



Develop a Recruitment and Retention Plan

Note: The following is an outline of different factors that an agency may want to consider in developing a recruitment and retention plan. None of the elements listed below are “required” components of a recruitment and retention plan.

Get the Most Out of Existing Staff

Are there volunteers on your department roster who are members but aren’t very active? If you can get these people reengaged with the department it will be much easier and cheaper than having to go out and recruit, train, and equip new volunteers.

Some departments use benefits to encourage more active participation. Offering even relatively small incentives for members who maintain a minimum level of activity can boost participation in training, emergency response or other department functions. Direct and indirect financial incentives may be helpful. Examples include:

- Direct
 - Retirement and Pension Plans (LOSAP)
 - Pay per Call or Per Hour
 - Reimbursement
 - Tax Exemptions and Deductions
 - Health Insurance
 - Tuition Assistance
 - Seasonal Bonus
 - Local Business Discounts
 - Health Club Memberships

- Indirect
 - Death and Disability Coverage
 - Accident and Sickness Coverage
 - On-Duty Injury and Hospitalization
 - Line-of-Duty Death and Disability Benefits
 - Liability Coverage
 - Uniform and Departmental Paraphernalia
 - Employee Assistance Programs
 - Substance Abuse Counseling
 - Assistance from Chaplains
 - Family Counseling
 - Status Circles/Peer Counseling
 - Leaves of Absence

Another strategy for maximizing your existing volunteers is to establish a schedule when personnel are expected to respond. Even if members aren't able or willing to be very active, if you know that you can count on them to respond during set "shifts" they can add to your department's staffing capacity. Establishing shifts also gives volunteers the ability to maximize their schedules – a welcome benefit for busy individuals who want to volunteer but have other commitments that need consideration.

Reduce Staff Turnover

Another low-cost way to increase staffing is to improve retention. This goes hand-in-hand with getting the most out of existing staff. The volunteers who are the most likely to quit are typically less active, and the strategies for encouraging retention often mirror those for getting members to be more active.

One of the most important ways to maximize staff retention is to make volunteers feel like stakeholders in the department. Many departments develop retention plans using feedback from members. This ensures that the department gets the most bang for their buck if they provide incentives, and it also demonstrates to volunteers that their views are valued.

Recruit Additional Staff

If your department is maximizing existing volunteers and still has unmet staffing needs, you need to recruit more volunteers. Even if you have enough volunteers at the moment, developing a recruitment plan is still a good idea in case you experience attrition or your call volume increases.

To start with, identify your pool of potential volunteers. Mostly these are people who live in or very near to your response area. One of the biggest recruitment challenges that volunteer agencies face is that they are often located in rural areas that have small population bases. Many of these communities are aging, as younger people move away to find work. Particularly in communities with a smaller pool of potential volunteers, it is critical that departments maximize available human resources.

The make-up of your department should ideally reflect the make-up of your community. Strive to create a diverse and inclusive environment to expand your recruiting pool. Target your recruitment efforts to attract certain populations and have the proper SOPs/SOGs in place to help ensure a positive environment.

There are a number of existing resources to help departments recruit new personnel. Agencies that register with the NVFC's free [Make Me A Firefighter](#) campaign gain access to customizable recruitment tools and strategies and can post volunteer opportunities for prospective volunteers. Potential volunteers are then able to connect directly with your department through <http://MakeMeAFirefighter.org>. The NVFC also offers a variety of [resources](#) and [online training](#) to assist departments in recruiting and retaining volunteers.

Many state-level volunteer firefighter associations have their own recruitment campaigns funded by Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response (SAFER) grants. [Awarded states](#) may have resources available to assist your department.

Many agencies are hiring or appointing a designated recruitment and retention coordinator, to oversee these activities. [SAFER grants](#) can be used for this purpose.