

**SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR THE VILLAGE OF MUNDELEIN FIRE
CHIEF**

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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Appendices Not Included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at <http://www.lrc.dhs.gov/> to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.

ABSTRACT

Since the first full-time fire chief was hired for the Mundelein Fire Department, significant change has occurred each time a new fire chief was named. The change associated with each new fire chief was also accompanied by a change in goals, programs, and future direction. The Mundelein Fire Department began experiencing this problem when the career chief retired in the early 1960's. Due to various circumstances, new fire chiefs appointed between 1960 and 1990 had tenures between eighteen months to seven years, often too short a time to provide the fire department or the village with clear plans for future direction.

In 1990 a new fire chief was once again appointed. The new chief brought vision and planning to the department. Clear, achievable goals were determined through the use of strategic planning and the involvement of all members of the department. New programs and practices quickly followed, along with a complete rebuilding of the department. The current fire chief has now been in command for nearly thirteen years and will reach retirement in less than three years. The chief would like to see the department continue to progress and to provide the same excellent services and programs to the community well into the future. To accomplish this, a succession plan would be most beneficial. Currently, no such plan exists. Also lacking is clear criteria for a succession plan, predominately in the area of educational achievements.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the components of a succession plan and to research the educational criteria to be included in a succession plan for fire chief. The research used both evaluative and action research methodologies, including a feedback instrument to determine the components of a succession plan and to further determine educational criteria for the position of fire chief. An analysis of pertinent literature concerning these issues was undertaken in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the components of a successful succession plan?
- 2) What, if any, are the educational criteria at the national level for chief officer succession planning?
- 3) What, if any, are the educational criteria at the state level for chief officer succession planning?
- 4) What educational criteria, if any, exist in fire service agencies of similar size and composition for chief fire officer succession planning?
- 5) What educational criteria should be utilized in developing a succession plan for the Village of Mundelein?

The procedures included an extensive literature review and the administration of a survey or feedback instrument. The results found that succession planning is an important and effective tool to be used for continued organizational growth. It was determined that successful succession planning consists of five key elements and also includes the need to determine educational criteria for the position being considered. The research also determined that, while most fire departments surveyed had no succession plan in place, the chiefs surveyed favored having a succession plan which included specific higher education and certification requirements.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1962, the Village of Mundelein determined that it would be in the best interest of the village to hire a full-time fire chief. The person selected for the job was the current chief of the all-volunteer fire department. This person served the village well until he was injured in the line of duty and ultimately retired from the position in 1968. In keeping with past practice, the volunteer assistant chief was offered the fire chief position and served with distinction and dedication until his untimely death in 1974. Again, the village considered promoting the assistant chief to the position, but the assistant chief was not interested in changing careers at that point in his life.

In order to fill the fire chief position, the village hired the former fire chief of a neighboring community. The new chief from the outside implemented his own goals and visions, some accepted and others rejected by the village. This chief left office within eighteen months of his hire. The village once again decided that it would be best to find a new chief from within due to the problems experienced in hiring a chief from the outside. The most senior career member, a firefighter, was promoted to fill the vacancy that once again existed. This chief attempted to change the vision and direction of the department yet again, and was well received for a time; however, after a period of five years, personal issues forced the replacement of the chief. Having failed with a chief from within, the village decided to once again look outside of the department due to the perceived lack of qualified internal candidates for the position. Unfortunately, this process would take fourteen months, during which time a volunteer assistant chief assumed the position of acting chief. Being acting chief, status quo was maintained.

A search was conducted and, once again, another former fire chief from a neighboring community was hired. This new chief, like his predecessors, implemented many new practices and ideas. Many of the new practices were positive, but often resented by the employees. In 1990, the village conducted a nationwide search to once again fill the chief position. This search resulted in the promotion of one of the current shift commanders. Within a short period of time, through the involvement of the employees, a mission statement, vision statement, and strategic plan were developed (and accepted) by the employees and elected officials.

Unfortunately, time passes on and the chief is nearing the end of a nearly thirty-year career with the village. At this time, a plan does not exist to provide for an orderly transition and the continued strategic vision that has been developed over the past twelve years. The author believes that it may be in the best interests of the village to begin to consider planning for an orderly, smooth transition. By implementing such a plan, employee morale, organizational direction, and stability of both the organization and the employees may be realized.

The goal of this research will be to identify components of a succession plan and to determine what educational criteria would be appropriate to include in a succession plan for the position of Village of Mundelein Fire Chief. This research will employ evaluative and action research methodologies. A literature review will be conducted to identify components necessary for the preparation of a succession plan, and to determine what educational criteria, on a nationwide, statewide, and similar sized agency basis, should be included as part of a succession plan for fire chief. Once the various criteria have been identified, a feedback form will be developed and sent to chiefs of similar sized fire departments, emergency medical service agencies, and emergency management agencies to determine the criteria that may be most beneficial to include in a succession plan for the Village of Mundelein.

The following research questions were proposed:

- 1) What are the components of a successful succession plan?
- 2) What, if any, are the educational criteria at the national level for chief officer succession planning?
- 3) What, if any, are the educational criteria at the state level for chief officer succession planning?
- 4) What educational criteria, if any, exist in fire service agencies of similar size and composition for chief fire officer succession planning?
- 5) What educational criteria should be utilized in developing a succession plan for the Village of Mundelein?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

In 1926, the Village of Mundelein officially constituted its volunteer fire department in response to the need to provide fire protection to the residents of the village and the surrounding rural areas. The need to create an official fire department was the result of several significant fires that occurred in the area during the early 1920's. Prior to the creation of the volunteer fire department in 1926, fire protection was supplied by a small group of individuals in the community. These individuals relied on a two-wheeled cart, which contained several lengths of hose used for firefighting. The cart was either pulled by one of the members' automobiles, when available, or manually by the firefighters. Unfortunately, these individuals had no funding mechanism for upgrading or even maintaining the extremely small amount of equipment that they had in their possession.

In 1926, the village was given a motorized fire truck by Cardinal Mundelein. Cardinal Mundelein, who had recently built a large university in the relatively rural community, decided

that fire protection for his new university was needed. In order to provide the fire protection he desired, he actually created the village's first, organized and properly equipped fire department. This marked the beginning of the all-volunteer fire department. The village was so taken by the generosity of the Cardinal that the village officials re-named the village after the Cardinal. The village, now having a fire department, also appointed the first fire chief to oversee the operation of the new department. In the ensuing years, the members of the fire department elected the fire chief and the Village Board of Trustees would then confirm the person elected as the village's fire chief. This resulted in a system where the employees elected their own supervisor, and the supervisor was then either re-elected or replaced by the employees, largely dependent on friendship rather than ability.

In 1958, the volunteer fire department consisted primarily of two competing factions, comprised mainly of two families on each side in addition to their supporters. Due to the differences in opinion and loyalties, the factions divided into two separate fire departments: the Mundelein Fire Department, which served the municipality and the Countryside Fire Protection District, which serviced the rural area surrounding the village. This process served the village and the district well and, in fact, provided additional assistance to both fire departments through mutual aid agreements.

In 1962, the village had grown to nearly 5,000 residents and the village officials determined it would be in the village's best interests to hire its first full-time fire chief. The hiring process was simple, as the current elected fire chief was simply appointed to become the new, full-time fire chief. Again, this system worked well and the all-volunteer fire department, under the direction of the full-time fire chief, continued to improve in the areas of training, equipment, and capabilities.

When the first full-time fire chief retired due to an injury in 1968, he was replaced by the deputy fire chief (second in command). The new chief relinquished his prior profession and began his full-time fire department career. Once again, this system worked well and the fire department continued to grow and prosper under the new fire chief's guidance. During this time, the department began to add career personnel in order to provide paramedics for the new emergency ambulance service that was established. Unfortunately, this fire chief passed away in early 1974 after a lengthy illness, and less than six years in office. This, once again, left the village with the difficult decision of whom to appoint as the new fire chief. Possible choices included appointing the volunteer assistant chief, one of the full-time firefighters, or hiring a chief from outside the organization. In order to maintain harmony between the volunteer and full-time employees, it was decided to look outside of the organization for the new fire chief.

After a search was made, which lasted approximately six months, the village hired the former chief of a neighboring fire department as the new fire chief in January of 1975. The new fire chief had worked in a system similar to the village's earlier system in which the chief was elected by the membership of the fire department and then formally appointed by the village fathers. His former department had recently dismissed the new chief as he had lost the annual election to his assistant chief. While the new fire chief brought a refreshing change to the department, the volunteers who viewed him as an outsider and a 'professional' chief opposed him soon thereafter.

In 1976, the Mayor that had appointed the current chief was defeated in a general election. The new Mayor determined that the chief should be replaced as there was open opposition demonstrated by the volunteer members. Once again, after having a chief in place for only eighteen months, the village was in need of a new fire chief. Ultimately, one of the career

firefighters was appointed to the position of chief. Again, minimal standards were required other than the fact that both the volunteer and career members respected the new chief and that the chief was a person that was already working for the fire department.

The new fire chief worked out well for a period of time, but ultimately had personal problems that resulted in his demotion to his prior rank of firefighter after serving as chief for a period of five years. During this period, little had been done to project needs or to determine a direction for the organization. Once again, the village was without a fire chief. An acting chief was appointed from the volunteer officer section of the department and served for fourteen months in that capacity. When the village and the acting chief were unable to come to terms regarding an employment contract, the village performed a search to find yet another new fire chief. Being the acting chief, once again no future planning or vision was provided.

The next fire chief was hired from another area fire department. As in the past, few prerequisites were stated. The new chief's primary qualification was many years of prior service with the neighboring fire department and transitioning that department from a volunteer fire department to a career department. This chief brought many new ideas to the fire department, and watched as the village developed to a population of nearly 20,000 residents. Unfortunately, this chief was unable to put an administrative structure in place for the department, and in 1990 left the department. Yet again, no vision or direction had been established.

Under the direction of the Mayor, the village conducted a nationwide search for the next new chief. The employees were asked what qualifications were necessary to ensure that a qualified fire chief would be hired. The volunteer members and the career members collaborated and presented a list of qualifications they believed would be necessary for the new chief to have. Many of the qualifications were included in the job announcement. During the search, one of the

full-time lieutenants was appointed to serve as acting chief. After approximately six months, this lieutenant was selected from a field of over sixty candidates to become the new fire chief. This new chief was equipped with the certifications, experience, and educational background that had been required in the job announcement.

This new chief had the good fortune to have a supportive mayor and board of trustees as well as the support of both the career and volunteer members. Many changes were incorporated in the operation of the department. Changes included the construction of two fire stations, the replacement of all apparatus, hiring several additional career firefighters, developing a new management structure for the department, and improving services to the community. The services now included, in addition to firefighting, emergency medical services at the paramedic level, hazardous materials, high angle, confined space, structural collapse capabilities, side scan sonar, underwater rescue and recovery, as well as improved public education programs. The village continued to prosper and currently has a population of 30,935 residents (United States Census, 2000).

The chief also recognized the need to provide a management structure. To accomplish this, the chief began to train each member to be capable of performing the job of the higher rank. Such training would provide for continuity in the fire department should any member, including the chief, retire, resign, or become unable to serve. The chief also developed a strategic plan and a vision for the department, tools that would be regularly updated and reviewed to insure continued progress.

The chief is now approaching the end of his career with the Mundelein Fire Department. This is due to the retirement system and the fact that the chief will reach maximum retirement benefits in less than three years. Once again, the village will be searching for a new fire chief.

Whether the new chief is selected from inside or outside of the department is not the issue. The issue is providing continuity for the department and insuring that the new chief is qualified to serve and equipped with the necessary attributes that will best serve the village. To this end, a succession plan should be developed and presented to the elected officials that will ultimately select the new fire chief.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The need for having a succession plan in place is evidenced by the tragic 1996 airplane crash that involved U.S. Secretary of State Ron Brown in Bosnia. In addition to Secretary Brown, the crash took the lives of over 30 top executives from major American corporations (Rothwell, Prescott, 2000). The attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001 also resulted in devastating losses, which drained the management resources of corporations such as Cisco Systems, Oracle, Compaq Computer, Sun Microsystems, 3Com, and many others. Each of these corporations lost key executives in the four aircraft crashes that occurred that day (Morris-Lee, 2001). The majority of the corporations that lost executives in these disasters had failed to plan for succession of the corporate leadership. A comprehensive succession plan would have provided for an orderly transition during this time of crisis. As these organizations scrambled to find replacement personnel, many suffered a loss in productivity and growth within the various businesses. Rothwell and Prescott found that this event served as the catalyst for corporations to examine their succession planning efforts and re-evaluate their existing policies.

The National Fire Academy (NFA) Executive Leadership class (2002) discussed the importance of developing succession plans. The NFA identified the keys to developing a succession plan as a three-step process. This process is comprised of building the capacity of the

organization's employees, enhancing the pool of candidates for open positions, and then clarifying expectations in order to provide promotional opportunities for the employees.

While most authorities now agree that succession planning is a necessary tool to ensure successful transition within an organization, there is little agreement as to what the components of a succession plan are. Wolfe (1996) defines succession planning as “the systematic steps or design that allows for one to follow another in time or place”. This textbook definition, while concise, is silent as to what constitutes a succession plan. Succession can also be defined as the replacement of the current manager by a new manager (Drazin and Rao, 1999). These definitions, while they convey a clear idea of what succession planning is, do not provide the organization with the guidance necessary to systematically plan for the retirement, demise, or loss of a key management position within the organization.

The American Society for Training and Development (1993) states that there are five components involved in developing a succession plan. The components are:

- 1) Replacement Planning
- 2) Human Resource Audit
- 3) High-Potential Employee Identification
- 4) Employee Input
- 5) Development

It is further important to understand that succession planning is very different from replacement planning. Replacement planning seeks to prevent a catastrophic stemming of an organization due to an immediate and unplanned loss of key personnel, while succession planning has the goal of ensuring continuity within an organization (Rothwell, 2001).

Albert (n.d.) believes the components of a succession plan include education and experience within the relevant field, coupled with accounting and communications abilities, maturity, and leadership ability. Coleman (1988) states that succession planning should focus more on the area of written and verbal skills, but should also include strong analytical and problem-solving abilities. Buzzotta and Lefton (1997) believe that the key component in developing a succession plan is trust, generated by integrity, consistency, reliability and interdependence. Winn (2000) proposes that the components of a succession plan are vision, credibility, and competence.

A review of the literature pertaining to the criteria other organizations have deemed valuable, on a national basis, provides much insight into the criteria required for the position of fire chief. The Department of Defense (1995) created the Defense and Leadership Program in 1995 in response to a report conducted by the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces. This report directed the Department of Defense (DOD) to create a comprehensive plan for preparing future leaders (Figura, 1999). The Department of Defense Fire Fighter Certification Requirement document (2001) requires that candidates for fire chief be certified in several areas of competency. These certifications include Hazardous Materials Awareness, Hazardous Materials Operations, Hazardous Materials Incident Command, Firefighter I, Firefighter II, Fire Officer I, II, III, and IV, Fire Service Instructor I and II, as well as Fire Inspector I, and II. Each of these certifications is defined by various National Fire Protection Association standards.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) created a national standard for fire officer qualifications in 1976. This standard is referred to as NFPA 1021. NFPA 1021 was reviewed and updated in 1983, 1987, 1992, and 1997. The current standard identifies four levels

of fire officers. The levels range from Fire Officer I to Fire Officer IV. Each level of Fire Officer builds upon the skills and abilities contained in the preceding level. Fire Officer I is the supervisory level officer. Fire Officer II is the supervisory/managerial level. Fire Officer III is the managerial/administrative level, and Fire Officer IV is defined as the administrative level. Fire Officer IV equates to the Chief of the Department (NFPA 1021, 1997).

The International Association of Fire Chiefs initiated a program for Chief Fire Officer Designation (CFOD) in 2000. Through this program, candidates wishing to apply for CFOD recognition submit documentation verifying the competencies required. The CFOD Commission then reviews the data submitted, verifies the accuracy of the documentation, and then either awards or reject the application. The current version of the process, 1.1, contains 25 core competencies. The competencies include education, leadership and management skills, as well as requisite knowledge skills and abilities required for fire chiefs (“Commission on Chief Fire Officer Designation,” 2002).

Additionally, the United States Fire Administration, through the National Fire Academy, conducts an Executive Fire Officer (EFO) program, which is open to senior officers in the fire service. (National Fire Academy Catalog of Courses, 2001). Successful completion of the Executive Fire Officer Program is considered mandatory for promotion to the fire chief level in the Minneapolis, Minnesota Fire Department (Clack, 2002).

In addition to the competencies identified at the national level, community colleges and universities have developed state programs. These programs have been created to provide educational opportunities for persons aspiring to become a fire chief. The fire science programs focus on communications, government, fire prevention, and building construction (Smoke, 1997).

The Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal, Division of Personnel Standards and Education (1999), identifies three categories of fire officer. The categories somewhat mirror the criteria adopted by NFPA 1021, with one important exception. Where the NFPA has four categories of fire officer, the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal identifies only three categories. The Illinois Fire Officer III correlates to the administrative level or NFPA Fire Officer IV level of certification.

Many fire departments similar in size to the Mundelein Fire Department have established educational competencies in order to be considered for the position of fire chief. The City of Highland Park, Illinois mandates “supplemental education in management skills, administration, and personnel relations by college level courses” (City of Highland Park Department of Public Safety, 1996). The Department of Fire and Emergency Services, Richmond, Virginia requires fire chief candidates to have attained a minimum of 93 semester hours of college level instruction (Department of Fire and Emergency Services, Richmond, VA, 1997). Carlsbad Fire Department, Carlsbad, California requires a minimum of a bachelor’s degree in order to be considered for fire chief (Carlsbad Fire Department, Carlsbad, CA, 1997).

Morris-Lee (2001) proposes competencies beyond formal education and certification criteria in his assessment of persons aspiring to a fire chief position. Morris-Lee identifies the abilities of analyzing, creative thinking, and exercising judgment, as well as drive, resilience, and empathy as traits to be considered in a successor. Flemming (2002) believes the four basic management functions for a fire chief are planning, organizing, directing, and controlling.

In summary, the literature review revealed that the Village of Mundelein would benefit by developing a succession plan for use in the future, when the current fire chief retires. It was found that the components of developing a succession plan include components identified as

replacement planning, a human resource audit, the identification of high potential employees, and the input of current employees, followed by the development of a succession plan. Criteria necessary for persons aspiring to the position of fire chief are varied and consist of education (both fire service, formal, and non-fire service related), adherence to national, state, and professional standards, as well as the ability to demonstrate the basic management skills of planning, organizing, directing and controlling.

PROCEDURES

Definition of Terms

Succession Planning – An organized system by which qualified future leaders will be available to succeed or replace the current manager.

Certifications – Standards recognized by professional organizations that attest to the employee's ability to perform specific job functions.

Executive Fire Officer – A course of study provided through the National Fire Academy that provides advanced administrative skills to current and future fire service administrators/managers.

Fire Chief – Commonly the highest-ranking officer within an individual fire department organization.

Research Methodology

The problem statement was submitted and checked for clarity and comprehensiveness. The purpose of this research is to identify the components of a succession plan and determine the criteria that candidates for the position of Village of Mundelein Fire Chief should possess.

The research questions were:

- 1) What are the components of a successful succession plan?

- 2) What, if any, are the educational criteria at the national level for chief officer succession planning?
- 3) What, if any, are the educational criteria at the state level for chief officer succession planning?
- 4) What educational criteria, if any, exist in fire service agencies of similar size and composition for chief fire officer succession planning?
- 5) What educational criteria should be utilized in developing a succession plan for the Village of Mundelein?

The first portion of this research included a review of literature on the process of succession planning. Once the components of a successful succession plan were determined, a second literature review was conducted to determine what national, state and similar sized fire department criteria have been used in selecting candidates for the position of fire chief.

A comprehensive feedback instrument was then developed to determine which criteria peers of similar sized fire departments deemed important in northern Illinois.

Completion of this research utilized the 4th edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.

Literature Review

The literature review was begun at the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center during March of 2002. Subsequent materials were obtained from the Learning Resource Center through the U. S. Postal Service. An additional literature review was conducted in July and August of 2002, utilizing the InfoTrac 2000 Database at the Fremont Public Library in Mundelein, Illinois. The InfoTrac 2000 is an Internet accessible database of periodicals, magazines, and newspapers published from 1996 through May of 2002. Additional materials

were supplied through the Interlibrary Loan Program. A variety of trade journals regularly received and utilized by this author were also employed in this research project.

The literature review targeted trade journals, magazines, and national standards relating to succession planning. Those sources pertaining to this research were summarized and included in the literature review section of this report.

Feedback Instrumentation

The second portion of the research procedure for this project was the development of a feedback instrument, which was then e-mailed to the fire chiefs in Lake and McHenry Counties, Illinois. This diverse group of fire chiefs represents the Mundelein fire chief's peer group and reflects the beliefs and opinions of fire chiefs in similar sized organizations within the northern Illinois area. A total of 46 feedback instruments were e-mailed to the selected group of fire chiefs in August of 2002. 36 feedback instruments were returned to the web server where the responses were electronically scored. The feedback forms allowed the respondent to quickly and easily select the desired response by utilizing their computer mouse. Once the survey was completed, the chiefs were instructed to select the 'submit' button at the bottom of the survey in order to complete the process.

Assumptions and Limitations

The procedures used to complete this research project were based upon the assumption that the various authors included in the literature review had been thorough, objective and unbiased when preparing their work. Second, it is assumed that the information provided by agencies responsible for developing standards has been thoroughly researched and approved by the various organizations that oversee the individual committees. It is further assumed that the respondents to the feedback instrument were fair and objective in their responses.

This research was limited by the lack of specific information pertaining to succession planning within the fire service. It appears that corporations and the private sector in general have realized the need for succession planning due to unfortunate, planned, or unplanned personnel losses, whereas the public sector has yet to understand the lack of continuity such losses would most certainly manifest.

Another limiting factor was the assumption that the feedback instrument was received and completed by the intended respondent. This is not necessarily the case as many chiefs allow others to receive their e-mail in order to stay current while out of the office. It is likely that some of the e-mails were opened and responded to by someone other than the intended recipient. Secondly, there are problems related to the relatively small sample size, which may render the results suspect. It should be understood that this feedback is not representative of fire chiefs in general, but of fire chiefs in this small region of the United States.

A final limiting factor was that the feedback tool defaulted to the first answer contained in each question if the respondent did not select another answer. This did not allow the respondent to leave the question blank or open if they had no opinion. This may have resulted in the respondent being forced to select an answer even if they had no opinion, disagreed, or did not wish to answer the item.

RESULTS

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1. What are the components of a successful succession plan?

The American Society for Training and Development (1993) defines five components to developing a succession plan. The elements were defined as:

- 1) Replacement Planning

- 2) Human Resource Audit
- 3) High-Potential Employee Identification
- 4) Employee Input
- 5) Development

Important to note is that succession planning is unlike replacement planning, in that succession planning ensures continuity within an organization. It is also recommended by Albert (n.d.), that the succession plan include educational requirements within the relevant field. In addition to the skills discussed, the succession plan should consider the requirements of communication skills, both verbal and written, as well as integrity, reliability, and problem solving abilities.

In the American Society for Testing and Development plan, the resource audit considers the pool of currently available employees that would aspire to the position. The human resource audit determines the short-, mid-, and long-term potential of the employees identified in the resource audit. Determining which candidates have the potential to assume leadership positions within the company further reduces the pool of candidates. The employees identified in the high-potential portion of the process then complete a personal audit of their strengths, abilities and perceptions. Development is the final component in the succession planning process and focuses on current and future issues.

Research Question 2. What, if any, are the educational criteria at the national level for chief officer succession planning?

There is a limited but rich amount of information available regarding criteria related to succession planning available on the national level. Of particular significance is the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard detailing Fire Officer Professional Qualifications.

The standard defines four levels of fire officer and lists skills and knowledge requirements for each level. The standard also defines the four levels of fire officer as supervisory, supervisory/managerial, managerial/administrative, and administrative. The fire chief is considered the administrative or Fire Officer IV level. Interesting to note is that each higher level of fire officer builds upon the previous level.

The Department of Defense was also a rich in providing information. The Department of Defense is the largest fire department in the United States, having numerous military bases around the world as well as ships at sea, each provided with some form of fire protection. Such fire protection ranges from multi-station fire departments to well trained shipboard firefighting crews. The Department of Defense established a standard in 2000 that requires firefighting personnel, as well as fire chiefs, to attain specific certification levels as defined by NFPA Standard 1021. The Department of Defense identifies Fire Officer IV, Fire Service Instructor II, Fire Inspector II, as well as other basic certifications as necessary for persons eligible for promotion to fire chief.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs recently developed a program to recognize fire chiefs that had attained specific competencies. This program is designed to ultimately provide professional status to those candidates that meet the criteria determined by the Chief Fire Officer Designation Review Board.

One of the most important criteria at the national level is the United States Fire Administration (USFA). The USFA, through the National Fire Academy, has developed and now conducts the Executive Fire Officer Program for senior level fire personnel. This program, conducted at Emmitsburg, Maryland, is available to senior level fire professionals by an application and selection process, and provides graduate level instruction for fire service leaders.

Research Question 3. What, if any, are the educational criteria at the state level for chief officer succession planning?

At the state level, it was found that numerous junior colleges and universities provide degree programs for persons wishing to enhance their firefighting, supervisory, management, and administrative skills. Programs include certificate studies, Associate, Bachelor, Master and Doctorate degrees.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal (Illinois) has also established certification levels for fire officers. The Illinois model differs from the NFPA model in that the Illinois standard identifies only three levels of Fire Officer. Illinois identifies supervisory, managerial, and administrative levels. Illinois incorporates many, if not all of the components the NFPA identifies in their Fire Officer IV standard into the Illinois Fire Officer III standard.

Research Question 4. What educational criteria, if any, exist in fire service agencies of similar size and composition for chief fire officer succession planning?

This research revealed that the criteria for fire chief vary vastly depending on the organization. It was generally noted that larger departments have developed more concise criteria for fire chief positions. It is important to note however, that this is not always the case as some progressive, smaller departments have identified the need for the chief officer to have multiple certifications, advanced education, and experience in the fire service at lower ranks.

Research Question 5. What are the criteria for developing a succession plan for the Village of Mundelein?

A feedback instrument was developed that incorporated the criteria identified, on a national, state, and similar size agency basis, to determine which items would be considered valuable by current fire chiefs in succession planning for a fire chief position. A feedback

instrument was constructed and reviewed by three fire chiefs that were outside of the area to be surveyed. Minor changes were made to the feedback instrument in response to the recommendations of the three fire chiefs. The feedback form was then converted to hyper-text mark up (html) language, enhanced by the addition of buttons that would allow the survey recipients to simply mouse click on their selection. Through the cooperation of the Village of Mundelein, Information Technology Department, the survey was placed on the Internet at <http://www.mundelein.org/feedback.htm>. A request was then sent to the fire chiefs in Divisions IV and V of Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS). The request contained a link to the survey page and each chief was able to answer anonymously. As each survey was “returned” to the web site, a tally of the responses was maintained by the computer system. A total of 46 fire chiefs received the survey, with thirty-six of forty-six fire chiefs responding to the survey. The results of the feedback survey are included in Appendix A.

Reviewing the results of the survey provided much insight into the beliefs of a diverse group of fire chiefs in northern Illinois. The survey included responses from three small fire departments, sixteen departments with between 26 and 50 employees, seventeen departments with 51 to 75 employees, and one department with over 75 employees. The departments included all-volunteer agencies (2), combination departments (22), and 12 all-career departments. The final demographic considered municipal agencies (22), fire protection districts (11), federal (1), and private fire department (2).

Of the respondents, only three had succession plans, less than 10 percent of the fire departments surveyed. When asked if they thought their organizations would benefit from a succession plan, the figures nearly reversed with 34 stating a succession plan would be beneficial and only 2 feeling they would receive no benefit from such a plan.

Regarding formal education, the survey asked questions at several educational levels. Each chief was asked if the next chief should be equipped with a specific educational degree. The majority, 34 of the 36 surveyed, believed that an Associates degree would be necessary. When asked the same question but raising the requirement to a Bachelors degree, 23 of the 36 respondents believed such a degree would be necessary. When considering the need for a Masters degree, only 14 of the respondents believed the next chief should be so equipped.

The literature researched revealed that an accounting (or financial) background would be helpful. Once again, a large majority (33 of 36) believed such a background would be necessary. When considering a human resource background, nearly the same majority was in favor (32 of 36). Most surprising was the response to the question regarding verbal and written communication skills. All but one survey (35 of 36) reported that such skills were necessary.

In order to ensure that candidates for the chief position actually were equipped with the credentials, the survey asked how this information was verified. All of the agencies surveyed believed that some form of background investigation would be necessary. 7 of the 36 reported that their agency would perform a background investigation on a new chief. 5 stated that an assessment would be conducted by an outside agency, and the majority (24) responded that a background investigation and an assessment by an outside agency would be employed.

When asked about fire service certifications, the respondents were evenly divided (18/36) regarding the need for the next fire chief to have certification at the Fire Officer III level (equivalent to NFPA 1021 Fire Officer IV). Regarding the need to attend advanced training, the survey asked if attending the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer program would be helpful. 25 of the 36 responded favorably to the benefit of this program. Regarding a

professional designation (Chief Fire Officer Designate), only 17 of the 36 surveys revealed that such designation would be necessary.

DISCUSSION

The historical analysis in this research indicates that the Village of Mundelein would benefit by employing succession planning for the position of fire chief. Fishkind and Kautz (2001) state that a properly drafted succession plan will provide for the orderly transfer and control of a business. Vouglas (1998) believes that without a succession plan, the loss of a key employee may have the same devastating effect on an organization as a major earthquake could on a building. By utilizing the five step succession planning process identified by the American Society for Training and Development (1993), which includes the modules of replacement planning, a human resource audit, the identification of high-potential employees, appropriate employee input, and development (or formalization) of the process, the Village of Mundelein would be better prepared to provide for either a planned or unplanned transition resulting from the loss of the fire chief.

Flemming (2002, p.40) writes “Becoming a successful chief officer requires thorough preparation, including education and experience.” Rothwell (2001, p. 77) states “Competency identification and values clarification are increasingly important foundations for an effective succession planning and management program.” This research identified national, state, and similar sized fire department criteria for educational qualifications necessary for a chief fire officer. Wolfe (1996) confirms the need for qualifications and requirements in her discussion on succession planning.

The National Fire Protection Association’s Standard 1021, Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications (1997), details twenty knowledge and skill items that a chief fire

officer should have. The twenty items are in addition to the knowledge and skill components required in the standards for Fire Officer I, II, and III levels. Many of the criteria focus on human resource, financial management, and communication abilities. As observed in the Village of Mundelein, these abilities are necessary skills and are used on a daily basis by the fire chief. The need for advanced communications abilities is confirmed by Coleman (1988) as he discussed the need for those competing for the fire chief position.

The Department of Defense (DoD) is the largest fire service provider in the nation. The DoD established the Fire and Emergency Services Certification Program in 1995. Once again, the benefit of various certifications is apparent, as the document requires several certifications (as outlined in NFPA Standard 1021) for individuals interested in attaining the rank of fire chief. The required certifications include Fire Officer IV, Fire Service Instructor II, Fire Inspector II, Firefighter III, and Hazardous Materials Incident Commander (DoD, 2001).

This research has also shown that formal education is deemed necessary by several organizations. Clack (2002) included in the standards he developed for the Minneapolis, Minnesota Fire Department, the requirement that the chief fire officer of the organization have a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree in a related field in addition to Graduate Level course work. Similar requirements were found in the City of Carlsbad, California Fire Department (1997), and in the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, Richmond, Virginia (1997). The Highland Park, Illinois Fire Department (1996) also mandates college education, but stops short of requiring a degree.

The National Fire Academy, through the Executive Fire Officer Program, offers upper level fire administrators a four-year course of study to "provide senior officers with a broad perspective on various facets of fire and emergency services administration" (National Fire

Academy Catalog of Courses, 2001, p.17). Admission into this prestigious program requires the applicant to submit a terminal academic degree as part of the application process. Participation in or graduation from the Executive Fire Officer Program is mandatory for the Minneapolis, Minnesota Fire Department (Clack, 2002).

The International Association of Fire Chiefs, Commission on Chief Fire Officer Designation program, offers the Chief Fire Officer Designate (CFOD) program to validate the professionalism of participating chief fire officers. This program reviews the certification, educational, and professional standards of candidates applying for this program. Fire chiefs having less than fifteen years experience in the fire chief position that wish to participate and receive the CFOD designation must possess a minimum of a Bachelors Degree (Commission on Chief Fire Officer Designation, 2002).

It is apparent that persons wishing to achieve the position of fire chief in an organization should be equipped with numerous certifications and advanced education. Once again, the Village of Mundelein would be wise to consider the inclusion of such criteria in the succession plan for fire chief.

State standards for Illinois revolve around educational and certification processes. The Office of the State (Illinois) Fire Marshal currently has designated three levels of fire officer. The three Illinois certification levels correlate to the requirements contained in the NFPA Standard 1021. In Illinois, the certification at the Fire Officer III level is equivalent to requirements contained in the NFPA 1021, Chapter 5, Fire Officer IV. Also on a state level, Illinois has several community colleges and universities that offer programs in public administration or fire related activities. These programs include certificate, Associate Degree, Bachelors, and Masters programs.

The feedback instrument contained in Appendix A represents the beliefs of 36 fire chiefs in fire departments of similar size and composition to that of the Mundelein Fire Department. It was apparent from the survey that the fire chiefs surveyed believed that education was a necessary requirement. The feedback instrument resulted in the majority of the respondents advocating education for fire chief at the Bachelors level. The majority of the chiefs surveyed did not favor the requirement for a Masters Degree. The vast majority of the respondents did not have a succession plan in place for their organizations while all but one respondent believed it would be beneficial to have such a plan.

In regard to certification requirements, the respondents were nearly equally divided on the importance of including Fire Officer III certification (Illinois) as a criteria for fire chief. The clear majority did recognize the benefit of attending the Executive Fire Officer Program through the National Fire Academy. The respondents were split on the importance of achieving designation as a Chief Fire Officer through the Commission of Chief Fire Officer Designation.

It was also evident from the vast majority of respondents that accounting, communication, and human resource skills were vital criteria for those aspiring to attain the position of fire chief.

The study demonstrates that there is a need for succession planning in the Mundelein Fire Department. It is further evident that by including the criteria identified in this research as part of a succession plan for the Village of Mundelein Fire Chief position, the Village of Mundelein will be better served at such time as planned or unplanned vacancies occur. By preparing and following a succession plan, the residents of the community will be better served by continuing the vision and dedication the fire department has come to be known for.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research indicates that most fire departments of similar size and composition do not have a succession plan for the position of fire chief. The lack of such a plan would, in all probability, negatively affect the programs, practices, and employees of the department should an anticipated or unanticipated vacancy occur in the fire chief position. This, in turn, would impact the citizens and possibly the elected officials as the department seeks to develop a totally new strategic plan. It is also possible that, lacking a succession plan, employee morale would decline and some of our most important employee resources would become dissatisfied, some to the point of atrophying or separating from the organization.

The Village of Mundelein would be well served by implementing a succession plan. Preparation of this plan would be a cooperative effort between the elected officials, administration of the village (including human resources), the fire chief, and the employees of the fire department. Once high-potential employees were identified and criteria for the position were identified, the process of employee input would be capable of beginning. High-potential employees would be capable of identifying their own abilities, goals, standards and job satisfactions to determine their interest in the fire chief position.

The succession plan, having identified educational criteria necessary for the fire chief position, would also provide junior members a guide for career development. Having a succession plan in place would also reduce posturing for the position among multiple employees, thereby reducing internal and external conflict and dissatisfaction.

It is further recommended that criteria for other positions within the Village of Mundelein be identified in an effort to begin development of succession plans for other key personnel. Such planning would benefit the other operating departments within the village and provide the same benefits that the fire department succession plan is anticipated to create.

In closing, it should be noted that the Mundelein Fire Department has experienced problems with succession in the past. Developing a succession plan for the fire chief position would prevent many of these problems from occurring as future vacancies arise. Succession planning, utilizing as a component the criteria identified in this research, would provide a proactive solution to the problems that have been traditionally experienced by the village.

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