



Rural Pennsylvania

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Answering the Call – Recruitment and Retention of Pennsylvania Firefighters



Every community needs trained emergency workers to answer the call for help. In Pennsylvania, the majority of these people are volunteer firefighters.

The time commitments placed upon firefighters, especially those in volunteer service, can be very demanding. In addition to responding to calls at all hours of the day and night, these volunteers complete long hours of training, and in many cases, participate in a variety of fund raising activities.

To better understand the issues of recruitment and retention that the state's nearly 2,500 fire companies are facing, as well as to gain insight into their response capabilities, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Fire and Emergency Services Institute conducted a statewide survey in 2001.

The survey results show a moderate level of success in net membership gain over the past two years. Sixty percent of the survey respondents stated they experienced a net gain in fire company members as a result of formal and informal recruitment efforts. However, two in five companies indicated that they were unable to respond to calls because of insufficient crew or lack of an apparatus driver. This survey obtained information on a company's first-due area, budget, membership, training, and response to calls, in addition to recruitment and retention as mentioned above.

Method

With staff assistance from the Pennsylvania Fire and Emergency Services Institute, the State Fire Commissioner's Office, and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a six-page mail questionnaire was prepared and then field-tested with a

number of fire chiefs. The questionnaire was divided into the following five sections:

- Background information about fire companies and their service area
- Profile of current membership
- Information on fire and rescue calls
- Information on recruitment and retention
- Opinion questions on issues facing fire companies.

To ensure a response rate that was statistically reliable, the questionnaire was sent to each fire chief of the 2,462 fire companies listed by the State Fire Commissioner's Office. The Pennsylvania Fire and Emergency Services Institute supplied the mailing list. The survey was mailed in May 2001 and responses were due in July 2001.

Of the 2,462 surveys sent, 889 usable responses were returned, resulting in a 36 percent response rate. The margin of error was 2.6 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Statistically, this means that we are 95 percent confident that responses could vary 2.6 percent if all fire chiefs had responded to the survey.

Like all surveys, this survey contained a number of limitations. The four most significant limitations are:

- *Under-representation of paid fire companies.* Although this survey was sent to all fire companies, less than 1.5 percent of paid fire companies responded. This possible bias, however, is offset by the fact that the majority of fire companies (97 percent) in Pennsylvania are comprised of volunteers.

- *Different definitions of "fire company member" and "active fire company member."* In field-testing the survey, some chiefs considered all members active, while others considered only those who regularly answer calls as active. To avoid confusion, three sets of questions were used. The first asked about the total number of members; the second for the total number of "active" members; and the third for the total number of members who regularly respond to calls. Despite the three questions and the explanation in the survey instructions, the

results indicate that some chiefs do not make any distinction among the types of membership. Therefore, unless otherwise noted, throughout this analysis the number of members who regularly respond to calls was used as the basis of analysis.

- *Under-reporting of non-response calls.* A “call” was defined as those instances when the fire company was dispatched to a fire, accident, or other emergency situation. (Some fire companies refer to calls as “runs”. In this analysis, the term “calls” was used.) A non-response call is when a company was called to respond to an emergency situation, but did not go. It is possible that some fire chiefs may have underreported the number on non-response calls perceiving that it would reflect badly upon the company.

- *Chief’s opinion may be different from the rank-and-file fire company members.* In many ways, the position of fire chief is one of management. His or her views on why members join or leave the company may differ from those who actually join or leave.

The final step in the survey was to analyze the data. To simplify the data, three variables were recoded and a new one was calculated.

1) Fire companies were classified into one of three categories depending on the number of members who regularly respond to calls. Small companies had 12 or less members; medium size companies had 13 to 18 members; and large companies had 19 or more. Each of these categories

represents approximately one-third of the total number of respondents.

2) Fire companies were classified as rural or urban, and into geographical areas based on the county in which they are located. Counties were classified as either rural or urban based on the 1990 Census Bureau definition. If more than 50 percent of a county’s population was classified as “rural” by the U.S. Census Bureau then the entire county was considered rural. Counties that were classified as less than 50 percent rural were considered “urban.” In addition, the counties—and the companies within each county—were divided into three geographical regions: east, central, and west.

3) Based on recruitment methods, fire companies were classified into one of three categories: formal networks, informal networks, and both (formal and informal networks). The formal category included those companies that recruited members through methods such as paid advertisements, newsletters, open houses, and presentations to local schools and businesses. The informal network included those that recruited new members through word-of-mouth efforts from family and friends, social clubs or auxiliaries, and fire police. The final category included those companies that used both formal and informal methods.

4) A new variable was calculated by subtracting the number of new members who had joined the company in the

TABLE 1
Apparatus Drivers by Company Size

	Small Companies (n=307)	Medium-Size Companies (n=253)	Large Companies (n=316)	Total (n=876)
All Volunteer Drivers Only	94.1%	94.1%	92.4%	93.5%
Paid Drivers Only	2.0%	1.2%	1.3%	1.5%
Combination (Paid & Vol.) Drivers	3.9%	4.7%	6.3%	5.0%

TABLE 2
Characteristics of First-Due Area by Company Size

	Small Companies (n=308)	Medium Size Companies (n=254)	Large Companies (n=318)	Total (n=880)
Includes Only 1 Municipality	50.2%	39.1%	41.9%	44.0%
Is More than 10 Square Miles	46.5%	52.2%	57.2%	52.0%
Is Located in Rural Counties	42.0%	39.5%	32.1%	37.7%
Has Population Under 2,500	33.3%	22.2%	16.1%	23.9%
Has Population Over 10,000	10.1%	13.5%	25.9%	16.8%
Population Increased in Last 5 Years	51.3%	61.4%	62.1%	58.1%

TABLE 3
Membership Characteristics by Company Size

	Small Companies (n=308)	Medium-Size Companies (n=254)	Large Companies (n=318)	Total (n=880)
Median # Members	35	45	72	50
Median # Active Members	15	25	35	25
Median # Who Regularly Respond	10	15	25	15
GENDER				
Female	10.0%	10.1%	7.7%	8.7%
Male	90.0%	89.9%	92.3%	91.3%
AGE COHORTS				
Under 18 Years Old	6.4%	8.1%	7.0%	7.1%
Between 18-30 Years Old	29.8%	31.3%	30.8%	30.7%
31 to 40 Years Old	30.7%	31.1%	29.2%	30.1%
Over 40 Years Old	33.1%	29.4%	33.1%	32.1%

past two years from the number of those who left the company or became inactive. This variable was then classified into four categories: (1) companies that lost members; (2) companies that had no change in members; (3) companies that gained 1 to 4 new members; and (4) companies that gained 5 or more new members.

Because this analysis focuses only on active members, the terms “fire company member” and “firefighter” are synonymous.

Findings

Company Profile

• As Table 1 illustrates, nearly 94 percent of the respondents said their drivers were volunteers. Approximately 5 percent had both paid and volunteer drivers, and less than 2

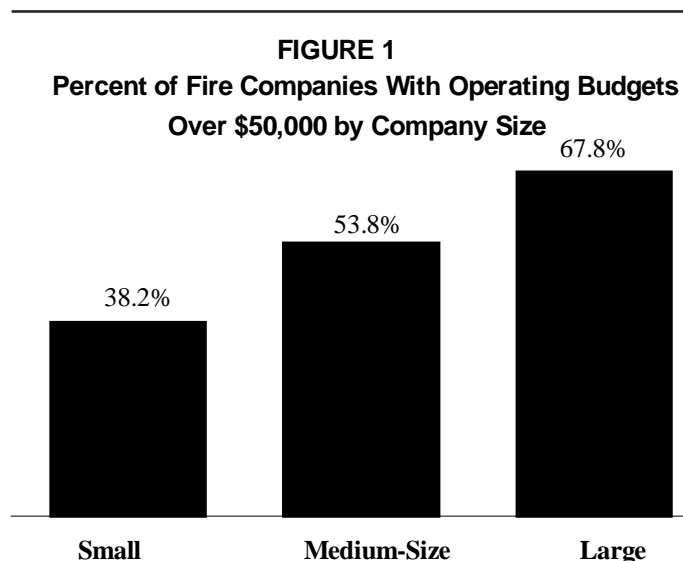
percent had only paid drivers. The more members a company has, the more likely it is to rely on combination of paid and volunteer drivers.

• A fire company’s “first-due” area is the geographical area where the company provides primary service. This area does not include mutual aid areas. From the survey results, approximately 44 percent have a first-due area containing one municipality. About 10 percent provide services to five or more municipalities. The median number of municipalities in the first due area is two.

• As Table 2 shows, most small companies (53 percent) have a first-due area of less than 10 square miles and most larger companies (57 percent) have a first-due area greater than 10 square miles.

• In terms of population, slightly less than 25 percent of the companies have a first-due area with less than 2,500 residents, while 17 percent have populations over 10,000. Fifty-eight percent of respondents said the population in their first-due area has increased over the last five years.

• Figure 1 compares company size with budget. Only 25 percent report having an operating budget in excess of \$100,000. One of the most statistically significant predictors of a company’s operating budget was the number of residents within the first-due area. The greater the number, the higher the budget. Fifty-three percent of respondents indicated that they have an auxiliary or social club. Among those with such an organization, over 86 percent helped with fundraising.



Membership Profile

• As presented in Table 3, the median number of members for all fire companies is 50; only one-half of

	Small Companies (n=308)	Medium-Size Companies (n=254)	Large Companies (n=318)	Total (n=880)
Require Training to <i>Become</i> Member	81.6%	86.4%	91.1%	86.5%
Require Monthly Training to <i>Remain</i> Active	55.6%	63.3%	62.6%	60.3%
# of Training Hours Required Each Month to Remain Active¹				
1 to 5 Hours per Month	67.5%	71.3%	69.4%	69.3%
6 to 10 Hours per Month	19.5%	17.2%	16.8%	17.8%
Over 10 Hours per Month	13.0%	11.5%	13.8%	12.8%

¹ Percent of companies that require monthly training for firefighters to remain active.

these members were considered active. Among the active members, only 60 percent, or 15, regularly respond to calls. This pattern of many members, fewer active members, and still fewer members who regularly respond to calls was found in every size of fire company.

- Active fire company members are predominantly male. Females represent about 10 percent of the active members. Forty percent of the chiefs reported no female members in their company. Despite being overwhelmingly male, there are some interesting exceptions. In almost 7 percent of the companies, more than 33 percent of active members are female. These companies are predominantly rural (70 percent) and generally located in central and western Pennsylvania (79 percent). These companies generally have small budgets, fewer active members (less than 20), and a larger first-due area (43 percent provide coverage to an area greater than 25 square miles.)

- The age of active fire company members is nearly evenly divided between three age cohorts—persons 18 to 30, 31 to 40, and 40 and over. As Table 3 illustrates, each group

comprises about 30 percent of company membership. Persons under 18 represent about 7 percent of a company's membership.

- Approximately 40 percent of respondents said that at least one of their members is an elected or appointed local government official. Among large companies, 47 percent report that one or more of their members is a local official, while 36 percent of the smaller companies report that a local official is a member.

- Throughout the state, less than 25 percent of fire company members work within their company's first-due area. However, more than 75 percent of the chiefs said that their members regularly leave work to respond to calls. Among small companies, 71 percent of the members regularly leave work, while in large companies 85 percent do so.

Training

- Regardless of size, training is important for fire companies. More than 86 percent of the companies require training prior to becoming a member. More than 94 percent of the

	Fire Calls	Rescue ¹	Medical Assistance	Ambulance Calls ²	Hazmat Calls	Other Calls
Small (n=305)	99.0%	98.4%	78.7%	21.0%	71.5%	79.7%
Medium (n=254)	97.6%	97.6%	78.7%	23.2%	81.1%	77.6%
Large (n=314)	98.7%	98.1%	74.8%	25.8%	79.0%	80.9%
Total (n=873)	98.5%	98.1%	77.3%	23.4%	77.0%	79.5%

¹ Includes auto accidents, searches, etc. ² Includes both ALS and BLS ambulance calls. Totals do not equal 100 percent due to multiple responses.

TABLE 6
Response Calls by Type and Number Over Past Two Years

	Fire Calls (n=860)	Rescue ¹ (n=856)	Medical Assistance (N=675)	Ambulance Calls ² (n=204)	Hazmat Calls (n=627)	Other Calls (n=694)
1 to 100 Calls	80.5%	74.1%	83.5%	36.8%	98.7%	87.3%
101 to 200 Calls	12.2%	17.8%	8.4%	11.8%	0.9%	7.8%
Over 200 Calls	7.3%	8.2%	8.1%	51.5%	0.4%	4.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

¹ Includes auto accidents, searches, etc. ² Includes both ALS and BLS ambulance calls.

companies provide monthly training, and 60 percent of the companies require monthly training to remain active. As shown in Table 4, smaller companies are only slightly less stringent on training requirements than larger companies.

- Among those companies not requiring training prior to becoming a firefighter, 54 percent are located within urban counties, and most are located in central and western Pennsylvania (70 percent). These companies have a median number of 20 active members with 14 regularly responding to calls. Fifty-six percent have an annual operating budget of less than \$50,000.

- Ninety-seven percent of fire chiefs indicated that their company pays for additional training outside the company. Examples include the State Fire Academy, National Fire Academy, and county fire schools.

Fire and Rescue Calls

- Ninety-eight percent of fire companies responded to fire and rescue calls over the last two years. Seventy-seven percent responded to medical assistance and hazardous materials (hazmat) calls. Less than 25 percent responded to ambulance calls (either ALS or BLS). (See Table 5)

- Table 5 also illustrates the similarity in the types of calls responded to by small, medium, and large fire companies. Eighty-four percent responded to four or more types of calls with the most common types being fire, rescue, and other.

- Except for ambulance calls, most fire companies had 100 or fewer of each type of calls over the past two years. (See Table 6) Among companies that respond to ambulance calls, 52 percent had more than 200 calls over the last two years.

- Fire company size appears to be a factor in the number of calls the company responds to; small companies responded to fewer calls than larger

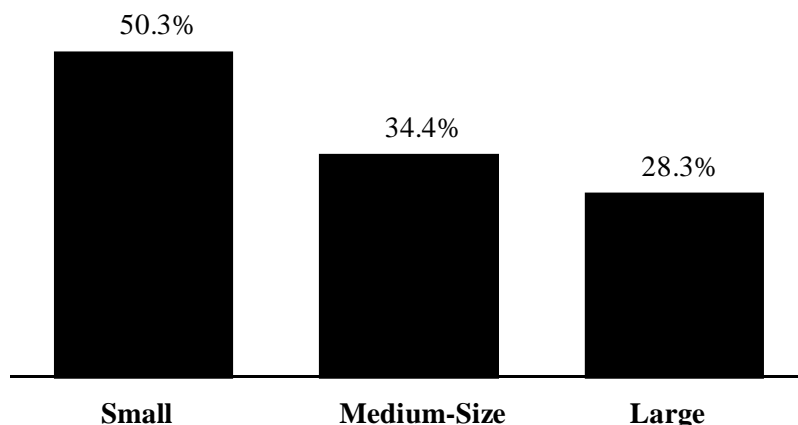
companies. The same pattern is true for the population and geographic size of the first due area. The larger the population and size of the first-due area, the more calls. Company and first-due area sizes, however, don't appear to influence the number of ambulance calls and medical assists.

- Sixty-two percent of fire chiefs said that, over the past two years, the number of calls their companies have responded to has increased. There was no significant difference between rural and urban fire companies in the change in the number of calls. The only factor that affects the change in the number of calls appears to be population. In first due areas where the population has declined or remained the same, 52 percent of the chiefs said the number of calls had also declined or remained the same.

Non-Response Calls

- According to the survey, over the past two years nearly 40 percent of all chiefs reported that their companies were unable to respond to calls. As Figure 2 shows, 50 percent of small companies has at least one non-response call. Less than

FIGURE 2
Percent of Companies with One or More Non-Response Calls by Company Size



30 percent of large companies had one or more non-response calls.

- Eighty-two percent of the fire companies that were unable to respond reported a non-response rate of 10 or less calls. As shown in Table 7, small- and medium-size companies had the fewest non-response calls, while large companies had the most, with nearly 22 percent of them not responding to 11 or more calls.

- The principle reason cited for non-response was insufficient crew, as cited by 77 percent of respondents. Nearly 57 percent did not have a driver and about 11 percent did not respond because the apparatus or equipment was out-of-service. The lack of a crew appears to be especially acute in small companies. Lacking a crew was cited by nearly 82

percent of small companies. Sixty-three percent of large companies cited a lack of drivers.

- Forty-two percent of the respondents cited weekday mornings as the most difficult time to respond to calls, followed by weekday afternoons. (See Table 8) Less than 5 percent have difficulty responding to calls during weekday evenings and nights, and less than 7 percent have difficulties responding anytime during weekends.

New Members

- Over the past two years, 94 percent of the chiefs reported that their fire companies have been able to recruit new members. Of those not successful in recruitment, 46 percent are located in western Pennsylvania. These companies

**TABLE 7
Non-Response Calls and Reasons by Company Size**

	Small Companies (n=159)	Medium-Size Companies (n=95)	Large Companies (n=94)	Total (n=348)
Number of Non-Response Calls				
10 or Less Calls	81.8%	86.3%	77.7%	81.9%
11 to 20 Calls	15.7%	11.6%	14.9%	14.4%
Over 20 Calls	2.5%	2.1%	7.4%	3.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Reasons for Not Responding to Call(s)¹				
Insufficient Crew	81.8%	75.8%	71.3%	77.3%
No Driver	54.7%	54.7%	62.8%	56.9%
Apparatus/Equipment Out-of-Service	10.7%	10.5%	10.6%	10.6%
Other	6.3%	7.4%	8.5%	7.2%

¹ Totals for Reasons do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple responses.

**TABLE 8
Most Difficult Response Times By Company Size and Time of Day and Week**

	Small Companies (n=308)	Medium-Size Companies (n=254)	Large Companies (n=318)	Total (n=880)
Weekday				
Mornings	50.0%	40.2%	34.6%	41.6%
Afternoons	47.4%	37.0%	27.7%	37.3%
Evenings	1.6%	0.8%	0.3%	0.9%
Nights	4.2%	2.0%	2.5%	3.0%
Weekend				
Mornings	6.2%	6.7%	5.0%	5.9%
Afternoons	8.4%	9.1%	3.1%	6.7%
Evenings	8.1%	5.5%	3.1%	5.6%
Nights	4.5%	2.8%	4.4%	4.0%

Totals do not add up to 100 percent because of multiple responses.

	Small Companies (n=308)	Medium-Size Companies (n=254)	Large Companies (n=318)	Total (n=880)
Number of New Members				
No New Members	8.4%	4.7%	3.8%	5.7%
1 to 4 New Members	51.0%	29.6%	16.0%	32.2%
5 to 9 New Members	28.9%	40.9%	34.0%	34.1%
10 or More New Members	11.7%	24.8%	46.2%	28.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Median # New Members	4.0	6.0	8.0	5.0
Mean # New Members	4.6	6.8	9.6	7.0
Age of New Members				
Under 18 Years Old	24.9%	29.4%	27.7%	27.6%
18 to 30 Years Old	50.3%	45.8%	47.0%	47.3%
31 to 40 Years Old	18.1%	18.0%	16.9%	17.5%
Over 40 Years Old	6.7%	6.8%	8.4%	7.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

typically have a first-due area of less than 10 square miles, serve a population of less than 5,000, and have an operating budget of less than \$50,000.

- As Table 9 illustrates, the median number of new members recruited was five. Small companies had four new members while large companies had eight new members. Urban-based companies are generally more successful in recruiting new members (more than 10), and have a first-due area of more than 10,000 residents. These companies are evenly divided across the state. Almost 60 percent have operating budgets under \$100,000.

- Seventy-five percent of new members are 30 years olds and under. Nearly 18 percent of the new members are between 31 and 40 years old, while those over 40 made up less than 8 percent of new member. As

Table 9 shows, there are only minor differences between the sizes of companies and the ages of new members.

- From the chiefs' perspectives, the top three reasons people join are: provide a community service; personal desire; and encouragement from family and friends. (See Table 10) There is little variation in

	Total (n=830)
Community Service	59.9%
Wanted to be a Firefighter	59.0%
Encouragement from Family/Friends	58.4%
Transfer from Another Fire Company	46.0%
Excitement/Adventure	23.7%
Social Aspects	13.0%
Other Reasons	5.7%

Total does not add up to 100 percent because of multiple responses.

	Formal Recruitment Methods Only (n=18)	Informal Methods Only (n=403)	Both Formal & Informal Methods (n=403)
Total Fire Companies	2.2%	49.8%	48.0%
Median # New Members	5.0	5.0	7.0
Mean # New Members	6.9	6.6	8.2
Rural Fire Companies	1.9%	58.8%	39.3%
Urban Fire Companies	2.3%	44.3%	53.4%
Small Companies	1.8%	56.6%	41.6%
Medium-Size Companies	1.6%	55.9%	42.4%
Large Companies	2.9%	38.6%	58.5%

	Small Companies (n=308)	Medium-Size Companies (n=254)	Large Companies (n=318)	Total (n=880)
No Inactive Members	16.2%	11.0%	9.1%	12.2%
1 to 4 Inactive Members	43.5%	46.5%	39.0%	42.7%
5 to 9 Inactive Members	25.3%	29.5%	28.9%	27.8%
10 or More Inactive Members	14.9%	13.0%	23.0%	17.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Median # Inactive Members	4.0	4.0	5.0	4.0
Mean # Inactive Members	4.6	4.5	6.1	5.1

these top three reasons by the size of the company, its location, or its budget.

- Table 11 on the previous page shows that 50 percent of respondents use only informal recruiting methods, such as word-of-mouth, family and friends, social club or auxiliary, and fire police. Approximately 2 percent use only formal methods, such as paid advertisements, newsletters/flyers, open houses, and presentations at local schools and businesses. The remaining 48 percent use a combination of the two.

- For fire companies using only informal or formal networks, both experienced a median number five new members over the past two years. Companies using both informal and formal methods were able to recruit a median number of seven new members.

Retention

- As shown in Table 12, over the past two years, four was the median number of people who became inactive (this may include leaving the fire company). More than 51 percent of the large companies lost five or more members compared to 40 percent of the small companies. Those losing 10 or more members were primarily large urban companies.

- More than 12 percent of the companies reported that no members became inactive. These companies were primarily small (47 percent) and almost evenly divided between rural and urban areas. Half (50 percent) of these companies had a first due area of just one municipality and most (62 percent) had operating budgets under \$50,000.

- Table 13 looks at reasons for being inactive. Sixty-three percent of fire chiefs attributed the loss in membership to the member moving out of the area. Other top reasons include job/employment commitments (51percent) and lack of interest (42percent). Less than 12 percent cited training requirements, illness or disability as reasons.

Change In Membership

- Over the past two years, 60 percent of fire companies gained members, approximately 27 percent lost members and 13 percent reported no change. (See Figure 3.)

- As Table 14 illustrates, small companies had no change in the number of members. These companies reported a median gain and loss of four members. Medium and large companies had a gain in membership, reporting two and three more members, respectively. Overall, fire companies gained one member. Regionally, there was no major distinction in membership gains or losses.

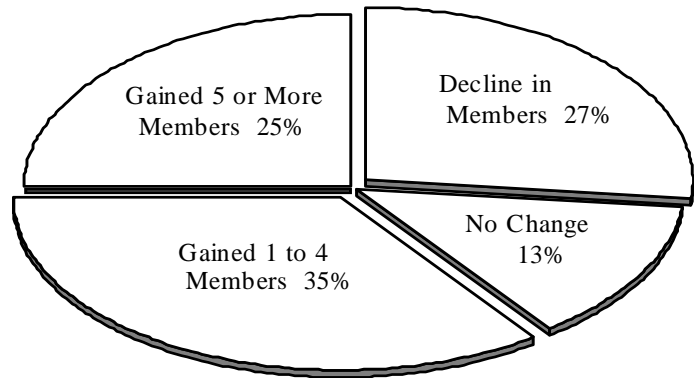
	Total (n=781)
Moved Away from Area	63.0%
Job / Employment Commitments	50.7%
Lack of Interest	41.7%
Family Commitments	41.6%
Personality Conflicts	37.6%
Retirement / Old Age	33.5%
School or College	23.7%
Disagreement with Leadership	22.8%
Expulsion	16.6%
Disliked Activities / Training	11.9%
Illness or Disability	8.6%
Other Reason	5.2%

Total does not add up to 100 percent because of multiple responses.

- Table 15, on page 10, profiles fire company membership losses and gains. Those experiencing a large increase in members reported a net median gain of seven members. These are primarily large fire companies (over 20 members who regularly respond to calls), predominantly located in urban areas (65 percent) and most (52 percent) having first-due areas with a population greater than 5,000.

- In contrast, companies that lost members had a median net loss of three members. As Table 15 shows, these companies have less than 14 members regularly responding to calls, serve a smaller population and have smaller budgets. Forty-eight percent of these fire chiefs reported that they were unable to respond to calls during the past two years. Interestingly, nearly 30 percent of the chiefs said that consolidation has been considered or discussed.

FIGURE 3
Net Change in Fire Company Membership



Opinions about Fire Company Issues and Recruitment/Retention Strategies

- The two most important issues identified by 77 percent of all fire companies are recruiting new members and retaining current members. The third most important issue was funding-raising, with over 66 percent citing it. (See Table 16 on page 11.)

- Upgrading fire apparatuses and equipment was also considered a very important issue to about 47 percent of the companies. Some issues that were not considered as very important by the majority of chiefs were mandatory training (39 percent) and conflicts between young and older members (12 percent.)

- More than 70 percent of the fire chiefs believe the state should play a more active role in helping companies recruit

and retain members. Nearly 77 percent strongly agreed that the state should fund public awareness campaigns to encourage people to volunteer for the fire service. A similar percentage (75 percent) also strongly agreed that volunteer firefighters should receive tuition reductions for themselves and family members to attend Pennsylvania community colleges and universities.

- More than 70 percent of the fire chiefs strongly agreed that, as a retention strategy, volunteer firefighters should be able to participate in local or state government pension programs. This percentage remained constant regardless of the size of the company, whether it lost or gained members, or any other indicator.

TABLE 14
Change in Membership by Company Size

	Small Companies (n=308)	Medium-Size Companies (n=254)	Large Companies (n=318)	Total (n=880)
Median # New Members	4	6	8	5
Median # Members who left	4	4	5	4
Net Change in Members	0	+2	+3	+1
Loss in Membership	37.0%	23.2%	19.8%	26.8%
No Change in Number of Members	18.2%	11.8%	9.4%	13.2%
Gained 1-4 Members	33.8%	40.6%	32.4%	35.2%
Gained 5+ Members	11.0%	24.4%	38.4%	24.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

TABLE 15
Profile of Fire Companies and Membership by Change in Number of Members

	Lost Members (n=233)	No Change in Members (n=117)	Gained 1 to 4 Members (n=306)	Gained 5+ Members (n=214)
Change in Membership per Company				
Median # New Members	4	3	5	10
Median # Members who left	7	3	3	3
Net Change in Members	-3	0	+2	+7
Median Number of Current Members per Company				
Members	43	40	45	70
Active Members	20	20	25	30
Members Who Regularly Respond to Calls	14	14	15	20
Age Cohorts				
Under 18 Years Old	5.7%	6.5%	7.0%	8.6%
18 to 30 Years Old	32.1%	28.7%	29.9%	31.0%
31 to 40 Years Old	31.0%	30.9%	29.3%	30.1%
41 Years Old & Older	31.2%	33.8%	33.9%	30.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Females as % of Active Members	8.9%	8.8%	7.7%	9.5%
Company Profile				
Located in Rural County	33.6%	45.7%	39.7%	34.9%
First Due Area Greater than 25 Square Miles	23.7%	23.1%	30.5%	32.3%
Less than 2,500 Population in First Due Area	18.5%	33.6%	26.4%	20.2%
Population Increase in the Past 5 Years	56.1%	41.9%	62.3%	63.5%
Operating Budgets Under \$50,000	48.5%	58.7%	46.4%	38.3%
Discussed or Considered Consolidation within the Past 2 Years	29.5%	19.0%	18.0%	20.6%
Unable to Respond to 1 or More Calls in the Past 2 Years	47.9%	36.5%	32.9%	34.9%
Unable to Respond to 11 or More Call in Past 2 Years	16.8%	28.2%	13.1%	20.3%
Responding to More than 200 Fire Calls	15.2%	9.8%	10.4%	17.7%

TABLE 16
Opinions on Recruitment & Retention

Indicated the Following Issues Were “Very Important”	Small Companies (n=308)	Medium-Size Companies (n=254)	Large Companies (n=318)	Total (n=880)
Recruiting New Members	80.8%	78.2%	72.2%	76.9%
Retaining Current Members	79.8%	79.2%	75.9%	78.2%
Mandatory Training for All Members	40.7%	40.0%	36.8%	39.1%
Conflicts Between Older & Younger Members	12.8%	14.9%	9.9%	12.3%
Fundraising	68.3%	68.8%	61.7%	66.1%
Upgrading Apparatus in Next 2 Years	44.6%	55.8%	44.9%	47.9%
Upgrading Equipment in Next 2 Years	43.6%	53.8%	45.5%	47.2%
Indicated “Strongly Agree” with the Following Statements				
Volunteer firefighters should be able to participate in local or state government pension programs	71.8%	71.5%	67.6%	70.2%
Volunteer firefighters should be able to receive tuition reductions for themselves and family members to attend PA community colleges and universities	75.6%	74.8%	74.0%	74.8%
The state should fund public awareness campaigns to encourage people to volunteer for the fire service	78.2%	79.9%	72.1%	76.5%

Summary

The survey responses presented in this report can be useful for continuing an informed discussion about Pennsylvania’s volunteer fire companies. Clearly, there are indications that fire companies have met with some success in recruiting and retaining volunteer membership. Sixty percent of the respondents reported experiencing a net gain in members over the past two years. And the reasons for participation are heartening - the top two reasons were the desire to perform community service and the desire to be a firefighter. Each of these motives was cited by almost 60 percent of chiefs as a primary motivating factor for membership. It is also encouraging that the reasons for leaving a company were mainly the result of someone moving from the area or employment commitments.

These statistics, though, should not mask the reality that issues of major concern exist for our statewide firefighting community. Forty percent of respondents reported no net gain in members. These companies represent a diverse group in terms of region, company size, budget, and service area. Because of these differences, the issues of recruitment and retention will not be resolved easily. Clearly, a “one-size-fits-

all” approach to helping our firefighting companies build and maintain membership may not work.

While membership has grown for some companies, the question of how many members are needed to provide sufficient service, though not addressed in this survey, has merit for future study. One indicator that the current level may be insufficient is that 40 percent of all chiefs reported their companies were unable to respond to calls over the past two years.

To increase their ranks and to reward volunteers for their service, fire chiefs are looking to state government for help. The majority of chiefs (more than 92 percent) agree that the establishment of state sponsored incentives would help in the recruitment and retention of firefighters. Among the specific activities mentioned is a state-funded public awareness campaign to encourage people to volunteer for the fire service.

Ironically, the tragic events of September 11, 2001 will no doubt go a long way to heighten public awareness of the role of firefighters and emergency workers.

Another state sponsored recruitment and retention

incentive fire chiefs would like to see is college tuition reduction for firefighters and family members.

Currently, state law (Act 129 of 1998) provides free tuition at state-owned and state-related universities and community colleges for the children of firefighters killed while on duty.

The third recruitment and retention incentive fire chiefs would like to see is the ability of volunteer firefighters to participate in local or state government pension programs. Currently, most, if not all, paid firefighters are enrolled in a pension program, and more than 70 percent of the survey respondents "strongly agree" that volunteers should share in this benefit.

In the open-ended portion of the survey, many fire chiefs identified other methods for recruiting and retaining firefighters. Among the more common suggestions were to provide:

- free vehicle registration;
- income tax incentives;
- state funded health care benefits;
- training for chiefs on fire company management and personnel issues; and
- hiring preferences for firefighters similar to veteran preferences.

A fact to be considered in addressing these responses is that expansion of any of these benefits will come at a cost that must be measured, in light of economic conditions. Additional study and analysis is needed to identify specific strategies that will have the greatest impact on fire company recruitment and retention. Successful strategies, however, will not ensure the provision of fire and emergency services to a community. It is in this area that discussion and resolution may be most effective.

As this survey shows, the issues are many and multi-faceted. Given the heightened public awareness of our firefighting community, there may be no better time and opportunity to identify and investigate the best method(s) for helping fire companies meet their staffing and operation challenges of the 21st Century.

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