assist you to successfully recruit for volunteers that will meet both the department needs for specific roles and the community's need to connect and collaborate for the common good.

You can also conduct a profile of the employers in the community to identify potential employers that may support volunteerism, and assist members to be able to meet time commitments.

\*The Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2004; Statistics Canada

**Table 2.2 Volunteer rate and distribution of volunteer hours, by personal and economic characteristics, population aged 15 and older, Canada, 2004**

	Volunteer rate	Average annual volunteer hours <sup>1</sup>	Median annual volunteer hours <sup>1</sup>	Population distribution	Percentage of total volunteer hours
	Percent			Percent	Percent
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>					
15 to 24	55	139	50	17	17
25 to 34	42	137	50	17	13
35 to 44	51	152	60	20	20
45 to 54	47	177	71	19	20
55 to 64	42	202	80	13	15
65 and older	32	245	119	15	16
<b>Sex</b>					
Male	44	166	60	49	46
Female	47	166	64	51	52
<b>Marital status</b>					
Married or common-law	46	172	67	61	63
Single, never married	46	146	51	27	25
Separated or divorced	43	199	65	7	8
Widow or widower	26	201	104	5	4
<b>Education</b>					
Less than high school	37	140	46	16	12
Graduated from high school	42	161	62	16	16
Some postsecondary	50	166	66	7	8
Postsecondary diploma	47	172	61	34	34
University degree	59	180	72	22	30
<b>Labour force status</b>					
Employed	50	152	60	66	63
Unemployed	42	235	F	2	2 <sup>F</sup>
Not in the labour force	43	199	75	32	35
<b>Household income</b>					
Less than \$20,000	30	177	59	13	9
\$20,000 to \$39,999	37	175	66	22	19
\$40,000 to \$59,999	45	184	64	19	21
\$60,000 to \$79,999	48	166	60	16	17
\$80,000 to \$99,999	51	151	60	10	11
\$100,000 or more	60	155	62	19	23
<b>Presence of children in household<sup>2</sup></b>					
No children in household	40	191	70	63	63
Pre-school aged children only	43	125	40	7	5
Both pre-school and school aged children	53	141	50	6	5
School aged children only	59	142	60	24	26

<sup>x</sup> use with caution

<sup>F</sup> too unreliable to be published

1. Estimates of average and median volunteer hours are calculated for volunteers only.

2. *Pre-school aged* is defined as ages 0 to 5, while *school aged* is defined as ages 6 to 17. *Both pre-school and school aged children* indicates the presence in the household of at least one child from each age range (i.e., at least one child aged 0 to 5 and at least one child aged 6 to 17).

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, *Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2004*.



## **Reflect Your Community**

Involving employees that work in your community, youth, older adults, families, individuals with disabilities and various ethnic groups offers many mutual benefits. The individuals are provided with opportunities to develop skills, gain knowledge and contribute to their community in a meaningful way. The department benefits by having a diverse and vibrant fund of resources, knowledge, skills and perspectives that reflect the community, which in turn, further strengthens the department.

In order to reap the benefits of these diverse populations, fire departments may be required to make some adjustments to processes, accommodations to environments and revisions in the manner in which people view different populations and work with them. In the big picture, the benefits of involving different populations far outweigh the costs, and serve to enhance the culture, work climate and capabilities of the department.

For further information regarding diversity and specific populations, refer to the Consideration for Specific Populations section of this resource.

## **Matching the Role and the Volunteer**

Once you have the above information, it will be easier for you to plan your recruitment. In order to effectively recruit volunteers, it may be necessary to identify your target group. Targeting your recruitment may increase your chances of success.

The following matching process illustrates how to do this.

1. Review your needs assessment and identify the role that needs to be filled.
2. Identify the skills, attributes and knowledge that the role requires.
3. Look at the profiles of community members and employers.
4. Target those individuals most likely to have those skills.
5. Develop marketing and communication strategies that would best attract the type of individual you are looking for.
6. Begin your recruitment.

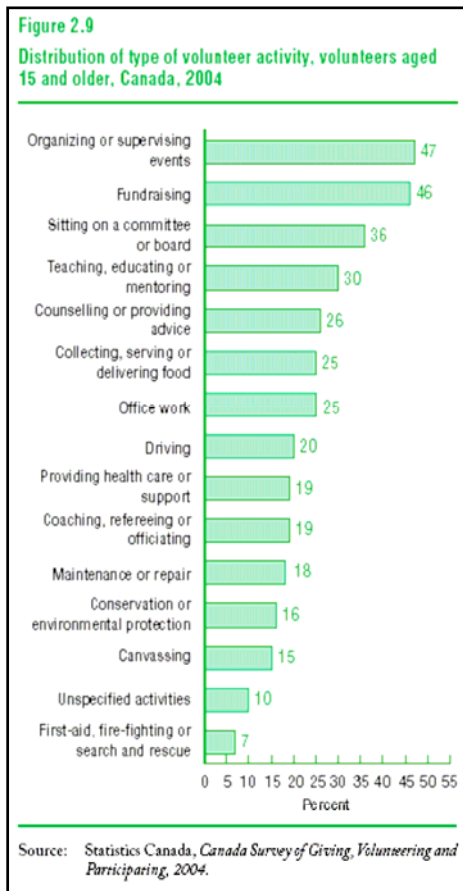
If it doesn't draw the individuals you need, reassess, redevelop and try again.

## **✂ Related Tools and Templates for Pre Recruitment Planning**

- Planning and Targeting Your Recruitment Efforts (Needs Assessment Worksheet)
- Role Description Overview
- Role Description Template
- Identifying Your Community Assets (Community Profile Worksheet)
- Word of Mouth Recruitment Brainstorming Worksheet
- Recruitment Needs Worksheet
- Recruitment Preparation Checklist



# Recruitment Strategies



When you recruit for volunteers, you are competing with many other individual and community interests. In fact, statistics garnered from the Canada Survey Of Giving, Volunteering And Participating\*, show that volunteering for fire and emergency services is losing that competition. Figure 2.9 indicates that fire and emergency services have attracted only 7% of the volunteer population.

This warrants closer examination. Why is it that such a low number of individuals volunteer with the fire service? It may be that due to the well-known dangers, physical and emotional demands of emergency response, many individuals believe they may not have the physical skills or fortitude to be in the fire service.

Look to the other, more successful volunteer activities. By expanding your fire department to include roles in public education, prevention, fundraising, maintenance, administration, support and logistics you can demonstrate to potential volunteers that they can employ their skills in similar activities within the fire service?

## The Message

Market your fire department in a manner that draws the attention of potential volunteers and clearly communicates the department's role in bringing community members together and making the community stronger and safer.

Make the community aware of all the contributions that the fire department makes. Let the volunteer nature of the fire department be known to the community and let the community know their help is needed.

Current volunteers are a good source for marketing your department. If you welcome them, support them and train them well, they will tell others. They are the most likely to be able to explain the requirements (and benefits) of joining.

However, relying solely on word of mouth can limit the number and variety of individuals invited and involved in your department. To promote diversity and involve volunteers with different skill sets, knowledge and perspectives, rely on more than one method.

\*The Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2004; Statistics Canada



Communication strategies should be both attention getting and informative. They may be the first impression that a potential volunteer has of your department. The strategy must demonstrate that the position is interesting, challenging and beneficial to both the individual and the community.

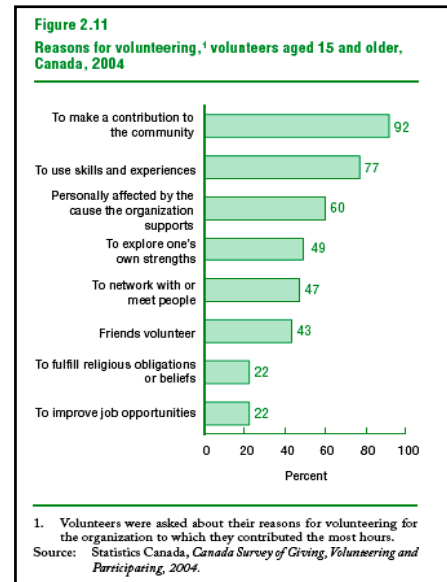
In order to effectively communicate and demonstrate the value of volunteering with your fire service, you may need to understand why people volunteer. \*Figure 2.11 shows the reasons why people volunteer.

When you recruit, you will need to clearly communicate how volunteering with your fire services addresses those reasons. For instance, demonstrate how the fire service allows people to contribute to the community (reason #1). Explain how the diverse roles in the fire service, beyond fire suppression provide opportunity to use their skills and experience (reason #2).

If you are creative in your message, you will likely find a way to address all of the reasons listed.

There are many recruiting strategies that your fire department can choose from. When deciding on a strategy, ask yourself:

- Who is representing the department and how will they do this?
- Who is the intended audience? Is it the general public or a target population?
- What message is the department going to communicate?
- Is it within our means? Do we have the financial, time and human resources?
- Do I need other resources such as media, posters, and ads?
- Does it talk about the benefits and rewards of joining?
- Does it identify hazards or potential stressors and how these are mitigated?
- Does it also relay expectations and potential stressors?



## **Recruitment Strategies**

### **Interactive**

- Action displays
- Open houses
- Public venues
- Word of mouth
- TV interviews
- Membership drives
- Person to person

### **Media**

- Web pages and email
- Media (radio, print, TV)
- Signs, brochures, flyers
- Bill boards

### **Networks & Other Sources**

- Provincial wide websites and networks such as the OAFIC or the FFAO
- Pre fire service classes
- Youth and School Volunteers
- Employer Supported Volunteerism

\*The Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2004; Statistics Canada



## **Accepting Applications and Follow Up**

Make it easy for individuals to pursue their interest by having role descriptions and application forms readily available by following up with interested individuals or community volunteers.

If any member of your department has contact with someone interested in the fire service, have them forward his or her name and phone number to the individual(s) responsible for recruitment. Contact the interested party directly and provide an application form.

Regardless of which method has brought the individual to your doorstep, ensure that you follow up with any interested individuals who have completed the application form. All applications should be promptly acknowledged. It may be a poor reflection on the department when interested parties don't know the status of their application until the recruit training has started without them.

## **Ongoing Recruitment**

Successful recruitment efforts are ongoing throughout the year. This will ensure that you consistently have a number of interested individuals to draw from. You may want to incorporate seasonal messages to draw the attention of potential volunteers.

## **🔗 Related Tools and Templates for Recruitment**

- Open House Worksheet
- Media Release, Newspaper and Radio Ad Templates
- Recruitment Posters
- Recruitment Activity Tracking Sheet



# Selection and Hiring

## Legislation

It is important to understand that there is legislation that dictates the gathering, disclosure and review of information required in the selection and hiring of volunteers.

Human Rights legislation protects individuals from discrimination due to age, sexual orientation, marital status, ethnicity and other characteristics. In your application and interview processes it is important to not ask for information about characteristics among the prohibited ground of discrimination, as set out by federal and provincial statutes. This legislation also distinguishes between what can be asked prior to hiring and what can be asked after hiring. Information requests allowed before a volunteer is selected are much more restrictive than information requests allowed after selection.

Privacy legislation protects individuals from the release or disclosure of personal information without their consent. Health Information legislation protects individuals from the release or disclosure of personal health information without their consent.

Once you receive information about an applicant, whether from the applicant, doctor, police or other individual, the fire department becomes responsible for that information and is then subject to legal requirements in terms of confidentiality and access to information.

Consider the following:

- Do you require an original or copy?
- Is the document kept or just verified?
- If it is kept, how does fire department deal with issue of confidentiality?
- Where will the information be housed, how will access be guarded?
- Does it meet legislative requirements? Refer to your municipal human resource policies, or legal counsel.

## Screening

Screening is a signal, in a very public way, that the fire department is serious about protecting the public interest. Fire departments take great pride in the service of their community. A screening process is essential for the fire department to demonstrate that its volunteers serve the community's best interest.

Some of the screening tools may incur a cost. Your policies will have to identify who will cover the cost of the screening. Options could include the department paying for the costs up front as part of the overall recruitment budget; the applicant being reimbursed upon successful hiring; the recruit being reimbursed after successful probation; or, the recruit being reimbursed after one year of continuous service.



It is also important to note that the individual must provide written consent, detailing the type of information required and the purpose of the request, prior to disclosure. Ensure that you document and file the results of these screening tools.

Your fire department will have to decide which screening tools are appropriate and necessary to ensure that individuals are the right fit for the role, and to allow individuals an opportunity to determine that the department is the right fit for them:

- Application form,
- Interviews,
- Minimum requirements,
- Physical and agility testing,
- Written and oral testing,
- Criminal background checks,
- Medical certificates,
- Driver's abstracts,
- Reference checks and
- Consideration for family, employer and significant others.

### **Application Forms**

An application form collects basic information, name, address, experience, and schooling. Ensure that the application form only asks for information related to the requirements of the position. Asking for an application form signals the seriousness of the fire department's recruitment efforts. It also starts the necessary paper trail.

### **Minimum Requirements**

At a minimum, an applicant should possess the qualifications specified in the ad. In addition, some preferred additional education, skill or experience could further identify strengths and challenges relevant to the role. A simple checklist on the application form may be sufficient.

### **Interviews**

Interviews are an extremely important step in the screening process. They are a two-way exchange of information, which gives the department enough information to judge whether or not the applicant is best suited to the role. At the same time, interviews allow the applicant to make judgment about the fire department.

The interview provides you with an opportunity to get to know the individual better and find out information about his/her background, talents, skills, interests and availability. It also allows you to clearly identify expectations and convey the norms of the fire department, up front, to determine if the individual is a right fit.

An effective interviews is:

- Structured- Ensure that relevant information is obtained.
- Consistent - Use the same process and questions for all applicants.
- Clear - Explain the interview, screening and selection process. Describe the position and make your selection based on the requirements of the position. Know in advance what information from the applicant is considered as favourable or unfavourable.



- Fair and transparent - Have at least 2 people conduct the interview (but not too many to prevent intimidation), document and file the applicant's response and use a ranking system to rate applicants.
- Timely – There is nothing gained by extending an interview; fatigue and frustration may set in.

### **Interview Questions**

Remember, job related tasks could be taught, but life skills take years to develop. Would you rather spend your time teaching someone how to put out a fire, or spend it putting out the fires he/she has created because of poor interpersonal skills?

While education, physical prowess and task related skills provide you with an indication of the individual's potential, questions should explore work, volunteer and life experience.

Identify the qualities and attributes that you'd like to see in your volunteers, and ensure you look for them in an applicant. Framing your questions in this manner will provide you with an indication of applicant's crisis management skills, problem solving ability, work ethic, ability to work with others and values. Scenario based questions could shed light on these qualities.

### **Medical Checks**

From a risk management perspective, to prevent injury and assist the volunteer to cope with some of the physical and emotional demands of the volunteer position, having some information about the individual's health status is important.

When developing a process and policy for medical clearance, you may want to consider risk management practices and reflecting the Occupational Health and Safety Act, in that the municipality and the fire department are practicing due diligence. That is to say that you identify the risks and demands associated with the position and mitigate those risks by ensuring that the individuals performing such tasks are physically and medically capable of doing them safely, without risk to themselves or others.

Depending on role requirements, size and financial resources of your fire department, this can be as simple as a doctor's note that says the individual is in good enough health to meet role responsibilities, to a standard medical exam (for driver's license) to a complex physical and medical exams.

To assess risk, tasks requirements for the position should be based on the Role Description and broken down into physical, medical or psychological demands.

NFPA 1582 is the standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments. It is a very detailed and comprehensive document and may be used as a reference (or model). It identifies the responsibility of the Fire Department, Medical Physician and Candidates. It also breaks down the Essential Job tasks through a physical demands analysis (i.e. climbing 6 or more flights of stairs while wearing fire protective ensemble weighing at least 50lb or more and carrying equipment/tools weighing an additional 20 to 40 lbs).



The role description, physical demands analysis and information sheets should go to the physician, who should review the requirements to determine if the individual is fit to complete those tasks and provide written confirmation of his or her findings.

In determining the need for regular or annual medical clearance, the municipality may want to assess if the risk warrants annual review, or if it is done on hiring and conducted when there is a perceived or potential risk. You may also consider the cost and who would pay for it.

In the event that the individual is not fit for the essential job tasks, you may want to determine if workplace accommodation is possible, or if it would cause undue hardship. If you can safely and realistically accommodate or modify work, you may want to consider it. Otherwise, you may want to consider offering other tasks or roles that the individual is capable of.

The bottom line is that you are trying to demonstrate due diligence and risk management. Ensure that you consult with your own municipal policies, human resource expert, municipal solicitor and the Human Rights Commission rights to ensure that your policy and practices do not discriminate.

### **Physical and Agility Tests**

There are a variety of physical and agility tests to choose from. Depending on the role requirements, size and financial resources of your fire department, your physical and agility testing could be simple (obstacle course and a doctor's note) or complex (medical with complex tests). Regardless of the test you choose, you want to be confident that the individual is capable of the physical requirements of the job.

### **Driver's Abstracts**

For insurance and risk management reasons, completing a driver's abstract, available at your local ministry of transportation office, is imperative, particularly if individuals are going to be using expensive, big, heavy, complicated emergency vehicles. This is a requirement of some insurance companies.

### **Role Specific Tests**

To ensure the right fit for specific roles, you may want to consider simple tests for verbal/written communication, or cognitive and perceptual tests.

For instance you may want to give:

- A public educator candidate an assignment to do a short presentation.
- A communicator/dispatcher a test requiring him or her to work in a distracting environment.
- A driver a map reading or direction test.
- An administrative support person a test that measures writing, typing or filing skills.
- A fire fighter a perception test.



## **Criminal Records Checks**

According to a recent Leger Marketing Opinion Poll\*, firefighter's rank amongst Canada's most trusted occupations. Without doubt, this is a perception that your fire department wants to maintain. For that reason, it is important that you are made aware of any criminal involvement.

It will be necessary to use a release form that states the agreement of the volunteer to permit the criminal records check.

To be proactive, you may want to consider having a written policy concerning whether or not to select individuals with criminal records. Considerations should include the nature of the role, the potential risk involved and the fire department's ethical, legal and policy principles. A policy will assist you in making these somewhat difficult decisions. Refer to existing municipal hiring policies for guidance.

Criminal records checks are only valid at the time they are issued. Again, to be proactive, you may want to consider doing checks on an ongoing basis throughout the volunteer's tenure. This could be in the form of an annual declaration from the volunteer to indicate he or she has not been convicted of a criminal offense during the year.

## **Reference Checks**

A reference check is a useful screening step during the hiring process, as the references will confirm the background and skills of the applicant and how they might relate to the position. It is suggested that you conduct more than one reference check. Prepare a list of questions before hand. These questions should describe the relevant responsibilities involved in the position and ask about the applicant's skill and suitability for the tasks. Remember, as with all requests for information, ensure that you receive written consent to speak with the references.

## **Family and Employers**

There is no question that the fire department will expect a great deal from its volunteers. Understandably, being an active member of a fire department competes with many priorities in an individual's life. Two of the most obvious priorities are family and employment.

It is important to ensure that family and employers are made aware of the expectations, commitments and psychological impact that are involved in volunteering with the fire department. Information nights, handouts and individual meetings are ways to provide family or significant others with the knowledge they need to make an informed choice to support the individual.

For these same reasons, it is also beneficial for the volunteer to have an informed and understanding employer. Some departments provide an information sheet that the employer signs to indicate that they are aware of the obligations of the volunteer and would support him/her in any manner possible to them.

\*Source: Leger Marketing, methodology: telephone interviews to 1, 500 Canadian adults, conducted from Feb. 14 to Feb. 19, 2005. Margin of error is 2.6 percent.



## **✂ Related Tools and Templates for Screening**

- Screening Checklist
- Eligibility Criteria
- Application Form
- Interview Questions Sample 1
- Interview Questions Sample 2
- Interview Record Sheet
- Reference Check Release
- Simple Medical form
- Invitation to Physical Agility Test
- Physical Agility Test – Explanation and Results Sheet
- Reference Check Questions
- Consent to release/review information

## **Documentation**

### **The Offer Letter**

To ensure that expectations are clearly understood, it is critical to formalize expectations and get an agreement from the volunteer regarding commitment. An offer letter is an example of such an agreement. It serves to confirm in writing the expectations both of the volunteer and of the fire department, which were identified during recruitment, interview and other communication.

### **Unsuccessful Applicants and Waiting Lists**

A prompt and tactfully worded letter to unsuccessful applicants is not only their due, but also contributes to effective public relations.

In the event that you are still interested in the unsuccessful applicant, develop a waiting list. Having a waiting list is a good measure to ensure that you have a pool of interested individuals to draw from during recruitment. If you do keep a waiting list, it would be wise to confirm every 3 months that the individuals are still interested and that their information will remain on record. If, when questioned, the individual is no longer interested, destroy any information you have on file about that individual.

## **✂ Related Tools and Templates for Hiring Documentation**

- Offer Letter
- Letter to Unsuccessful Candidate – Waiting List
- Letter – Waiting List Retention
- Letter to Unsuccessful Candidate – Not Put On Waiting List



# Orientation, Probation and Advancement

Your fire department will benefit from having an organized system to orient, train and advance new volunteers. Though the initial training will take time and resources, at the end of the training, you will have safe, informed, and competent volunteers.

One of the most successful and safe approaches for developing volunteers and establishing a commitment is to initially offer them specific tasks that allow them to become involved in a limited way. Later, offer opportunities to grow into roles with more responsibilities. Depending on the role this can range from 3 to 6 months of progressive assignments and responsibilities.

Besides the tasks involved in orientation, consider how to socially integrate the individual into the department. Involve other department members in training. Identify a contact “go to” person or mentor.

Initiating a mentorship program can address the need of the new volunteer to make a connection. Another benefit is that it will serve to recognize the knowledge, skill and leadership qualities of the more experienced department members.

The following are milestones in recruit development:

- Orientation,
- Initial training,
- Probationary period, and;
- Recognition as a regular member of the fire department.

For each of these milestones in this system consider:

- The amount of time required to progress,
- Skills and knowledge to be gained,
- Safety,
- Responsibilities, expectations and limitations of the recruit when completing role specific tasks,
- Equipment provided to recruit,
- Documentation required, and;
- Social integration.

## Orientation

Conducting an orientation session is an important means of welcoming new volunteers. It is also an opportunity to give clear direction regarding departmental operations and clear up any misunderstandings right up front. It can be helpful in providing an introduction to existing policies, programs and operating guidelines.



Joining a new organization and starting a new role can be overwhelming. Most people remember only a portion of the information received. For this reason, there are several principles to consider when developing your orientation.

- Ensure that it is welcoming, dynamic and informative,
- Involve other members of the department to ensure that new members become acquainted,
- Identify your priorities (corporate needs, operational needs, safety, expectations),
- Limit the information to your priorities,
- Deliver overviews and key messages about a topic, identifying where further information can be found (some topics can be detailed in recruit training sessions), and;
- Provide written information, so the recruit can refer to it later.

At a minimum, orientations cover:

- Induction paperwork,
- Mission and values of the department,
- The new volunteer development program,
- Scheduling and;
- Applicable policies and operating guidelines.

## **Initial Training**

Initial training is not limited to the front line suppression recruit training. It covers a more broad based context that includes preliminary training for all types of volunteer positions. It is critical in preparing new volunteers to deliver quality services to the community safely, skillfully and professionally. This training prepares individuals to perform duties as outlined in their respective role descriptions. A comprehensive training program would include human skills and role specific technical skills.

### **Human skills:**

Behaviour is an expression of an individual's values and ethics. Such is the same for your fire department's values and ethics. Your training program should create an environment that educates and encourages volunteers to act in the manner that allows them to succeed.

Simply stated, you want to develop motivated, responsible and accountable individuals, who are committed to goals, work and learning. You will want them to demonstrate this by the manner in which they communicate, resolve conflict, and manage stress and work within the team.

The fire department's Code Of Conduct and other guidelines that identify expected behaviour and interactions would be emphasized in this component. These topics would be addressed to the general population of recruits, regardless of their designated positions.



## **Role Specific Technical Skills:**

While each position within your department has training requirements that are distinctive to the tasks involved, answering these general questions will assist you in developing specific training. The best sources of information for this are role descriptions, Ontario Fire Service Standards, Section 21 Guidance notes and any training curriculum that is recognized as an industry standard.

### *Relevancy:*

- What are the major duties of this position?
- What knowledge and skills are required to competently complete those tasks?
- How will these be measured?

### *Safety:*

- What hazards (physical, environmental, psychological) might the individual be exposed to?
- What training will prevent or mitigate the impact of those hazards?

## **Probation**

During the probationary period, it is imperative that the new volunteers receive ongoing supervision and coaching to ensure that they are safe and that the operations are running efficiently.

Tasks assigned should be congruent with the knowledge and skills displayed by the individuals. As they continue to gain knowledge, skills and experience, begin to introduce them to more challenging tasks and responsibilities.

A probationary period gives you an excellent opportunity to assess that the volunteer is suited to the position and the fire department.

If you must dismiss an individual during the probationary period:

- Conduct a personal interview,
- Give reasons for terminating the individual's involvement,
- Identify how the position is not suited to the individual's skills and strengths and;
- Thank them for trying and suggest a different position if appropriate.

## **Recognition as a Regular Member of the Fire Department**

Completing the initial training and probationary period involves a great deal of time, physical and emotional commitment. As such, individuals should be recognized formally for their efforts.

Some type of recognition such as certificates or graduation ceremonies will go a long way in motivating individuals to continue their efforts. It will also signify another level of integration and acceptance in your department.



## **✂ Related Tools and Templates for Orientation and Advancement**

- Orientation Agenda
- Induction Paperwork Checklist
- Volunteer Service Agreement
- Equipment Sign Off
- Statement of Commitment, Confidentiality, Allegiance
- Template for Orientation Handbook
- Sample Initial Training Agendas- Generic
- Graduation Certificate



## Ongoing Retention Efforts

We the willing, led by the unknowing  
Are doing the impossible, for the ungrateful.  
We have done so much, for so long, with so little,  
We are now qualified to do anything, with nothing.

Anonymous

### Don't let this be the motto of your department!

Recruiting and training new volunteers is just the beginning. The long-term challenge will be to create an environment, in which individuals want to stay because they continue to be motivated, interested, challenged and supported as valued members of the team.

## Leadership

The tools and templates in this resource provide you with some basic leadership practices that support retention efforts. They are not intended to replace the need to develop leadership practices and operating guidelines on a broader scale.

By being a proactive, involved and present leader you can put a different meaning to the above quote.

Motivate your volunteers, and they will *be willing*.  
Lead them to achieve your fire department mission and goals and you will *be knowing*.  
Train and challenge them to make tasks *possible*.  
Recognize their efforts and show you are *grateful*.  
Give them responsibility and provide them with the tools to do the tasks.  
This way they can be *qualified to do everything, to the best of their ability*.

## Mission and Values

*Tell me and I'll forget. Show me and I'll remember. Involve me and I'll understand.*  
Confucius

When developing your fire department's mission, goals and objectives, involve your membership. Communicate these often in writing and in speech. By being involved and informed, they are more able to assist you in achieving goals and fulfilling the mission.

Demonstrate your belief and commitment to the values through your words and actions. Identify your expectations, set high standards and communicate them clearly so that the volunteers can do the same.



## **Performance Management and Supervision**

Provide volunteers with opportunity to learn, grow and lead through relevant training, progressive responsibilities and challenges. Motivate them. Coach them. Continue to challenge them.

A fair, firm and flexible approach to informal and formal performance evaluation provides volunteers with meaningful information about the work they do. View it as an opportunity for the volunteer to know where they stand relative to the goals and objectives of their role, and of the department. In doing so, you can challenge your volunteers to continually improve performance and personal effectiveness.

In order to provide adequate and ethical supervision, those responsible should be provided with the necessary tools and training to do so effectively.

## **Discipline**

Generally, the need for discipline is a result of an individual behaving in a way that contravenes a policy, guideline or direction. It is necessary for you, as the leader to ensure that the individual acts in the manner prescribed. Therefore you must use discipline.

This aspect of leadership is likely the most difficult, as discipline usually has negative emotions involved. However, the word “discipline” is derived from the Latin word *disciplina* meaning teaching or learning. Rather than viewing discipline as a negative task, consider it in a more positive light, in that you are providing an opportunity for the individual to learn the right way of doing things.

Focus on the behaviour rather than the individual. View it as an opportunity to teach the individual to act in a different way. If you must discipline volunteers, do so evenly and fairly. Having a fair discipline policy, and applying it consistently will assist both the leadership and the membership in achieving positive outcomes.

## **Empowerment, Involvement and Delegation**

### **Sharing and Distributing the Workload**

If you have ever attended a session in stress, time or quality management, you may have heard of the Pareto Principle, or the 80/20 Principle. In some fire departments, this principle can be applied in two ways.

Often leaders in the fire service feel that they spend 80% of their time completing 20% of the tasks. Unfortunately, it is often those tasks that they feel are not the most important, or are tedious, or they spend their time running from one crisis to another (most of which are not emergency response type). This may lead to frustration.

Another application of this principle that may be seen in the fire service is the perception that 80% of the work is only done by 20% of the people. Again, this may lead to frustration. In some cases frustration from the 20% who are perceived as doing the



work, and in some cases, frustration from others who'd like to be more involved but who haven't been given the opportunity.

There are several positive and proactive ways to tip the balance on this principle. If you have conducted the needs assessment for your department that was identified in pre-recruitment planning section of this book, you have already begun to identify tasks and roles that need to be filled in order to further enhance the efforts of the department. Look within your department to determine if any willing individuals have the skills and knowledge required to complete the tasks. If not, look externally and recruit for that purpose.

Once you have identified the tasks, and the individuals assigned, then delegate the work, ensuring that you are communicating relevant expectations, timelines, authority and accountability.

In this way, you can distribute the work so that each member is contributing in a meaningful way to the goals of the department, and that each member is accountable for their part in achieving those results.

By tipping the balance, you have met a number of needs. You as the leader can focus your attention to the tasks that are most imperative. Members who may have felt they were in the 20% doing 80% of the work might feel relief. Members, who wished to be more involved, are more involved.

### **Operational Guidelines Review and Development**

To foster continued growth and organizational success of the fire department, encourage creativity, innovation and evaluation. Recognize that volunteers are often in the best position to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Constantly review your practices and operational guidelines (OGs) to identify strategies that will allow volunteers to contribute to the department in a meaningful and constructive way.

You may want to consider assigning the research and development of OGs to individuals who have the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to create an accurate and relevant document. Ensure that when you delegate the tasks, that you are also communicating your expectations, as well as the accountability and responsibility.

When developing your OGs and practices, confirm that they reflect:

- Fair distribution of work,
- Current industry standards and practices,
- Safety, referencing Section 21 Guidance Notes, and other legislation and;
- Clear and measurable expectations of behaviour and conduct.

### **Communication and Problem Solving**

Open communication practices and ample opportunity to provide ideas and concerns will promote a sense of belonging, involvement and ownership. Be prepared to act on any problems that arise from this communication. Otherwise, you run the risk of losing credibility. Although there may be reasons why you may be unable to implement the ideas, you can assure the individual that you give it serious consideration.



Examples of these types of practices include:

- Continuous improvement forms,
- Satisfaction surveys,
- Agenda items in meetings and;
- Problem solving and decision making processes.

### **✂ Tools & Templates Leadership, Empowerment, Involvement**

- How To Develop Vision, Mission and Values
- Sample Supervision Form
- Sample Performance Evaluation
- How To Delegate
- Continuous Improvement Form
- Assisting Members to Problem Solve

### **Training and Meetings**

*Well, at least there was coffee and donuts. Anonymous*

If the above quote is what your volunteers are saying about meetings and training, perhaps it is time to review your methods. Well-run training and meetings mean a lot to busy volunteers. Make your training worth their while.

#### **Training**

Offer a training program that:

- Identifies attendance expectations,
- Is flexible to reasonably accommodate schedules and shift work,
- Is stimulating and fun, meeting the competitive nature of some individuals,
- Is relevant and real (such as scenarios and live fire training),
- Is diverse and offers a variety of relevant topics,
- Is scheduled in advance throughout the year and;
- Is based on an accepted industry standard and curriculum.

#### **Meetings**

During meetings:

- Follow an organized agenda,
- Discuss relevant topics (goals, objectives, operating guidelines, safety, work assignments, ideas or concerns) and;
- Clearly assign tasks and responsibilities.

#### **Professional Development**

A relevant form of recognition and involvement comes through supporting individuals in pursuing, and achieving professional development and accreditation. There are many opportunities within a fire department, to pursue recognition by professional bodies. While there may be some up front work and coordination, the effort is well worth it for the fire department's image and the esteem of the volunteers.



These include, but are not exclusive to:

- Certified Municipal Manager (CMM), Ontario Municipal Management Institute,
- Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Canadian Association Of Fire Chiefs),
- Certification for Fire Fighter, Company Officer, Fire Prevention Officer and Training Officer, Office of the Fire Marshal,
- Community Emergency Management Coordinator (CEMC), Emergency Management Ontario,
- Public Fire and Life Safety Educator Certificate, Office of the Fire Marshal; and,
- Support and credit for courses taken at college or university.

### **✘ Related Tools And Templates For Training And Meetings**

- Meeting Agenda and Meeting Minutes
- Training Calendar Sample
- Training Calendar Template
- Sample Training Night Agenda

### **Recognition, Rewards and Incentives**

Rewards and recognition help both the volunteers and the leaders get what they need. Recognition rewards and incentives range from a simple thank you, to certificates of appreciation, compensation for work and official recognition such as exemplary service medals and long service investitures.

The following principles will assist you in determining the nature of the recognition that best fits the needs of your department. Establish criteria for the performance or contribution that constitutes recognizable behaviour. Identify what behaviours or actions are being rewarded and recognized. Ensure that all volunteers are eligible and that anyone that performs at the level or standards stated in the criteria receives the reward.

Identify types of behaviour that you would like to reward.

- Duration of service,
- Attendance for training, prevention, public education activities, incident response, administration,
- Achieving milestones,
- Exemplary service,
- Team work and;
- A job well done or above and beyond the call of duty, or other behaviours.

Determine the logistics.

- Cost? For consistency, you want to have enough time, support and finances to sustain the reward on an ongoing basis.
- How are you going to budget for monetary compensation such as wages or honorarium?
- Timing? In some cases, recognition should occur, as close to the performance as possible in order to reinforce the behaviour you want to encourage. In others, you may want to wait for an annual event.
- Longevity? Do you make it an annual event or presentation, or will it be a one-time event.



The following paragraphs provide examples of recognition efforts. This list is limitless. Use these examples to enhance your efforts, or as a starting point for your own ideas.

### **Meeting Intrinsic Needs**

Many volunteers have a need to grow, develop, contribute in a meaningful way, achieve a sense of accomplishment and have a sense of belonging. In order to assist the individual to meet these intrinsic needs, consider the following strategies. This list is not exhaustive. Be creative and you can find many ways to recognize the efforts of volunteers. Regardless of which you choose, ensure that you are enthusiastic and sincere in showing your appreciation.

#### **Foster a sense of fellowship, family and belonging in the following ways:**

- Use preferred name (i.e. First name, last name or nick name)
- Send cards to celebrate personal milestones (birthdays, anniversaries, new arrivals)
- Send cards to celebrate personal or professional achievement (graduation, promotions)
- Send get well or sympathy cards
- Lend a helping hand when they need it outside of the fire service (barn raising, construction, roofs, decks, moving)
- Provide opportunity to get together, network and celebrate fellowship through events such as banquets, lunches, awards nights, sporting event
- Make the time to have lunch or coffee with a volunteer
- Take an interest in their personal lives
- If volunteers have been absent, let them know that they were missed
- Keep them informed
- Provide caps, shirts and jackets to promote belonging and camaraderie
- Take pictures at scenes, during training, of fun times. Put them in to a slide show for banquets and special events, or put them on wall or in album.
- Have reserved seating for them at special events
- Ensure that you and they are having fun. Have competitions; encourage them to develop their skills through competitive teams (vehicle extrication, fire fit combat challenge, relays, mutual aid events, provincial, national and international events)

#### **To foster and promote personal and professional growth, you can:**

- Cultivate special interests or strengths and find opportunities to use them
- Offer training opportunities and resources
- Offer leadership opportunities
- Provide constructive and positive feedback on performance
- Provide notes of encouragement
- Show that you are watching and paying attention to what they are doing
- Debrief with them after an event
- Provide them with a mentor
- Ask them to represent the fire department at a public event
- Continue to offer expanded, higher levels of responsibility



**To show that you recognize and celebrate their accomplishments, you can:**

- Say thank you sincerely and often, either verbally, in writing or by your actions
- Say thank you for not only those big jobs, but also for small tasks
- Share their success with others
- Create the “Wall of Fame”. Have a wall lined with portraits of volunteers, dressed in uniform. Below each volunteer, note years of service, title, accomplishments and copies of certificates.

**Provide them with opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways by:**

- Asking for their input
- Assigning them to act as leaders in orientation or education activities
- Assign them mentor roles
- Assigning them to research and recommend new apparatus, equipment, techniques or operating guidelines
- Making a gift to a charitable cause in their name

**Recognize Tenure and Service**

Nominate them for:

- Ontario Volunteer Service Awards (note monetary compensation may limit eligibility)
- Outstanding Achievement Awards for Volunteerism in Ontario
- Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers
- Fire department awards (use a nomination form and apply criteria consistently)
- Ontario Fire Service Long Service Medals and Bars
- Federal Fire Service Exemplary Service Medals and Bars
- Municipal awards

**Let Everyone Know**

- Post news articles in local newspapers or newsletters. Profile volunteers and highlight their contributions and achievements.
- Post a “Volunteer of the Month”
- Create an Honour Roll
- Provide letters of reference
- Provide their employers with letters describing how they’ve contributed
- Plant a tree or flowerbed in volunteer’s name

**Provide Extrinsic Rewards**

These rewards are tangible ways to recognize volunteers for their efforts. Some may come at a cost, so you may have to budget for them, solicit Council support, collaborate with local businesses to sponsor these through donations or partnerships.

- Reduced rates on food, beverages, admission or membership from local businesses
- Gift certificates
- Attendance draws
- T shirts, ball caps, pins, pens, calendars, bumper stickers, licence plates, business cards
- Sending them to workshops or conferences



## **Monetary Rewards**

These types of incentives and rewards do have a cost involved. If you are interested in pursuing them, you will have to consider including them in your budget, seeking support and endorsement from Council, or collaborate with businesses to make them a reality.

- Scholarship funds
- Group retirement saving plans or pensions
- Fair and generous insurance coverage
- Expenses for costs accrued through fire department business (mileage, equipment)
- Travel expenses
- Training and conference registration
- Childcare provided, or cost reimbursed

## **Honorarium or Pay**

It is the practice of some departments to provide an honorarium or pay for volunteer activities. The determination of pay or honorarium varies from department to department and could be based on a points system (so many points per call or event) or an hourly rate.

If you wish to pursue this type of recognition program, it is imperative that you seek input and involvement from the volunteer compliment. Consider the economic means of your Municipality, your budget, criteria for payment, taxation implications, how pay will be calculated and how records will be maintained. It is suggested that you consult with neighbouring departments, or departments of the same economic, response and capability profiles as your own. Once you have the necessary information, develop a business case and present it to Council. To assist you in establishing a business case, the following link provides you with a formula to determine the economic value of your volunteers. <http://www.kdc-cdc.ca/vvc/eng/>.

## **Recognizing and Appreciating the Family and Significant Others**

How do you thank the person who is awoken at 2am to a pager tone, who watches their loved one rush out the door into potential danger, who sits all night waiting for the return, only to spend the remainder of the early hours listening to a recap of the emergency as the volunteer fire fighter tries to wind down?

How do you thank the youngster who had to wait patiently for a parent to return from a fire call, in order to finish building the new bike?

How do you thank the individual who was left behind to oversee a mob of six year olds at a birthday party, by a partner who was paged out to a car accident?

How do you thank the family who has listened to the same message for the 10<sup>th</sup> time in one week as the individual rehearses for a public education event?

How do you thank the family who's regular weekend outing seems to be yet another fire department fundraising event?



The answer is simple. Thank them often, thank them with enthusiasm and thank them personally. Consider what families of volunteers have actually contributed and offered to the fire service. Through their sacrifice, understanding and flexibility, they have enabled the volunteer to be available and capable of doing the work.

### **Turned missed birthdays into an opportunity to say thanks**

Many spouses, friends and children of fire service volunteers would be able to list when a birthday, anniversary or special event has been cut short, or missed because of an emergency response call or other fire department event.

You can say sorry and thank you at the same time by sending out an annual birthday, anniversary card to families, just in case their family member gets called out during a special event. It sends two messages:

- 1) Sorry that your family member might miss a special event in your life.
- 2) Thank you for accepting that this may happen. Your continued support and encouragement helps our volunteers contribute and make a difference in the community.

You can also take this a step further and make it an annual family event. Once a year you can host a birthday/anniversary party for the entire department and their families. It's a good reason to get together and it just may make up for all those missed occasions.

### **Spouses' Night Out**

How many times have the spouses or significant other had to worry about child care so that the volunteer could respond to an emergency, or work at a fundraising event, or do a public education session?

Arrange a night for the spouses or significant others to get together without worrying about childcare, which would be the responsibility of the volunteers.

### **Childcare**

If the department is hosting an adult only event, arrange for childcare, or reimburse for childcare expenses for that night.

### **Simple yet effective ideas:**

- Send a thank you note to volunteer's spouses, partners and families for sharing the time and talents of their loved ones. Note what kind of contribution the volunteer is making.
- Send personal cards or letters during the holidays.
- Ensure that there are flowers or other gifts available at social events to recognize the significant others.

## **✂ Related Tools and Templates for Recognition and Motivation**

- What Motivates Me
- Event Planning Checklist



## **Support and Assistance**

*The only thing you volunteered for was to join...the rest is mandatory.*

*Anonymous Fire Chief*

Though the above quote may sound harsh, it is a reality that many volunteers in the fire service have had to adjust to. One of your jobs as a leader is to support and assist volunteers to cope with the many responsibilities and challenges that are inherent in the fire service.

Volunteer firefighters can go through cycles of activity/interest and reduced activity. There are many factors that can determine where an individual is in this cycle.

A holistic approach to support and assistance for volunteers would include consideration of the many priorities within a person's life. This could be relationships within and outside of the fire service, family, work, or internal factors such as fatigue, health and critical incident stress responses.

Establishing programs and providing information to the volunteers and their families will assist them in balancing the many priorities in their life. Provide resources for volunteers and their families with regard to social, emotional challenges resulting from their volunteer work that may impact on their performance and their family life.

Involve the volunteers and family members in developing the programs and information. Elicit their thoughts to identify the barriers to involvement, brainstorming ideas to overcome those barriers and implementing the ideas.

Programs offered could include:

- Volunteer assistance program,
- Family information sheets,
- Critical incident stress management for the volunteer and the family,
- Childcare considerations and programs,
- Protection by means of a fair and generous insurance program,
- Health and wellness programs,
- Stress management programs and;
- Physical fitness programs.

## **✂ Related Tools and Templates for Support and Assistance**

- Family Information Sheets
- Critical Incident Stress Management Handout
  - Note that the CISM Handout does not replace the need for a formal CISM program. Contact your local Fire Protection Adviser or Critical Incident Stress Management team for more details.
- Childcare Ideas
- Health and Wellness Ideas
- Stress Management Ideas
- Physical Fitness Program Ideas



# Exit Process

*There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. That will be the beginning.*  
*Louis L'Amour*

Volunteers leave for both good and bad reasons. They find new opportunities, go back to school, retire or land their dream job, or they could be terminated for poor performance, poor attendance or leave because of conflict. In any case, both the department and the volunteer deserve fair and respectful leave-taking.

In each instance, you may want to use a volunteer termination checklist to help the exit process go smoothly.

## **The Exit Interview**

When someone leaves your fire department, it is a good opportunity to reflect and evaluate. You want to know if the person is leaving for the right reasons, and if not, you may want to find out what can the department do to improve. An exit interview is a voluntary process, in which you can obtain information about what your department is doing well, and opportunities for improvement.

In order to provide a climate and environment that encourages the individual to speak freely and honestly, consider alternative interviewers, such as the clerk or municipal official.

## **Dismissal**

While not a pleasant experience from either side, a fair interview should occur if you remain objective and respectful when conducting the meeting. Ensure that the discussion is documented and refer to existing municipal policies regarding discipline and dismissal.

Be objective by informing the volunteer that his or her role is terminated and the reason why in a compassionate, concise manner. Allowing the individual an opportunity to speak and responding to any questions will provide some dignity. If responding to anger, maintain your emotions.

You can also be proactive by informing all volunteers, during orientation, reasons for immediate termination. These may include: threats, violence, conviction of criminal acts, or other similar offenses.

## **Retirement**

If an individual is retiring, besides offering thanks for his or her tenure of service, consider involving your membership in organizing and hosting an event to celebrate the individual's remarkable contribution. You may want to consult with your Council to determine if pension options are available. You can also partner with your local newspaper to publicly acknowledge the individual's long-term commitment to public service.



## **References**

When you give references, make sure that they are truthful and accurate. Choose your words carefully; describe behaviour (not personality) that you observed during the time the volunteer was with you.

## **Connecting the Individual to a Subsequent Fire Department**

Despite it being a loss to your department, if the person is leaving because of relocation, you can also view it as an opportunity to help out another volunteer department. No doubt, the chief in the future community would appreciate adding a potential volunteer to the list. As with references, be prudent when making the decision to “pass the baton” to another chief. Provide the individual with the contact information of the potential departments.

## **✂ Related Tools and Templates for Exit Process**

- Termination Checklist
- Exit Interview
- Accepting Resignation Letter
- Letter of Recommendation
- Letter of Introduction to Subsequent Fire Department



# Considerations for Specific Populations

## Employer Supported Volunteerism

The community, the employee and the employer all gain from employer supported volunteerism.

Obviously the community gains from the efforts of the individual through a larger workforce with diverse skills and knowledge, which results in increased capacity to prevent or respond to emergencies.

The employee gains by having an opportunity to obtain skills, knowledge and experience that can enhance their personal and professional growth.

The employer by having a more skilled, knowledgeable and experienced workforce through the training received from the fire department and by having trained employees who may be able to respond to emergencies in the workplace. Employers can also increase their presence in the community and enhance their public image as a result of their employees representing the business, as well as being publicly recognized by the fire service.

Figure 2.4 shows the percentage of volunteers who were supported by their employers in 2004. Since this survey was conducted, the movement of employer-supported volunteerism continues to gain in momentum.

Completing the business profile for your community will assist you in identifying potential employers to support volunteerism.

Consider the goals within your fire department that can be achieved by employer-supported volunteers. Do you require people to respond to emergencies, do public education, do inspections, and do filing or other administration?

Consider the time requirement for these tasks and whether an employer can reasonably accommodate these needs. Can the employee leave to respond to a call? Can they be gone for more than an hour? Are there less timely assignments that can be done?

To increase your potential for success, you will want to approach the employer with a professional, thorough and fair proposal that demonstrates mutual benefits. This may include developing a business plan, using a memorandum of understanding that clearly establishes

**Table 2.4 Percentage of employed volunteers<sup>1</sup> receiving employer support for volunteering, employed volunteers, excluding self-employed, aged 15 and older, Canada, 2004**

Percentage of employed volunteers receiving employer support	
	Percent
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Age group</b>	
15 to 24	59
25 to 34	60
35 to 44	57
45 to 54	56
55 to 64	54
65 and older	45 <sup>E</sup>
<b>Household income</b>	
Less than \$20,000	49
\$20,000 to \$39,999	50
\$40,000 to \$59,999	56
\$60,000 to \$79,999	56
\$80,000 to \$99,999	62
\$100,000 or more	62

<sup>E</sup> use with caution  
1. This is the 58% of volunteers who had an employer at some time during the 12 months preceding the interview. The remainder were unemployed, not in the labour force, or self-employed.  
Source: Statistics Canada, *Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2004*.



expectations, promoting fair and respectful collaboration between the employer, the volunteer and the department and maintaining open, honest communication.

When establishing expectations and practices, consider the following trends identified by the Canada Survey Of Giving, Caring And Participating, "Over half (57%) of volunteers with an employer reported that they had received some form of non-monetary support from their employer for volunteering. About one-third said that their employer had allowed them to change or reduce their work schedule in order to volunteer (33%) and/or to use work facilities or equipment for their volunteer activities (32%). Almost one-quarter (23%) said that they had received some form of recognition or a letter of thanks for their volunteering, while 21% said that they had received paid time off to volunteer or volunteered while on the job. Among volunteers with employers, 29% said that their employer had programs or policies in place to encourage volunteerism."

The following paragraphs summarize possible steps in an Employer Supported Volunteer Program.

### **Pre Recruitment planning**

- Conduct an assessment to determine recruitment needs in your fire service.
- Conduct a profile of businesses in your community to that you might approach.
- Identify existing volunteers who are supported to volunteer by their employers (these employers could be presented as role models) and others who are not supported by their employers (you will have to demonstrate the value of supporting volunteerism to them).
- Prepare a business case or presentation for employers that identify the benefits to the community, fire service, individual volunteer and employer. Describe employer recognition initiatives. Describe process for negotiation and agreement regarding volunteer involvement and ongoing communication.

### **Recruitment**

Organize and implement recruitment strategies.

These could include:

- Mass mail out of letters or brochures,
- Individual and personal letters and phone calls,
- Volunteers approaching their employers to initiate the process, and;
- An Employer's Open House (presentation that describes program and benefits, facilitated discussion amongst community businesses, municipality and the fire service).

### **Selection and Hiring**

Selection and hiring practices would be consistent with processes described in this resource.

### **Employer Supported Volunteerism Agreement.**

This would involve a discussion between the fire service, the volunteer and the employer. The results of this discussion would be documented in the Memorandum of Understanding, which all parties sign.



Items to consider in this meeting are:

- Is the employer able to use discretionary judgment to release employee-volunteers to attend calls? This judgment may be based on the requirement for the employer to maintain a safe and efficient workplace.
- If employee-volunteers leave the workplace, how is leave granted, with pay or without pay? If the employee has leave with pay, what records are kept to demonstrate to the employer the amount of time the employee was attending the emergency scene and how is this communicated?
- Is there a limit to the amount of time the employee can be away from the workplace? (Is there a maximum number of hours per week?)
- After the call, is the expectation that the employee returns to work to resume their duties?
- Can employees flex their time to attend calls, yet still be productive at work?
- It is suggested that a process be in place to determine who should leave first, then who would leave on a subsequent page out for more personnel. Consider the nature of the call, the area of the call out, whose hall it is, how many personnel are required to attend, what expertise or skills is required, whose absence at work will be least disruptive.
- Is there an opportunity to evaluate the agreement and process to determine if it continues to meet employer, volunteer and fire department needs?

### **Orientation and Initial Training**

Orientation and training of employer supported volunteers would be generally consistent with the practices described in the appropriate section of this resource. There might be some adjustment and flexibility required depending on the time commitment agreed to with the employer. If adjustments are required, the orientation and training provided to the volunteer must still allow for the volunteer to be safe and effective in their role.

### **Employer Recognition**

In order to maintain a strong relationship with employers in your community, it is imperative that you demonstrate your appreciation of the employer's generosity. You may want to do so in a number of ways, which may include the following. Again, you may require support from your Council to implement some of these initiatives:

- Publicly acknowledging those employers who support their volunteers through newspaper ads, signs, logos, notations in newsletters, annual reports;
- Annual Employer Recognition Night;
- Yearly letter of thanks, or a letter of thanks after a call in which the volunteer responded to; and,
- Encouraging community members to personally and publicly recognizing employers who released employees to come to their aid.

### **Ongoing Communication and Evaluation**

It is essential to ensure that you are paying due attention to this program and communicating with employers. This may include an annual review of Employer Supported Volunteer Contract, and Tracking information in the Volunteer's File (the Personnel File Tracking Sheet provided with this resource package includes an area that tracks and reviews Employer Supported Volunteer Involvement).



Active recruitment and collaboration with employers to support volunteerism can reap many rewards. The only loss to the department is that the employer says “no”, however, the gains can only be achieved if the department’s leadership asks the question.

### **✦ Tools and Templates for Employer Supported Volunteerism**

- General Business Profile of your Community Worksheet
- Detailed Business Profile Worksheet
- Brochure – Employer Supported Volunteerism
- Letter – Employer Supported Volunteerism
- Memorandum of Understanding – Employer Supported Volunteerism
- Records Tracking Sheet – Employer Supported Volunteerism

### **Youth in the Fire Service**

By involving youth, your fire service benefits by drawing from a vibrant, energetic, enthusiastic and motivated source of volunteers. The youths benefit by gaining valuable life skills such as problem solving, crisis management and communication, in addition to technical skills that are relevant to the particular volunteer role.

#### **Developing the Role for Youth**

Considerations for safety and understanding the developmental stages and maturity of youth volunteers would be necessary in order to establish a successful youth program.

Determine meaningful tasks within your department that can be safely accomplished by youth. Identify necessary training requirements. Assess risks for each role and set limits for exposures to those risks that are appropriate to the age, skills and knowledge of the youth. Ensure that adequate supervision is available. Ensure that your fire department offers an organized, efficient environment that is not too overwhelming to the youth. Provide a work setting where youth are welcomed, treated with respect and are provided with an opportunity to learn and grow.

During recruitment and retention efforts, you will need to demonstrate that the volunteer opportunity is:

- Flexible and offers a choice of short and long term opportunities. Meaningful, in that the volunteer is making a significant difference.
- Accessible and responsive to the youth’s needs.
- Educational, offering opportunities to gain valuable life skills and job related skills.
- Rewarding, identifying the types of incentives, rewards, references and potential connections to future employers.
- Enjoyable, offering a variety of training and experiences in which to learn new things and meet new people.

#### **Student Volunteers**

As part of the new education curriculum in Ontario, students are required to contribute 40 hours in volunteer service. You can use a similar approach to that of Employer Supported Volunteerism to recruit potential youth volunteers. Establish a partnership with the school, Board of Education, Administration, students and parents.



This will enable the youth to successfully volunteer and gain valuable knowledge, skills and experience. What may start out as simply clocking volunteer hours for school may lead to an ongoing commitment from the youth to continue volunteering.

To implement a Student Volunteerism Program, you may want to consider steps similar to those you would take with Employer Supported Volunteerism, applying concepts to principals, teachers, school boards and students (and their parents).

Briefly, these steps are:

1. Pre-recruitment planning
2. Recruitment
3. Selection and Hiring
4. Student Volunteer Agreement.
5. Orientation and Initial Training
6. School and School Board Recognition
7. Ongoing Communication and Evaluation

## **Women in the Fire Service**

Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of women among the ranks of the fire service. However, this number is still low in comparison to other volunteer opportunities. The Canadian Survey for Volunteering, Giving and Participating reveals that 47% of those that volunteer are women. Does your fire service reflect this trend? If not, there could be any number of factors that have limited the potential for women to volunteer.

The well-known physical requirements of suppression and rescue tasks can limit the potential for women to apply. Understandably for safe and efficient operations, these are a necessity. More often, women are becoming active and involved in sports and fitness activities (rock climbing, weightlifting) and occupations (construction and other trades) requiring similar physical prowess. With this growing trend, there is a growing pool of potential recruits for fire suppression and rescue. Fair and equitable physical testing that is reflective of role specific tasks will ensure that you recruit females that are capable of safely and competently completing those tasks.

Consider as well that there are many other important and relevant positions within the fire service for women, and men, who do not have the physical ability for the fire suppression role.

Efforts of fire departments to be more welcoming and inclusive have made tremendous gains in changing the perception of the traditional fire service being comprised of men only. Past and more recent reports of harassment and discrimination within the fire service do not help this cause. While these circumstances have occurred in only a few departments, the media coverage of these circumstances has unfortunately impacted on the image of the entire fire service. During your recruitment efforts, you will want to demonstrate that this is not the case for your department. You may also want to ensure



that you have policies and guidelines regarding a harassment and discrimination free workplace.

Childcare and family responsibilities are other common challenges. While these commitments are not exclusively related to women, they are a common concern for them. You can alleviate some of this stress by offering leaves of absence for family purposes, and assisting or supporting families to find childcare options.

Health concerns, particularly exposure from hazards to reproductive systems and during pregnancy are relevant and valid concerns for females. Demonstrate due diligence in protecting pregnant women by modifying tasks and potential for exposure to hazards.

During your recruitment efforts, you may want to have females representing the fire department, speaking to women about the role of women in the fire service, the opportunities and benefits of involvement and the fire department's commitment to addressing challenges and barriers faced by women.

To promote long term active volunteering, involve female members in discussions to identify their specific challenges and problem solve solutions to overcome those challenges.

### **The Older Adult in the Fire Service**

During this decade, we will see an evolution of the Baby Boomer generation. More and more individuals will be retiring. Most of them will still be healthy, active and capable of volunteering. Now that they have the time, many will consider volunteering as a way to stay active, stay in touch and to contribute to their community.

The knowledge, skills and experience that this population bring can be invaluable to the fire service. They will come from diverse backgrounds: labour, professionals, sales, front line workers, management and administration.

Despite those differences, they will have similar reasons for volunteering. Most will be seeking opportunities to be challenged, to continue to learn and grow and to use their skills and abilities to help others.

They will also have similar expectations regarding the volunteer experience. Having come out of the labour force, from a variety of backgrounds, most will have high expectations for the leadership, organization and practices of the fire service. They will have strong values and opinions and will want to be provided with opportunity to share and have input. They will be seeking flexibility in scheduling and possibly short-term projects that will allow them accommodation to enjoy their retirement and leisure time. They will want to be provided with opportunity to not only share their skills, knowledge and experience, but also to continue to learn new skills and have new experiences.

If you wish to draw on this vast resource, you will need to demonstrate that you are responsive to those needs and expectations.



When developing roles, determine how you will incorporate the older adult in a way that is adaptable, challenging and relevant, offering a variety of tasks and roles. Keep in mind that as they age, they may be more susceptible to injury and illness. Ensure that the older adult is assigned roles that are safe by limiting hazards and potential injury.

When recruiting, you will need to demonstrate how volunteering with the fire service can be an enriching, challenging experience where they can use their skills and gain new ones in a variety of ways, in a flexible environment.

In order to maintain their interest, ensure that you involve them in meaningful ways, soliciting their input and drawing from their experience. As noted previously, some may seek ongoing challenges and learning. Ensure that you are providing stimulating and relevant training. Others may also have joined for the social aspect. Encourage fellowship and camaraderie to meet this need.

Volunteer Canada\* also suggests collaborating with employers in your community who have employees approaching retirement. By providing volunteer opportunities, you can draw potential volunteers and the employer can assist them in transitioning from employment to retirement.

## **Volunteers with Disabilities**

Volunteers with disabilities are not common in the fire service, partly due to the mistaken perception that the fire service is not an environment where they can excel. Fire departments that currently involve people with disabilities can tell you that this perception is far from true.

Creating an inclusive and accessible volunteer opportunities can provide many mutual benefits to the fire service and the individual. This often untapped resource is brimming with ability, knowledge, skills, enthusiasm and commitment. The individual benefits by gaining an opportunity to gain experience, life skills and job related abilities.

In order to successfully create an environment that is welcoming, accessible and inclusive, consult with the individual to design roles using strength based planning to capitalize on the skills of the individual, while accommodating limitations.

Determine how you will incorporate the individual in a way that is adaptable, challenging and relevant, offering a variety of tasks and roles, ensuring that assigned roles are safe by limiting hazards and potential injury. Work with the individual to identify existing skills, knowledge and strengths that are relevant to the role. Identify barriers that may limit the individual's ability to complete the tasks. Problem solve to identify work accommodations that would alleviate those barriers while still maintaining the integrity of the role, ensuring safety is addressed and providing a meaningful volunteer experience.

When considering work accommodations and accessibility, it is important to note that some accommodation requires little, if any cost. This could simply be a matter of redesigning tasks, changing an assignment schedule, or having material available in a different format.

\* Volunteer Connections: New Strategies for Involving Older Adults; Volunteer Canada, 2001



In regard to assistive devices, in most cases the individual already has existing assistive devices that he or she can use. If more costly accommodation is required, consider if the department can make reasonable accommodations within its budget. You can also work with the individual or agencies to garner funds to provide assistive devices or workplace modifications.

Work modifications could include:

- Providing physical access (wheelchair ramp);
- Technical aids and assistive devices
- Support services (buddy system)
- Modifying work areas
- Adjusting work schedules
- Restructuring tasks
- Ensuring that materials or resources are available in alternate formats such as Braille, having a TTY system and audio or video taping sessions, depending on the needs of your volunteers.

Aside from physical barriers and work modifications, another challenge that you may have to address is the perceptions of your membership. This is particularly so for those who have not worked or interacted with a person they know has a disability. It can be awkward and make people nervous. You can alleviate some of this discomfort and uncertainty by raising awareness that despite being disabled, the individual is capable of completing the assigned task and fulfilling the responsibility of their role. You can also provide training on the practical aspects of work accommodations such as the use of special equipment and understanding the individual's unique needs.

Practices for selection, hiring and training, in relation to content and objectives, should be essentially the same as any other individual. He or she should be provided with all of the information, tools and resources to fulfill their role. What may be different is the method in which you deliver information. For instance, someone that is hard of hearing may require more written documentation. An individual with vision difficulties or literacy challenges may require more verbal interaction.

Supervision should be much the same as other department members, focusing on the individuals skills and performance, addressing the disability if it is relevant to performance and ensuring that the individual feels supported and included in your fire department. You will also want to ensure that any modifications or accommodations are relevant and enable the individual to perform their job effectively.

If you are interested in involving volunteers with disabilities, there are several sources to draw from. Initially, you may want to consider consulting with your department members to determine if they know someone with a disability, who has skills and knowledge that your department requires and who may be interested in volunteering. This may alleviate some of the potential awkwardness at first, as the individual will already have a connection to someone in the department. This could provide both a social bridge, as well as an educational bridge with other department members. Other avenues to recruit individuals with disabilities include agencies that promote vocational placement such as the Ontario March of Dimes, local agencies that support individuals with disabilities and local volunteer centers.



## **Unusual Events and Major Emergencies**

If your community experiences an unusual event that brings members of the public out to assist, these individuals are termed “Episodic Volunteers”. During major emergencies, there may be individuals in your community, though not officially affiliated with your fire department, due to emerging circumstances, become involved to help others.

Recently, St. John Ambulance, the Canadian Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the Public Health Agency of Canada collaborated to develop and release two documents pertaining to volunteer involvement in health emergencies.

The document “Maintaining the Passion – Sustaining the Emergency Response Episodic Volunteer” discusses this phenomenon in volunteerism and provides strategies to manage an episodic volunteer program from recruitment, to screening and selection, retention and maintenance and database information management. This document can be viewed at the Canadian Red Cross Website or at the following link.

[http://www.redcross.ca/cmslib/general/crc\\_disastermanagement\\_maintaining\\_e.pdf](http://www.redcross.ca/cmslib/general/crc_disastermanagement_maintaining_e.pdf)

The other document “Voluntary Sector Framework for Health Emergencies” discusses the collaboration and coordination of many volunteer organizations to assist in major emergencies. While not specific to recruitment and retention of volunteer fire service personnel, it identifies strategies to bring together volunteers from many sectors, which serves to strengthen the capacity of not only the fire service in emergency response, but also the entire community. You can access this resource through the Canadian Red Cross website, or at the following link

[http://www.redcross.ca/cmslib/general/crc\\_disastermanagement\\_voluntary\\_e.pdf](http://www.redcross.ca/cmslib/general/crc_disastermanagement_voluntary_e.pdf).

## **Fostering Diversity and a Respectful Environment**

As noted previously, in order to enhance your department by utilizing the skills and talents of a diverse population, you may have brought in individuals from different backgrounds, genders, age and abilities.

Regardless of whether the diversity is a result of gender, age, ethnicity or disability, it would benefit your department and the volunteer to consider accommodations that are necessary and suitable. These may include making physical facilities accessible, modifying work areas, restructuring tasks and providing assistance as required.

To involve your membership and support a diverse workplace consider the following:

- Raise awareness of department members (disability awareness, cultural sensitivity, other interpersonal topics).
- Train for specific needs (educate members on the use of assistive devices, resolving communication, cultural age or gender differences).
- Consider policy and budget implications.

Where there is difference, therein may lay conflict. In some cases that conflict comes in the form of harassment. Your responsibility as a leader is not to simply react appropriately to harassment complaints; you also have an obligation to prevent



harassment from occurring in the first place. You can do this by ensuring that volunteers are aware of policies and are educated about what harassment is and is not. Ensure that you have a complaint procedure in place to allow the volunteer to feel comfortable about bringing forward any concerns.

### **✂ Related Tools and Templates for Diversity**

- Understanding Difference
- Conflict Resolution



## Specific Challenges

This resource was developed to assist the fire service across Ontario, therefore, the concepts discussed were viewed from a broad perspective, and the practices identified can be used by all fire departments in the province. We recognize that there may be specific challenges within your municipality that fall outside of the scope of this document. While considerations listed below may not prevent these challenges, or remove the root cause of the problem, they may at least provide ways in which to mitigate the negative impact of those challenges.

### **Limited Pool of Volunteers**

Communities across the province have identified that it is increasingly more difficult to maintain the necessary number of volunteers. This could be a result of an aging population, decline in industry and employment, geographic isolation or lack of affordable housing in the community.

We suggest conducting a fire department needs assessment to clarify the specific requirements of the department, completing a community profile to identify potential volunteers that may yet be untapped and looking at resources such as small businesses, major employers, schools and the municipality itself, as potential stakeholders for employer supported volunteerism.

### **Short Duration of Service**

There is potential for all volunteers to leave the department at some point in their life. In some cases, this departure is a result of the individual successfully gaining fulltime employment with another fire department.

In some instances frustration can occur in a fire department where this has happened a number of times. The department may feel that they have put a great deal of time, effort and money into the development of the individual and in return, once the individual has left, there is no benefit to the department.

On the other hand, some fire departments use this potential as a recruitment strategy. They identify that by volunteering with the fire department, individuals will gain skills, knowledge and experience that may assist him or her in acquiring full time employment in the fire service. While the individual is with the department, they believe that by providing training, opportunity and good treatment, they will have active participation from the individual. In their mind, the long-term potential of the volunteer leaving is far outweighed by the immediate benefits of having a motivated and enthusiastic member for the foreseeable future.

Regardless of the potential for a volunteer to leave, both the individual and the fire department should demonstrate mutual commitment and respect while the relationship exists. Leadership practices such as empowerment, involvement and delegation may in fact sustain that relationship for a longer term than anticipated.



### **When Employment Conflicts With Volunteer Commitment**

Another challenge faced by the volunteer fire service occurs when individuals employed full time in fire departments, volunteer with the fire department in the community in which they reside. This practice has been discouraged by some employers and unions and in many cases; the individual may not be able to continue volunteering. The result is that the individual's skills, knowledge and experience are lost to the volunteer service.

Strategies and practices identified in this resource may help to mitigate the impact of this issue. You can retain a large, diverse and sustainable volunteer force by broadening recruitment and marketing strategies, providing high quality training, treating volunteers fairly and with respect, involving volunteers and recognizing them for their efforts. The result is a solid volunteer compliment that can endure the rise and fall in membership.



# References and Resources

## Links

There may be Web sites linked to and from this site that are operated or created by or for organizations outside of the Government of Ontario. Those organizations are solely responsible for the operation and information (including the right to display such information) found on their respective Web sites. These linked Web sites may or may not be available in French. The linking to or from this site does not imply on the part of the Government of Ontario any endorsement or guarantee of any of the organizations or information (including the right to display such information) found on their respective Web sites.

The Government of Ontario does not assume and is not responsible for any liability whatsoever for the linking of any of these linked Web sites, the operation or content (including the right to display such information) of any of the linked Web sites, nor for any of the information, interpretation, comments or opinions expressed in any of the linked Web sites. Any comments or inquiries regarding the linked Web sites are to be directed to the particular organization for whom the particular Web site is being operated.

## Primary Sources of Information

[www.volunteer.ca](http://www.volunteer.ca)

Canada's site for information on volunteering. Volunteer Canada.

[www.hrvs-rhsbc.ca](http://www.hrvs-rhsbc.ca)

Developing human resources in the voluntary sector. The HR council for the voluntary/non-profit sector.

## Other Resources

### **Critical Incident Stress Management Handout**

Provided by Murray Firth, National Critical Incident Stress Foundation and the *Georgian Critical Incident Stress Management Team*.

<http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/71-542-xie/71-542-xie2006001.pdf> (highlights from the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating)

<http://www.imaginecanada.ca> (Imagine Canada, website for volunteerism)

<http://www.kdc-cdc.ca> (Knowledge Development Centre of Imagine Canada)

<http://www.nonprofitscan.ca> (nonprofitscan is the public information portal of **Imagine Canada**)

[www.sustainabilityonline.com](http://www.sustainabilityonline.com) (general recruitment and retention ideas for volunteers)



<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/heritage/compartne/strongr1.htm> (diversity)

[www.volunteerfd.org](http://www.volunteerfd.org) (general recruitment and retention)

<http://www.firecorps.org> (general recruitment and retention)

<http://www.frstoolkit.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp> (recruitment and diversity)

<http://www.volunteer.ca/volunteer/pdf/NewstratEng.pdf> (youth)

<http://icma.org/main/ld.asp?ldid=19370&ideas=1&mgtsite=1> (older adults)

[http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/oems/locality\\_resources/recruitment\\_retention.asp](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/oems/locality_resources/recruitment_retention.asp) (retention workbooks)

[www.ohrc.on.ca](http://www.ohrc.on.ca) (Ontario Human Rights Legislation)

[www.labour.gov.on.ca](http://www.labour.gov.on.ca) (Employment Standards)

<http://www.volunteer.ca/volunteer/pdf/prcbrochureeng.pdf> (information about police records checks)

[http://www.youngworker.ca/young\\_worker\\_en.html](http://www.youngworker.ca/young_worker_en.html) (WSIB website - safety considerations for young volunteers and workers)

[http://www.redcross.ca/cmslib/general/crc\\_disastermanagement\\_maintaining\\_e.pdf](http://www.redcross.ca/cmslib/general/crc_disastermanagement_maintaining_e.pdf) (link to Maintaining the Passion – Sustaining the Emergency Response Volunteer)

[http://www.redcross.ca/cmslib/general/crc\\_disastermanagement\\_voluntary\\_e.pdf](http://www.redcross.ca/cmslib/general/crc_disastermanagement_voluntary_e.pdf) (link to Voluntary Sector Framework for Health Emergencies)

Retention & Recruitment In The Volunteer Fire Service - Problems And Solutions; NVFC & USFA, Final Report 1998.

Recruiting, Training And Maintaining Volunteer Firefighters, Third Edition; International Association Of Fire Chiefs, Jack W. Snook, Jeffrey D. Johnson, Dan C. Olsen, John M. Buckman, III, 1998

Fire Department Strategic Planning; Mark Wallace, Fire Engineering Books And Videos, 1998

## **Graphics**

For ideas and graphics to enhance your posters, letter head and newsletters, see the following websites.

<http://www.worldfiredepartments.com/animations/gallery.htm>

[http://www.the911site.com/911\\_clip/](http://www.the911site.com/911_clip/)



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## **Give Us Your Feedback**

The Office of the Fire Marshal is committed to continually improving its resources to support members of the Ontario Fire Service.

We want to know what you think of this resource, what you like best, and what you think needs to be changed or improved so that we can make the necessary adjustments.

We welcome your comments by mail, telephone or e-mail.

Reference: Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Project

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