

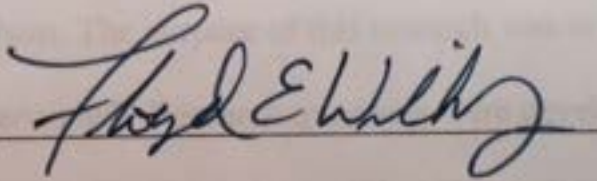
Developing a Professional Development Plan for the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service

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Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: 

Abstract

This research project was designed to evaluate the need for a professional development plan for the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service Department (BFRSD). The problem was the BFRSD does not have a defined professional development plan for the firefighters. The purpose of the research was to develop a professional development plan that would improve the education of all firefighters that would lead into succession planning.

An action research was conducted to develop a standard operating procedure for a professional development plan for all ranks and positions in the BFRSD. This was conducted by the development of research questions asking: 1) what is the purpose of a professional development plan? 2) What are some recognized professional development models? 3) How can professional development lead into succession planning? 4) How can the BFRSD implement a professional development plan?

Information was collected through literary review and surveys distributed to members of the BFRSD and departments across the nation. The researched looked at professional development in the business world, education community and fire service. The survey to the BFRSD asked questions pertaining to the current level of education of the members. The survey, distributed to departments across the nation, resulted in providing a view of how other departments are involved in professional development.

The recommendations compiled after the research were to form a committee to develop a professional development plan for the BFRSD. The recommendation included working with the human resource department to include the professional development into the department's promotional process.

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Introduction

The Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service Department (BFRSD) employs six hundred and twenty-five (625) sworn firefighters to serve the citizens and visitors of Birmingham. Every day, the men and women of the BFRSD respond to the request for services that range from an average of 150 emergency responses each day to numerous community service requests. The knowledge, expertise and efficiency of these provided services require proper training. The community expects the personnel arriving to assist with their requests, to be well trained and have the knowledge to solve their problems. The responsibility of the BFRSD is to provide the training necessary to accomplish this expectation. The BFRSD provides the minimum level of training that is required by the Alabama Personnel Standards Commission, National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians, and Insurance Service Office rating schedules. Is this minimal expectation enough to be completely competent in our profession?

The problem is the BFRSD does not have a defined professional development plan for our firefighters. The purpose of this research is to develop a professional development plan that would improve the education, knowledge and skills of our firefighters. This plan would improve the efficiency of our firefighters and lead into succession planning through the departments rank structure. This research paper will use an active research methodology to develop a professional development plan for all ranks within the department. This research will be accomplished by collecting information using the following questions:

- 1) What is the purpose of a professional development plan?
- 2) What are some recognized professional development models?
- 3) How can professional development lead into succession planning?
- 4) How can the BFRSD implement a professional development plan?

Background

The Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service Department (BFRSD) has been in existence since 1871. The City of Birmingham covers 151 square miles (City of Birmingham website, n.d.) and has a living population of 212,237 (United States Census Bureau website, n.d.). The daytime population can reach over 300,000 (City Data, 2016). The city is experiencing massive increase in residential apartments and lofts, which is resulting in, increase population and increase in call volume. Birmingham has three major interstates running through the city with an unknown number of people traveling each day. The BFRSD serves the city by providing fire suppression, emergency medical services, hazardous materials response, technical rescue, and fire prevention/public education services. Over 700 employees, including 625 sworn firefighters, provide services from 31 fire stations. The BFRSD responds to all 911 requests for services by utilizing 26 fire suppression engine companies, 7 quint/ladder companies, 3 ARFF, and 19 advanced life support transport units. In 2016, the BFRSD responded to over 60,000 emergency responses with 70% of the responses being emergency medical in nature.

Since 2011, the department has seen a complete change over in the executive staff with two different fire chiefs taking command and three complete changes in the ranks of assistant/deputy chiefs. This change over flowed down through the ranks with only 1 of the 20 battalions chief left from a group of 13 that was promoted in May of 2011. This change has affected all ranks from captain down to apparatus operator. Looking forward to the next three years, another complete change in the executive staff is expected to occur, including a potential new fire chief. With these potential changes on the horizon, the BFRSD must begin preparing for individuals to move into higher ranks including executive position. The department needs to

create a professional development plan that will include succession planning for all divisions and sections.

Through the 1970's and 80's, in Birmingham, professional development was not available for firefighters and officers. Professional development was centered on the department's promotional process. Promotional tests were given every 2-3 years and had a required reading list of 10 – 15 books. There were limited numbers of promotions each year so the competition was tough with each promotion awarded strictly by the rank of the exam scores. Members spent hours upon hours memorizing text books on fire dynamics, hydraulics, fire service management, and building construction, to name a few. The knowledge gained by this process resulted in very competent officers.

In the 1990's, the promotional process changed to only about 5 books to study and the test went from 200 questions to 100 questions. At this point, professional development was still not in the in the forefront of the department. The only requirements to take the lieutenant's test were that you had 2 years of service as a firefighter. A new fire chief was selected in 1993 from Miami Dade Fire and Rescue. This chief was the first outside fire chief the BFRSD had ever hired. He quickly changed the process for promotion and placed a college degree and paramedic certification at the top of his consideration for promotion. This change resulted in that by the end of the 1990's close to 85% of all officer ranks had a bachelor's degree, associate's degree or a paramedic certification. This fire chief also brought the Executive Fire Officer Program into the department. This fire chief left the department in 1998 and over the next few years the emphasis on formal education began to fade.

In the 2000's, Pro Board and IFSAC certification became very accessible to individual firefighters. Although you saw several firefighters receiving numerous certifications, they did

not correlate into consideration in promotions. This lack of consideration caused a downturn in certifications received. Also in the 2000's, the promotion exams changed to an assessment center type test. The written test with required books to study was removed from the exam. With this change in the testing process, study to gain knowledge from fire service manuals changed to studying on how to take the test. The focus was on the "buzzwords" for the assessment center and not general fire service knowledge.

The BFRSD is in need of a structured professional development plan for each rank and division assignment to build the officers of the future and a succession plan for the next fire chief or assistant chief to be ready to take command. This research paper is linked to the Executive Leadership class by diagnosing ones self to determine how professional development will improve the efficiency of the department but also one's self. Linkage will also be found in looking at professional development as an adaptive challenge. This research will also meet the National Fire Academy's goal advancing the professional development of fire service personnel and other people engaged in Fire Prevention and Control Activities.

Literature Review

Education and learning is at the forefront of world culture today. Children are in school at age four and will continue for the next twenty years. Our culture pushes society and the education system to challenge children to expand their knowledge. City, county, state and federal budgets all have a considerable percentage of funds dedicated to education. There is a push for all high school students to go to college and pursue higher education. Some people go to college straight out of high school and some when they have established a career; then they continue on with their higher education. The fire service is no different than any other profession though many, members of the profession, feel that your basic training is enough and

the rest is on the job training. Experience is essential to the fire service profession to build Recognition Prime Decision Making (RPDM). RPDM helps build the memory bank on how to respond to the multitude of emergency incidents. RPDM is a blend of intuition and analysis (Klein, 2008, p. 457). Intuitions are, “things you know without knowing how you know them (Gasaway, 2016). RPDM is the collection of experiences through emergency response that one can recall to assist in mitigating another similar incident. Is RPDM enough for the fire service profession? Education needs to be life long or a career long learning process.

The Executive Leadership course within the Executive Fire Officer Program sees professional development as an opportunity for self-reflection and continued personal and professional leadership development (*EL-Student Manual*, 2015, p. 2-13). Two areas of responsibility drive professional development. The first area, is taking personal responsibility to make yourself better and to learn your craft. The second responsibility leans on the organizations to create an atmosphere and avenues of support to progress through a professional development plan. A professional development plan is plan for the future (*EL-Student Manual*, 2015, p. 2-13).

Professional development or education planning involves looking at your past, looking at where you are now and looking at where you want to go. This is an opportunity for you to set a path for your entire career. A professional development plan can begin before you even enter the fire service. This plan can have vocational skills that could be developed in high school or a technical college and/or a plan to enter college to pursue a management degree or emergency medical technician license. Planning will allow a framework and time-table for adopting your goals and adapting to factors beyond your control (Coleman, 2017, p. 34).

Professional development can have a wide variety of opportunities. Opportunities can range for specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning (Glossary of Education Reform website, n.d.). The goal of any professional development plan is to grow the persons knowledge. Members of the education community have constant professional development throughout the school year. Hours are spent learning new skills to improve the education of our children. According to the Glossary of Education Reform, “professional development is considered to be the primary mechanism that schools can use to help teachers continue to learn and improve skills over time” (Glossary of Education Reform website, n.d.). Some goals of professional development, as pertaining to educators, are to further education and knowledge and to develop technical, quantitative and analytical skills (Glossary of Education Reform website, n.d.). When looking at these goals and how the education community views professional development, there is information the fire service can learn. Professional development is not limited to one or two professions; it is for all.

Professional development is to be looked at as self-improvement. An individual must develop his or her own personal goals for their career and move forward; each individual must “begin with end in mind” to develop their own plan (Covey, 1989, p. 97). Education and knowledge will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of one’s self and to improve the organization. Steven R. Covey states “effectiveness starts with self” (Covey, 1989, p. 42). An organization should aspire for everyone to be engaged in the future of the organization. In the fire service, like many organizations, the department has a mission statement; but how many departments have professional development as part of their mission? By growing the development and knowledge of the firefighters, the department will become more efficient and provide a better service to the citizens and stakeholders we serve. Michael Abrashoff stated in

It's Your Ship, “the people operating the equipment are what gives us a fighting chance and we seem to have lost our way when it comes to helping them grow” (Abrashoff, 2002, p. 1).

The stakeholders and citizens we serve will benefit when members of the department engage in professional development. Educators engage in professional development for the purpose of improving the students. In public schools, effective professional development affects students. Students learning and achievement increase when educators engage in affective professional development focused on the skills needed to address students major learning challenges (“Why PD matters,” 2010, p. 5). By engaging in professional development, all personnel will be headed down the same path of knowledge and skills. The *Practice of Adaptive Leadership* states, “when people begin to use the same words with the same meaning, they communicate more effectively, minimize misunderstanding, and gain a sense of being on the same page” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 9).

By having a structured professional development plan, the organization is providing the employee the opportunity to gain valuable knowledge, skills and abilities to perform effectively when called on by the citizens. Professional development is key to preparing leaders to perform. If you prepare for the most challenging scenarios, chances are good that you will be prepared for the unforeseen (Abrashoff, 2002, p. 122). A structured plan can instill a habit for education and learning. A plan laid out for each level in the organization with a time frame will keep the employee engaged in learning. Steve Covey states “habit is the intersection of knowledge, skill and desire.... knowledge is what to do, skill is how to do it, and desire is the motivation to want to do it” (Covey, 1989, p. 47). When looking at gaining knowledge, we have to look into tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is gathering knowledge from life experiences, education and training. This is knowledge that resides outside your consciousness and guides intuition. Tacit

knowledge will assist personnel in making high stress, high consequence, split second decisions (Gasaway,). By using tacit knowledge, personnel can make good decisions with limited information and a limited time frame. Tacit knowledge requires little or no thought and can quickly determine how decisions will be made (Smith, 2001, p. 314). Elizabeth A. Smith stated, “the ability to acquire and manage tacit knowledge is hallmarks of managerial success” (Smith, 2001, p. 311).

Any organization is seeking the best employees to come to work for them. The fire service is no different. Positions in the department are highly competitive from the entry-level position to all ranks up the chain. When a new recruit is hired and starts the academy, the department is 100% focused on providing the recruit with knowledge skills and abilities to be able to perform as part of a company. In many cases, this training will continue for the first year. So the question arises as to why professional development does not get the same priority for the officer ranks. The lack of structured officer training, that is inline with recruit training, is puzzling when you consider the responsibilities we place on company and chief officers. This question leads back to the fact that professional development is an organizational responsibility and a personal responsibility. From the standpoint of the organization’s responsibility, Abrashoff stated, “ a challenge for leaders is attracting the best employees and how to motivate them so that they work with passion, energy and enthusiasm” (Abrashoff, 2002, p. 12). Abrashoff continued with, “by not pushing development (of your employees), you are keeping your people in the dark (Abrashoff, 2002, p. 55).

Motivation is key to one’s desire to develop and achieve personal goals. Motivation is one’s passion for achievement that is intrinsic to the individual and not by external stimuli (*EL-Student Manual*, 2015, p. 4-11). Edgar Puryear, in his book *Nine-teen Stars* stated, when talking

about Generals MacArthur, Marshall, Eisenhower, and Patton leadership, “dedication to one’s career and willingness to work, study and prepare is essential to success” (Puryear, 1971, p. 395). These generals were motivated to lead and they commanded with great respect. The organization must create an environment that an employee can be motivated in; send the signal to your people how important they are to you (Abrashoff, 2002, p. 36). Professional development takes time, discipline, and dedication. Chase Sargent stated in *Buddy to Boss*, “the discipline to undergo some formal education is required in order to get ahead in the modern fire service (Sargent, 2006, p. 119). Very often, in the fire service, training is a reactive measure. We respond to a low frequency event that does not go very well, so a training program is created. This program will lead departments into a proactive state as we have seen with departments conducting RIT training, active shooter training, and flow path training. But a lot of departments still are only looking at the skill aspects of training and not being proactive in training the leaders of tomorrow. When bringing personal and organizational motivation into professional development we have to make a decision to be the best; “we are responsible for our lives... our behavior is a function of our decisions not our condition” (Covey, 1989, p. 71).

Professional development models for the fire service can be found. These plans set a path for firefighters to expand their knowledge with a direction. The National Professional Development Matrix from the United States Fire Administration is designed to “integrate training, education, experience, and certifications” (U.S. Fire Administration website, 2016). The matrix is a planning tool for fire service professional development. This matrix combines NFPA Fire Officer I-IV competencies, with National Fire Academy courses, and associate and bachelor’s courses that are recommended by the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education Model (FESHE) is a curriculum for fire related courses. These courses are designed for college and universities bachelor and associate's programs (U.S. Fire Administration website, 2016). The curriculum in FESHE is designed so that all colleges and universities teach the same courses with the same textbooks. This will help firefighters, across different departments and states, be on the same page with education.

The International Association of Fire Chief's have developed a Fire Service Executive Development Institute and an Officer Development Program (International Association of Fire Chief's website, n.d). The Executive program is conducted with a one-year commitment to attend structured classes and conferences. The Officer Development program is designed to meet the job performance requirements of NFPA 1021. This program has an officer development handbook that covers supervising to executive fire officers. This handbook outlines the certifications required for each level, years of experience at each level, the formal education, and National Fire Academy curriculum for each level. The IAFC's plan is put together as a systematic plan for one's professional career and is seen as "a never ending journey of professional development" ("IAFC ODH," 2003, p. 1).

The business and education communities can provide insight into the professional development world outside the fire service. The fire service is not the only profession that is trying to develop their employees. Gaining the funding for training is a struggle in the fire service. When budget times come around, the training and travel budget are usually the first to be cut. In the sales profession, funding for training can be shown to increase the bottom line of a company by as much as 10% ("Negotiate training," 2010). In 2011, companies with more than 100 employees spent over \$59 million on training; an increase of 13% from 2010 to 2011 (Goset,

n.d.). Companies with more than 1,000 employees budgeted \$922 per employee in 2011 (Goset, n.d.).

Budgets are not the only obstacle for training. Creating relevant training that will capture the attention of the employee is important. Julie Giulioni stated, that a challenge to training is “training a workforce with a short attention span; you have to edu-tain” (Giulioni, 2017). Based on adult learning principles, a successful training experience has to have clear goals, the employees have to be included in determining the training program, and the employees are participating in activities during the training (“Components of successful learning,” n.d.). These principles can be seen in the Alabama Fire College student enrollment numbers when the outside training classes are always full to capacity. These classes are hands on with very little classroom learning.

Professional development falls into a category of personnel responsibility. Vivian Blade stated, “you have to be intentional about seeking out opportunities for broader experiences” (Blade, 2017). To continue to grow in your profession, you need to attend a professional development activity each year, participate professional organizations, enroll in training programs, and do some type of research (Human Resource Management, n.d.). Organizational responsibilities fall into creating an effective professional development plan for their employees. Components of an effective plan include, assessing where the organization is against professional standards, training that challenges an individual, and providing support to the plan (Human Resource Management, n.d.).

Leaders of an organization have to be out front when it comes to professional development. Chief officers must be participating in career development just as a company officer would be. If the members of the organization see the executive staff in professional

development, they will begin to see the importance of expanding their knowledge. If leaders do not continue with professional development then why would the members see it as important? The lack of professional development can lead to mediocrity. In the book *Extreme Ownership*, the authors state, “if substandard performance is accepted.... then the poor performance becomes the new standard” (Willink & Babin, 2015, p. 54).

Professional development is designed to grow each employee so they can be more efficient and effective to serve the citizens, customers, and or stakeholders. The organization will become better when all personnel are on the same page and going down the same path. With a structured professional development plan, an organization can look to the future and begin identifying and building the leadership of tomorrow. In the fire service, a professional development should not only be designed for firefighters to obtain a formal degree or officer level certifications, it should be designed to grow personnel to be the next executive officers and the fire chief. Professional development or career planning involves matching individual's career goals with opportunities in an organization (Ivancevich, 2007, p. 460). Succession planning is considered an integral part of a comprehensive career-planning program (Ivancevich, 2007, p. 140).

One of the jobs of the fire chief or company executive is to educate and inspire the work force. In the fire service we should be building each firefighter to move to the next level. One of the first overall tasks of leadership is to educate the people around you (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 115). When you have a succession plan in-place, a leader can look for their replacement from the current employees and begin developing that employee. When practicing adaptive leadership, a commitment to an individual's professional development comes from

understanding that the courage to make needed changes resides in the people who have a long-term perspective and a stake in the organization (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 104).

In *Step Up and Lead*, Frank Viscuso states, “true succession planning is an ongoing process that is designed to ensure the effectiveness of an organization at all levels. This is accomplished by training and developing new leaders” (Viscuso, 2013, p. 84). Within the fire service, there are many divisions and sections that have to be managed. These will include training, fire prevention & inspection, human resources, and logistics. A proactive department, with a structured professional development and succession plan, can begin identifying the individuals that can step up and lead these divisions. We should not have an officer that is riding an engine company one day and running the logistics division the next. The most important obligation of an organization is to train those who are coming up the ladder (Abrashoff, 2008, p. 76). A training/mentoring program should be in-place for all divisions to identify personnel to move into the upper level positions. Simon Simek states, “what ignites the human spirit is when leaders of our organization offer us a reason to grow” (Simek, 2014, p. 211).

Creating and implementing a professional development plan will be a challenge to an organization. Professional development can be considered an adaptive challenge. Some members of an organization may be against a required plan and also would not participate in a voluntary development plan. There could be senior members that will resist a structured professional development plan out of fear. This fear could be fear of failure or a fear of talented younger people changing the organization (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 18). An adaptive challenge requires people to change their ways. One distinctive aspect of leading an adaptive change is that you must connect with the values, beliefs, and anxieties of the people you are trying to move (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 38). Jordan Cotapano show five obstacles to professional development:

“fear of failure, believing you have it all figured out before you begin, perfectionism, lack of focus, and fear of criticism or ridicule”(Cotapano, n.d.). As a leader of an adaptive change, you have to be mindful of the “casualties” that will be incurred. These casualties are employees that will lose something they value or an opportunity to advance. As a leader you must be willing to accept responsibility for these casualties (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 145).

Implementation of a professional development plan will take time. The members of the organization must have a say in the plan. A diverse committee needs to be formed to seek out and agree on the direction to be taken. The plan needs to be in line with the department’s mission, “ a leader must have a true belief in the mission” (Willink & Babin, 2015, p. 76). The member must buy into the plan to build the best organization. In *Extreme Ownership*, it is stated the “ the best teams are constantly looking to improve and push the standards higher” (Willink & Babin, 2015, p. 55). Implementation will take time and does not need to be rushed. We can begin to grow young firefighters, but we have to be careful not to push them too fast. The plan should be implemented with a set of education opportunities each year based on the position they are in. The education community recommends one professional development activity each year (Human Resource Management, n.d.). Experience is an important part of professional growth. The IAFC officer development handbook recommends years of experience at one level before moving forward to the next. An example would be 2-4 years experience as a supervising officer before moving into the managing officer (“IAFC ODH,” 2003, p. 23).

The information presented in this section shows that professional development is needed in all professions. One must look at professional development as a tool to improve not only the individual, but also the organization and the organization’s ability to serve the community. Leadership is a key component of implementing and the success of a professional development

plan. As a leader, you have to look at this as an adaptive change, changing a culture. When leaders set the example, junior members will join in. Professional development will increase efficiency and effectiveness and a high performing winning team is the result (Willink & Babin, 2015, p. 31). Learning in the fire service will never stop. As leaders we must embrace this idea. Leaders can look to Robert E. Lee for his dedication to lifelong learning by stating “the education of a man or woman is never complete till they die” (Parker, Achenbaum, Fuller, & Fay, 1995, p. 103).

Procedures

This research will be an action research to develop a professional development plan for the BFRSD. This research was conducted through literary review on professional development through educational institutions and the business world. The research continued by considering leadership principals and how they apply to professional development. Surveys were developed and submitted to BFRSD personnel and fire officers across the nation. The first survey was distributed to 650 sworn firefighters of the BFRSD. This survey asked these personnel the level of certification they have and the education and certifications they believe is needed during the promotional process in the department. This survey resulted in 202 or 31% participation. The limitations of this survey were firefighters not reading their emails or failure to respond. The next survey was distributed to fire officers across the nation and state. This survey resulted in 85 responses. This survey was first sent to 142 members of the EFO program and resulted in 48 or 56% participation. The limitations on this group were people viewing the survey on an EFO Facebook page or reading emails. This survey was also distributed through the IAFC EFO section and to students of a NFA class. This distribution resulted in 38 or 44% participation. The limitations of this survey were the unknown number of people the survey reached though the

IAFC. Eighteen of the 22 NFA students responded to the survey. An additional limitation of the survey was it only reached 12 departments that are a similar size of the BFRSD.

The first research question was developed to explore the purpose of a professional development plan. This question was researched through literature review of general business practices and public/private education institutions. This review went further to explore professional development as a leadership role. Survey questions were developed to ask members of the BFRSD and departments across the nation the level of education each person had and the level of education they thought would be needed at each level of the organization. The limitation to this question was the number of responses to the survey that were returned.

The next research question focused on recognized professional development models. This was researched through literature review of fire service, military and general businesses. Survey questions were distributed to ask how many departments had a structured professional development plan. The limitation to this question was the number of surveys that were returned that had a department size that matched the BFRSD.

The next research question was concentrated on succession planning. This was researched through literature review of the fire service, the business field and education field. A survey question was distributed to fire departments around the country to ask if they had a formal succession plan in their departments. The limitation to this question was the information found tended to be the same regardless of the profession.

The last research question focused on ways to implement a professional development plan. This was conducted through literature review of the fire service, the business field and education field. There was limited information found on a true timetable of implementation.

The research continued by conducting a personal interview with Director Alan Rice. Director Rice is the former director of the Alabama Fire College, which is one of three largest Pro Board and IFSAC, accredited training agencies in the nation. Director Rice has 25 years of fire service experience and is now city administrator for the City of Hoover, Alabama.

Results

Two surveys were developed and distributed to the members of the BFRSD and departments across the country. The survey to the members of the BFRSD resulted in a response from 202 of the 650 or 31% of the department (Appendix B). The survey distributed across the country only returned 85 responses from 33 different states (Appendix D). This survey question was designed to gather information from different regions of the country and how professional development is viewed. (Appendix C).

Surveys to the members BFRSD returned results from all ranks (Appendix A). The years of service in the department varied with 23% with 5 years or less and 21% with over 20 years as the two highest percentages of returns. This survey question provided information from a broad spectrum of experience.

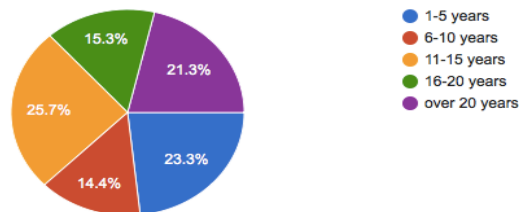


Figure 1. BFRSD Yrs. Service

This survey showed that 64% of the respondents have a college degree. These degrees included 3% reporting they had a master degree. Of the returns, 35% reported that they did not

have a degree. Of those that do not have a degree, 49.5% stated they were not pursuing a degree (Figure 2). These results show that a professional development plan would help these individuals with a path to improve their careers. The degree fields of the members that responded are fire service or public administration in nature, but 40% stated that their degree was in other fields.

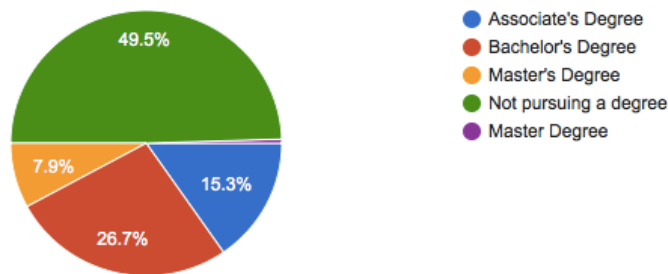


Figure 2. Pursuing a Degree

The first research question asked the purpose of professional development. Through the literature review, evidence collected showed that continued education throughout one's career is essential to the organization and the citizens. The survey to the BFRSD explored if members were achieving some level of professional development. According to the survey, 38% of the respondents have Fire Officer I and 34% have Fire Officer II. A drop off in certifications was found with only 9% having Fire Officer III. The same can be found with Fire Instructor, with 50% having Instructor I, 38% having Instructor II, but only 3% having Instructor III. The Fire Inspector level has a very low participation with 63% of the respondents not having any Inspector training. These areas show the need to have a structured plan in place. Exploring training at the National Fire Academy, only 23% of the have attended the NFA (Appendix B). When looking across the country, 45% of the departments that responded have a structured professional development program.

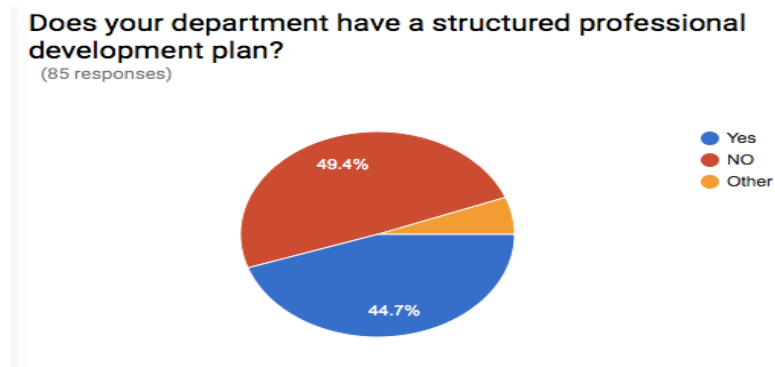


Figure 3. Dept. with PD Plan

The departments that have a professional development plan, the plan covers all ranks in the department (Appendix D). This survey continued to ask if the professional development plan was considered in promotions. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents stated that the professional development plan is not considered during promotions.

The next research question looked for some recognized professional development plans. Through the research, fire service professional development plans were found through the National Fire Academy FESHE program, National Professional Development Matrix, and the IAFC Officer Development Handbook. In the survey to the members of the BFRSD, a question was asked if certain certification should be required for promotion. An overwhelming response of 91% stated yes. This response lead to the conclusion that the members would be in favor of a professional development plan that would lead to potential promotions. Less than 9% of the respondents were against any degree or certifications for promotion to the ranks lieutenant through Battalion Chief (Appendix B).

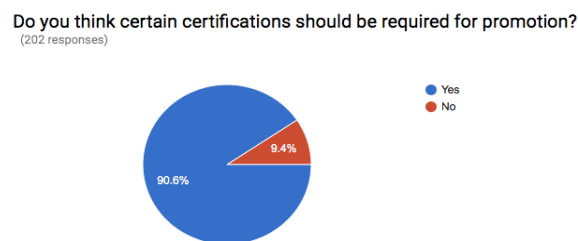


Figure 4. Required for Promotion

When looking at departments across the nation, 45% say that they have a formal professional development plan. Through the survey, most do not have a formal degree as a part of the plan and 65% do not require courses from the National Fire Academy (Appendix D).

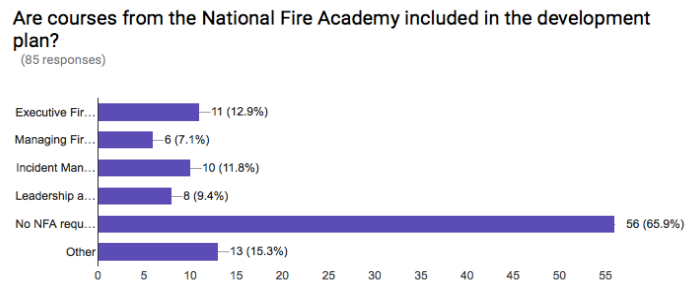


Figure 5. NFA Courses

The next research question focused on a professional development plan and how could it lead into succession planning. This literature review showed that leadership is key to professional development and building leaders of the future. A survey question was developed to ask departments if they had a structured succession plan and what positions are part of the plan (Appendix C). Of the surveys that were returned, 87% stated that they did not have a structured professional development plan.

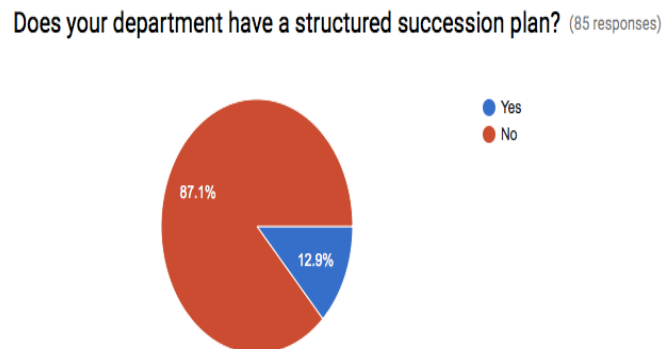


Figure 6. Succession Plan

When looking toward succession planning, do you look at rank or a certain position to be part of the plan? In the survey of departments with a succession plan, the results showed different ranks and positions were included in the plan.

What ranks and/or positions are a part of succession planning? (85 responses)

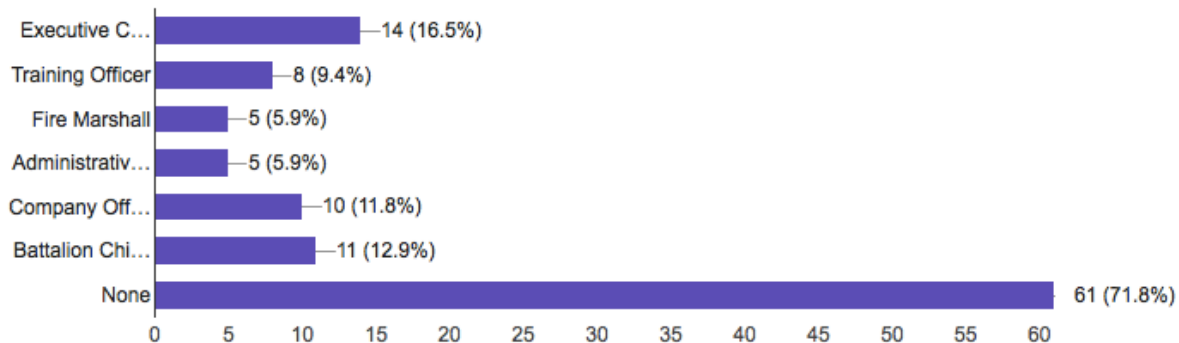


Figure 7. Positions in Succession Plan

The last research question asked how can the BFRSD implement a professional development plan. The literature review showed the importance of a plan to the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. In addition, the members of the organization must take part in the development of the plan and also have incentive to participate. The survey to the departments across the country showed that 37% of the departments do not require the professional development plan for promotion and 90% do not have a pay increase attached to the completion of the plan (Appendix D). Director Rice stated, in a personal interview, that you have to first look at where each person is in relation to the professional development plan. He also stated that a plan could take as much as 24 months to implement (A. Rice, personal communication, April 6, 2017).

This research will lead to the development of a standards operating procedure (SOP) for the BFRSD. The SOP will outline a professional development plan for each level of the organization. The SOP will also include position specific development for each division of the department that will include fire prevention and training.

Discussion

The research has concluded that the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service Department is in need to develop a structured professional development plan for its members. The mission of the BFRSD is to provide rapid, reliable, professional services to the citizens and stakeholders of Birmingham. The mission statement states that the BFRSD will accomplish this through, as one component of the mission, education. Education in this context would mean educating the community. The belief of this research is that education includes firefighters. The BFRSD must educate our members to the latest information provided to be able to better educate and serve the citizens. In *Extreme Ownership*, Willink and Babin state, “the best teams are constantly looking to improve and push the standards higher” (Willink & Babin, 2015, p. 55). They continue by saying, “a leader must be a true believer in the mission” (Willink & Babin, 2015, p. 76). In any organization, if the mission is to be the best, you must train and educate your employees to be the best.

Professional development is a continuing process through one’s career. Abrashoff states, “training and staff development are never ending task that require time, dedication and investment (Abrashoff, 2008, p. 30). He continues by stating that leaders must “inspire all your people to hit the highest level they can” (Abrashoff, 2008, p. 24). The need for a structured professional development plan can be seen in the survey responses. The data shows the lack of progression past Fire Officer II and Instructor I by officers of the BFRSD (Appendix B).

Abrashoff stated that training and staff development are never ending task that require time, dedication and organizational investment (Abrashoff, 2008, p. 30). The BFRSD is following this best practice by providing 3 occurrences of paid leave to members attending any training of their choosing each year. This shows the department's investment in time. Each member must dedicate his or her time to professional development also; "the discipline to undergo some formal education is required" (Sargent, 2006, p. 119). Training and education must be a core value of the organization. Covey states, "proactive people are driven by values if the value is to produce good quality work"; the organization must instill the efficiency and effectiveness as a value (Covey, 1989, p. 72). Organizations must make an investment in the professional development of its members. Alan Rice stated "that budget allocations and organization priority" are two barriers to professional development (A. Rice, personal communication, April 6, 2017).

Incentive to build and participate in a professional development plan is on the shoulders of the organization; "organizations atmosphere is key to getting the most out of our crews" (Sargent, 2006, p. 3). The lack of incentive can be seen in the survey when 90% of the respondents, from across the nation, stated they had no pay incentive from completing the professional development plan (Appendix D). Positive incentive can be seen in the survey of the BFRSD personnel with 90% stating they believe that certifications should be required for promotion (Appendix B).

A structured professional development plan will keep members on task with education. Models found through the National Fire Academy can provide guidance for organizations and its members (U.S. Fire Administration website, 2016). The surveys show a lack of continuing education with 35% of the respondents stating they do not have a formal degree and 50%, of those with no degree, stating that they are not pursuing a degree (Appendix B). The National

Fire Academy is a great resource for professional development. The departments surveyed, from around the country, show that 66% of the respondents do not require NFA courses in their professional development plan (Appendix D).

“True leaders create organizations that support, educate and exercise the cultivation of leadership” (Sargent, 2006, p. 17). Succession planning is essential to keep an organization thriving into the future. The survey shows that 87% of the departments, that responded, stated that they do not have a structured succession plan (Appendix D). A strong professional development plan will educate personnel and provide a pool of individuals that can move up in the organization. From *19 Stars*, Puryear found a common leadership pattern, of the generals in the book, was “leaders were not born...they were made” (Puryear, 1971, p. 395). If we are not educating and building leaders of tomorrow, how do we expect to make change and lead into the future. When looking to succession planning, as leaders, “we must spot candidates with a sacred trait – passion” (Abrashoff, 2008, p. 18).

Implementation of a professional development plan will take time. Alan Rice stated “implementation could take up to 24 months to accomplish” (A. Rice, personal communication, April 6, 2017). The beginning phase has to begin with planning where you want your members to be. During this process, employees must be involved in determining the knowledge to be learned (“Components of successful learning,” n.d.). In the survey of the BFRSD, being involved in the process is shown as 75% of the respondents saying there is a need for a degree to be promoted to the officer ranks (Appendix B). A professional development plan will require some to change. This can cause fear of the unknown to some. According to Heifetz and Linsky, this change is an adaptive challenge because it will require people to change their ways ((Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 69).

Recommendations

The purpose of this research paper is to develop a professional development plan that will improve the education of the personnel of the BFRSD. Through the research, information was gathered that would lead to the development of a professional development standard operating procedure (Appendix E).

The first recommendation is to create a professional development plan committee with the purpose of developing an SOP. This committee will be diverse through the ranks, years of experience, and diversity of the members. This committee will be charged with making recommendations on the courses to be completed for each level and the time frame for completion. In addition, the committee will need to develop an implementation plan for the SOP.

The next recommendation will be to take the SOP to the Human Resource division for approval. This step will need to be taken to be able to incorporate the SOP into the promotion process. A key component of this step is to not stop the growth of professional development waiting on approval to be a part of the promotion process.

Based on the recommendations above, the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service Department will improve the level of knowledge and education of its members through professional development

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Appendix A

Professional Development

This information will be utilized for an Executive Fire Officer Applied Research Project on Professional Development.

Rank *

- ☐ Firefighter
- ☐ Apparatus Operator
- ☐ Lieutenant
- ☐ Captain
- ☐ Battalion Chief

Years of Service *

- ☐ 1-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ 16-20 years
- ☐ over 20 years

Do you have a college degree? *

- ☐ Associate's Degree
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ No Degree

...

Is your degree Fire Service related or other field? *

- ☐ Fire Science
- ☐ Fire Administration
- ☐ EMS
- ☐ Emergency Management
- ☐ Public Administration
- ☐ Other...

Are you pursuing a degree? *

- ☐ Associate's Degree
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Not pursuing a degree

EMT License Level *

- ☐ EMT Paramedic
- ☐ EMT Advanced
- ☐ EMT Basic
- ☐ EMT Intermediate
- ☐ First Responder

What Fire Officer certifications do you have? *

- ☐ Fire Officer I
- ☐ Fire Officer II
- ☐ Fire Officer III
- ☐ Fire Officer IV
- ☐ None

What Instructor certification do you have? *

- ☐ Fire Instructor I
- ☐ Fire Instructor II
- ☐ Fire Instructor III
- ☐ None

What Inspector certifications do you have? *

- ☐ Inspector I
- ☐ Inspector II
- ☐ Inspector III
- ☐ None

What Special Operations certifications do you have? Mark all that apply. *

- ☐ Rope
- ☐ Confined Space
- ☐ Trench
- ☐ Structural Collapse
- ☐ Hazardous Materials Technician
- ☐ Vehicle Extrication

Have you attended the National Fire Academy? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you think certain certifications should be required for promotion? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What degree should be required for promotion to each position? *

Row 1. Lieutenant	Column 1. Associate's Degree
Row 2. Captain	Column 2. Bachelor's Degree
Row 3. Battalion Chief	Column 3. Master's Degree
	Column 4. None

Which Officer Certification should be required for promotion to each position? *

Row 1. Lieutenant	Column 1. Fire Officer I
Row 2. Captain	Column 2. Fire Officer II
Row 3. Battalion Chief	Column 3. Fire Officer III
	Column 4. Fire Officer IV
	Column 5. None

Which certification should be required for promotion to each position? *

Row 1. Lieutenant	Column 1. Fire Instructor I
Row 2. Captain	Column 2. Fire Instructor II
Row 3. Battalion Chief	Column 3. Fire Instructor III
	Column 4. None

What EMT Level should be required for promotion to each position? *

Row 1. Lieutenant	Column 1. Paramedic
Row 2. Captain	Column 2. Advanced EMT
Row 3. Battalion Chief	Column 3. Basic EMT
	Column 4. None

What other certification should be required for promotion to Lieutenant? Mark all that apply. *

- ☐ Haz Mat Technician
- ☐ Safety Officer
- ☐ Health Safety Officer
- ☐ Rope Rescue
- ☐ Vehicle Extrication
- ☐ Fire Inspector
- ☐ Fire Investigator
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other...

What other certification should be required for promotion to Captain? Mark all that apply. *

- ☐ Haz Mat Technician
- ☐ Safety Officer
- ☐ Health Safety Officer
- ☐ Rope Rescue
- ☐ Vehicle Extrication
- ☐ Fire Inspector
- ☐ Fire Investigator
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other...

...

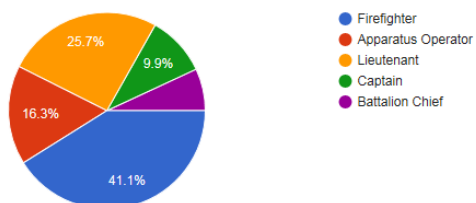
What other certification should be required for promotion to Battalion Chief?
Mark all that apply.

- ☐ Haz Mat Technician
- ☐ Safety Officer
- ☐ Health Safety Officer
- ☐ Rope Rescue
- ☐ Vehicle Extrication
- ☐ Fire Inspector
- ☐ Fire Investigator
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other...

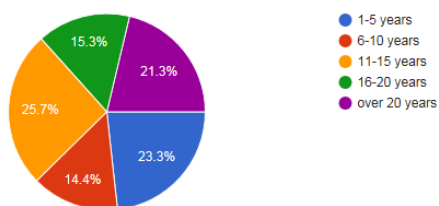
Appendix B

Responses from BFRSD Survey

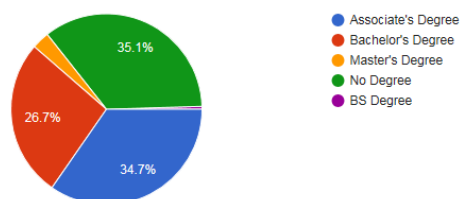
Rank (202 responses)



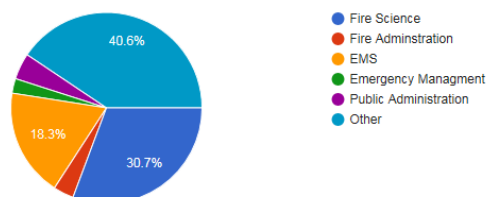
Years of Service (202 responses)



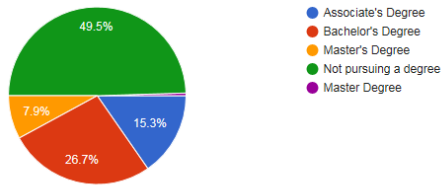
Do you have a college degree? (202 responses)



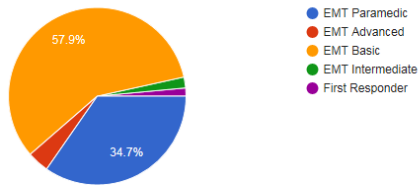
Is your degree Fire Service related or other field? (202 responses)



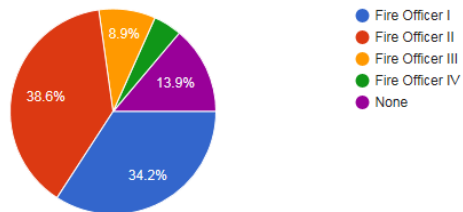
Are you pursuing a degree? (202 responses)



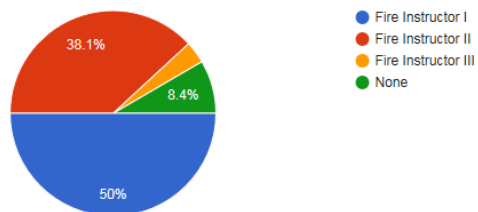
EMT License Level (202 responses)



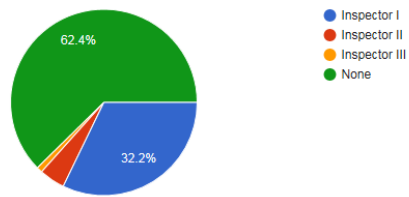
What Fire Officer certifications do you have? (202 responses)



What Instructor certification do you have? (202 responses)

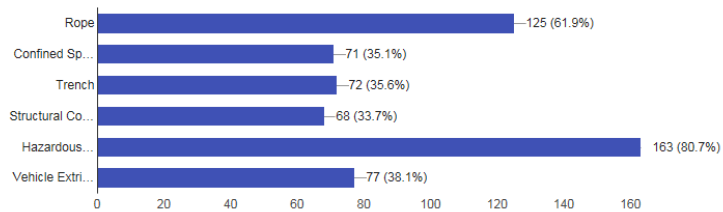


What Inspector certifications do you have? (202 responses)

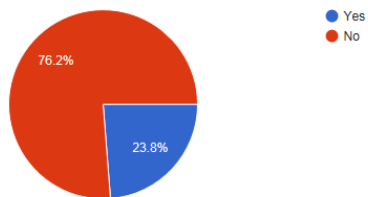


What Special Operations certifications do you have? Mark all that apply.

(202 responses)

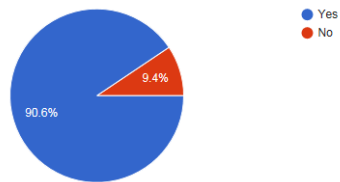


Have you attended the National Fire Academy? (202 responses)

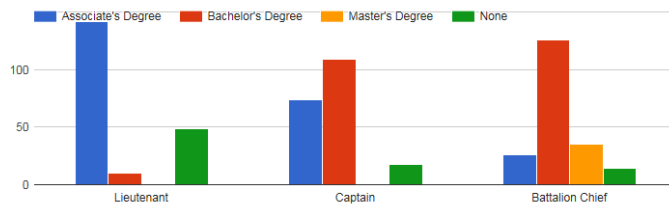


Do you think certain certifications should be required for promotion?

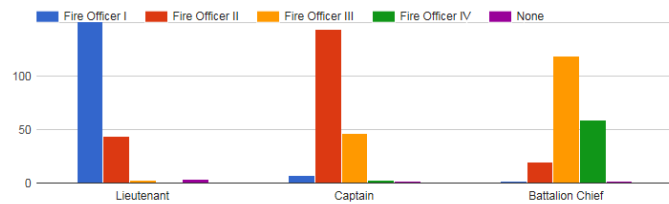
(202 responses)



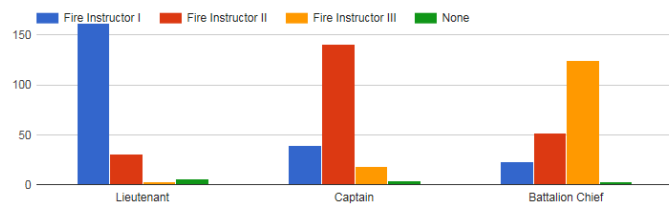
What degree should be required for promotion to each position?



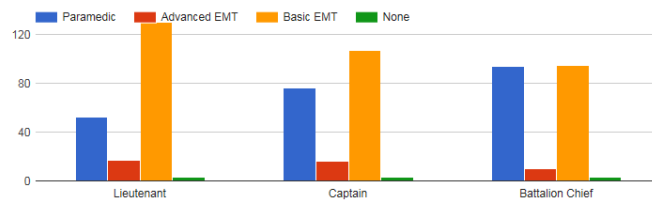
Which Officer Certification should be required for promotion to each position?



Which certification should be required for promotion to each position?

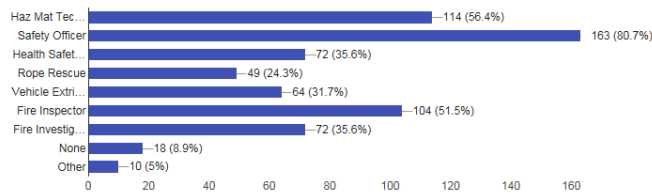


What EMT Level should be required for promotion to each position?



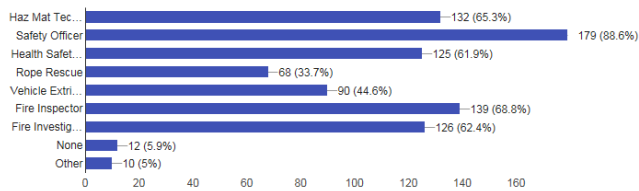
What other certification should be required for promotion to Lieutenant? Mark all that apply.

(202 responses)



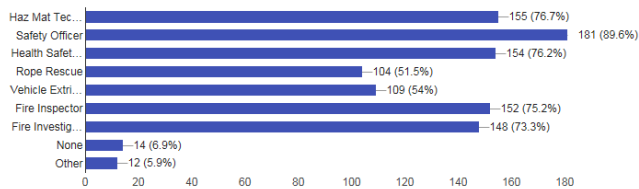
What other certification should be required for promotion to Captain? Mark all that apply.

(202 responses)



What other certification should be required for promotion to Battalion Chief? Mark all that apply.

(202 responses)



Appendix C

Professional Development Questions

Professional Development Plan

This survey is for an Executive Fire Officer Program Applied Research Project.

What size is your department?

☒ Multiple choice ▾

- ☐ less than 100 members ×
- ☐ 100 to 250 members ×
- ☐ 250 to 500 members ×
- ☐ more than 500 members ×
- ☐ Add option or [ADD "OTHER"](#)



Required



What is your community population? *

- ☐ less than 99,999
- ☐ 100,000 to 199,999
- ☐ 200,000 to 399,999
- ☐ 400,000 to 500,000
- ☐ greater than 500,000

What is your rank? *

- ☐ Fire Chief
- ☐ Assistant/Deputy Chief
- ☐ Battalion Chief
- ☐ Captain
- ☐ Lieutenant
- ☐ Firefighter
- ☐ Other...

What level of degree do you have? *

- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Associate's Degree
- ☐ None

Does your department have a structured professional development plan? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ NO
- ☐ Other...

What ranks does the plan include? Mark all that apply. *

- ☐ Firefighter
- ☐ Lieutenant
- ☐ Captain
- ☐ Battalion Chief
- ☐ Assistant Chief/Deputy Chief
- ☐ Fire Chief
- ☐ Other...

Is the professional development plan considered during promotion? *

- ☐ must be completed to move to next position
- ☐ must be progressing in the development plan to test
- ☐ point value added to promotion score
- ☐ not considered during promotion
- ☐ Other...

Is a formal degree part of the professional development plan? *

Row 1. Firefighter	Column 1. Associate's Degree
Row 2. Officer	Column 2. Bachelor's Degree
Row 3. Chief Officer	Column 3. Master's Degree
	Column 4. None

...

Are courses from the National Fire Academy included in the development plan? *

- ☐ Executive Fire Officer Program
- ☐ Managing Fire Officer Program
- ⋮ ☐ Incident Management Curriculum
- ☐ Leadership and Executive Development Curriculum
- ☐ No NFA requirement
- ☐ Other...

Is there a pay increase for completion of the development plan? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Does your department have a structured succession plan? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

What ranks and/or positions are a part of succession planning? *

☐ Executive Chief Officer

☐ Training Officer

☐ Fire Marshall

☐ Administrative Positions (i.e. Logistics Officer)

☐ Company Officer

☐ Battalion Chief/Shift Commander

☐ None

How are individuals chosen to participate in succession planning? *

☐ Voluntary

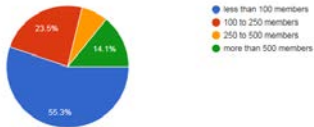
☐ Chosen by Fire Chief

☐ Other...

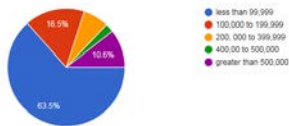
Appendix D

Professional Development Responses

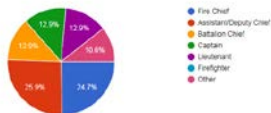
What size is your department? (85 responses)



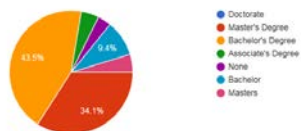
What is your community population? (85 responses)



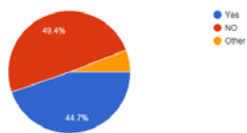
What is your rank? (85 responses)



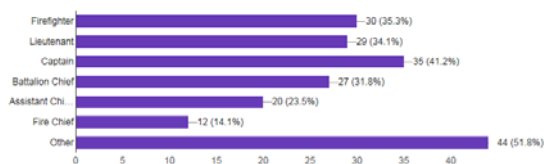
What level of degree do you have? (85 responses)



Does your department have a structured professional development plan? (85 responses)

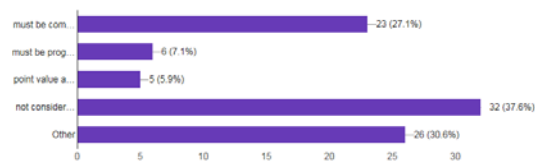


What ranks does the plan include? Mark all that apply. (85 responses)

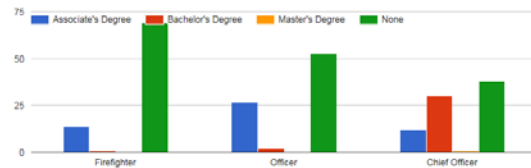


Is the professional development plan considered during promotion?

(85 responses)

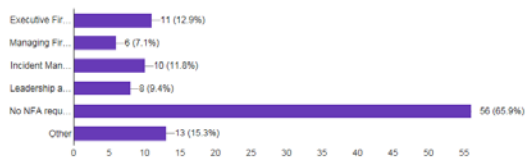


Is a formal degree part of the professional development plan?



Are courses from the National Fire Academy included in the development plan?

(85 responses)



Is there a pay increase for completion of the development plan?

(85 responses)



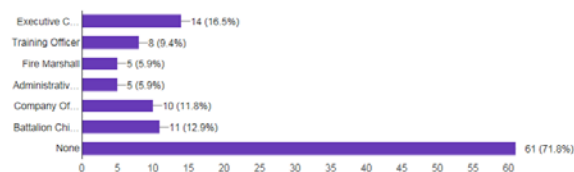
Does your department have a structured succession plan?

(85 responses)



What ranks and/or positions are a part of succession planning?

(85 responses)



Appendix E

Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service Professional Development Plan

Purpose: The purpose of this plan is to have a structured education and training plan for all levels in the BFRSD.

Objectives: The objectives is to outline the training and education requirements and establish a time line for each position and division assignment in the BFRSD

Position	Time Frame	NFPA Certification	EMS Training	Formal Education	National Fire Academy	Other
Firefighter	Year 1	FF I, FF II, Haz Mat A&O, Rope I, RIT	EMT Basic			
	Year 2	AO Pumper, Haz Mat Tech	Advanced EMT			Building Construction
	Year 3	AO Aerial, Rope II, Vehicle Extrication		AA Degree		
	Year 4	Fire Officer I, Fire Instructor I				
	Year 5		Paramedic EMT		Fire Service Supervision: Self Study	
Lieutenant	Year 1	Fire Inspector I, Fire Investigator I,		AA Degree	NFIRS	Fire Dynamics
	Year 2	Fire Officer II, Fire Instructor II			CCIO	Strategies and Tactics
	Year 3	Incident Safety Officer			Community Risk Reduction	
	Year 4			BS Degree	Safety Program Operations	
	Year 5				Managing Officer Program	

Position	Time Frame	NFPA Certification	EMS Training	Formal Education	National Fire Academy	Other
Captain	Year 1	Fire Officer III		BS Degree	Command and Control Multiple Alarm Incidents	
	Year 2	Public Information Officer			Command and Control at Target Hazards	
	Year 3	Fire Instructor III			Hazardous Materials Incident Management	
	Year 4	Fire Inspector II			Fire Investigation for Company Officers	
	Year 5	Health Safety Officer			Command and Control Natural and Man-Made Disasters	
Battalion Chief	Year 1	Fire Officer IV			EFO	
	Year 2				EFO	TEEX Enhanced All-Hazards IMS
	Year 3				EFO	
	Year 4				EFO	
	Year 5				Executive Planning	
	Year 6				Financial Management	
Executive Officers					EFO Standards of Cover-Resource Deployment	IAFC Conference State Fire Chief Association Conference

Position	Time Frame	NFPA Certification	EMS Training	Formal Education	National Fire Academy	Other
Fire Inspectors	Year 1	Fire Inspector I Hazardous Materials A&O			Fire Inspection Principles I	
	Year 2	Fire Inspector II			Fire Inspection Principles II	
	Year 3	Fire Inspector III			Fire & Life Safety Plan Review	
	Year 4	Fire Investigator I			Cultural Competence in Risk Reduction	
	Year 5				Hazardous Materials Code Enforcement	
Training Officer	Upon Assignment	Live Fire Instructor Health Safety Officer		AA Degree	Training Program Management Fire Service Course Design	
Arson Investigator	Upon Assignment	Fire Investigator II		AA Degree	Fire Investigation – Electrical System Fire Investigation –Forensic Evidence Fire Investigation – Interview & Testimony	

Position	Time Frame	NFPA Certification	EMS Training	Formal Education	National Fire Academy	Other
EMS Officer	Upon Assignment		Paramedic EMT	AA Degree	Advanced Leadership EMS EMS Quality Management EMS Special Operations Management of EMS	

Appendix F

Personal Interview with Director Alan Rice – April 6, 2017

What would be your definition of professional development?

- Climbing to a higher plateau. Continued personal growth.

Do you think the fire service, as a whole, embraces professional development?

- Professional development is seen just as training and not as a method for self-improvement.

What areas of professional development do you think is lacking in the fire service?

- Leadership
- Organizational Management
- Human Resources
- Budget and Finance
- Strategic Planning

What barriers do you see in professional development?

- Organization priority
- Budget
- Resources
- Individual Motivation

What positive movements have been made in professional development?

- More conference opportunities

Do you feel that professional development is too concerned with certifications?

- Use certification course as the departments training. Not looking at other training areas outside of certification.

How do you think a professional development plan should be implemented?

- Have to look at where people are now in relation to professional development
- May take as many as 24 months to fully implement