

# **Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention Research Report**

**Released May 2026**



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# Executive Summary

## Research Goals

Research was conducted to gather insights to inform the development of recruitment and retention resources for volunteer firefighters and their departments across the country.

Specifically, the research aimed to learn about prevalent barriers and facilitators to becoming a volunteer firefighter for the general population and to identify priority audiences that have higher potential for recruitment to inform recruitment efforts. Further, the research aimed to identify key barriers and facilitators to continued volunteering for current volunteers to inform retention efforts.

## Methodology

Four phases of research were conducted to address the research objectives:

- Two phases of recruitment research included:
  - An online survey with general population participants who expressed at least some interest in becoming a volunteer firefighter.
  - Online focus groups with general population participants of key audiences interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter.
- Two phases of retention research included:
  - An online survey of current volunteer firefighters.
  - Online focus groups with former volunteer firefighters who left the service.

## Key Findings

### Recruitment

People in the general population who are somewhat or very interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter see themselves as the kind of person who is passionate about helping their community. These audiences seek clarity on the time investment that is required of them as a volunteer and what they can expect their day-to-day tasks to look like when deciding whether they will join the fire service. They also question and in many cases doubt their ability to cope with the emotional distress or perform the physically demanding tasks that are associated with being a volunteer firefighter.

## Retention

The culture of the fire department is a major driver of whether a volunteer firefighter remains in the fire service or decides to leave. Volunteers want to serve in a department where they are valued and supported – allowing them to focus on building meaningful relationships within the department and carrying out their passion for helping people within the community. Serving in an unsupportive department – with siloed cliques, lack of recognition, disrespect towards women and racial/ethnic minorities, unclear expectations about their role, or few opportunities to build skills and advance in the department – can cause feelings of burnout and indifference that can override the volunteers' initial reasons for joining the service, ultimately leading to a volunteer wanting to leave the service.

Both current and former volunteers suggest interventions that hold leadership to an external standard to combat the outdated culture and practices within fire departments and create opportunities for newer volunteers to rise into leadership roles, as this would have a positive impact on retention and build more trust between leadership and volunteers.

Interventions that prioritize social and emotional support – through mentorship programs at the department and activities that engage firefighter families – have the potential to improve retention by building networks for volunteers to learn from one another and meld different aspects of their lives together to reduce strain on personal relationships.

## **Key Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this research, the following key strategies are recommended for future recruitment and retention communications and interventions:

- Develop messaging that incorporates sentimental and practical information that resonates with potential recruits – including the unexpected benefits that contribute to lifelong learning and fulfillment.
- Develop materials and messaging that give potential recruits an idea of what to expect from training and volunteering, including examples of the non-operational tasks that are accessible to those with lower perceptions of their physical strength and abilities.
- Prioritize retention interventions that help to create social support and flexibility in scheduling current volunteers to support their lives both within and outside the fire department.
- Conduct regular assessments of volunteers to determine improvements and pain points in retention in fire departments across the county.

# Introduction

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) is committed to ensuring that volunteer fire departments around the country have a dedicated workforce of volunteer firefighters and emergency responders. Doing so ensures the communities these fire departments serve have improved quality fire and rescue services and lower risk adverse outcomes during emergencies.

To strengthen the volunteer fire service, the NVFC regularly conducts research with the general public and volunteer firefighters to inform communications and other resources to support effective recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

As such, research was conducted to answer the following questions related to recruitment and retention:

- What is the type of person who expresses at least some interest in becoming a firefighter?
- What are the reasons that individuals might want to volunteer to be a firefighter? What intrigues them?
- What are the primary reasons people don't volunteer or don't want to volunteer? Do people understand that anyone can volunteer?
- Are there sub-groups of the population who express interest who have not typically been the target of recruitment efforts in the past?
- Are people aware their local fire department is in need of volunteers?
- What types of individuals are more likely to continue/quit? What type of station environments facilitate continued volunteering?

## Methodology

### Overview of Methodology

Four phases of research were conducted to address the research objectives:

- Two phases of recruitment research included:
  - An online survey with general population participants who expressed at least some interest in becoming a volunteer firefighter.
  - Online focus groups with general population participants of key audiences interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter.
- Two phases of retention research included:
  - An online survey of current volunteer firefighters.
  - Online focus groups with former volunteer firefighters who left the service.

# Recruitment Research Methodology

## Survey with the General Population

A total of 1,249 participants aged 18 and older completed the survey. The research team worked with a third-party survey vendor to disseminate the survey to their national online panel of participants to recruit a sample of respondents whose characteristics matched census data, with an oversample of individuals who express at least some interest in volunteering as a firefighter (see Appendix A for a full sample description).

The survey was fielded May 10 to May 17, 2024. The questions in the survey measured respondents':

- General interest in volunteering
- Knowledge of volunteer opportunities in the community
- Perceived attributes and roles of a firefighter
- Interest in becoming a firefighter
- Demographic characteristics

The data was analyzed to identify subgroups of the population who express interest in becoming a volunteer firefighter who have not typically been the target of recruitment efforts in the past. Focus groups would then be conducted with these identified subgroups to gain deeper insight. Findings from the recruitment survey included within the report are statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$  (see Appendix C for complete summary of statistical findings).

Based on the survey results, females and Black/African American adults demonstrated the greatest opportunity for recruitment – these audiences reported obstacles to volunteering that are within the NVFC's and departments' ability to influence through recruitment messaging.

Significantly more female survey respondents reported being motivated to become a volunteer firefighter because of their desire to learn new skills and help others. However, a lack of knowledge about what being a volunteer firefighter entails, including the time commitment involved, were major obstacles to becoming a volunteer firefighter. Black/African American survey respondents were more likely to identify lack of excitement (i.e., having to do limited, repetitive tasks each day) as a primary obstacle to joining and reported a significantly higher interest in having opportunities to preview the volunteer firefighter experience before joining.

The NVFC and departments can tailor their interventions and messaging to address these needs in these populations to give participants a better idea of the volunteer firefighter experience to increase their confidence and understanding about the experience before joining. Further, as underrepresented populations in the fire service, gathering qualitative insights from females and

Black/African American adults would add new and useful information to the literature on barriers and motivators to recruiting new volunteer firefighters.

### **Focus Groups with Population Subgroups**

Six focus groups (three with female participants and three with Black/African American participants) were conducted with a total of 35 participants across the groups. Participants were recruited through a recruiting vendor with an established panel of participants who consented to participate in paid data collection efforts for which they qualify. Participants in all of the six groups expressed at least some interest in volunteering as a firefighter, did not report previous experience as a firefighter, and did not report a rigid work/school schedule or childcare as major obstacles to volunteering.

The three female groups consisted of the following segments:

- Participants who are motivated to volunteer to gain professional experience
- Participants who are motivated to volunteer to help their community
- Participants who report living in a rural/less densely populated region

The three Black/African American groups consisted of the following segments:

- Participants who identify as males
- Participants who identify as females
- Participants who report living in a rural/less densely populated regions

Within these groups, researchers aimed for a diverse representation of age, gender, educational attainment, geography, and employment location (see Appendix A for a full sample description).

The online focus groups were 90 minutes each and consisted of the following topics:

- Current perceptions of being a volunteer firefighter
- Barriers and motivators to becoming a volunteer firefighter
- Recruitment message testing

The groups were recorded and transcribed, and the research team analyzed transcripts to identify the most common themes across groups.

## **Retention Research Methodology**

### **Survey with Current Volunteers**

A total of 1,214 current and former volunteers completed the survey. The online survey was disseminated by the NVFC through their social channels and newsletters. The majority of the sample consisted of current volunteers (n=1,169), 52% of whom reported their primary roles as leadership positions (i.e., chief, assistant chief, or line officer) and 48% of whom reported their

primary roles as non-leadership positions (i.e., safety officer, training officer, volunteer firefighter, volunteer firefighter/EMS provider, volunteer EMS provider). Respondents who reported their role as a president or trustee or a non-operational role or a former volunteer who left the service more than five years ago were terminated from the survey; former volunteers who left the service within the last five years were invited to take the survey (see Appendix A for a full sample description).

The survey was fielded from July 23 to August 5, 2024. The questions in the survey measured respondents’:

- Experiences thinking about switching departments or leaving the fire service entirely and their reasons for doing so
- Reactions to potential retention interventions
- General demographic characteristics and firefighter-specific characteristics (i.e., years as a firefighter, type of department, frequency of volunteering)

The data was analyzed to summarize current volunteers’ thoughts around leaving the fire service or switching departments and to learn the most prevalent reasons for these considerations and the interventions that might be most impactful in promoting retention. Findings from the retention survey included within the report are statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$  (see Appendix C for complete summary of statistical findings).

### **Focus Groups with Former Volunteers**

Six focus groups were conducted with a total of 35 participants across the groups. Participants were recruited by the NVFC, who shared a screening questionnaire out to their network through their social channels and newsletters. Upon reviewing the questionnaire respondents, the research team prioritized scheduling former volunteers who left the fire service less than 5 years ago and whose primary reasons for leaving the service were reasons other than retirement or life changes outside of the department’s control.

The selected participants represented the following segments for former volunteers:

- Volunteer-only department leaders
- Volunteer-only department non-leaders with 5 years or less in the fire service
- Volunteer-only department non-leaders with 6 years or more in the fire service
- Volunteer-only department non-leaders who are women
- Combination department leaders
- Combination department non-leaders

Within the groups, researchers aimed for a mix of demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and race/ethnicity (see Appendix A for a full sample description).

The online focus groups were 90 minutes each and covered the following topics:

- Experience being a volunteer in the fire service
- Personal experience leaving the fire service
- Retention in fire departments in general
- Interventions for retention

The groups were recorded and transcribed, and the research team analyzed transcripts to identify the most common themes across groups.

## **Limitations of Methodology**

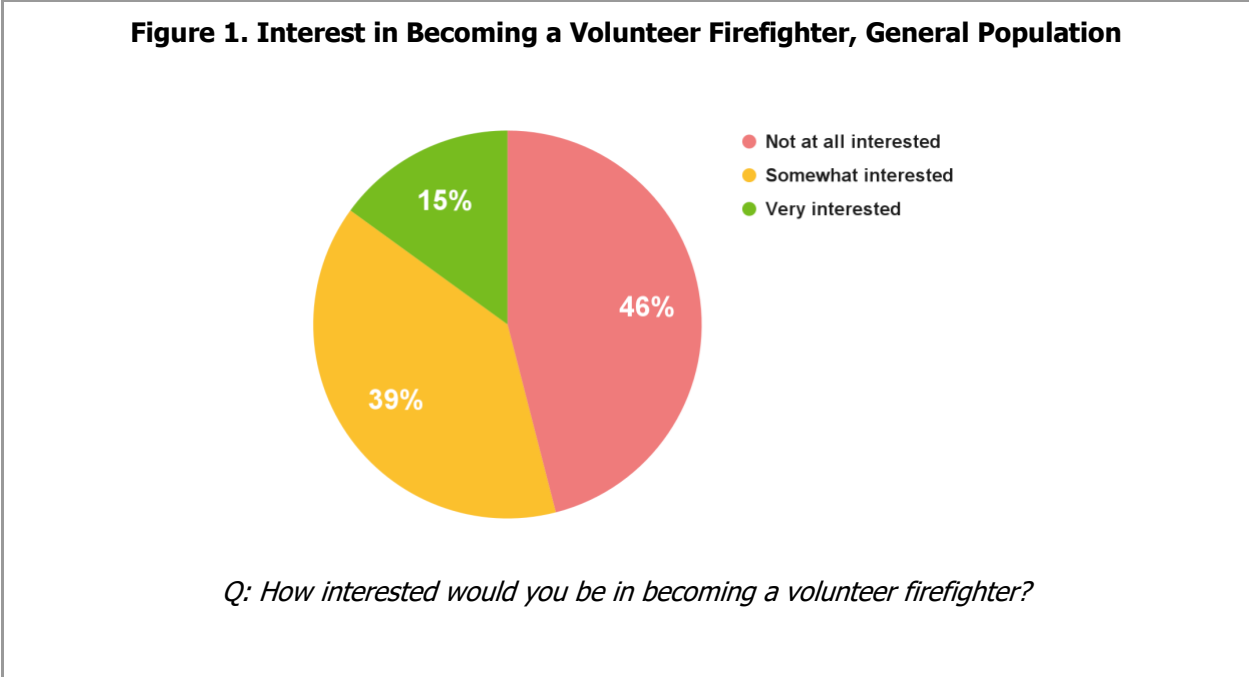
This report includes references to the NVFC's previous research conducted in 2014 and 2020. The methodology between these studies and the current studies differ – including the consolidation of specific barriers and facilitators to retention in the survey with current volunteers into fewer categories than previously used – so the comparisons between the outcomes are not directly comparable. However, they give insight into general trends within fire department culture worth consideration.

Additionally, the report focuses on “volunteer firefighters” rather than other emergency responders, such as emergency medical service (EMS) providers. Across each of the research phases, EMS providers and other first responders who worked in fire departments were invited to provide their feedback; however, the focus on this research is around the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

# Recruitment Research Findings

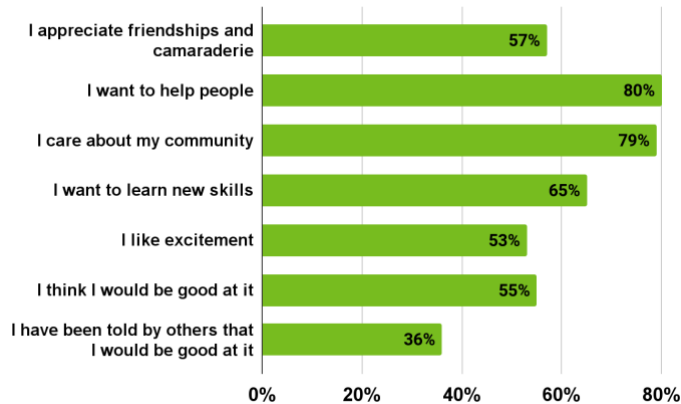
## General population interest in becoming a volunteer firefighter

Just over half of survey respondents (54%) expressed at least some level of interest in volunteering as a firefighter. Younger males with higher income were more likely to express interest in becoming a volunteer firefighter. Race/ethnicity was associated with interest in becoming a firefighter among individuals aged 18-34: White & Hispanic young adults were more likely to be very interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter compared to Black individuals or other races. For all other age groups, race/ethnicity was not a significant factor.



The majority of survey respondents said their reasons for wanting to be a volunteer firefighter were because they wanted to help people (80%) and because they cared about their community (79%). The most prevalent facilitator to being a volunteer firefighter among survey respondents was having the “feeling [that] I am making a difference in my community,” which half of respondents (50%) said would make it easier for them to volunteer.

**Figure 2. Reasons for Interest in Becoming a Volunteer Firefighter, General Population**



Q: What are some reasons why you are interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter?

*% who selected VERY RELEVANT*

*Of respondents who said they were "somewhat" or "very" interested in becoming a firefighter*

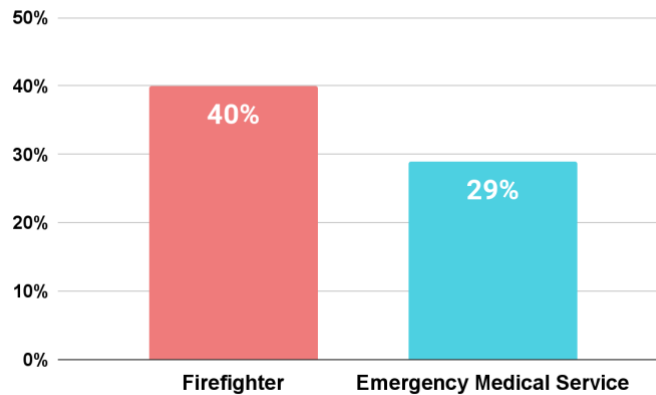
This sentiment was echoed among focus group participants, which consisted of female and Black/African American adults. Participants reported that they wanted to become a volunteer firefighter because they had the desire to give back to their community. This was especially prevalent among people who reported personal experiences where they were impacted by fires, especially among those living in rural or small-town communities.

*"The fire station is not too far from me. It's about four miles from me...all volunteers. I had quite a large medical emergency about four years ago, and I had to be rushed out by ambulance and still to this day, I will see these people [volunteer firefighters] that took me [by] ambulance at the local store or whatever, and they will still ask me, 'how [are you] doing?' It felt like they really actually cared, I guess, and something you could actually be proud of. So, it was always in the back of my mind, like, man, I feel like they really do a lot of things for our community...." -- Female Rural Group*

### Perceived need at their local departments

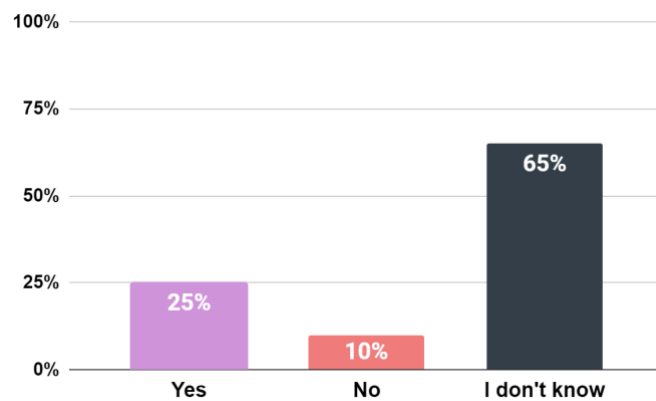
Less than half of survey respondents (40%) correctly indicated that a person can volunteer as a firefighter in their community, and almost two-thirds (65%) were unsure if their local fire department was seeking volunteers.

**Figure 3. Knowledge of Firefighting as a Community Volunteer Role, General Population**



Q: In which of the following roles can someone be a volunteer in the community?

**Figure 4. Knowledge of Volunteer Firefighter Opportunities in the Community, General Population**



Q: Is your local fire department currently seeking volunteers?

Furthermore, focus group participants were generally not confident in identifying whether their local department needed volunteers, and some had a misconception about the role of a

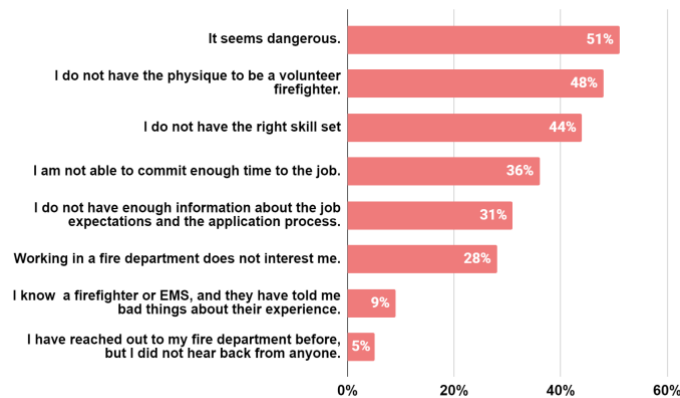
volunteer firefighter in a fire department. Some participants thought that volunteer firefighters do *not* fight fires because they receive less training than paid firefighters. Instead, some participants saw volunteer firefighters serving a support role to paid firefighters who would perform non-operational tasks, such as maintaining the station and equipment in the fire department, so paid firefighters have what is needed when an emergency happens, or doing fire safety education or recruitment outreach in the community.

*"I would say, I mean, we are a volunteer. We're not fully trained but taking a task of being able to be a firefighter. So we volunteer for a reason. We're just helping out. That's not our full-time job. So we would have like the basics to help and assist." – Female Professional Experience Group*

### Worries about being a firefighter

About half of survey respondents said they did not want to become a volunteer firefighter due to the perceived level of danger (51%). Additionally, slightly less than half of respondents said that they did not have the right physique (48%) nor the right skillset (44%) to become a volunteer firefighter. Females, older adults, and those who perceived themselves to have poor health status were more likely to indicate these as their reasons for not wanting to join.

**Figure 4. Reasons for Not Having Interest in Becoming a Firefighter, General Population**



Q: What are some reasons why you are NOT interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter?

*% who selected VERY RELEVANT*

*Of respondents who said they were "somewhat" or "not" interested in becoming a firefighter*

Focus group participants also expressed concerns about the physical dangers associated with being a volunteer firefighter, such as being near fires and potentially becoming seriously injured or losing their lives. Some participants also noted other physical aspects of the role that they were not looking forward to, such as running physical drills and getting dirty.

*"Yeah, not excited to maybe run into injuries, being out there, risking your life. There's always room for error, so not looking forward to hearing about injuries or getting injured yourself." – AA Female Group*

*"[People who know me] would probably imagine me orchestrating things in other manners, but not actually going in like the fires, just because I'm like really not for the heat. I hate the heat. . . . So that, in general, would just kind of be tough for me." – AA Rural Group*

*"I was going to say the actual physical training of it. More like doing the drills, like practicing climbing a wall or something within so many seconds versus I guess doing it like where it's just on the spot [during an emergency response] like you just go ahead and do it because it's a natural reaction. Like that sounds better to me than actually like working or practicing uncertain drills like that you have to do physically." – Female Community Help Group*

The concern around the physique needed to be a volunteer firefighter was a prevalent theme in the groups. While many participants believed they had some of the characteristics of a firefighter – being selfless, compassionate, and caring – they did not think others would think of them as a firefighter because of their physiques not being strong. This sentiment was most prevalent in the female audience focus groups; however, some participants in the male-only Black/African American group also expressed this.

*"Since I have a petite frame, the people who know me would say that I could help out at the back end but not at the front end because I feel that I am not strong enough to help out as a firefighter even though I really want to. . . . I think [being] physically fit is really important for being a firefighter and having a good frame, not a petite one." – Female Professional Experience Group*

*"The only thing I have to do now [before becoming a volunteer firefighter] is basically get myself back in shape. That's one of the main things because I stopped going to the gym about two months ago. So I had to get back in shape. But as far as that, the type of person that I am, I do believe that my peers would say [I could be a volunteer firefighter] because I volunteer. I'm not a volunteer firefighter, but as far as like, [in] my community." – AA Male Group*

More than the physical toll of firefighting, focus group participants – particularly women – expressed concerns about being able to cope with the emotional toll of their duties if they were to become a volunteer firefighter. Respondents wondered how the fire departments would support them if they experienced vicarious trauma from the emergencies to which they would respond or otherwise be exposed, even in non-operational roles. Because of this, many focus

group participants said that being a volunteer firefighter takes someone who is both physically and emotionally strong.

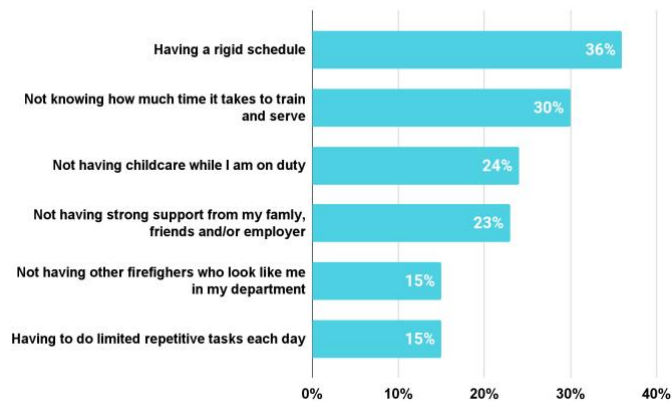
*"I'm pretty empathetic so it tugs at my heartstrings and I'm not gonna forget about these like traumatic situations for a while. So like anything to do with like children or the elderly like especially those situations it might be too much for me one day. I'm not sure I could do it long term." – Female Rural Group*

*"Especially when you're in a smaller area and you know everybody. Whose house are you going to roll up on with somebody that can't breathe, and then you fail to fix them? I feel like that would just fire you." – Female Rural Group*

### **Barriers to joining the fire service**

Having a rigid schedule was the top obstacle to becoming a volunteer firefighter survey respondents mentioned (36%), especially among younger and more educated respondents. Lack of knowledge about how much time it takes to train and serve was the second-highest rated obstacle (30%), and females and younger survey respondents were even more likely to view this knowledge as a very relevant barrier. Black/African American respondents and those with larger families were more likely to view not having childcare while on duty as a very relevant obstacle, while younger respondents saw a lack of support from family/friends as an issue that would make it hard for them to volunteer.

**Figure 5. Barriers to Becoming a Volunteer Firefighter, General Population**



Q: Here are some other things that might make it hard to volunteer as a firefighter. For each statement, select how relevant the statement is to you when thinking about volunteering as a firefighter.

*% who selected VERY RELEVANT*

When screening for focus group participants, the research team prioritized focus group participants who did not report having a rigid work or school schedule or childcare needs as major obstacles to volunteering – making them likelier prospects for volunteering as a firefighter. Despite this, participants still expressed concern about the amount of time they would need to commit to training and ultimately volunteering as a firefighter. Such an obligation would detract from other work, family, and self-care obligations needed to sustain their lifestyles. One of the biggest lingering questions among focus group participants was around the flexibility of training and volunteer shifts, as many did not think they could commit large chunks of time; however, some participants thought shorter stints, such as one to four hours of time, would fit into their schedule if they were available.

*"I am a single mom and have one son. You never know what you're going to have to do on a random Wednesday. I hate to not be able to commit to my eight-hour shift at the fire department. So maybe eventually it'd be easier for me to do, but it's just too hard to. You can't predict fires and emergencies, so it's just too hard." – Female Rural Group*

*"It depends on the time, whatever. If [the department] is like, 'hey, we need you around this time,' it might be a conflict [with] some of my kids. [Being] flexible. That's the big thing for me." – AA Male Group*

*"Having that ability to have that time in your life. . . It could be good fortune, it could be maybe you have money that is set aside, so you're able to take this on. Or it could be that you just worked really hard at your job, and you're able to put less hours in your*

*regular work and hours into [volunteering]. And like, maybe you can take a little bit of sabbatical for work, you've been putting enough aside in savings, that you have that fortune that you can use to take this time." – Female Helping Community Group*

Many focus group participants only had a vague idea of the time it might take to train and actually serve as a volunteer. Most participants' perceptions of what it is to be a firefighter were learned through exposure to media, such as television and movies; only a few participants had friends or family who were firefighters, and these participants generally had more knowledge of the firefighter lifestyle. If this information was readily available to all prospective volunteers, some said it could help them to decide whether they could fit volunteering into their schedule, something they're motivated to do because they want to help and give back to their community.

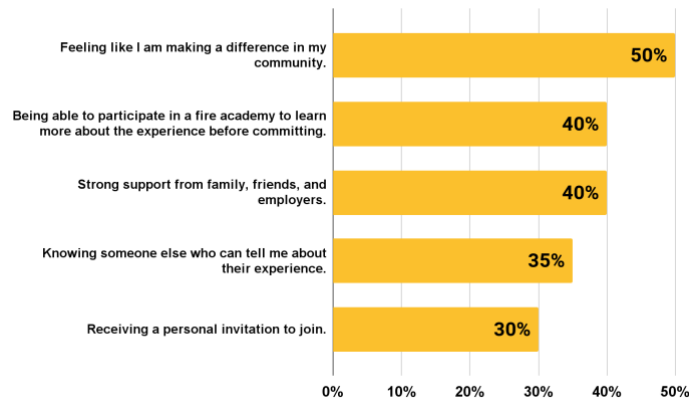
*"I'm not sure if you can only do it on the weekends, or if you do a part-time, but I work full-time, then go to school full-time. So it's like, wait, could I do just one day a week, or is it a minimum amount of hours that I could do?" - Female Community Help Group*

*"Even though I'm not a volunteer firefighter, I do help my neighbors out a lot. Some of them are elderly and can't open the doors around our community. So sometimes I even give my cell phone number, and I'm there to help them out. It's neighbor helping neighbor to help them into the building sometimes." – AA Female Group*

### **Motivators to joining the fire service**

Opportunities to have a positive impact on the community (50%), social support (40%), and the opportunity to sample the firefighter experience (40%) were among survey respondents' most selected motivators to becoming a volunteer firefighter. Younger, healthier respondents were especially motivated by opportunities to make a difference in their community. Survey respondents who were Hispanic, younger, more educated, from larger households, and those who reported they were healthier said that strong support from family, friends, and employers would make it easier for them to become a firefighter. Many participants – specifically males, Black/African Americans, younger, more educated, from larger households, and those who reported they were healthier – said having the opportunity to sample the experience of being a firefighter or knowing someone else who can tell them about the experience would make it easier to become a volunteer firefighter.

**Figure 6. Facilitators to Becoming a Volunteer Firefighter, General Population**



Q: Here are some other things that might make it easier to volunteer as a firefighter. For each statement, select how relevant the statement is to you when thinking about volunteering as a firefighter.

*% who selected VERY RELEVANT*

Focus group participants agreed that knowing more about what their day to day tasks and training would be like would increase their confidence that they would be able to do what was required of them, and insight into information about the time investment required would help respondents to decide whether they could fit volunteering into their schedule because they want to help and give back to their community.

While almost two-thirds (65%) of survey respondents noted that they were interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter to learn new skills, many focus group participants were surprised to learn about the skills they would acquire and the training that they would receive. These skills were an added benefit in addition to the opportunity to help their community. While some participants were excited to learn skills that would help with career advancement, most participants were excited about how the skills one learned as a volunteer firefighter could be transferable to everyday life – lessons to take home and teach to kids, family and friends, and in future situations to help them build their ability to act as a resource in the community.

*"Somebody mentioned learning a lot of things there. It might be tools, or it might be certain components or certain things that you can learn at a firehouse that you could probably take home. Learn about how certain systems work, especially in your house. So I think there's a lot of opportunity." – AA Male Group*

*"I love helping people, especially if there's something that I'm knowledgeable about. Because a lot of people don't know how to put out certain types of fires. So if you learn those skills and those traits during the volunteer firefighting, if you have a neighbor or a*

*friend or anybody that's close to you and they're experiencing some type of a fire, you can be like, 'hey, well, I learned this so I can apply these skills to help them until the fire department gets here.'"* – AA Rural Group

Messaging that communicated that anyone with any physique could volunteer as a firefighter or within a fire department was also motivating. Focus group participants were motivated by learning that there are other ways to help their local fire departments besides fighting fires and other physical tasks, with a few mentioning that being in non-operational roles at the fire department could give them visibility into the firefighting experience.

### **Audience-specific language**

Focus group participants (females and Black/African American) prefer language that highlights their strengths and values as opposed to specific aspects of their identity. During message testing, participants were asked to react to the phrase "people like you" in a message that said, "Each day, people like you save their community by being a volunteer firefighter." Many participants took this phrase to speak to an "average Joe" who is able to help their community, while others thought the phrase referred to a person who was compassionate and selfless.

When probed about tailoring this language to speak to their specific demographic characteristics (e.g., "Women like you" or "Black residents like you"), most participants said the tailored language was less motivating and off-putting. Some participants mentioned that the current culture is generally more sensitive to identity politics, so it is better to have more inclusive language.

*"Someone would [have a problem with the phrase "women like you"]. Someone from the LGBTQ community would find that you're reaching, and you're going beyond them and you're excluding people. . . . So you [should] try to make it general like the statement is right now,. . . . It's not saying, we want only the strongest people. . . . This is saying, you could be scrawny, you could be skinny, you could be weak. We'll take you, come in." – AA Female Group*

*"Putting it like that, you're putting it at just one specific group of people. It would almost feel more personal because of whatever color it may be, but at the same time, it makes the statement more closed. It closes the statement up because it only is directed towards a certain type of person or people." – AA Rural Group*

### **Connections to previous recruitment research**

Between the previous survey conducted in 2014 and the current survey, awareness of local fire departments' need for volunteers increased, with 79% of respondents being unsure of whether their department needed volunteers in 2014 compared to 65% in the current survey. This

finding demonstrates that awareness is improving; however, there is still more progress to be made in ensuring that the general population knows that fire departments are seeking volunteers.

Respondents in the NVFC's 2014 recruitment research indicated similar reasons for being interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter as the current cohort of respondents; qualitative discussion board participants identified their interest in volunteering as a firefighter or first responder arose from a personal connection to fire services that inspired them to want to give back to their community. Participants in 2014 cited examples of exposure to experience of a volunteer firefighter – such as personally knowing someone who volunteers, being involved in an Explorer or juniors' program, or being involved in a related medical or volunteer activity – while the current cohort described their experiences receiving fire services in their community.

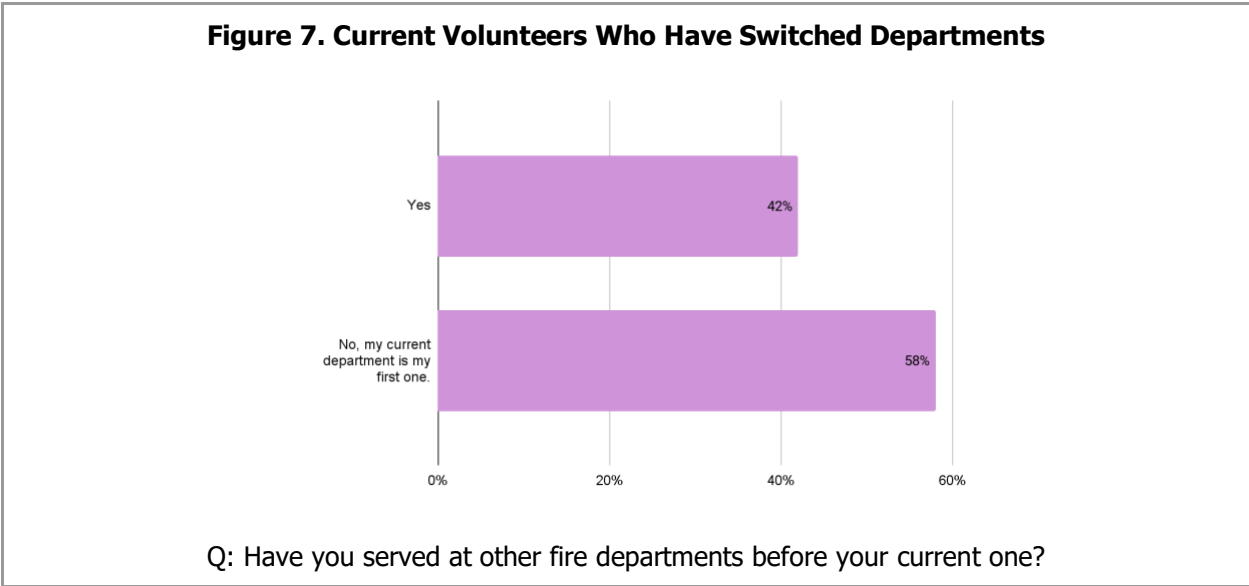
Qualitative discussion board participants who were current volunteers indicated that they were more likely to join after being given a preview of what it was like to be a volunteer – the current cohort of respondents expressed a similar interest in opportunities to learn about the experience before joining to aid their decision-making in whether they would become a volunteer.

There is continued interest in non-operational, non-emergency roles in the fire department. In the quantitative survey conducted in 2014, one in five individuals was interested in volunteering to help volunteer firefighters in a non-emergency role. Female respondents surveyed at this time also expressed a high interest in non-operational roles, specifically fundraising, which was echoed in the current cohort of female focus group participants.

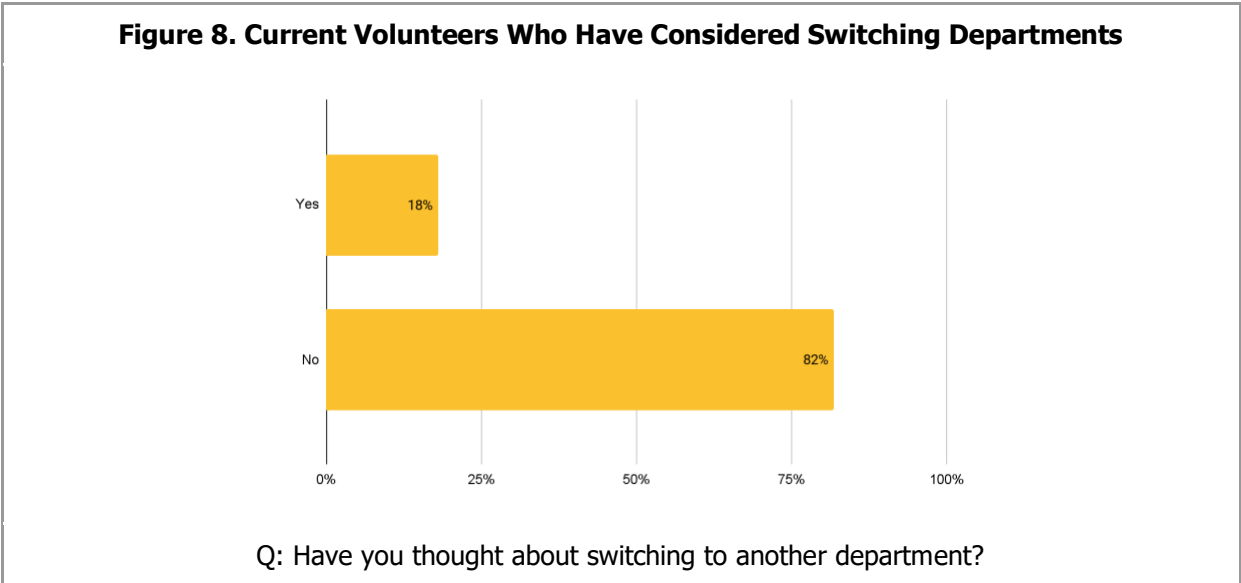
# Retention Research Findings

## Why volunteers think about switching departments or leaving the fire service entirely

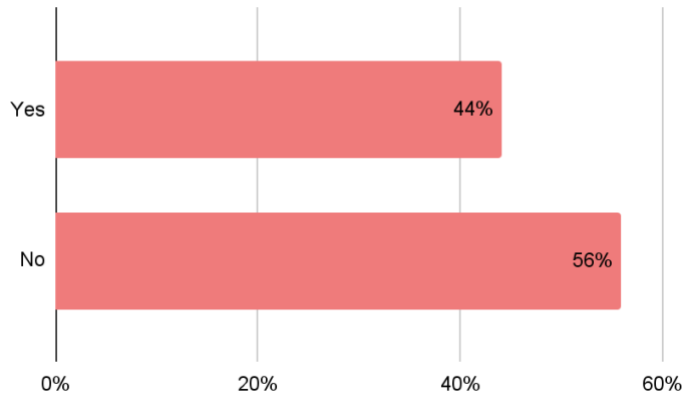
About two in five survey respondents (42%) reported having switched departments at least once. Respondents who reported switching departments were more likely to have more years as a volunteer firefighter, currently belong to a combination department, and identify as male.



More survey respondents have thought about leaving the service than switching departments.



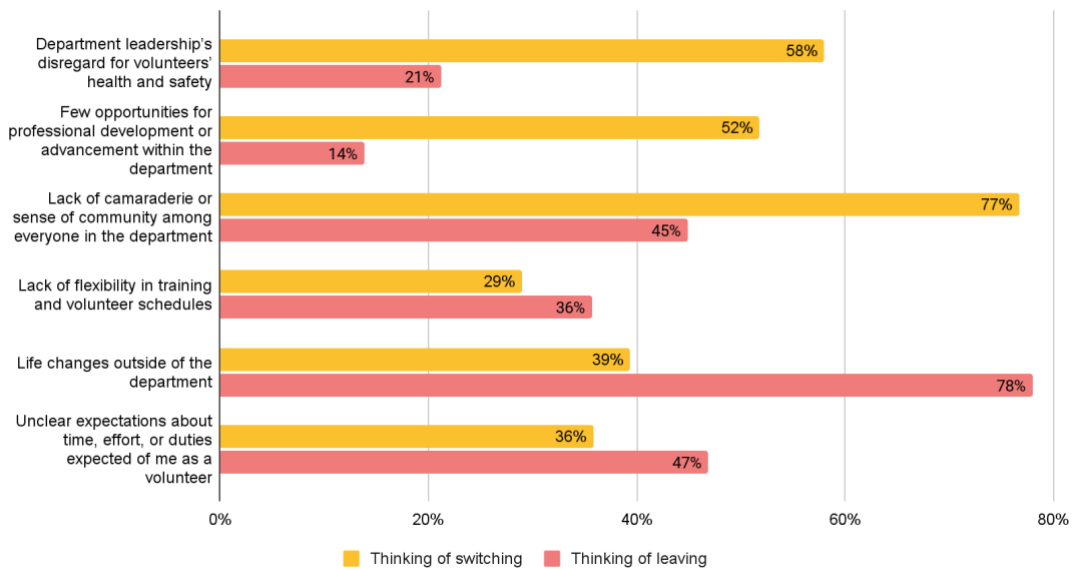
**Figure 9. Current Volunteers Who Have Considered Leaving the Fire Service**



Q: Have you thought about leaving the fire service entirely?

The biggest reason for thinking about leaving the fire service reported by survey respondents was life changes outside of the department's control, such as changing full-time careers or moving to a new community. Other top department-related reasons include lack of camaraderie, health & safety concerns, and unclear expectations about the time, effort, or duties of a volunteer.

**Figure 10. Reasons for Considering Switching or Leaving, Current Volunteers**



Q: Here are some other reasons that someone might think about switching departments [or leaving the fire service entirely]. Select the statements that feel most related to the reasons why you might consider switching departments.

*Thinking of switching = % of respondents who reported thinking about switching*  
*Thinking of leaving = % of respondents who reported thinking about leaving*

Respondents were more likely to report considering switching departments or leaving the fire service entirely if their department did not feel like a welcoming environment that prioritized the enrichment of volunteers. Specifically, respondents were more likely to report thinking about switching or leaving if they felt their department lacked camaraderie or a sense of community among everyone in the department.

There was a difference between leader and non-leader survey respondents' reported reasons for switching departments or leaving the fire service entirely. More leaders than non-leaders said that unclear expectations and life changes outside of the department were key reasons for switching or leaving the service, while more non-leaders said that leadership's disregard for volunteers' health and safety, lack of opportunities for professional development, and lack of camaraderie within the department were key reasons for leaving or switching departments.

When discussing their reasons for leaving the service entirely, many focus group participants discussed the "toxic environments" created by their leadership. Many described belonging to departments with chiefs and other leaders who have been in the service for a long time and were not receptive to the idea that they needed to change their practices – including outdated

humor at the expense of women or racial/ethnic minorities and using masculinity as a reason to disregard certain safety measures. Focus group participants explained how the lack of mutual trust and camaraderie between volunteer firefighters and leadership led to uncomfortable environments and safety concerns during emergency responses.

*"Some of the traditions that we used to have, some of the jokes and some of the attitudes towards women and people of color that used to be okay in these small rural areas, but there seems to be an unwillingness to accept progress in those areas. . . . It got to be unacceptable. . . . There was, I think, a lack of principles and morals, and for those reasons, I just didn't feel like I could be a part of it." – VO Dept. 6 or more years Group*

*"I think for me, firstly, it was a slow burn, having a lot of issues, trying to manage a lot of things at once, but then for me change is a big thing, so I needed something to influence my decision [to leave]. So for me, I think there was a new leader, who I kind of felt was a racist because I'm a person of color, and a lot of my colleagues would tell me [about this person], but I wouldn't believe it until it happened to me, or he did it to me. I felt really bad, and this was a decision I actually planned on making before, so the whole events kind of furthered my decision even more." – VO Dept. 6 or more years Group*

*"It's still a guy's world, and I don't think that a lot of women have the respect, and women are still, sadly, mistreated in some arenas, although there are now full female fighting forces and full shifts of just females. So I think it's changing, but yeah, it's still hard to get a seat at the table." – VO Dept. Women Group*

Some respondents described being denied opportunities for additional training; rather, there were often cliques whose members received more of the opportunities, even when they were not a team player and did not pull their weight within the department. Many former volunteers did not feel that the environment was conducive to their goals of wanting to serve the community because of the culture the department leadership created and perpetuated.

*"There was a particular one or two individuals that were on just a few years longer than me but were about the same age as me. And they got into leadership positions and just made it absolutely miserable. Even asked for, 'can I go to this training? What if I pay for that training? Can I get that?' And just every step of the way, just throwing rocks and sticks and just making it miserable. . . . That's what ultimately, I couldn't take that anymore." – VO Dept. Women Group*

*"I would say actually probably one of the, one of the overriding factors [for leaving] was sort of lack of training. I was newer at it and that was one of the things. . . . [They] kept promising, promising for some classes and some, and some hands-on stuff. But*

*one of these days I'm going to get stuck in a situation where I have to do something, and I don't have the skills and somebody's going to get hurt. So it was kind of one of the reasons I kind of bop out."* – VO Dept. Less than 5 years Group

Many focus group respondents also described the emotional toll of their role as a volunteer firefighter – it often caused a slow burnout from not having a supportive environment to volunteer. The burnout resulted from the stress of wearing multiple hats within their departments, especially among volunteer-only departments, where volunteers had to balance their firefighting tasks – including the tragedies they witnessed during responses – with fundraising and other tasks that muddled the idea of what was expected of them as a volunteer.

Focus group participants also expressed disappointment in the lack of transparency from leadership, in addition to the lack of recognition and limited advancement opportunities. This stress and lack of control of their situation often placed tension on participants' mental health and personal relationships.

*"I was having less time to spend with my family, and my relationship was getting bad."*  
– Combination Dept. Non-leader Group

*"I'd say on top of that, like, continuing increased pressure on paperwork, you know, filing all the reports that you can even be eligible for grants to subsidize [your budget]. . . if you don't have staff to even do paperwork. . . And then when it comes to leadership, like, we had a board, and we had the money to hire someone to, like, at least do part-time, and there was a push among several departments to try to merge and become, like, a county-wide district so that we could consolidate some of those things, and it became all those old-timers, the good old boys that 'this is my turf, don't touch it. This is mine.'" – VO Dept. Leader Group*

*"When I started thinking about leaving the department. . . , me and my wife were having some issues. Apparently for her, she said I didn't bring much money to the table, and having to go through all that and still trying to be a hero was kind of stressful for me."* – VO Dept. 6 or more years Group

*"I feel like access to resources like, therapy for mental health could really help for a lot of people while I was in the department. [For] most of them, their mental health was deteriorating, and they couldn't really speak out because there was no resource."* – Combination Dept. Non-leader

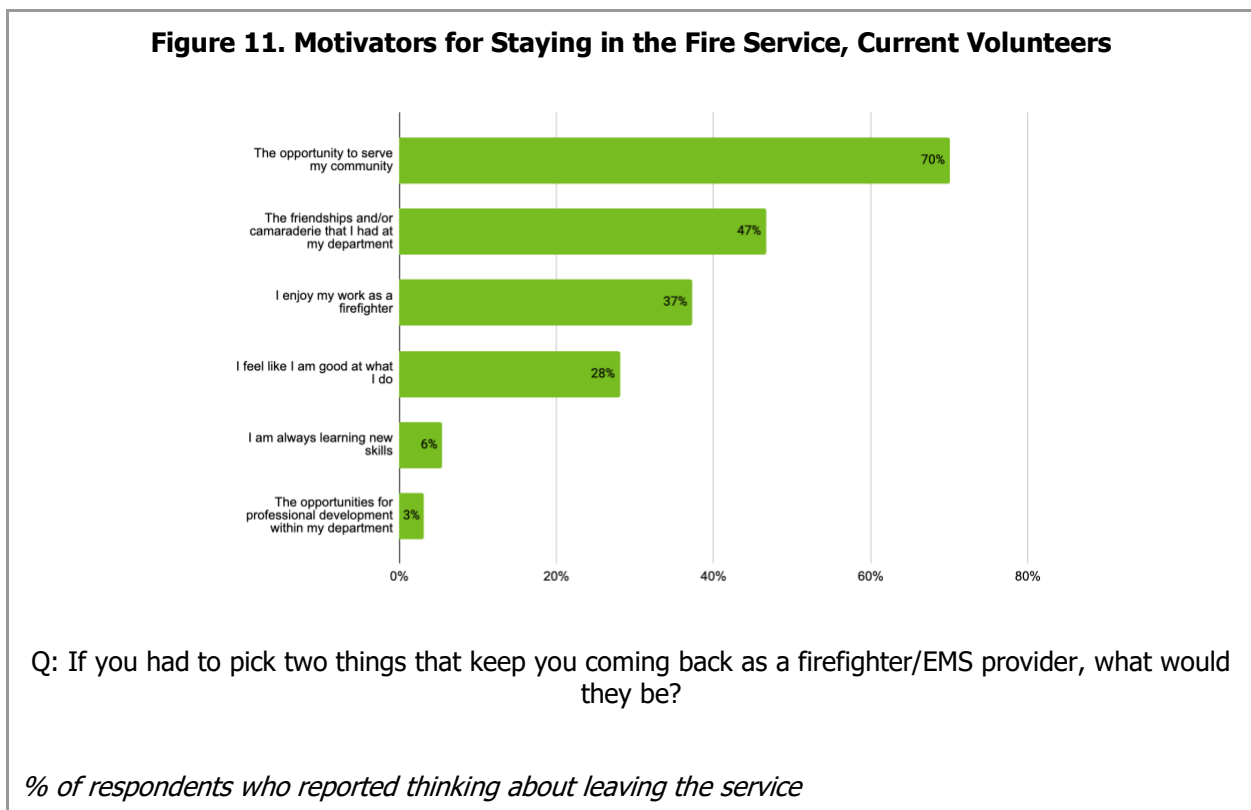
Focus group participants expressed differences in how they think about switching departments versus thinking about leaving the fire service entirely. They explained that volunteers switch departments with the hope that the issues encountered in their previous department were

“one-off” and that the next department would have the environment and tools needed to help them safely do their volunteer work.

*"You kind of see if something's better somewhere else because you do put so much time and energy and effort into learning this stuff and then to just walk away. I just couldn't completely do it if that makes sense." – Combination Dept. Non-leader*

### Why volunteers want to stay in the fire service

Passion for community service and friendships keep current volunteers in the fire service. When survey respondents who reported thinking about leaving the department were asked about the top things that keep them coming back as a firefighter/EMS provider, almost three-quarters of respondents (70%) said the opportunity to serve their community was one of their top reasons. These were followed by the friendships and/or camaraderie that they had at their department (47%) and enjoyment of their work as a firefighter (37%).



Focus group participants shared these same reasons for staying in the fire service as long as they did. Many focus group participants described their mixed feelings about leaving the fire service – they had become accustomed to their life as a firefighter and grappled with not being able to serve their community in the same way after leaving the service; however, these

motivators eventually were not enough to overcome the issues they experienced at their departments (noted above).

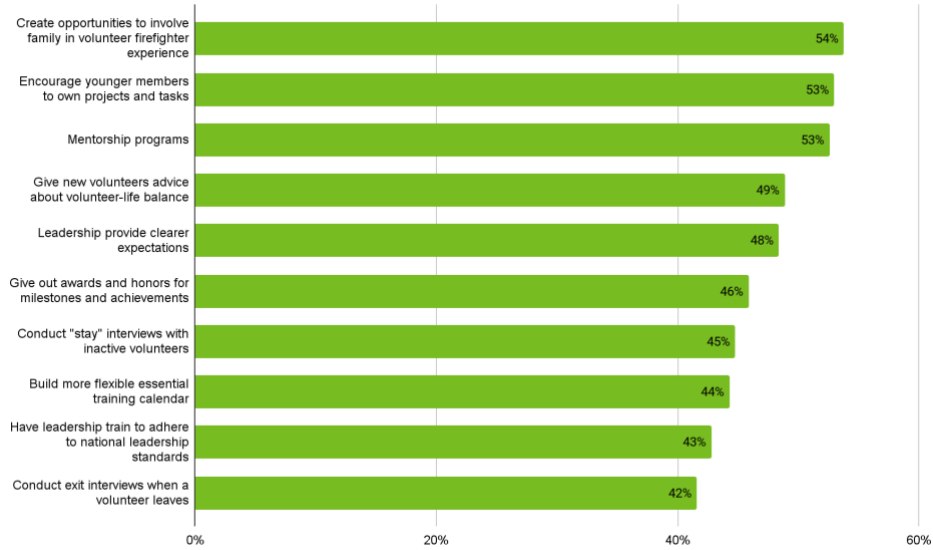
*"It's been a little over two years since I turned in my equipment. . . . I still have days when I put my hand down to my side and I'm like, 'where's my pager?' . . . Just maybe if I found another department, maybe if something else changed, maybe I'll just use it to train other people. But I don't want to do that again." – VO Dept. Leaders*

*"For me, it has not been easy. I miss being able to go out and put a smile on people's faces by being able to save lives and properties. And also, I miss the department, I miss my teammates, I miss some of my leaders that were nice and cool with me. And sometimes I, I think just once or twice, I've given it a thought of actually rejoining, but I still have my doubts. I'm not fully healed. So I want to be sure that I can go back feeling ready in terms of, I'll say mentally." – VO Dept. 6 or more years Group*

### **Most Impactful Retention Interventions**

Interventions that center around social support were most often selected by survey respondents as the ones likely to have a positive impact on retention at their department; specifically, over half of respondents noted that creating opportunities to involve family in the firefighter experience (54%) and creating mentorship programs that pairs new volunteers with more experienced members (53%) would have a positive impact on retention at their departments.

**Figure 12. Most Impactful Retention Interventions, All Current Volunteers**

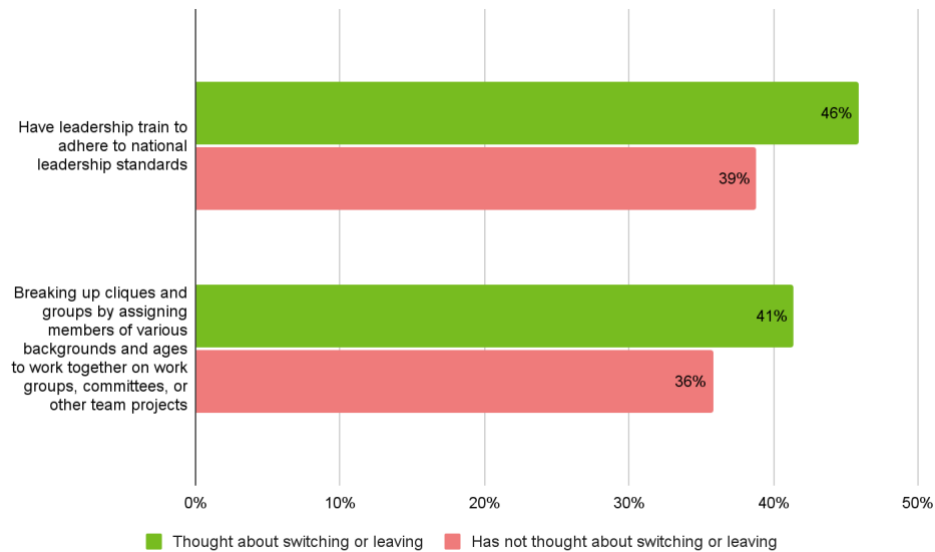


Q: Which, if any, of these do you think could have a positive impact on retention at your department?  
Please select all that apply.

*Chart displays top 10 most selected interventions (see Appendix B for rankings of all interventions).*

Respondents who reported thinking about switching departments or leaving the fire service were more likely than those who were not thinking about switching or leaving to select breaking up cliques and tight-knight groups that were not inclusive or having department leadership actively participate in training to adhere to national leadership standards and core competencies as having a positive impact on retention at their department, underscoring the priority of a supportive social environment.

**Figure 13. Most Impactful Retention Interventions, Volunteers Who Have Considered Switching or Leaving vs. Those Who Have Not**



Q: Which, if any, of these do you think could have a positive impact on retention at your department?  
Please select all that apply.

Further, interventions that help set clearer expectations of volunteers and promote leadership were also seen among survey respondents as having a positive impact on retention in their departments. Combination-department volunteers who reported thinking of switching departments were more likely to report that additional training for department leadership focused specifically on managing combination departments would have a positive impact on retention.

More non-leader survey respondents said that creating mentorship programs would have a positive impact on retention, while more leader survey respondents said that encouraging new and younger members to own specific projects and tasks, giving out awards or honors for milestones and achievement, and creating opportunities to involve family in their experience as a volunteer firefighter would have the most positive impact.

For combination department-specific interventions, most combination department volunteers said holding joint training with career and volunteer staff would have a positive impact (72%), followed by providing department leadership with training focused on managing combination departments (61%), and then mentorships with career members for volunteers who are career-bound (52%).

Focus group participants echoed the need for various forms of social support. Some mentioned that their families often sacrifice more than the firefighters, so creating opportunities to involve families in the department experience – such as family dinners or “ride along” activities – may help reduce the strain caused by time away from family. A few participants suggested limiting family events centered around fundraising so as to not put continued financial pressure on firefighter families to contribute.

*"You as the member of the department are not the only one that's making sacrifices as far as time and emotional sacrifices. If you have a spouse and if you have children, they're making sacrifices too. You're missing countless family activities, family dinners. So, if there could be like monthly social gatherings where the spouses could get together." – VO Women*

*"So, one of the things that we tried to focus on. . . before I left was putting family back in the firehouse. So, we started doing, like, family game nights, or family pitch-in dinners, or things of that sort. So, the intent was to bring the families in, so they could be a part of things, too. Because, and someone who has a family, when your family's not involved, sometimes they just don't understand it, or they, sometimes the families sacrifice more than we do. And we were just trying to bring them and give something back to them. And I think that was one of the programs that actually worked the best in retaining some of our folks." – VO Dept. Leaders*

Former volunteers also supported the creation of mentorship programs with established expectations and clear avenues on how to accomplish goals within the systems in place at the department. This kind of program would also help to foster relationships within the department and increase the sense of community within the department by pairing firefighters with volunteers who might be outside of their usual clique.

*"Creating the mentorship program where you have guys that have experience even though they may be new to that department, but they've got 10 or 15 years with the fire service. Let them share some of that knowledge. Give them the opportunity to prove what they know and help develop that with some of the younger members." – VO Dept. Less than 5 years Group*

Former volunteers mentioned wanting additional compensation for their work in the form of increased stipends as well as non-monetary compensation, such as recognition of their ideas and other contributions. Additionally, support to do their work in the form of opportunities to learn new skills and support to take care of their health and safety which is often impacted by the job (i.e., health insurance, feedback loops to improve systems, access to resources for training). This would also help to train a new cohort of leadership to contribute new ideas and leaders to their departments.

The following tables (Table 1 and Table 2) summarize the individual- and department-level characteristics that impact retention of volunteer firefighters as described by focus group participants.

**Table 1. Individual Characteristics that Impact Retention**

Individuals who are easier to retain	Individuals who are harder to retain
Are passionate about helping their community	Have a demanding job or family obligations
Have flexible, adaptable schedules to commit time to volunteering	Look for recognition or glory from department leadership
Have coping skills and support to promote emotional resilience	Have less confidence in their ability to cope with high-stress situations
Are financially stable	

**Table 2. Department Characteristics that Impact Retention**

Department practices that are good for retention	Department practices that are bad for retention
Mentorship and genuine interest in others' growth and wellbeing	Disconnect / lack of trust between volunteers and leadership
Families included in fire department culture (i.e. family dinners, game nights)	Lack of camaraderie or sense of community among volunteers – includes department having cliques
Encouragement and access to flexible training opportunities	Lack of systems in place to support the emotional wellbeing of volunteers
Opportunities for promotion into leadership	Lack of flexibility in training / volunteer opportunities
Recognition for work and contributions to the department	

### Connections to previous retention research

Many insights from 2020 remain true in the current study. Similar to the current cohort of respondents, nearly half of all volunteers in 2020 reported having considered leaving the fire service at some point. The factors that influence retention, however, have changed a bit as we

look at the 2024 data. While flexibility in training requirements and volunteering schedules remain important factors in retention, the 2024 data indicate that department leadership and culture may be more influential when it comes to volunteers choosing to leave the service.

There continues to be a disconnect between leaders' and non-leaders' perceptions of key issues and solutions – more leaders continue to cite unclear expectations about time, effort, or duties expected of volunteers as reasons for leaving the service, while non-leaders continue to cite concerns with the fire department environment (i.e., disregard for volunteers' health and safety, professional development, or sense of belonging) as key reasons for thinking about leaving the fire service.

One thing that remained very consistent is respondents in both the 2020 and 2024 research cohort noted that their desire and sense of responsibility to serve the community helped to keep them in the fire service.

Both 2020 and 2024 respondents endorse the creation of mentorship programs between new volunteers and more experienced members would be a key intervention that would have a positive impact on retention, as it would help to create a sense of community by encouraging interactions and connections that might not happen otherwise due to common clique culture.

A few insights were different in the current research. Slightly fewer survey respondents in 2024 reported conducting exit interviews as a key intervention that would have a positive impact on retention (42%) compared to 2020 (50%). While this sentiment did arise in at least one of the focus groups with former volunteers, it was not a major theme across groups. Further, boredom with their roles and training methods was cited as major themes in why volunteers would leave the service in 2020 that did not arise in 2024, and having officers and senior firefighters encourage volunteers to stay was a motivator that arose in 2020 not in 2024.

# Discussion

## Overview of Recruitment and Retention Findings

### Alignment between recruitment and retention research findings

There are people who are willing to volunteer their time as a volunteer firefighter – they have a true interest in helping to keep their communities safe. In order to fully commit to such volunteer roles, people need to feel respected and supported.

Ideally, departments would give prospective and current volunteers a clear set of expectations around the requirements that are needed as a volunteer, including the time and duty requirements that are expected of them. At a minimum, volunteers want a sense of community, emotional and physical safety, and compensation for, and recognition of, their contributions to the department. This kind of department environment would help make volunteers feel supported enough to continue to pursue their passion for helping through the fire service; otherwise, volunteers might decide to leave the department or the service entirely in pursuit of a better opportunity to help their communities.

These barriers and facilitators to volunteering as a firefighter largely remain the same as they did in previous years. The persistence of these issues suggests that more can be done to improve the current fire department culture to welcome and retain a strong volunteer force.

## Recommendations

### Key Recommendations for Recruitment

- Develop messaging that incorporates both the sentimental and practical information that potential recruits are seeking:
  - Compassionate statement that appeals to the self-standard of being someone who helps the community. For example, “Being a volunteer firefighter is a way to give back and make a difference in your community.”
  - Highlighting the skills – both professional and lifelong – that a person can gain as a result of volunteering. For example, “You will gain valuable skills that you can use in so many parts of your life to keep you and your family safe.”
  - Explain the level and type of time investment required of them. For example, “You need to commit [insert number of hours] per month to train, with flexible online training opportunities available when needed.”
- In messaging, position becoming a volunteer firefighter as the opportunity to gain unexpected benefits, such as:
  - Useful lifelong skills to keep their families and friends safe.

- Opportunities for increased physical activity and improved physical fitness.
- Note that there are various tasks that can be done by anyone of any physique and give examples of those tasks so potential recruits can confidently assess whether the tasks match their interests.
- Create “day in the life” content to help set expectations on what a day as a volunteer firefighter looks like to help give participants a preview of the experience.
- Use imagery, rather than “like you” language, to tailor recruitment materials to attract female and Black/African American audiences.

## **Key Recommendations for Retention**

- Implement interventions at the department leadership level to improve fire department culture and, ultimately, retention.
  - Prioritize interventions that were highly endorsed by leaders to increase the likelihood of adoption. Some examples include:
    - Encouraging new and younger members to own specific projects and tasks.
    - Giving out awards or honors for milestones and achievement.
    - Creating opportunities to involve family in the volunteer firefighter experience.
- Recruit for non-emergency roles to lighten the roles of firefighters who feel overwhelmed by wearing too many hats.
- Invest in social support programs that encourage camaraderie within the department and help volunteers maintain their support networks outside of the department.
  - The NVFC could consider creating a toolkit on how to create effective mentorship programs within the department.
  - Departments can organize low-investment activities that regularly invite families to the department, such as family dinners or game nights.
- Invest in technologies and other resources to provide more flexibility in training and volunteering, such as virtual opportunities where appropriate.
- Conduct brief department-level post-employment surveys to provide ongoing insight into the performance of departments’ retention efforts (see Appendix B for sample instrument).
  - Use survey software that allows for results to be shared with individual departments.
- Continue conducting national surveys at regular intervals to track trends in volunteers’ perceptions of issues and effective interventions in their department.
  - Include questions in the assessments that measure respondents’ perceptions of:
    - Their departments’ current retention efforts – in general and specific key efforts (mentorship programs, involvement in family, leadership changes).

- Most pervasive department culture concerns and the type of person within the department most likely to perpetuate them.

# Appendices

## Appendix A. Respondent Characteristics

### Appendix A1. Recruitment, General Population Survey Respondents

	Survey	US†
<b>Age</b>		
18 - 34	22%	29%
35 - 44	27%	17%
45 - 54	22%	15%
55 & over	28%	39%
<b>Education</b>		
High school or less	44%	38%
Two-year degree	23%	10%
Four-year degree	18%	22%
Graduate degree	9%	13%
<b>Race / Ethnicity</b>		
Black or African American	15%	13%
Hispanic or Latino	7%	19%
White or Caucasian	67%	59%
2 or more races	7%	2%
Other race/ethnicity*	4%	7%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	52%	50%
Male	47%	48%

	Survey	US†
Other gender identity**	1%	3%
<b>Household Income</b>		
Less than \$25,000	21%	14%
\$25k - \$49,999	29%	17%
\$50k - \$74,999	25%	16%
\$75k - \$99,999	12%	12%
\$100,000 or more	13%	41%
<b>Work from Home***</b>		
Always	14%	
Usually	8%	
About half the time	14%	
Seldom	19%	
Never	45%	

Total N=1,249 respondents

\*Includes Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Middle Eastern/N. Africa

\*\*Includes Transgender, I use a different term

\*\*\*Among employed participants

†US Census data

## Appendix A2. Recruitment, General Population Focus Group Participants

	n	%
<b>Age</b>		
18 - 34	16	46%
35 - 44	19	54%
45 - 54	0	0%
55 & over	0	0%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	9	26%
Female	26	74%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Black or African American	23	65%
White or Caucasian	8	23%
Asian	2	6%
Hispanic or Latino	1	3%
Two or more races	1	3%
<b>Area</b>		
Urban	12	34%
Suburban	16	46%
Rural	7	20%

*Total N=35 participants*

### Appendix A3. Retention, Current Volunteer Survey Respondents

	%
<b>Department Type</b>	
Combination department	23%
Volunteer-only department	77%
<b>Primary Role in Department</b>	
Chief	21%
Assistant Chief	10%
Line Officer (Bat. Chief, Captain, Lt)	21%
Safety Officer	3%
Training Officer	4%
Volunteer Firefighter	21%
Volunteer Firefighter/EMS Provider	18%
Volunteer EMS Provider	2%
<b>Years as a Volunteer</b>	
Less than a year	1%
1 to 2 years	4%
3 to 4 years	6%
5 to 6 years	5%
7 to 10 years	7%
11 to 19 years	19%
20 years or more	58%
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	13%
Male	86%

Transgender or another identity	<1%
<b>Neighborhood Density</b>	
All or mostly urban	4%
All or mostly suburban	28%
All or mostly rural	67%
<b>Frequency Volunteering</b>	
Several times a week	80%
Once a week	10%
A couple times a month	8%
Once a month	2%
Less than once a month	1%

*Total N=1,214 respondents*

#### Appendix A4. Retention, Former Volunteer Focus Group Participants

	n	%
<b>Department Type</b>		
Combination department	9	26%
Volunteer-only department	26	74%
<b>Primary Role</b>		
Chief	4	11%
Assistant Chief	2	6%
Line Officer (Bat. Chief, Captain, Lt)	2	6%
Safety Officer	0	0%
Training Officer	0	0%
Volunteer Firefighter	15	43%
Volunteer Firefighter/EMS Provider	9	26%
Volunteer EMS Provider	3	9%
<b>Years as a Volunteer</b>		
Less than a year	0	0%
1 to 2 years	4	11%
3 to 4 years	8	23%
5 to 6 years	5	14%
7 to 10 years	10	29%
11 to 19 years	5	14%
20 years or more	3	9%
<b>Gender</b>		

Female	13	37%
Male	22	63%
Transgender or another identity	0	0%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Black or African American	12	34%
White or Caucasian	12	34%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%
Asian	3	9%
Two or more races*	8	23%

*Total N=35 respondents*

*\*Includes American Indian/Alaska Native, Middle Eastern/N. Africa*

## Appendix B. Additional Retention Data

### Appendix B1. Top Retention Interventions by Perceived Impact Among Current Volunteers (Survey Respondents)

Intervention	Percentage
Creating opportunities to involve family in their experience as a volunteer firefighter	54%
Allowing and encouraging new and younger members to own specific projects and tasks	53%
Creating mentorship programs that pair new volunteers with more experienced members	53%
Providing new volunteers with advice on how to fit volunteering into the rest of their life	49%
Having leadership provide a clearer understanding to new volunteers of what is expected of them – including monthly time commitment, minimum length of service, goals, and responsibilities	48%
Giving out awards or honors when members reach service milestones (1 year, 5 years, 10 years, etc.), mark and achievement, and/or superlatives at the end of the year	46%
Conducting “stay” interviews with volunteers who have lapsed attendance and may be considering leaving the department	45%
Building the essential training calendar around members with less flexibility in their schedule, such as holding it on the days they are available or holding essential training sessions on multiple days	44%
Having department leadership actively participate in training to adhere to national leadership standards and core competencies	43%
Conducting exit interviews when a volunteer leaves the department	42%
Breaking up cliques and groups by assigning members of various backgrounds and ages to work together on work groups, committees, or other team projects	40%
Offering virtual training opportunities when possible	37%
Offering “micro-volunteer” opportunities (1 day or 1 week a month) for those that are unable to commit to traditional volunteer time commitments	34%
Enrolling rising volunteers in an officer candidate course to gain leadership skills and training	32%
Setting up a comment box for anonymous feedback and/or create dedicated “office hours” to provide members a clear opportunity to express their opinions	24%

## **Appendix B2. Retention Interventions by Perceived Impact Among Former Volunteers (Focus Group Participants)**

Focus group participants (former volunteers) were shown the following interventions – which were the top interventions selected in the survey with current volunteers – *after* an unaided discussion about what they thought would be impactful retention interventions.

Here are the interventions ranked from most to least impactful:

1. Creating mentorship programs that pair new volunteers with more experienced members
2. Having leadership provide a clearer understanding to new volunteers of what is expected of them
3. Building the essential training calendar around members with less flexibility in their schedule
4. Allowing and encouraging new and younger members to own specific projects and tasks
5. Creating opportunities to involve family in their experience as a volunteer firefighter
6. Having department leadership actively participate in training to adhere to national standards and core competencies
7. Breaking up cliques and groups by assigning members of various backgrounds and ages to work together on work groups, committees, or other team projects

## Appendix B3. Sample Post-Employment Survey Instrument

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please answer the following questions as candidly as possible.

1. Which of the following best describes your primary reasons for leaving the department?  
Please select all that apply.
  - a. Unclear expectations about time, effort, or duties expected as a volunteer
  - b. Lack of flexibility in training and volunteer schedules
  - c. Few opportunities for professional development or advancement within the department
  - d. Lack of camaraderie or sense of community among everyone in the department.
  - e. Department leadership's disregard for volunteers' health and safety
  - f. Financial constraints that prevent me from volunteering
  - g. Scheduling constraints that prevent me from volunteering
  - h. Moving to a new area
  - i. Retiring from the fire service
  - j. Other conflicts / concerns within the department, please explain: [Open end response]
  - k. Other conflicts / concerns outside of the department, please explain: [Open end response]
2. What did the department do well to retain volunteers at the department? [Open end response]
3. What could the department have done better to retain volunteers at the department? [Open end response]
4. Would you consider rejoining the fire department in the future?
  - a. No
  - b. Yes
5. How long have you been/were you a firefighter or EMS provider?
  - a. Less than a year
  - b. 1 to 5 years
  - c. 6 or more years
6. How long have you been at your current department?
  - a. Less than a year
  - b. 1 to 5 years
  - c. 6 or more years

7. Which of the following best describes your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Transgender
  - d. I use a different term
  - e. Prefer not to answer
  
8. Which of the following best describes your race and/or ethnicity? Please select all that apply.
  - a. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - b. Asian
  - c. Black or African American
  - d. White or Caucasian
  - e. Hispanic or Latino
  - f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - g. Other
  - h. Prefer not to answer

## Appendix C. Complete Statistics Data

The following tables represent the results of the logistic regressions that were conducted to predict which members of the general population would be most interested in volunteering as a firefighter and whether a current volunteer firefighter is thinking about switching departments or leaving the fire service entirely.

A positive B value indicates a positive relationship between the variable that is changing (the independent variable) and the outcome (the dependent variable) (e.g., as X increases, the likelihood of Y also increases); a negative B value indicates a negative relationship (e.g., as X increases, the likelihood of Y decreases).

A p value less than 0.05 indicates that the relationship between the two variables is statistically significant – the observed data is the result of a significant relationship between the two variables rather than occurring by chance. Significant results are highlighted in blue.

### Recruitment Data

#### *Predicting Obstacles to Volunteering*

	Rigid schedule		Not knowing time it will take to train and serve		Not having childcare while on duty	
	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>
Age	<b>-.09</b>	<b>.004</b>	<b>-.07</b>	<b>.029</b>	<b>-.31</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Gender (Female)	.04	.216	<b>.06</b>	<b>.046</b>	.04	.106
Black/African American	.03	.257	.04	.159	<b>.06</b>	<b>.036</b>

Hispanic	.02	.493	-.01	.819	.04	.128
Household Size	.04	.204	.02	.593	<b>.19</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Education Level	<b>.06</b>	<b>.038</b>	.05	.101	.03	.249

***Predicting Obstacles to Volunteering (continued)***

	Not having support from family, friends, employer		Not having other firefighters who look like me		Having limited repetitive tasks each day	
	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>
Age	<b>-.15</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.18</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	-.06	.051
Gender (Female)	.04	.196	.02	.602	-.01	.705
Black/African American	.00	.950	<b>.10</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Hispanic	.01	.771	.04	.121	<b>.07</b>	<b>.019</b>
Household Size	.03	.341	.02	.415	.03	.315
Education Level	.03	.317	<b>.06</b>	<b>.023</b>	-.02	.607

**Predicting What Might Make It Easier to Volunteer**

	Feeling like I am making a difference in my community		Being able to participate in fire academy, try out experience		Strong support from family, friends, employers	
	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>
Age	<b>-.14</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.15</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.21</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Gender (Female)	-.04	.151	<b>-.07</b>	<b>.011</b>	-.03	.259
Black/African American	.05	.068	<b>.08</b>	<b>.007</b>	.05	.103
Hispanic	.05	.094	.01	.674	<b>.06</b>	<b>.039</b>
Household Size	<b>.11</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.11</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.11</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Education Level	<b>.06</b>	<b>.027</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.09</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>

Predicting What Might Make It Easier to Volunteer (continued)

	Knowing someone who can tell me about the experience		Receiving a personal invitation to join	
	B	<i>p</i>	B	<i>p</i>
Age	<b>-.16</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.19</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>

Gender (Female)	-.04	.169	<b>-.18</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Black/African American	.03	.271	.02	.516
Hispanic	.03	.376	<b>.08</b>	<b>.004</b>
Household Size	<b>.08</b>	<b>.005</b>	.03	.346
Education Level	<b>.09</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>.09</b>	<b>.002</b>

## Retention Data

### *Leaders vs. Non-leaders Reasons to Switch or Leave, Significant Results*

	$\chi^2$	df	p
Reason to Switch			
Few opportunities for professional development or advancement within the department	4.063	1	0.044
Reasons to Leave			
Lack of camaraderie or sense of community among everyone in the department. * role2cat dept. role into leader or non-leader	13.733	1	<.001
Department leadership's disregard for volunteers' health and safety	8.389	1	0.004

Life changes outside of the department that make it difficult to continue volunteering (e.g., moving to a new area, new addition to family, etc.)	21.613	1	<.001
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***Leaders vs. Non-leaders Motivators to Stay, Significant Results***

	$\chi^2$	df	p
Creating mentorship programs that pairs new volunteers with more experienced members	4.767	1	0.029
Allowing and encouraging new and younger members to own specific projects and tasks	4.500	1	0.034
Creating opportunities to involve family in their experience as a volunteer firefighter	19.966	1	<.001
Giving out awards or honors when members reach service milestones (1 year, 5 years, 10 years, etc.), mark and achievement, and/or superlatives at the end of the year	12.586	1	<.001

***Predicting Thinking about Switching Departments by Desired Retention Interventions***

	B	p
Years as a Firefighter	-0.089	0.113
Department Type (Volunteer-only department)	-0.087	0.665

Department Neighborhood Density (All or mostly suburban)	0.22	0.624
Department Neighborhood Density (All or mostly rural)	-0.008	0.985
Gender (Female)	0.026	0.912
Primary Role (Leader)	-0.256	0.166
Frequency Volunteering	-0.146	0.17
Race (White)	-0.392	0.256
Having leadership provide a clearer understanding to new volunteers of what is expected of them – including monthly time commitment, minimum length of service, goals, and responsibilities	<b>-0.451</b>	<b>0.021</b>
Creating mentorship programs that pairs new volunteers with more experienced members	-0.146	0.453
Providing new volunteers with advice on how to fit volunteering into the rest of their life	<b>-0.517</b>	<b>0.006</b>
Having department leadership actively participate in training to adhere to national leadership standards and core competencies	<b>0.706</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>
Enrolling rising volunteers in an officer candidate course to gain leadership skills and training	0.369	0.065
Allowing and encouraging new and younger members to own specific projects and tasks	0.081	0.664
<b>Breaking up cliques and groups by assigning members of various backgrounds and ages to work together on work groups, committees, or other team projects</b>	<b>0.694</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>

Creating opportunities to involve family in their experience as a volunteer firefighter	-0.334	0.08
Giving out awards or honors when members reach service milestones (1 year, 5 years, 10 years, etc.), mark and achievement, and/or superlatives at the end of the year	-0.218	0.257
Conducting exit interviews when a volunteer leaves the department	0.387	0.054
Conducting "stay" interviews with volunteers who have lapsed attendance and may be considering leaving the department	0.324	0.108
Setting up a comment box for anonymous feedback and/or create dedicated "office hours" to provide members a clear opportunity to express their opinions	0.117	0.58
Offering "micro-volunteer" opportunities (1 day or 1 week a month) for those that are unable to commit to traditional volunteer time commitments	0.133	0.482
Building the essential training calendar around members with less flexibility in their schedule, such as holding it on the days they are available or holding essential training sessions on multiple days	0.185	0.323
Offering virtual training opportunities when possible	-0.114	0.553

***Predicting Thinking about Switching Departments by Combination-Dept. Intervention***

	B	p
Years as a Firefighter	-0.207	0.072

Department Neighborhood Density (All or mostly suburban)	-0.854	0.196
Department Neighborhood Density (All or mostly rural)	-0.786	0.237
Gender (Female)	0.229	0.6
Primary Role (Leader)	0.055	0.885
Frequency Volunteering	-0.057	0.758
Race (White)	-0.302	0.644
<b>Providing department leadership with training focused on managing combination departments</b>	<b>1.086</b>	<b>0.004</b>
Holding joint trainings with career and volunteer staff	0.412	0.282
Mentorships with career members for volunteers who are career-bound	-0.095	0.8

***Predicting Thinking about Leaving the Department by Barriers to Staying***

	B	p
Department Type (Volunteer-only department)	0.195	0.209
Years as a Firefighter	<b>0.106</b>	<b>0.02</b>
Department Neighborhood Density (All or mostly suburban)	-0.224	0.499
Department Neighborhood Density (All or mostly rural)	0.208	0.514
Primary Role (Leader)	0.042	0.753

Frequency Volunteering	-0.108	0.198
Race (White)	0.237	0.411
Gender (Female)	0.275	0.144
Unclear expectations about time, effort, or duties expected as a volunteer	<b>-0.319</b>	<b>0.015</b>
Lack of flexibility in training and volunteer schedules.	-0.003	0.983
Few opportunities for professional development or advancement within the department	0.065	0.742
Lack of camaraderie or sense of community among everyone in the department	<b>0.518</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>
Department leadership's disregard for volunteers' health and safety	-0.062	0.721
Life changes outside of the department that make it difficult to continue volunteering (e.g., moving to a new area, new addition to family, etc.)	-0.22	0.181

***Predicting Thinking about Leaving the Department by Desired Retention Interventions***

	B	p
(Intercept)	-0.255	< .001
(Intercept)	-0.368	0.527

Department Type (Volunteer-only department)	0.074	0.633
Years as a Firefighter	<b>0.09</b>	<b>0.048</b>
Department Neighborhood Density (All or mostly suburban)	-0.201	0.543
Department Neighborhood Density (All or mostly rural)	0.192	0.545
Primary Role (Leader)	-0.025	0.857
Frequency Volunteering	-0.086	0.31
Race (White)	0.169	0.558
Gender (Female)	0.227	0.236
Having leadership provide a clearer understanding to new volunteers of what is expected of them – including monthly time commitment, minimum length of service, goals, and responsibilities	<b>-0.498</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>
Creating mentorship programs that pairs new volunteers with more experienced members	-0.231	0.101
Providing new volunteers with advice on how to fit volunteering into the rest of their life	<b>-0.341</b>	<b>0.013</b>

Having department leadership actively participate in training to adhere to national leadership standards and core competencies	<b>0.339</b>	<b>0.021</b>
Enrolling rising volunteers in an officer candidate course to gain leadership skills and training	0.014	0.927
Allowing and encouraging new and younger members to own specific projects and tasks	0.004	0.979
Breaking up cliques and groups by assigning members of various backgrounds and ages to work together on work groups, committees, or other team projects	0.126	0.369
Creating opportunities to involve family in their experience as a volunteer firefighter	0.037	0.789
Giving out awards or honors when members reach service milestones (1 year, 5 years, 10 years, etc.), mark and achievement, and/or superlatives at the end of the year	-0.115	0.406
Conducting exit interviews when a volunteer leaves the department	-0.012	0.935

Conducting "stay" interviews with volunteers who have lapsed attendance and may be considering leaving the department	0.245	0.103
Setting up a comment box for anonymous feedback and/or create dedicated "office hours" to provide members a clear opportunity to express their opinions	-0.217	0.197
Offering "micro-volunteer" opportunities (1 day or 1 week a month) for those that are unable to commit to traditional volunteer time commitments	-0.072	0.616
Building the essential training calendar around members with less flexibility in their schedule, such as holding it on the days they are available or holding essential training sessions on multiple days	-0.083	0.549
Offering virtual training opportunities when possible	0.073	0.606

***Predicting Thinking about Leaving the Department by Combination Dept. Intervention***

	B	p
Years as a Firefighter	0.002	0.987
<b>Department Neighborhood Density (All or mostly suburban)</b>	<b>-1.239</b>	<b>0.041</b>

Department Neighborhood Density (All or mostly rural)	-1.05	0.084
Primary Role (Leader)	0.291	0.336
Frequency Volunteering	-0.259	0.096
Race (White)	-0.363	0.525
Gender (Female)	-0.134	0.728
Providing department leadership with training focused on managing combination departments	-0.005	0.986
Holding joint trainings with career and volunteer staff	0.351	0.249
Mentorships with career members for volunteers who are career-bound	-0.388	0.216

## Appendix D. Data Collection Instruments

### Appendix D1. General Population Recruitment Survey Instrument

#### General Population Audience Survey Instrument

##### Screening Question

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>1. Please select all the statements that apply to you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. I have lived in more than one US state.</li> <li>b. I have worked as a cashier.</li> <li>c. My birthday is in the month of April.</li> <li>d. I have been to a movie theater within the last week.</li> <li>e. I have been in a motor vehicle within the last week.</li> <li>f. I have worked as a project manager.</li> <li>g. I have worked as a firefighter.</li> <li><b>[TERMINATE]</b></li> <li>h. I have worked as an emergency medical service (EMS) provider. <b>[TERMINATE]</b></li> </ul> <p><b>[RANDOMIZE ANSWER CHOICES]</b></p>	<p>Screen out participants who are currently or have ever been firefighters or EMS.</p>

##### Interest in Volunteering in General

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
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<p>2. How many hours did you volunteer to help your community in the past month?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. I did not volunteer this past month.</li> <li>b. 1-4</li> <li>c. 5-10</li> <li>d. 11-15</li> <li>e. 16-20</li> <li>f. 21-25</li> <li>g. 26-30</li> <li>h. 31-35</li> <li>i. More than 35 hours</li> </ul>	<p>Measure intention to volunteer based on current volunteer involvement</p>
<p><b>Display if Q2 is "I did not volunteer in the past month"</b></p> <p>3. How interested are you in applying for a volunteer position to help your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Not likely [<b>SKIP TO Q8 and Q9; THEN TERMINATE</b>]</li> <li>b. Somewhat likely</li> <li>c. Very likely</li> </ul>	<p>Screen out participants who are not likely to engage in any volunteer work in the near future</p>
<p>4. What are some reasons why you would want to volunteer? Please select your top 3 reasons from the following list.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. I want to create new friendships.</li> <li>b. I want to help people in my community.</li> <li>c. I care about my community.</li> <li>d. I want to learn new skills.</li> <li>e. I want to use the skills I have to improve my community.</li> </ul>	<p>Gauge general values around volunteering</p>

f. Another reason, please specify: <b>[OPEN END]</b>	
<p>5. How many hours per week would you want to volunteer?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Less than 5 hours per week</li> <li>b. 5-10</li> <li>c. 11-15</li> <li>d. 16-20</li> <li>e. 21-25</li> <li>f. 26-30</li> <li>g. 31-35</li> <li>h. More than 35 hours</li> </ul>	Gauge time desired commitment to volunteering in general
<p>6. What kinds of things would you like to do as a volunteer? Please select all that apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Help prepare and serve meals for families in the community</li> <li>b. Responding to emergencies</li> <li><b>c. Fundraising for a cause</b></li> <li><b>d. Teaching others about safety and prevention</b></li> <li><b>e. Recruiting and engaging volunteers for a cause</b></li> <li><b>f. Performing administrative tasks, such as filing or typing, in an office setting</b></li> <li>g. Teaching others a skill, such as reading or using computers</li> <li>h. Other, please specify: <b>[OPEN END]</b></li> </ul>	Gauging specific interest in volunteering roles, including non-operational roles that are relevant to fire department operations

## Knowledge of Volunteer Opportunities in the Community

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>7. In which of the following roles can someone be a volunteer in the community? Select all that apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Firefighter</li> <li>b. Emergency medical service (EMS) provider</li> <li>c. Police officer</li> <li>d. Nurse</li> <li>e. Health educator</li> <li>f. Food pantry worker</li> <li>g. Nursing home assistant</li> <li>h. Tutor</li> <li>i. Camp counselor</li> <li>j. Cashier</li> </ul> <p><b>[RANDOMIZE ANSWER CHOICES]</b></p>	<p>Volunteer eligibility knowledge in general, including firefighter eligibility</p>
<p><b>If Q3 is "Not likely" to volunteer <u>or</u> If "Firefighter" is selected in Q7</b></p> <p>8. Does your local fire department use paid firefighters, volunteer firefighters, or a combination of the two?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Paid</li> <li>b. Volunteers</li> <li>c. Combination</li> <li>d. I don't know</li> </ul> <p><b>If Q8 is "Volunteers" or "Combination"</b></p>	<p>Volunteer firefighter eligibility knowledge</p>

<p>9. Is your local fire department currently seeking volunteers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. No</li> <li>b. Yes</li> <li>c. I don't know</li> </ul> <p><b>[THEN, TERMINATE If Q3 is "Not likely" to volunteer]</b></p>	
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**Perceived Attributes and Roles of a Firefighter**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>10. Would people you know describe you as someone who could be a volunteer firefighter?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. No</li> <li>b. Yes</li> <li>c. I don't know</li> </ul> <p><b>If Q10 is <u>not</u> "I don't know"</b></p> <p>11. What makes you think this? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Self-standard, seeing themselves as someone who could be a firefighter</p>
<p>12. Who volunteers as a firefighter? What type of person are they? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Measuring perceptions / stereotypes about who can be a firefighter</p>
<p>13. What do volunteer firefighters do that you'd like to do? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Measuring perceptions / stereotypes about firefighters</p>

<p>14. What do they do that you wouldn't want to do?  <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	
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**Interest in Becoming a Firefighter**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>15. How interested would you be in becoming a volunteer firefighter?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Not at all interested</li> <li>b. Somewhat interested</li> <li>c. Very interested</li> </ul> <p>16. How interested would you be in becoming an emergency medical service (EMS) provider?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Not at all interested</li> <li>b. Somewhat interested</li> <li>c. Very interested</li> </ul>	<p>Gauging interest in becoming a volunteer firefighter or EMS</p>
<p><b>If Q15 and/or Q16 is "Very interested" OR "Somewhat interested"</b></p> <p>17. How likely would you be to apply to become a volunteer firefighter or EMS provider <u>within the next 6 months</u>?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Not at all likely</li> <li>b. Somewhat likely</li> <li>c. Very likely</li> </ul>	<p>Gauging immediate behavioral intent of those who are at least somewhat interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter or EMS provider</p>

<p><b>If Q15 is "Very interested" OR "Somewhat interested"</b></p> <p>18. What are some reasons why you are interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Unaided, reasons for wanting to become a firefighter</p>
<p><b>If Q15 is "Very interested" OR "Somewhat interested"</b></p> <p>19. Here are some other reasons why someone might be interested in volunteering as a firefighter</p> <p>For each statement, select how relevant the statement is to you when thinking about volunteering as a firefighter.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. I appreciate friendships and camaraderie.</li> <li>b. I want to help people.</li> <li>c. I care about my community.</li> <li>d. I want to learn new skills.</li> <li>e. I like excitement.</li> <li>f. I think I would be good at it.</li> <li>g. I have been told by others that I would be good at it. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Not at all relevant</li> <li>■ Somewhat relevant</li> <li>■ Very relevant</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p>Aided, reasons for wanting to become a firefighter</p>
<p><b>If Q15 is "Somewhat interested" OR "Not at all interested"</b></p>	<p>Unaided, reasons for <u>not</u> wanting to become a firefighter</p>

<p>20. What are some reasons why you are <u>not</u> interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	
<p><b>If Q15 is “Somewhat interested” OR “Not at all interested”</b></p> <p>21. Here are some other reasons why someone might not be interested in volunteering as a firefighter.</p> <p>For each statement, national leadership standards and core competencies, when thinking about volunteering as a firefighter.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. I do not have the physique to be a volunteer firefighter.</li> <li>b. I am not able to commit enough time to the job.</li> <li>c. I do not have the right skill set.</li> <li>d. I do not have enough information about the job expectations and the application process.</li> <li>e. I have reached out to my fire department before, but I did not hear back from anyone.</li> <li>f. I know someone who is a firefighter, and they have told me bad things about their experience.</li> <li>g. Working in a fire department does not interest me.</li> <li>h. It seems dangerous. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Not at all relevant</li> <li>■ Somewhat relevant</li> <li>■ Very relevant</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p>Aided, reasons for <u>not</u> wanting to become a firefighter</p>

<p>22. What might make it hard for you to volunteer as a firefighter ? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Unaided, barriers to volunteering as a firefighter</p>
<p>23. Here are some other things that might make it hard to volunteer as a firefighter.</p> <p>For each statement, select how relevant the statement is to you when thinking about volunteering as a firefighter.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Not knowing how much time it takes to train and serve as a volunteer.</li> <li>b. Having a rigid schedule</li> <li>c. Not having strong support from my family, friends, and/or employer.</li> <li>d. Not having childcare while I am on duty</li> <li>e. Not having other firefighters who look like me in my department</li> <li>f. Having to do limited, repetitive tasks each day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Not at all relevant</li> <li>■ Somewhat relevant</li> <li>■ Very relevant</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p>Aided, relevant barriers to volunteering as a firefighter</p>
<p>24. What might make it easier for you to volunteer as a firefighter <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Unaided, facilitators to volunteering as a firefighter</p>
<p>25. Here are some other things that might make it easier to volunteer as a firefighter.</p>	<p>Aided, relevant facilitators to volunteering as a firefighter</p>

<p>For each statement, select how relevant the statement is to you when thinking about volunteering as a firefighter.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Having strong support from family, friends, and employers.</li> <li>b. Knowing someone else who can tell me about their experience.</li> <li>c. Receiving a personal invitation to join.</li> <li>d. Being able to participate in a fire academy to learn more about the experience before committing.</li> <li>e. Feeling like I am making a difference in my community. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Not at all relevant</li> <li>■ Somewhat relevant</li> <li>■ Very relevant</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	
<p>26. Which words best describe how volunteering as a firefighter would make you feel? Select all that apply.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Surprised</li> <li>b. Scared</li> <li>c. Happy</li> <li>d. Distracted</li> <li>e. Interested</li> <li>f. Disgusted</li> <li>g. Content</li> <li>h. Calm</li> <li>i. Trustful</li> <li>j. Sad</li> <li>k. Nervous</li> </ol>	<p>Emotions related to volunteering as a firefighter</p>

l. Curious m. Reflective n. Annoyed	
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### Demographic Questions for Segmentation

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
27. How old are you? a. 18-24 b. 25-34 c. 35-44 d. 45-49 e. 50-54 f. 55-64 g. 65+	Age
28. What is your zip code? <b>[OPEN END]</b>	Geographic location, prioritize people living in rural and suburban areas
29. Which of the following best describes your gender? a. Male b. Female c. Transgender d. I use a different term (please specify) e. Prefer not to answer	Gender

<p>30. Which of the following best describes your race and/or ethnicity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. American Indian or Alaska Native</li> <li>b. Asian</li> <li>c. Black or African American</li> <li>d. White or Caucasian</li> <li>e. Hispanic or Latino</li> <li>f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</li> <li>g. Other</li> <li>h. Prefer not to answer</li> </ul>	<p>Race / ethnicity</p>
<p>31. Do you fluently speak any other language at home besides English?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. No</li> <li>b. Yes</li> </ul> <p><b>If Q31 is "Yes"</b></p> <p>32. Which language(s) do you speak at home?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Spanish</li> <li>b. Chinese</li> <li>c. Tagalog</li> <li>d. Vietnamese</li> <li>e. Arabic</li> <li>f. Other, please specify: <b>[OPEN END]</b></li> </ul>	<p>Languages spoken, looking for people who speak Spanish</p>
<p>33. Are you a veteran?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. No</li> <li>b. No, but I have a family member who is a veteran</li> <li>c. Yes</li> </ul>	<p>Veteran status</p>

<p>34. What is the highest level of education you have completed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Less than high school graduate</li> <li>b. High school graduate or equivalent</li> <li>c. Two-year college degree</li> <li>d. Four-year college degree</li> <li>e. Graduate school or higher</li> </ul>	<p>Educational attainment, categories from previous survey</p>
<p>35. Are you currently employed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. No, I am not currently employed [<b>SKIP TO Q39</b>]</li> <li>b. Yes, I work part-time</li> <li>c. Yes, I work full-time</li> <li>d. Prefer not to answer</li> </ul> <p><b>If Q35 is "Yes"</b></p> <p>36. In what industry do you work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Agriculture</li> <li>b. Utilities</li> <li>c. Finance</li> <li>d. Entertainment</li> <li>e. Education</li> <li>f. Health care</li> <li>g. Information services</li> <li>h. Data processing</li> <li>i. Food services</li> <li>j. Hotel services</li> <li>k. Legal services</li> <li>l. Publishing</li> <li>m. Military</li> </ul>	<p>Employment status and industry</p>

<p>n. Other, please specify: <b>[REQUIRE RESPONSE]</b></p> <p>o. Prefer not to answer</p>	
<p><b>If Q35 is "Yes"</b></p> <p>37. How often do you work from home?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Always</li> <li>b. Usually</li> <li>c. About Half the Time</li> <li>d. Seldom</li> <li>e. Never</li> </ul> <p><b>If Q35 is "Yes" AND Q37 is not "Always"</b></p> <p>38. How do you get to work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. I drive myself</li> <li>b. I carpool with others (This includes using ridesharing apps.)</li> <li>c. I take public transportation, such as a bus or train</li> <li>d. I walk or ride a bike</li> <li>e. I get to work another way, please specify: <b>[OPEN END]</b></li> </ul>	<p>Transportation to/from work</p>
<p>39. What is your total household income?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Less than \$25,000</li> <li>b. \$25,000 to \$49,999</li> <li>c. \$50,000 to \$74,999</li> <li>d. \$75,000 to \$99,999</li> <li>e. \$100,000 and above</li> </ul>	<p>Household income, categories from previous survey</p>

f. Prefer not to answer	
<p>40. Which of the following best describes your marital status?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Never married</li> <li>b. Married</li> <li>c. Widowed</li> <li>d. Divorced</li> <li>e. Living with a romantic partner</li> </ul>	Marital status
<p>41. What is your household size? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p> <p>42. How many people in your household do you care for (physically and/or financially)? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	Household size, number of dependents
<p>43. In general, how would you rate your physical health?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Excellent</li> <li>b. Very Good</li> <li>c. Good</li> <li>d. Fair</li> <li>e. Poor</li> </ul>	Self-reported health status

## Appendix D2. General Population Focus Group Discussion Guide

### NVFC General Population Recruitment Focus Groups Discussion Guide

#### Introduction (2 min)

Hi, my name is [NAME], and I will be leading our discussion today. I'd like to thank you for being here and for agreeing to participate in our focus group. What we'll be doing today is called opinion research, which means that there are no right or wrong answers. Everybody's perspective is important to me. I'm not an expert on what we're going to be talking about. What you say won't make me feel good OR feel bad – I'm just here to listen to what you really think.

A part of what we'll be doing today is looking at some messages. I didn't make these messages so please be open and honest in your feedback. Our goal is to understand how these messages make people feel and think so they can be improved.

It is important that I hear from everyone. This is a group discussion so please don't wait for me to call on you. There's no need to raise your hand but be respectful and try not to speak over each other. It's important for me to hear where you agree and disagree and why. All of you have your own opinions and it is completely ok to disagree with something someone else said.

We have 90 minutes together and I have a lot of questions to ask. Sometimes it will feel like I'm repeating myself. I just ask that you be patient with me. If I ask anything that's confusing, please ask me to explain. It's possible that if it's confusing to you, it may also be confusing for others, so it's important that I understand. I also want you to know that because I have so many questions and we only have 90 minutes, I may have to move the conversation along at certain points to respect your time. If you have a cell phone with you, please turn it to vibrate.

Finally, I am recording our discussion to make sure I don't miss anything. The recording will only be used for research purposes and will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. Some of my colleagues may be watching this discussion to help take notes and to understand what was said. Ultimately, we'll compare notes and write up a report. Your name will not be used in that report.

**Are there any questions for me before we get started?**

#### Warm Up (10 min)

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
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<p>1. Great. I think the best place to get started is to quickly get to know each other a little bit better. Let's begin with some quick introductions. Please tell us:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your first name</li> <li>The state where you live</li> <li>And thinking back to when you were 10 years old, what did you want to be when you grew up?</li> </ol>	<p>Introductions</p>
<p>You all were selected because you said that you were at least somewhat interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter</p> <p>I'd like to learn more about why you all would be interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter.</p> <p>2. What are some reasons why you are interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who else agrees with this reason?</li> <li>Who has other reasons to add?</li> </ol>	<p>ID: List of key motivators to becoming a volunteer firefighter including self-standards and social norms</p>
<p>3. Who volunteers as a firefighter? What type of person are they?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Would people you know describe you as someone who could be a volunteer firefighter? Why or why not?</li> </ol>	<p>List of key motivators/obstacles to becoming a volunteer firefighter including self-standards and social norms</p>

**Current perceptions of being a volunteer firefighter (20 min)**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>4. How does someone become a volunteer firefighter?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the first step? What is the second step, etc.?</li> <li>Who is eligible to become a firefighter?</li> <li>Where did you get information on being a firefighter?</li> </ol>	<p>ID: List of most prominent obstacles to becoming a volunteer firefighter including: Eligibility knowledge</p>
<p>5. What do you imagine it would be like being a firefighter? What would your day look like?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What makes you think that?</li> <li>What would you be doing at the start of your day?</li> <li>What would you be doing at the end of your day?</li> <li>What other things might you be doing when you're in the fire department?</li> </ol>	<p>ID: List of key motivators to becoming a volunteer firefighter including positive views of firefighting; ID: List of most prominent obstacles to becoming a volunteer</p>

<p>e. <b>If training is mentioned:</b> What kind of training do you expect to be doing?</p> <p>6. How do you feel about the day we just described?</p> <p>a. Which parts of the day are you excited about?</p> <p>b. Which parts are you <u>not</u> excited about?</p>	<p>firefighter including stereotypes about firefighter roles and work</p>
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**Barriers and motivators to becoming a volunteer firefighter (10 min)**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>As I mentioned, you all were selected because you said that you were at least somewhat interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter but are not one currently.</p> <p>7. What makes it hard for you to become a volunteer firefighter right now?</p> <p>a. <b>Probe on specific parts of the enrollment journey and perceived firefighter tasks the group described above, as needed.</b></p> <p>i. <b>[If people say generic things like “not enough time”, make sure to follow up]</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. How much time do you think it takes to volunteer?</b></li> <li><b>2. What sort of things are taking up your time outside of work?</b></li> </ol>	<p>ID: List of most prominent obstacles to becoming a volunteer firefighter (including perceived investment)</p>
<p>8. What would make it easier to become a firefighter?</p> <p>a. <b>Probe on specific parts of the enrollment journey and perceived firefighter tasks the group described above, as needed.</b></p>	<p>ID: Identification of incentives that could facilitate volunteering</p>

**Message Testing (45 mins)**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>Great, now I'd like to get your feedback on some messages. These eventually might become advertising or messaging that you would see online or in other places, like a billboard or community center, but right now they are stand-alone messages since we want to learn about your</p>	<p>Introduction to message testing</p>

<p>reactions to the words and the main ideas in the message. Also, I did not create these, so feel free to tell me the truth about how you think and feel.</p> <p>There are 4 messages in total. We'll read the first message together and answer a few questions, then we'll look at the next and do the same thing, and so on. Please try and think of each message individually and don't compare them to each other. After you have looked at all of them, you will have a chance to compare them.</p>						
<p><b>MESSAGE FRAMES TO BE DISPLAYED ONE AT A TIME IN STIMULUS DECK</b></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="228 758 1008 1858"> <tr> <td data-bbox="228 758 1008 827">Message</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="228 827 1008 1066"> <p><b>Being a volunteer firefighter is a way to give back and make a difference.</b>  Volunteer firefighting is about neighbor-helping-neighbor. It's about a commitment to your community. It is a way to pass on one's good fortune by helping others.</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="228 1066 1008 1346"> <p><b>Volunteer firefighters get valuable skills and experiences.</b>  Volunteering as a firefighter, EMT, or paramedic can provide you with training, experience and leadership opportunities that employers and others respect. By volunteering, you gain valuable skills for a future profession.</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="228 1346 1008 1585"> <p><b>Each day, people like you save their community by being a volunteer firefighter.</b>  You don't have to be the strongest person in the room to make a difference in your community. Your community depends on volunteers to keep their communities safe.</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="228 1585 1008 1858"> <p><b>We can teach you how to fight fires. . . and more.</b>  When you become a volunteer firefighter, you will receive training to help you develop the skills you need to take care of your health and safety while saving lives. And volunteers do more than fight fires – there are other ways to help your local volunteer fire department. Visit [website] to learn how you can get a preview of the</p> </td> </tr> </table>	Message	<p><b>Being a volunteer firefighter is a way to give back and make a difference.</b>  Volunteer firefighting is about neighbor-helping-neighbor. It's about a commitment to your community. It is a way to pass on one's good fortune by helping others.</p>	<p><b>Volunteer firefighters get valuable skills and experiences.</b>  Volunteering as a firefighter, EMT, or paramedic can provide you with training, experience and leadership opportunities that employers and others respect. By volunteering, you gain valuable skills for a future profession.</p>	<p><b>Each day, people like you save their community by being a volunteer firefighter.</b>  You don't have to be the strongest person in the room to make a difference in your community. Your community depends on volunteers to keep their communities safe.</p>	<p><b>We can teach you how to fight fires. . . and more.</b>  When you become a volunteer firefighter, you will receive training to help you develop the skills you need to take care of your health and safety while saving lives. And volunteers do more than fight fires – there are other ways to help your local volunteer fire department. Visit [website] to learn how you can get a preview of the</p>	<p>ID: Qualitative insights into potential messaging frames that speak to different behavioral determinants</p>
Message						
<p><b>Being a volunteer firefighter is a way to give back and make a difference.</b>  Volunteer firefighting is about neighbor-helping-neighbor. It's about a commitment to your community. It is a way to pass on one's good fortune by helping others.</p>						
<p><b>Volunteer firefighters get valuable skills and experiences.</b>  Volunteering as a firefighter, EMT, or paramedic can provide you with training, experience and leadership opportunities that employers and others respect. By volunteering, you gain valuable skills for a future profession.</p>						
<p><b>Each day, people like you save their community by being a volunteer firefighter.</b>  You don't have to be the strongest person in the room to make a difference in your community. Your community depends on volunteers to keep their communities safe.</p>						
<p><b>We can teach you how to fight fires. . . and more.</b>  When you become a volunteer firefighter, you will receive training to help you develop the skills you need to take care of your health and safety while saving lives. And volunteers do more than fight fires – there are other ways to help your local volunteer fire department. Visit [website] to learn how you can get a preview of the</p>						

firefighter experience.

**REPEAT MESSAGE TESTING QUESTIONS (Q9 - Q14) FOR EACH MESSAGE BEFORE MOVING ON**

9. What is your first reaction to this message	– First reaction
10. What do you think is the main idea of this message?	– Main idea
11. Which words or phrases stand out to you in a good way? – What motivates you to want to learn more? 12. Which words or phrases stand out to you in a bad way? – What is confusing, off-putting, does not make you want to learn more? <b>a. For message N:</b> What do you think of when you see “people like me?” What if the message said: “Each day, African American residents like you. . .” / “Each day, women like you . . .” How would that impact what you think about the message? <b>b. For Message E:</b> What would you hope to see at the website in the message?	– Specific wording/phrases
13. How relevant does this message feel to you?	– Message relevance
14. Does this message make you think differently about anything? Does it make you want to do anything differently?	– Behavioral intention after viewing message
<b>[AFTER VIEWING EACH MESSAGES, DISPLAY SLIDE WITH ALL MESSAGES]</b>  15. Here are all the messages we just reviewed. I want you to rank the messages in order of how much they motivate you to take the first step to becoming a volunteer firefighter, with 1 being the most motivating and 4 being the least motivating. <b>[MODERATOR SHARES LINK TO FORM WITH MESSAGES IN THE CHAT]</b>  <b>[AFTER RESPONDENTS SUBMIT RESPONSES]</b>  16. Tell me what you selected as your top choice – why was it the most motivating?	– Most/least motivating message

<p>17. Which message was the least motivating? Tell me about why that is.</p>	
<p>18. After viewing these messages, I'm curious to know whether you would be more or less likely to become a volunteer firefighter or EMS provider <u>within the next 6 months</u> compared to when we first started the session?</p> <p><b>a. Count show of hands how many MORE LIKELY, LESS LIKELY, and ABOUT THE SAME</b></p> <p><b>b. [For those who changed their response]</b> Tell me what made you change your response?</p>	<p>Change in behavioral intention to become a volunteer firefighter after exposure to all messaging</p>

**Conclusion (3 min)**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>18. What was missing from the messages we reviewed? What questions do you still have about becoming a volunteer firefighter?</p>	<p>Outstanding questions – additional motivators/barriers to volunteering</p>
<p>19. Who here has a volunteer fire department looking for volunteers near where they live?</p> <p><b>a. Ask for a show of hands for YES, NO, DON'T KNOW. Record number of each.</b></p> <p>b. Where do you think you would find this information?</p>	<p>Knowledge of volunteer opportunities in their community</p>
<p>20. Is there anything else that you think the campaign developers should know when creating materials to recruit people to become volunteer firefighters?</p>	<p>Additional thoughts</p>
<p>Those are all the questions I had. Thank you again for your time.</p>	<p>Wrap statement</p>

### Appendix D3. Current Volunteer Survey Instrument

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) wants to hear from you! Please take 10 minutes to fill out the NVFC’s Retention Survey. Your feedback is important in helping the NVFC better understand why volunteers stay with and leave the volunteer fire service and will be used to inform future retention initiatives.

If you are interested in participating, please click the arrow to continue.

#### Screening / Segmentation – All Respondents

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>1. Which of the following best describes your fire department?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Career-only department <b>[TERMINATE]</b></li> <li>b. Combination department</li> <li>c. Volunteer-only department</li> <li>d. EMS-only department <b>[TERMINATE]</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Screening</b> – Type of fire department</p>
<p>2. Are you currently a volunteer firefighter or EMS provider?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Yes – I am currently a volunteer firefighter/EMS provider.</li> <li>b. No – I was previously a volunteer firefighter/EMS provider, but I am now a career firefighter/EMS provider. <b>[TERMINATE]</b></li> <li>c. No – I was previously a volunteer firefighter/EMS provider, but I am now a volunteer or paid leader who oversees volunteer firefighters.</li> <li>d. No – I was previously a volunteer firefighter/EMS provider, but I left the fire service within the last five years.</li> <li>e. No – I was previously a volunteer firefighter/EMS provider, but I left the fire service more than five years ago. <b>[TERMINATE]</b></li> <li>f. No – I was never a volunteer firefighter/EMS provider. <b>[TERMINATE]</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Screening</b> – Experience as a volunteer</p> <p><i>Note: Respondents who pick D are "former volunteers" who will see the former volunteer questions Q30-41. Everyone else (A and C) is a "current volunteer," unless they're terminated.</i></p>

<p>3. Which of the options below best describes your primary role with your current department, or most recent department if you are no longer in the fire service?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Chief</li> <li>b. Assistant Chief</li> <li>c. Line Officer (Bat. Chief, Captain, Lt.)</li> <li>d. President or Trustee <b>[TERMINATE]</b></li> <li>e. Safety Officer</li> <li>f. Training Officer</li> <li>g. Volunteer Firefighter</li> <li>h. Volunteer Firefighter/EMS Provider</li> <li>i. Volunteer EMS Provider</li> <li>j. Non-operational support <b>[TERMINATE]</b></li> <li>k. Other (please specify): <b>[OPEN END]</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Screening</b> – Role in department</p> <p><i>Will monitor response from leadership (Chief, Assistant Chief, Line Officer) and Volunteer EMS providers, and cap as needed.</i></p>
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**Recruitment Questions – All Respondents**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>4. How long have you been/were you a firefighter or EMS provider?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Less than a year</li> <li>b. 1 to 2 years</li> <li>c. 3 to 4 years</li> <li>d. 5 to 6 years</li> <li>e. 7 to 10 years</li> <li>f. 11 to 19 years</li> <li>g. 20 years or more</li> </ul>	<p>Length of service, in general</p>
<p>5. What first made you want to join the fire service? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Reason for joining</p>
<p>6. How did you learn about the opportunity to become a volunteer firefighter or EMS provider? Please select all that apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. I searched for volunteer opportunities in my community.</li> <li>b. I saw an advertisement somewhere in-person in the community.</li> </ul>	<p>Learning about firefighter opportunity</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c. I saw an advertisement online.</li> <li>d. I had a family member who was a fire service volunteer.</li> <li>e. I had a friend who was a fire service volunteer</li> <li>f. Someone invited me to join the department.</li> </ul>	
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**Retention Questions - Current Volunteers (Q7-29)**

**Switching departments - Current volunteers**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>7. How long have you been at your current department?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Less than a year</li> <li>b. 1 to 2 years</li> <li>c. 3 to 4 years</li> <li>d. 5 to 6 years</li> <li>e. 7 to 10 years</li> <li>f. 11 to 19 years</li> <li>g. 20 years or more</li> </ul>	Length of service at their last department
<p>8. Have you served at other fire departments before your current one?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. No, my current department is my first one. <b>[SKIP TO Q16]</b></li> <li>b. Yes</li> </ul>	Experience switching department
<p><b>If Q8 is YES</b></p> <p>9. What are some reasons that you left your previous department? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	Reasons for switching departments, open end
<p><b>If Q8 is YES</b></p> <p>Here are some other reasons that someone might switch departments. Select the statements that feel most related to the reasons why you switched departments.</p> <p><i>Scale for Q10-15: Not related to why I switched, Somewhat related to why I switched, Major reason why I switched</i></p>	Reasons for switching departments, multiple choice

<p>10. Unclear expectations about time, effort, or duties expected of me as a volunteer.</p> <p>11. Lack of flexibility in training and volunteer schedules.</p> <p>12. Few opportunities for professional development or advancement within the department.</p> <p>13. Lack of camaraderie or sense of community among everyone in the department.</p> <p>14. Department leadership's disregard for volunteers' health and safety</p> <p>15. Life changes outside of the department that made it difficult to continue volunteering (e.g., moving to a new area, new addition to family, etc.)</p>	
<p>16. Have you thought about switching to another department?</p> <p>a. No <b>[SKIP TO NEXT SECTION, Q24]</b></p> <p>b. Yes</p>	<p>Considered switching departments</p>
<p><b>If Q16 is YES</b></p> <p>17. What are some reasons why you have thought about switching to another fire department? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Considered switching departments</p>
<p><b>If Q16 is YES</b></p> <p>Here are some other reasons that someone might <u>think about switching departments</u>. Select the statements that feel most related to the reasons why you might consider switching departments.</p> <p><i>Scale for Q18-23: Not related to why I thought about switching, Somewhat related to why I thought about switching, Major reason why I thought about switching</i></p> <p>18. Unclear expectations about time, effort, or duties expected of me as a volunteer.</p> <p>19. Lack of flexibility in training and volunteer schedules.</p> <p>20. Few opportunities for professional development or advancement within the department.</p> <p>21. Lack of camaraderie or sense of community among everyone in the department.</p> <p>22. Department leadership's disregard for volunteers' health and safety</p>	

23. Life changes outside of the department that made it difficult to continue volunteering (e.g., moving to a new area, new addition to family, etc.)	
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**Leaving the fire service - Current volunteers**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
24. Have you ever thought about leaving the fire service entirely? a. No <b>[SKIP TO Q26]</b> b. Yes	Considered leaving the fire service
<b>If Q24 is YES</b> 25. What are some reasons you have thought about leaving? <b>[OPEN END]</b>	Considered leaving the fire service
26. What do you think are the <u>three biggest reasons</u> that firefighters have left or would consider leaving the fire service? Please select 3 of the following reasons.  a. Unclear expectations about time, effort, or duties expected as a volunteer. b. Lack of flexibility in training and volunteer schedules. c. Few opportunities for professional development or advancement within the department. d. Lack of camaraderie or sense of community among everyone in the department. e. Department leadership's disregard for volunteers' health and safety f. Life changes outside of the department that make it difficult to continue volunteering (e.g., moving to a new area, new addition to family, etc.) g. Something else (please specify): <b>[OPEN END]</b>	Reasons other firefighters consider leaving the fire service
<b>IF Q24 is YES</b> 27. What kept you from leaving? <b>[OPEN END]</b>	Reason for not leaving

<p><b>IF Q24 is YES</b></p> <p>28. If you had to <u>pick two things</u> that keep you coming back as a firefighter/EMS provider, what would they be?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The friendships and/or camaraderie that I had at my department</li> <li>The opportunity to serve my community</li> <li>The opportunities for professional development within my department</li> <li>I am always learning new skills</li> <li>I feel like I am good at what I do</li> <li>I enjoy my work as a firefighter</li> <li>Something else (please specify): <b>[OPEN END]</b></li> </ol> <p><b>[ALLOW UP TO 2 CHOICES]</b></p>	<p>Ranking reasons for continuing to serve as a firefighter/EMS</p>
<p>29. What might keep other volunteers from leaving? <b>[OPEN]</b></p>	<p>Unaided motivators</p>

**Retention Questions - Former Volunteers (Q30-41)**

**Switching departments - Former Volunteers**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>30. How long were you at your last department?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less than a year</li> <li>1 to 2 years</li> <li>3 to 4 years</li> <li>5 to 6 years</li> <li>7 to 10 years</li> <li>11 to 19 years</li> <li>20 years or more</li> </ol>	<p>Length of service at their last department</p>
<p>31. Did you serve at other fire departments before your most recent one?</p>	<p>Experience switching department</p>

<p>a. No, my most recent department was my first one. <b>[SKIP TO NEXT SECTION, Q39]</b></p> <p>b. Yes</p>	
<p><b>If Q31 is YES</b></p> <p>32. What are some reasons that you left your other department? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Reasons for switching departments, open end</p>
<p><b>If Q31 is YES</b></p> <p>Here are some other reasons that someone might switch departments. Select the statements that feel most related to the reasons why you switched departments.</p> <p><i>Scale for Q27-32: Not related to why I switched, Somewhat related to why I switched, Major reason why I switched</i></p> <p>33. Unclear expectations about time, effort, or duties expected of me as a volunteer.</p> <p>34. Lack of flexibility in training and volunteer schedules.</p> <p>35. Few opportunities for professional development or advancement within the department.</p> <p>36. Lack of camaraderie or sense of community among everyone in the department.</p> <p>37. Department leadership's disregard for volunteers' health and safety</p> <p>38. Life changes outside of the department which makes it difficult to continue volunteering (e.g., moving to a new area, new addition to family, etc.)</p>	<p>Reasons for switching departments, multiple choice</p>

### Leaving the fire service - Former Volunteers

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>39. What are some reasons why you left the fire service? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Considered leaving the fire service</p>
<p>40. What do you think are the <u>three biggest reasons</u> that firefighters have left or would consider leaving the fire service? Please select 3 of the</p>	<p>Reasons other firefighters consider leaving the fire service</p>

<p>following reasons.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Unclear expectations about time, effort, or duties expected of me as a volunteer.</li> <li>b. Lack of flexibility in training and volunteer schedules.</li> <li>c. Few opportunities for professional development or advancement within the department.</li> <li>d. Lack of camaraderie or sense of community among everyone in the department.</li> <li>e. Department leadership’s disregard for volunteers’ health and safety</li> <li>f. Life changes outside of the department that make it difficult to continue volunteering (e.g., moving to a new area, new addition to family, etc.)</li> <li>g. Something else (please specify): <b>[OPEN END]</b></li> </ul>	
<p>41. What might keep other volunteers from leaving? <b>[OPEN]</b></p>	<p>Unaided motivators</p>

**Motivators to improve retention – All Respondents**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>42. Please look at this list of items a department could do to impact retention – making it so people are more likely to stay at your department. Which, if any, of these do you think could have a positive impact on retention at your department? Please select all that apply. <b>[RANDOMIZE OPTION CHOICES]</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Having leadership provide a clearer understanding to new volunteers of what is expected of them – including monthly time commitment, minimum length of service, goals, and responsibilities</li> <li>b. Creating mentorship programs that pair new volunteers with more experienced members</li> </ul>	<p>Motivators - Onboarding practices</p> <p><i>Internal note: "Mentorship programs" and "Advice on how to fit in volunteering" were among the top 5 motivators in the previous research</i></p>

<p>c. Providing new volunteers with advice on how to fit volunteering into the rest of their life</p>	
<p>d. Having department leadership actively participate in training to adhere to national standards and core competencies</p>	<p>Motivators - Improving leadership (<i>previously "Finding new leadership"</i>)</p>
<p>e. Enrolling rising volunteers in an officer candidate course to gain leadership skills and training</p> <p>f. Allowing and encouraging new and younger members to own specific projects and tasks</p>	<p>Motivators - Promoting leadership and professional development (<i>new category based on statements used in the previous survey</i>)</p>
<p>g. Breaking up cliques and groups by assigning members of various backgrounds and ages to work together on work groups, committees, or other team projects</p> <p>h. Creating opportunities to involve family in their experience as a volunteer firefighter</p>	<p>Motivators - Broader member satisfaction practices / Social support</p>
<p>i. Giving out awards or honors when members reach service milestones (1 year, 5 years, 10 years, etc.), mark and achievement, and/or superlatives at the end of the year</p>	<p>Motivators - Fun stuff</p>
<p>j. Conducting exit interviews when a volunteer leaves the department</p> <p>k. Conducting "stay" interviews with volunteers who have lapsed attendance and may be considering leaving the department</p> <p>l. Setting up a comment box for anonymous feedback and/or create dedicated "office</p>	<p>Motivators - Feedback opportunities</p> <p><i>Internal note: "Exit interviews" and "Stay interviews" were among the top 5 motivators in the previous research</i></p>

<p>hours” to provide members a clear opportunity to express their opinions</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>m. Offering “micro-volunteer” opportunities (1 day or 1 week a month) for those that are unable to commit to traditional volunteer time commitments</li> <li>n. Building the essential training calendar around members with less flexibility in their schedule, such as holding it on the days they are available or holding essential training sessions on multiple days</li> <li>o. Offering virtual training opportunities when possible</li> </ul>	<p>Motivators - Flexibility</p>
<p><b>DISPLAY IF Q1 IS “Combination department”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>p. Providing department leadership with training focused on managing combination departments</li> <li>q. Holding joint trainings with career and volunteer staff</li> <li>r. Mentorships with career members for volunteers who are career-bound</li> </ul>	<p>Motivators - Combination department solutions only</p>
<p>43. Here are the items you selected. Please select the items that you think would have the biggest positive impact on retention (select no more than 3).</p> <p><b>[CARRY FORWARD ITEMS PREVIOUSLY SELECTED IN Q42; ALLOW UP TO 3 CHOICES]</b></p>	<p>Ranking motivators to remain in the service</p>
<p>44. What else would have a positive impact on retention at your department. (Note: This question is optional.)</p> <p><b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Other motivators to remain in the service</p>

**Firefighter-specific Demographics – All Respondents**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>45. How often do you spend time volunteering with your current department, or your most recent department if you are no longer in the service?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Several times a week</li> <li>b. Once a week</li> <li>c. A couple times a month</li> <li>d. Once a month</li> <li>e. Less than once a month</li> </ul>	<p>Frequency of volunteering</p>
<p>46. What zip code and state is your current or most recent department in? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Location of department</p>
<p>47. Which of the following best describes the area your current or most recent department serves?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. All or mostly urban</li> <li>b. All or mostly suburban</li> <li>c. All or mostly rural</li> </ul>	<p>Type of community served</p>

**Additional Demographic Questions – All Respondents**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>48. How old are you? <b>[OPEN END]</b></p>	<p>Segmentation - Age</p>
<p>49. Which of the following best describes your gender?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Male</li> <li>b. Female</li> <li>c. Transgender</li> <li>d. I use a different term (please specify)</li> <li>e. Prefer not to answer</li> </ul>	<p>Segmentation - Gender</p>
<p>50. Which of the following best describes your race and/or ethnicity? Please select all that apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. American Indian or Alaska Native</li> <li>b. Asian</li> <li>c. Black or African American</li> <li>d. White or Caucasian</li> </ul>	<p>Segmentation - Race/Ethnicity</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>e. Hispanic or Latino</li><li>f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</li><li>g. Other</li><li>h. Prefer not to answer</li></ul>	
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## Appendix D4. Former Volunteer Focus Group Discussion Guide

### NVFC Retention Research Former Volunteer Focus Group Discussion Guide (90 minutes)

#### Introduction (2 min)

Hi, my name is [**NAME**], and I will be leading our discussion today. I'd like to thank you for being here and for agreeing to participate in our focus group. What we'll be doing today is called opinion research, which means that there are no right or wrong answers. Everybody's perspective is important to me. I'm not an expert on what we're going to be talking about. What you say won't make me feel good OR feel bad – I'm just here to listen to what you really think.

It is important that I hear from everyone. This is a group discussion so please don't wait for me to call on you. There's no need to raise your hand but be respectful and try not to speak over each other. It's important for me to hear where you agree and disagree and why. All of you have your own opinions and it is completely ok to disagree with something someone else said.

We have 90 minutes together and I have a lot of questions to ask. If I ask anything that's confusing, please ask me to explain. I also want you to know that because I have so many questions and we only have 90 minutes, I may have to move the conversation along at certain points to respect your time. If you have a cell phone with you, please turn it to vibrate.

Finally, I am recording our discussion to make sure I don't miss anything. The recording will only be used for research purposes and will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. Some of my colleagues may be watching this discussion to help take notes and to understand what was said. Ultimately, we'll compare notes and write up a report. Your name will not be used in that report.

**Are there any questions for me before we get started?**

#### Warm-up (5 min)

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
1. I'd like us to start by quickly getting to know each other a little bit better. Let's begin with some quick introductions. Please tell us:	Ease participants into sharing opinions in the group. No

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Your first name</li> <li>b. The state where you live</li> <li>c. How you like to spend your free time</li> </ul> <p><b>[MODERATOR WILL SHARE FIRST]</b></p>	analysis is necessary on this question.
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**Experience being a volunteer in the fire service (10 min)**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>You all were selected to participate in this group discussion because you are all former volunteer firefighters or EMS providers who served at your local fire department.</p> <p>I'd like to begin with hearing a bit about some of the reasons you were interested in becoming a firefighter in the first place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are some reasons why you were interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Who else agrees with this reason?</li> <li>b. Who has other reasons to add?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Level-setting shared experience among participants;</p> <p>ID (REC): Key motivators to becoming a volunteer firefighter</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. What were your favorite parts of volunteering?</li> </ul>	<p>ID: Analysis of the most important factors that facilitate continued volunteering</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What concerns did you have <u>before</u> you joined the fire service? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Which of those concerns turned out to be accurate?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>ID: List of the key individual and contextual issues that lead individuals to stop volunteering;</p> <p>ID (REC): List of most prominent obstacles to becoming a volunteer firefighter</p>

**Personal experience leaving the fire service (35 min)**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. When did you first think about leaving the fire service? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Can you describe what happened that made you think about leaving?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>ID: List of the key individual and contextual issues that lead individuals to stop</p>

	volunteering
<p>5. What was the trigger that made you finally decide to leave the fire service?</p> <p>a. What about others?</p> <p>i. Who has <u>similar</u> experiences?</p> <p>ii. Who has had <u>different</u> experiences?</p>	<p>ID: List of the key individual and contextual issues that lead individuals to stop volunteering;</p> <p>Validate/gain depth of understanding into our research findings</p>
<p>6. We did a survey with current volunteer firefighters where we asked them whether they have thought about leaving the fire service, and we learned that there are a number of reasons why people leave.</p> <p><b>[MODERATOR SHARES SLIDE WITH THE LIST OF REASONS FOR LEAVING THE FIRE SERVICE]</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unclear expectations about time, effort, or duties expected of me as a volunteer.</li> <li>2. Lack of flexibility in training and volunteer schedules.</li> <li>3. Few opportunities for professional development or advancement within the department.</li> <li>4. Lack of camaraderie or sense of community among everyone in the department.</li> <li>5. Department leadership's disregard for volunteers' health and safety</li> <li>6. Life changes outside of the department that made it difficult to continue volunteering (e.g., moving to a new area, new addition to family, etc.)</li> </ol> </div> <p><b>[MODERATOR SHARES OPTIMAL WORKSHOP LINK IN CHAT]</b></p> <p>Using the link I just put in the chat, I'd like for you to rank these reasons in order of most common to least common among volunteer first responders at a fire department in your opinion.</p>	<p>ID: List of the key individual and contextual issues that lead individuals to stop volunteering;</p>

<p><b>[AFTER RESPONDENTS COMPLETE THEIR RANKING, MODERATOR WILL DISPLAY THE RESULTS ON SCREEN AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WITH THE GROUP]</b></p> <p><b>If able to view Optimal Workshop results, identify highest/lowest rankings and ask participants to elaborate on these. Otherwise, ask:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Which reason did you say was most common? Why?</li> <li>b. Which was the least common? Why?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>[MODERATOR TO STOP SHARING SCREEN]</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. How did you feel when you left the fire service? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How did leadership respond?</li> <li>b. How did other volunteers respond?</li> <li>c. How did you feel about their response?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>LISTEN FOR DETAILS ABOUT EXIT INTERVIEW</b></p>	<p>ID: List of the key individual and contextual issues that lead individuals to stop volunteering;</p> <p>ID: Analysis of the most important factors that facilitate continued volunteering</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. How is life after volunteering? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What do you miss about being in the fire service?</li> <li>b. What do you not miss?</li> <li>c. Have you considered rejoining? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. What has prevented you from doing so?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>ID: List of the key individual and contextual issues that lead individuals to stop volunteering;</p> <p>ID: Analysis of the most important factors that facilitate continued volunteering</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Some volunteers might switch departments before they decide to leave the fire service entirely. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why do you think some volunteers switch? What do you think they're looking for at their next department?</li> <li>b. What is the difference in the reasons why someone might switch departments rather than leave the fire service entirely?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Learn the nuance between factors that make someone want to leave a department vs. the fire service entirely to inform tailored retention activities</p>

### Retention in fire departments in general (10 min)

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>10. Given today's current environment, what type of people do you think would be a good fit for the volunteer fire service? Tell me about that.</p> <p>a. And who would be a bad fit? Tell me more.</p> <p><b>LISTEN FOR:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>PERSONA TYPES (REFLECTED IN PREVIOUS QUAL),</b></li> <li>● <b>DETAILS ABOUT IMPLICATIONS RELATED TO INCREASE IN FIRES/CLIMATE CHANGE,</b></li> <li>● <b>TIME/CHOICE AVAILABLE TO TAKE ON EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES</b></li> </ul> <p>11. What kind of <u>person</u> stays in the fire service as a volunteer for a long time (more than 5 years)?</p> <p>a. What kind of person does not stay in the fire service for a long time?</p> <p>b. <b>[Probe to understand gender, age, skill set, time commitment, etc. for each]</b></p>	<p>ID: List of the key individual factors that lead individuals to stop/continue volunteering</p>
<p>12. What kind of <u>department</u> has volunteers who stay for a long time?</p> <p>a. What kind of department has trouble retaining volunteers?</p> <p>i. Describe in detail the factors at the department level that might make it hard for them to retain volunteers.</p>	<p>ID: List of the key department-level factors that lead individuals to stop/continue volunteering</p>

### Interventions for retention (25 min)

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>13. What have you seen your department try to do for retention?</p> <p>a. What seemed to work well?</p>	<p>Ideating possible interventions for departments to implement</p>

<p>b. What did not work well?</p>	
<p>14. If you were in charge of promoting retention at your former department, what programs / activities / incentives / processes would you create? In other words, what would make <u>you</u> not want to stop volunteering if you were still at your department?</p> <p>Please write your responses in the chat. I encourage you to think beyond what you think might be possible at your former department and instead, think of your ideal department.</p> <p><b>[MODERATOR TO SHARE SCREEN TO SHOW SLIDE OF TASK PROMPT FOR PARTICIPANT REFERENCE]</b></p> <p><b>[AFTER PARTICIPANTS WRITE THEIR THOUGHTS IN THE CHAT, ASK EACH RESPONDENT (TIME PERMITTING; AT LEAST ASK 1 OR 2) TO SHARE WITH THE GROUP. LEAD PARTICIPANTS IN DISCUSSION TO EXPAND UPON ONE ANOTHER’S IDEAS]</b></p>	<p>ID: Analysis of the most important factors that facilitate continued volunteering;</p> <p>Ideating possible interventions for departments to implement</p>
<p>I am going to show you a list of activities that a department could do to impact retention – making it so people are more likely to stay at your department. <b>[MODERATOR SHARES SLIDE WITH LIST OF MOTIVATING ACTIVITIES]</b></p> <p>I’d like you to take a moment to look at this list, then I am going to ask you a few questions. I did not personally create this list, so please be as open and candid as possible with your responses.</p> <p>15. What are your initial reactions to these activities?</p> <p>16. Which could you imagine seeing your former department implement? Why?</p> <p>a. How would volunteers respond? <b>[Probe to understand whether it would be a positive or negative response]</b></p>	<p>ID: Analysis of the most important factors that facilitate continued volunteering;</p> <p>Ideating possible interventions for departments to implement;</p> <p>Validate/gain depth of understanding into our research findings</p>

- b. Which ones would your former department absolutely NOT deploy? Why?

17. I'm going to put another link in the chat with this same list of activities. **[MODERATOR PUTS OPTIMAL WORKSHOP LINK INTO CHAT]**

I'd like for you to rank these in order of most to least motivating to you if you were still a volunteer at your last department

- A. Having leadership provide a clearer understanding to new volunteers of what is expected of them
- B. Creating mentorship programs that pairs new volunteers with more experienced members
- C. Having department leadership actively participate in training to adhere to national standards and core competencies
- D. Allowing and encouraging new and younger members to own specific projects and tasks
- E. Breaking up cliques and groups by assigning members of various backgrounds and ages to work together on work groups, committees, or other team projects
- F. Creating opportunities to involve family in their experience as a volunteer firefighter
- G. Building the essential training calendar around members with less flexibility in their schedule

**[AFTER RESPONDENTS COMPLETE THEIR RANKING, ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS THEIR RESPONSES]**

- a. Which would motivate you the most to continue volunteering if you were still at your last department? Why?
- b. Which would motivate you the least? Why?

<p>18. Which activity/activities should a department prioritize?  <b>[ASK PARTICIPANTS TO WRITE THE LETTER OF THEIR CHOICE INTO THE CHAT; NO MORE THAN 2 CHOICES PER PERSON]</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why?</li> <li><b>b. LISTEN FOR BDF - control over schedule/receiving more training; social identity/sense of belonging, etc.</b></li> </ul>	
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**Wrap (3 min)**

Question	Purpose / Analysis Guidance
<p>19. Before we end our session, if you were to give advice to someone new considering this volunteer opportunity, what might you tell them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What’s the most important thing they should know about volunteer firefighting that would encourage them to invest their time?</li> </ul>	
<p>Those are all my questions. Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this group discussion. This project is sponsored by the National Volunteer Fire Council (the NVFC).</p> <p>20. Is there anything else that you think the NVFC should know when thinking about ways to help fire departments retain their volunteers?</p> <p><b>Incentives:</b> You will be receiving a \$125 e-gift card for your participation. We will be processing them after completing the remaining groups this week, so you should see the gift card in your email early next week. If you don’t see anything by next Tuesday, then please feel free to reach out to us.</p> <p><b>[THANK AND END]</b></p>	<p>Wrap statement;</p> <p>Elicit final thoughts from participants</p>