VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

FOR HORRY COUNTY FIRE/RESCUE

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The problem was Horry County Fire/Rescue (HCFR) has experienced a decline in active volunteer firefighter membership over the past ten years. The purpose was to define the components of successful volunteer recruitment and retention programs that may be used by HCFR. This was a descriptive research project. The research questions were:

1. What are the current trends for volunteer firefighter membership, recruitment and retention in the United States?

2. What are the components of a successful volunteer firefighter recruitment program?

3. What are the components of a successful volunteer firefighter retention program?

The procedures involved conducting an interview with the Assistant Chief of HCFR for the purpose of gathering department statistics and compare them to national trends. A feedback form was also distributed to HCFR volunteers to assess perception of existing programs and to gather information on desired programs. A convenience sample of 30 volunteers was randomly selected, of which 22 returned feedback forms. Responses to each question were tabulated and the raw scores were converted to percentages.

The results for recruitment were: 27.3% recommended a cadet/junior firefighter program, 27.3% recommended a retirement program, 41% recommended health insurance, 36.4% recommended participation in job fares, 41% recommended monetary compensation, 18.3% recommended education assistance, 4.5% recommended better leadership qualifications, 4.5% recommended reduction in training, and 4.5%

recommended promoting organizational pride. The results for retention were: 27.3% recommended a retirement program, 36.4% recommended health insurance, 45.5% recommended monetary compensation, 22.7% recommended enhanced training programs, 27.3% recommended better equipment, 22.7% recommended better facilities, 18.3% recommended education assistance, 4.5% recommended more discipline, 4.5% recommended reduction in training, and 4.5% recommended promoting organizational pride.

The recommendations were for HCFR to establish a recruitment program consisting of job fare participation and an advertising campaign. It was further recommended that the department establish a retention program centered on a retirement and health insurance program. Additional recommendations included improving pride, discipline, communication, and leadership perception within the organization.

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Introduction

The problem is Horry County Fire/Rescue has experienced a decline in active volunteer firefighter membership over the past ten years. This reduction has required handling an increasing number of emergency incidents with fewer personnel. Additionally, this shortage has required the department to budget, and thereby increase taxes, to hire full-time suppression personnel to adequately respond to emergencies and perform other duties. The purpose of this research is to define the components of successful volunteer recruitment and retention programs that may be used by the Horry County Fire/Rescue Department. This is a descriptive research project. The research questions are:

1. What are the current trends for volunteer firefighter membership, recruitment and retention in the United States?

2. What are the components of a successful volunteer firefighter recruitment program?

3. What are the components of a successful volunteer firefighter retention program?

Background and Significance

Horry County is the southeastern most, coastal county in South Carolina, and encompasses 1,134 square miles with a population of more than 196,000 full time residents (*Welcome*, 2003). In addition, over 14 million tourists visit Horry County each year. Horry County Fire/Rescue (HCFR) is responsible for responding to fire and specialty rescue incidents in the unincorporated areas of Horry County and emergency

medical incidents in all areas of Horry County including the seven municipalities therein (*Fire/Rescue*, 2003).

According to a report written for the United States Fire Administration (USFA), volunteer firefighter membership in the United States has decreased over the last 20 years (Bush, Schaenman, and Thiel, 1998b). The majority of volunteer fire service members surveyed in the publication stated it was harder today to recruit a significant number of volunteers as compared to just two decades ago. Another trend cited by Bush et al. is the increase of emergencies to which firefighters are dispatched. Statistics compiled in the publication show fire departments as a whole have assumed more diverse response roles such as emergency medical, hazardous materials, and technical rescue incidents, which has contributed to a higher call volume. These trends have required the addition of full-time firefighters to respond to emergencies according to Bush et al.

Data collected by this researcher suggests the national trends in volunteer membership and emergency incidents correlate with trends in Horry County. An interview was conducted with Assistant Chief Jerry Casteel in November 2003 for the purpose of gathering specific information on the department's history, budget, and statistical information. He has been with the department in various management capacities since 1989, and therefore had access to the desired information. Prior to 1993, HCFR depended solely on volunteers to respond to all emergency incidents (Casteel, 2003). Since 1993, volunteer firefighter membership for HCFR has experienced a steady decline according to data supplied by Casteel. If the trend of increasing emergency incidents and decreasing volunteer membership continues in the future, he stated HCFR will need to hire additional full-time suppression employees, requiring an increase in

taxes to the community. However, Casteel suggested that by bolstering volunteer membership, the department could expect to decrease the number of additional full-time suppression employees needed to respond to emergencies. A copy of the interview questions and responses can be found in Appendix A.

This Applied Research Project relates to Unit 10, Service Quality/Marketing, of the National Fire Academy's Executive Development course. This project's objective is directly associated with the terminal objective of Unit 10 which states "…evaluate services provided by their organizations and develop strategies to improve organizational quality and service standards" (National Fire Academy, 1998, p. 10-2).

This research project relates to United States Fire Administration (USFA) operational directive "to promote within communities a comprehensive, multi-hazard risk reduction plan led by the fire service organization" (National Fire Academy, 2002, p. II-2) by defining methods to increase volunteer firefighter membership which in turn will allow the Horry County Fire/Rescue Department the ability provide expanded service to the local community.

The USFA's operational directive "reduce the loss of life from fire of firefighters" (National Fire Academy, 2002, p. II-2) also relates to this research project which seeks to define methods to increase volunteer firefighter membership, in turn increasing the available manpower at emergency incidents to better perform necessary incident functions.

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to present current information from contemporary sources to support the foundation of the study. This researcher sought to

find support for the three basic research questions. First, what are the current trends for volunteer firefighter membership, recruitment, and retention in the United States? Second, what are the components of a successful volunteer firefighter recruitment program? Finally, what are the components of a successful volunteer firefighter retention program?

First, a review of available literature in journals, government reports, books, and previous research papers supports the premise that there has been a decline in volunteer firefighter membership throughout the United States over the past 20 years. According to Goldfeder (1992), some of the causes of the reduction in membership are time constraints due to increasing incidents and more required training, as well as increased family and career responsibilities. The author suggests in some cases poor leadership and improper management also contribute to a decline in volunteer recruitment and retention. If the trend of volunteer membership decline continues, Goldfeder states "taxes will rise as career personnel will have to replace at least a portion of the volunteers lost; and many communities will suffer social consequences, since the volunteer firehouse in many rural and suburban communities is the center of activity" (p. 10).

An article by Bush (1998a) supported the findings of Goldfeder that excessive time demands due to increasing call volume and training demands have played a major role in the decline of volunteer membership in the United States. Bush adds that expansion by fire departments into new areas of service such as emergency medical services, hazardous materials response, and technical rescue has added to the demands placed on volunteers. He believes this widened mission of the fire service is often designed for the purpose of justifying its existence due to the decreasing percentages of

actual fire related incidents. As a result, Bush suggests that an inevitable solution to the problem has been the addition of paid members to supplement volunteers in such areas as administrative duties and handling minor incidents. In the author's view, the volunteers in these systems are still the primary responders, and the paid members are in place as a supplement to them.

Bruegman (1997) expands on the previous two authors' premise that increased call volume is a direct cause of declining volunteer membership. According to him, as the American population ages, the demand for service will increase and the range of services expected will drastically expand. Bruegman believes this expansion will most logically be into managing pre-hospital and out-of-hospital care. The aging population also poses an additional challenge to the fire service according to Bruegman: as the population ages, there will be fewer people interested and/or qualified to fill the volunteer roles. This is supported by Carter (1996) who states "in some cases where a community wants or needs fire protection, there may not be a sufficient number of persons willing or able to serve in a volunteer capacity" (p. 51).

An additional problem found in the literature review that related to historical decline in national volunteer membership is interpretation of government laws and regulations. In an article by Campbell (1997), the Labor Department's interpretation of the Fair Labor Standards act caused officials in Baltimore County, Maryland to announce that career firefighters employed by the county would no longer be allowed to volunteer for any other fire service agencies in the county. The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) stated in this article that this interpretation "will lead to staffing shortages in some volunteer organizations" (p. 18). The action by Baltimore County, according to

Campbell, was due to fear that employees may be able to sue for overtime compensation from their primary employer when volunteering off-duty time.

In response to the second research question, several existing ideas concerning volunteer firefighter recruitment were researched. Ellis (1996) describes several techniques used in recruiting volunteers. Ellis states the department can solicit local media resources to post feature stories about department programs and activities, as well as to conduct interviews with members stating interesting facts about the department. According to the author, utilization of the mass media is generally an avenue for publicity and awareness, but can have negative effects such as inaccurate information because of editing, and the inability to be detailed. Due to the negative effects of the mass media, Ellis suggests a more fruitful means of recruitment is through special publications. Since these trade journals and newsletters generally target a specific audience, Ellis says the advertiser has the ability to be more specific and detailed. The third recommended recruiting resource by Ellis is public speaking at local organizations and clubs. These engagements offer the recruiter the ability to inform active community groups on department activities, as well as target prospective volunteers from community members who are already active. By establishing booths at local fairs and special events, Ellis states the recruiter has the ability add a more personal touch to the recruiting process by providing face-to-face interaction with prospective volunteers. This method of recruiting also allows the distribution of information packets and brochures describing the benefits of volunteering. Sending letters through mass mailings, mailings targeting a specific group, or inserts in other mailings are another option the author suggests as well as designing posters to be placed throughout public places in the community.

In a book by Esmond (2001), the author lists several successful methods used to recruit new volunteers. Esmond writes that the organization must first put some practices into place prior to starting the active recruiting process. First, the organization needs to support the recruiters by relieving them of other duties where possible, providing them with training and networking opportunities, and taking steps to protect against burnout. Second, Esmond states the organization needs to evaluate its functions and set goals for the recruiting program. Next, the author recommends the department remove any barriers to new volunteer involvement such as a confusing appointment process and an unreceptive attitude of existing members. Also, the department should prepare to meet the needs of prospective members by researching what those needs are and understanding what motivates today's volunteers. Esmond also suggests involving existing volunteers in the recruiting process which will promote a higher sense of belonging. Esmond's recommendations on specific recruiting techniques support the suggestions of Ellis (1996) in several areas such as utilizing the media, public speaking, targeting specific audiences through trade publications, and producing posters and other advertisements for distribution in the community. Esmond further suggests utilizing the Internet for recruiting by establishing a website containing information on the department's history and available benefits. The Internet can also be an effective recruiting tool by placing advertising and links to the department's webpage on industry specific websites.

Golfeder (1992) makes several suggestions for recruiting volunteers. Among these is to develop a new resident awareness package to be distributed through local real estate agencies describing the department's safety tips as well as recruitment needs. Additionally Goldfeder recommends holding basic courses in first aid, emergency

medical technician, and firefighter I at local schools to not only recruit, but also to prepare prospective volunteers. Short courses such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation, babysitting safety, and general fire safety held at local fire stations can also be a valuable recruiting tool according to the author.

In a report compiled for the NVFA and USFA, Bush et al. (1998b) supports many of the aforementioned methods of volunteer recruitment such as use of the mass media, distribution of brochures, direct mailings, placement of posters in the community, and advertising on the Internet. Bush further recommends placing advertisements on the outside of apparatus and fire stations, as well as placing recruitment advertisements in the preview slides at local movie theaters.

In response to the third research question, this researcher found several pertinent recommendations for retaining volunteers. White (1990) lists six strategies to maintain the volunteer members once they have been recruited. First, the author stresses effective personnel management through the establishment of an orientation program to make the individual feel welcomed to the organization and to assist them in learning important information about the department. White states this orientation should include a brochure that contains the rules and mission of the department, a calendar of department activities, and a summary of member responsibilities. Second, the author stresses both written and verbal communication of department policies and procedures as well as current events and activities. Third, White encourages member development through training. Fourth, he suggests maintaining discipline and enforcing the rules consistently from day one. As his fifth strategy for retaining volunteers, White writes that management must be aware of and respect the individual's priorities and responsibilities to their family and primary

jobs. As a final suggestion, the author stresses the importance of promoting motivation by avoiding discouragement, poor leadership attitudes, and negative reactions.

Goldfeder (1992) supports White's (1990) suggestions of effective leadership and written and verbal communication of rules and proper procedures, and further recommends three additional strategies to retain volunteer members. First, Golfeder promotes utilizing open brainstorming sessions to discuss improvements to the department which will foster participation and a feeling of ownership on behalf of the membership. Second, the author recommends the establishment of a quality assurance program that "governs performances of the organization and individual members – as well as firm, concise criteria that all members can follow " (p. 10). Third, Goldfeder advocates providing a volunteer benefits package to provide members with rewards recognition, and assistance. Examples that the author describes are tax incentives, education/tuition assistance, length of service awards, retirement benefits, health insurance programs, and social/family activities.

Snook, Johnson, Olsen, and Buckman (1998) state that a successful volunteer retention program has four basic criteria: the program must meet individual needs, it must provide for rewards and recognition, and it must challenge members. "A fire department's ability to maintain volunteer firefighters is directly related to their ability to manage people" (p. 91). The authors mention that volunteers are motivated to remain in an organization if their basic needs of a sense of belonging, achievement, understanding, challenge, recognition, reward, enjoyment, self respect, freedom from fear of reprisal, and security are met. Other important motivating practices a department's management should utilize to promote volunteer retention are: treat people as individuals, praise

sincerely, promote participation, promote cooperation and teamwork, and provide growth opportunities. Snook et al. also support the previously mentioned retention techniques of effective leadership, maintaining discipline, and promoting achievement.

Bush et al. (1998b) further recommend promoting a positive department image through stressing pride in both the organization and in the community. According to the authors, this can be accomplished by providing uniforms and requiring members to wear them at public functions. An additional strategy they advise to uphold community pride is to encourage involvement in local activities such as the Adopt a Highway program. Ensuring well maintained gear and apparatus is another method Bush et al. suggest will improve overall morale. In addition, reducing time demands on volunteers by narrowing assignments, utilizing selective paging on non labor intensive incidents, and involving family members in department activities are all recommendations made by the authors to retain volunteer membership. In their publication, Bush et al. promote the utilization of additional incentives such as pay-per-call or per-hour, bonuses, gift certificates, local business discounts, and housing assistance programs.

In summary, the review of contemporary literature supports the first research question that there has been a reduction of volunteer firefighter membership over the past 20 years. There are various causes of this trend as cited by Goldfeder (1992), Bush (1998a), and Bruegman (1997) including time constraints, improper management, expanding service and missions, and a shift in population demographics and values. Several strategies for volunteer recruitment are cited in response to the second research question. Some of the more widely recommended methods by Ellis (1996), Esmond (2001), Goldefer, and Bush et al. (1998b) are use of the mass media, distribution of

brochures, direct mailings, placement of posters in the community, and advertising on the Internet. Finally, numerous retention techniques are discussed by White (1990), Goldfeder, Snook et al., (1998) and Bush et al. Among these are effective leadership, written and verbal communication, motivation, and promoting department and community pride.

<div align="center">Procedure</div>

Interview

An interview (Appendix A) was conducted by the researcher to gather specific data on incident and budgetary statistics as well as historical facts of Horry County Fire/Rescue. The Assistant Chief of Support Services for Horry County Fire/Rescue was selected as the subject for the interview due to the position's access to the desired information. According to HCFR Standard Operating Procedures, the Assistant Chief of Support Services is responsible for overseeing budgetary issues, managing department records, and overseeing the overall function of the Volunteer Services Division (Horry County Fire/Rescue, 2001). These functions were all pertinent areas that the researcher desired to collect data on in order to provide an answer to research question 1.

The interview was conducted on November 13, 2003 at 2:00 pm in Assistant Chief Jerry Casteel's office located at 2560 North Main Street in Conway, South Carolina. Questions were prepared and written in advance by the researcher. During the course of the interview, the answers to each question were written down as they were asked to ensure accuracy. The questions asked were as follows:

1. Please describe the responsibilities of your current position

2. What other positions have you held since July of 1993?

3. What was the number of incidents your department responded to in 1993?

4. What was the number of incidents your department responded to in 2003?

5. How would you classify your department's staffing from the following categories?

6. How many volunteers did your department have in 1993?

7. How many volunteers does the department currently have?

8. When did your department hire the first full-time personnel allocated solely to fire suppression? How many did they hire?

9. How many full-time suppression positions does your department currently have?

10. Briefly describe the progress of hiring full-time suppression personnel in your department year by year.

11. What was the dollar amount allocated to salaries in your department in 1993?

12. What is the current dollar amount allocated to salaries in your department?

13. Briefly describe the duties of volunteer firefighters in your department.

14. Have those duties changed since 1993? If yes, how have they changed?

15. What actions will your department take in the future if volunteer membership continues to decline and call volume continues to increase?

The interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was concluded after each question was answered. The answers were later used in both the background and significance and literature review sections to support or refute whether national trends in volunteer recruitment and retention were similar to trends in Horry County.

Feedback Form

A feedback form (Appendix B) was developed by the researcher to gather data on recruitment and retention programs, and to provide information to answer research questions 2 and 3. Specifically the instrument was designed to assess volunteer perception of programs utilized by Horry County Fire/Rescue, as well as programs they viewed would be beneficial. The questions to be answered were:

1. In terms of priorities, which area does the Horry County Fire/Rescue Department place more emphasis on?

2. Of the following, which programs does your department/station utilize for volunteer recruitment and retention?

3. Of the programs listed below, which in your opinion would be most effective in recruiting new volunteer members?

4. Of the programs listed below, which in your opinion would be most effective in retaining current volunteer members?

Question 1 had 4 possible responses:

a. Volunteer Recruitment

b. Volunteer Retention

c. Both Equally

d. Neither

In question 2, the respondent was allowed to assess programs utilized by either the department or their individual station, since some stations were established as corporations and had their own funds. This question could be answered with a yes, no, or don't know response for each of the following recruitment and retention programs:

1. Standardized application process

2. Written policies and procedures

3. Advertising program (classified ads, TV ads, etc.)

4. Standardized training program

5. Supplemental pay (paid-on-call, part-time, pay-per-call, bonus, etc)

6. Job fares, local school recruiting, etc

7. Supplemental health insurance

8. Supplemental retirement (CD's, IRA's, 401K, etc.)

9. Incentive, awards, and recognition program

10. Cadet/junior firefighter program

Each of the following recruitment programs was to be rated in order of perceived importance, 1 being the highest, for question 3:

1. Cadet/junior firefighter program

2. Supplemental retirement (CD's, IRA's, 401K, etc.)

3. Supplemental health insurance

4. Job fares, local school recruiting, etc

5. Monetary compensation

6. Education programs (tuition reimbursement, etc)

Each of the following retention programs was to be rated in order of perceived importance, 1 being the highest for question 4:

1. Supplemental retirement (CD's, IRA's, 401K, etc.)

2. Supplemental health insurance

3. Monetary compensation

4. Training Programs

5. Equipment

6. Facilities

7. Education programs (tuition reimbursement, etc)

Additionally, questions 2, 3, and 4 contained an "other" category where the respondent could list a recruitment or retention program that was not provided on the feedback form. Each of the sample recruitment and retention programs listed in questions 2, 3, and 4 were selected based on the most widely mentioned recruitment and retention programs revealed in the literature review.

The data collected was later analyzed and compared to information reviewed in the literature review in order to determine whether recruitment and retention programs recommended by outside sources compared to those utilized by HCFR and those desired by HCFR volunteers.

Population

A convenience sample was used for this study. The total population was 204 (N=204), and the sample population was 22 (n=22). According to Gay (1987), a sample of 10 percent of the population is considered the minimum for descriptive research. Due to the difficulty and cost of contacting each HCFR volunteer by mail, a sample of 30 active volunteers were randomly selected from the department's personnel roster. After the sample was selected, feedback forms including a cover letter explaining the purpose and giving instructions for the form, were mailed to each person. In order to reduce postage costs, forms were e-mailed when possible. Of the 30 forms mailed, 22 were returned by the December 23rd deadline.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to calculate and interpret the data generated from the feedback form. The responses for question 1 were tabulated and each was converted to a percentage. Each possible response for the sample programs listed for question 2 was tabulated and converted to a percentage. For questions 3 and 4, all "1" responses for each sample program were tabulated and converted to a percentage. A "1" response was the only rating analyzed because it signified the highest perceived importance.

Limitations

Due to cost and logistical limitations, a small sample was used for this study, although it met recognized standards (Gay, 1987). No attempt was made to survey potential volunteers. Furthermore, responses other than "1" for programs listed in questions 3 and 4 were not analyzed. Finally, the researcher made the assumption that all respondents answered honestly.

Definition of Terms

Full-Time Employee – An individual working an assigned shift for a minimum of 40 hours per week who is compensated hourly or by salary for services performed.

Suppression Personnel – An individual below the rank of Battalion Chief, whose primary function is to perform fire extinguishment and rescue duties, excluding emergency medical transport.

Administrative Staff – Personnel allocated to perform support functions within the fire department whose duties do not include fire extinguishment and rescue operations.

Results

In the interview, fifteen questions were asked of Assistant Chief Casteel pertaining to department facts, statistics, and plans. The purpose of the interview was to provide support for research question 1. The answers to each of the questions can be found in Appendix A.

A total of 22 out of 30 feedback forms were returned, which equates to a 73.3% response rate. All respondents answered the first question: "In terms of priorities, which area does the Horry County Fire/Rescue Department place more emphasis on?" Of the responses, 18.3% answered recruitment, 4.5% answered retention, 54.5% answered both equally, and 22.7% answered neither. The results of question 1 are displayed in Figure 1 below.

Figure1

Recruitment and Retention Priorities
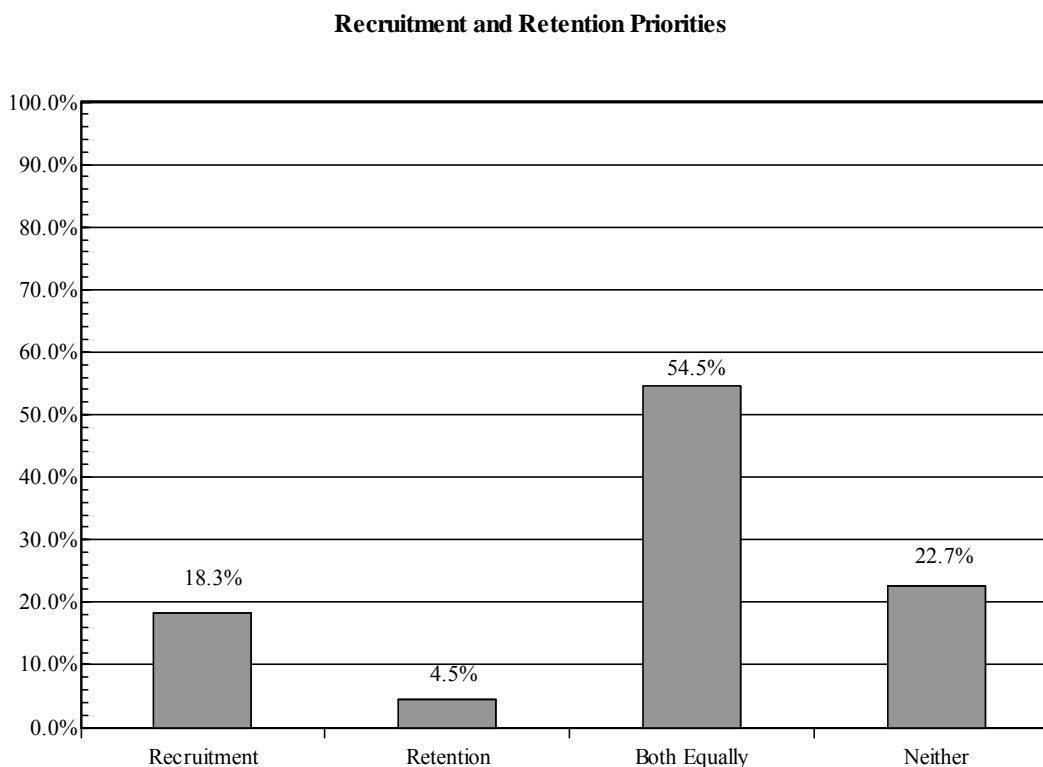
The second question was used to provide support for research questions 2 and 3. All 22 respondents answered this question: "Of the following, which programs does your department/station utilize for volunteer recruitment and retention?" To item 1, standardized application process, 95.5% answered yes that their department/station did use the program and 4.5% answered no. For item 2, written policies and procedures, 86.4% answered yes, 9.1% answered no, and 4.5% stated they did not know. Item 3, advertising programs such as classified ads, TV ads, etc., was answered yes by 31.8%, no by 59.1%, and 9.1% stated they didn't know. Ninety-one percent answered yes to item 4, standardized training program, 4.5% answered no, and the remaining 4.5% stated they didn't know. On item 5, supplemental pay such as paid-on-call, part-time, pay-per-call, bonus, etc, 95.5% answered yes and 4.5% answered no. To item 6, job fares, local school recruiting, etc, 4.5% answered yes, 54.5% answered no, and 41% stated they didn't know. For item 7, supplemental health insurance, 72.7% answered no and the remaining 27.3% stated they didn't know. Item 8, Supplemental retirement (CD's, IRA's, 401K, etc.), was answered yes by 22.7%, no by 54.5%, and don't know by 22.7%. Forty-one percent answered no to item 9, incentive, awards, and recognition program, 54.5% answered yes, and 4.5% answered they didn't know. On the last item, cadet/junior firefighter program, 22.7% answered yes, 63.6% answered no, and 13.7% stated they did not know.

The third question on the feedback form was used to provide support for research question 2. All 22 subjects answered question 3: "Of the programs listed below, which in your opinion would be most effective in recruiting new volunteer members?" Item 1, cadet/Junior firefighter program, was signified as being of the highest importance by

27.3% of the subjects. Item 2, supplemental retirement, was rated as being of the highest importance by 27.3% of the respondents. Forty-one percent listed item 3, supplemental health insurance as being the highest importance. Item 4, job fares, local school recruiting, etc., was listed as the highest importance by 36.4% of the subjects. Item 5, monetary compensation, was listed as the highest importance by 41% of the subjects. Education programs such as tuition reimbursement, item 6, was said to be of the highest importance in recruiting by 18.3%. Respondents listed three additional items in the "other" category. These included better leadership qualifications, a reduction and consolidation in required training, and encouragement of pride. Each of these was said to be of the highest importance by 4.5% of the subjects. The results of question 3 are displayed in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Recruitment Program Components
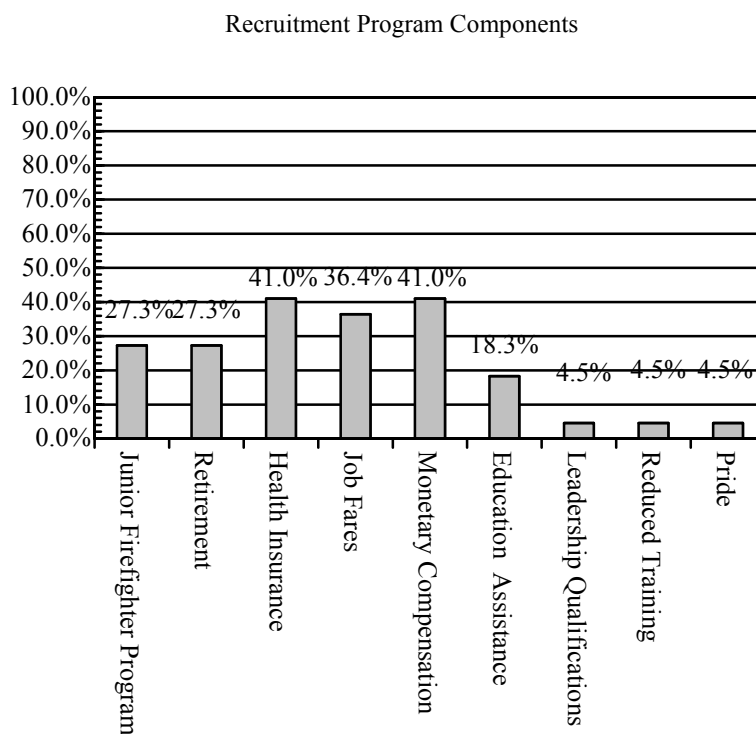
The forth question on the feedback form was used to provide support for research question 3. This question, which read: "Of the programs listed below, which in your opinion would be most effective in retaining current volunteer members?" was also answered by all 22 subjects. Supplemental retirement, item 1, was listed as the highest important components in a retention program by 27.3% of the respondents. Item 2, supplemental health insurance, was stated to be of highest importance by 36.4% of the subjects. For item 3, monetary compensation, 45.5% responded that it was of the highest importance. Item 4, training programs was listed as the highest importance by 22.7% of the subjects. Item 5, equipment, was listed among the highest importance by 27.3% of the subjects. Item 6, facilities, was listed as a high importance by 22.7% of the subjects. Education programs such as tuition reimbursement, item 7, was the highest importance according to 18.3% of the respondents. Three additional retention programs were listed by subjects, which included enforcement of the chain of command, a reduction and consolidation in required training, and encouragement of pride. Each of these was said to be of the highest importance by 4.5% of the subjects. The results of question 4 are displayed in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3

Retention Program Components
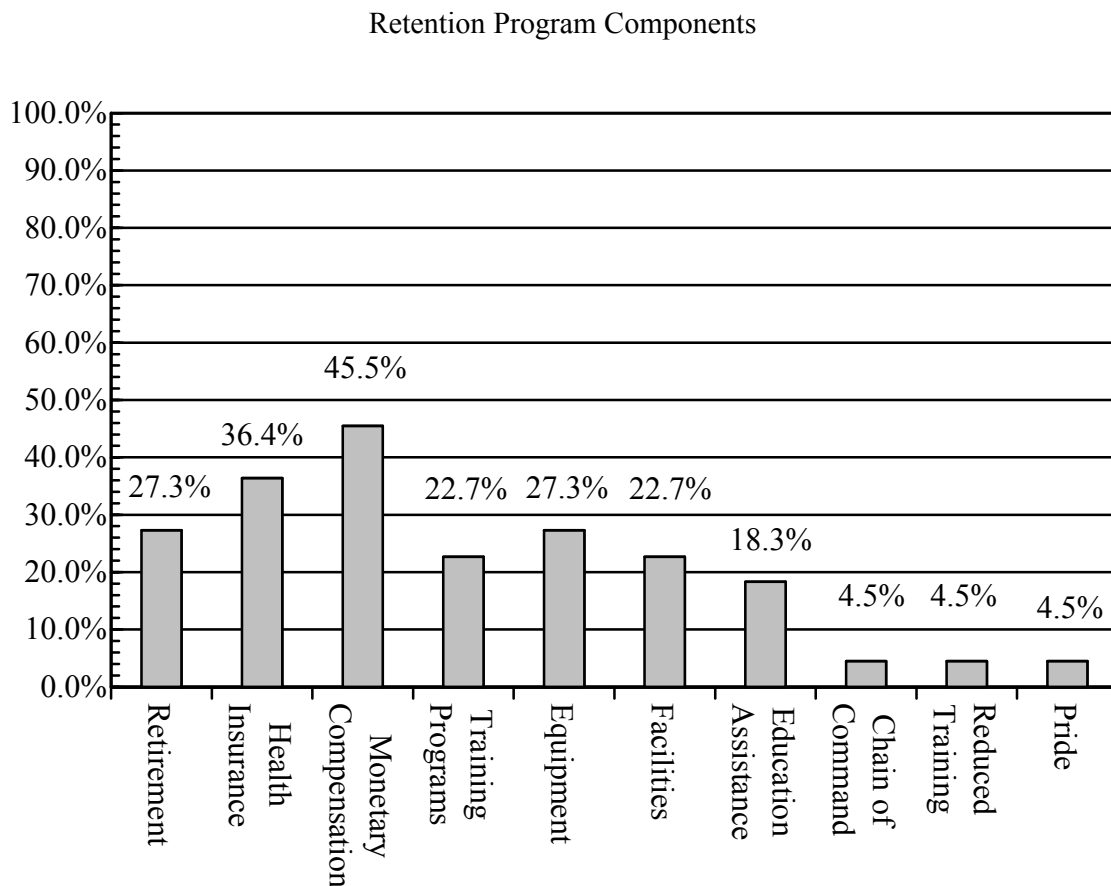
Discussion

Nationally, membership in volunteer organizations is declining (Sinclair, 1996).

According to research conducted by other fire service professionals, many fire

departments that rely on volunteers have experienced this trend (Barnes, 1992). Costigan

(1991) cites implementation of new federal regulations, especially those by OSHA, has

increased expenses, liability, and turnover among volunteers. The results of the interview

with Assistant Chief Casteel indicate that there is a similarity between the trends of

volunteer recruitment and retention nationally and in Horry County.

Casteel (2003) stated that in 1993 HCFR maintained a volunteer membership of approximately 350 people. He also described the duties expected of HCFR volunteers as; fire suppression functions, assist with arson investigations, and perform various maintenance activities on apparatus and facilities. Since 1993, volunteer firefighter membership for HCFR declined from 350 members to 204 members in July 2003 according to Casteel. During this same period of time, he stated the number of emergency incidents the department responded to increased from approximately 9,500 to 12,246. Casteel stated that beginning in 1993 the department supplemented its volunteer system through the addition of full-time suppression personnel. He said the first 14 full-time suppression employees were added in 1993, bolstered by 19 additional full-time employees in 1997. Today according to Casteel, HCFR employs 257 full-time employees including the administrative staff. Of these full-time positions, he stated Horry County Emergency Medical Service (HCEMS) employed 154 prior to a merger that occurred between the two departments in July of 2001. The number of HCFR's full-time suppression employees increased from zero in 1992 to 83 in 2003 excluding administrative staff and former HCEMS employees. This increase has required an increase in taxes to the community of over $4 million for salaries and benefits according to budget data provided by Casteel.

The second research question pertains to components of effective recruitment programs currently utilized by volunteer fire departments in the United States. Many such components were cited in the literature review including advertising in both the mass media and in trade specific publications, participating in job fares, effective leadership, and financial assistance through health insurance and retirement programs (Stittleburg,

1995). Each of these components were evaluated by HCFR volunteers on the feedback form. The results support that members of HCFR have similar views of effective recruitment programs. Specifically, these subjects rate financial assistance through direct monetary compensation, supplemental health insurance, and a retirement program as among the most desired means of recruiting volunteers. A new bill being reviewed by the United States Congress proposes an additional means of assisting volunteer firefighters financially. H.R. 2961, also known as *The Firefighter Affordable Housing Act*, will if passed, reduce interest rates on mortgage payments for volunteer firefighters (New House Bill, 2003). Stittleburg (1994) further suggests departments should use continuous rather than sporadic recruiting practices. According to the author, recruiting messages are more effective when customers receive it repeatedly.

The third research question asks for components of successful volunteer retention programs currently in practice by fire departments in the United States. According to Burch (1995), the difficulty in retaining volunteers is due in large part to more competition for volunteers from other organizations, increased financial and family obligations, and a decrease in the amount of time available to volunteer. Many programs detailed in the literature review suggest ways to not only attract new volunteers, but equally important to retain the volunteers a department currently has. Among these suggestions are: promoting effective leadership, maintaining discipline and standards, promoting achievement and pride, and providing various financial incentives (Bush et al., 1998b). Zimmerman (1993) presents an affordable retirement system that makes contributions based on points earned from incident response, training attendance, and other duties. This system allows for the department to asses a volunteer's value over time

as well as act as an incentive for the member to exceed standards according to the author. These ideas are tested in this research project by allowing HCFR volunteers the opportunity to evaluate each one as well as recommend programs not mentioned. Of the programs listed, HCFR volunteers most often select financial assistance programs, namely health insurance and direct compensation, as the most appealing programs. Additionally, some members on their own suggest that instilling pride and maintaining discipline are highly important in retaining volunteers.

Horry County Fire/Rescue is currently using some of the recruitment and retention programs suggested by fire service professionals in the literature review (Casteel, 2003). Some of the programs HCFR is currently using are working according to its volunteers, namely supplemental pay and standardized training. However, according to the data collected on the feedback form several of Horry County's volunteers state that they are unaware of whether or not certain programs are being offered. This anomaly poses a problem in that the department may be offering recruitment and retention programs that may be ineffective simply because there is an internal communication breakdown. The data presented in this study both in the literature review and the results sections supports that HCFR could benefit from following the suggested recruitment and retention guidelines.

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

Based on this study, Horry County Fire/Rescue should develop a comprehensive volunteer recruitment and retention program. The first step should be recognizing and comparing the trends in volunteer membership decline with other similar organizations. The research also suggests that a program should be designed around the department's

needs. Simply copying another department's program item for item is not always effective. A modular program comprised of components appealing to the local population should be considered. Since the department already has certain programs in place, it is not recommended to start from scratch. Adding the most sought after programs first will allow the department to analyze effectiveness and not waste valuable time and financial resources on programs that may not be beneficial to its members.

A recruitment program in Horry County should consist of targeting prospective members through job fares and career days at local high schools, colleges, and community organizations. According to feedback provided by HCFR volunteers, 36.4% state participating in job fares would be of a high benefit to the department's recruiting process. Establishing a display at these events and having existing members talk with interested parties as well as hand out department brochures explaining benefits and duties could go far in attracting volunteers at a relatively low cost. An additional 27.3% of the respondents state that the establishment of a cadet or junior firefighter program would be beneficial. This can also be accomplished through job fare and career day participation. Placing advertisements in local newspapers, cable-advertising stations, and on apparatus will establish visibility in the community and raise awareness of the need for volunteers.

A retention program for HCFR will involve more financial commitment than the recruiting programs listed above. However, the research supports that many components of a successful retention program are also lucrative in attracting new volunteers. Of the items surveyed in the feedback form, 36.4% and 27.3% of HCFR volunteers respond that health insurance and retirement program respectively would be most beneficial in member retention. These two programs are also rated as among the most important

recruitment tools, 41% and 27.3% respectively. Information presented in the literature review also supports these two programs as being highly effective in retention. HCFR should begin exploring the costs and details of health insurance and retirement programs at the earliest convenience, since these programs will undoubtedly involve budgetary planning. Additional retention tools that Horry County should implement are improving pride, discipline, and leadership perception within the organization. These three items come at a relatively low financial cost, however they involve time and dedication. The research data supports that HCFR volunteers advocate these items, especially taking into consideration they added the items on the feedback form.

A final key component to a successful recruitment and retention program in Horry County is communication. Information that was not directly sought by this researcher, was discovered while analyzing the data on the feedback form. When asked what programs their department currently uses to recruit and retain volunteers, many of the respondents answer they are unsure of several of the items. Specifically, 1 person is unaware of written policies or procedures, 2 are unaware of advertising programs, 1 is unaware of a standardized training program, 9 are unaware of participation in job fares, 6 are unaware of whether a health insurance program is available, 5 are unaware of any retirement programs, 1 is unsure of any awards and recognition programs, and 3 are unsure of the existence of a junior/cadet firefighter program. It is recommended that the department conduct meetings with its volunteers on a regular basis for the purpose of communicating benefits and incentives available to members, as well as to allow volunteers the ability to communicate their needs and ideas back to management.

   Future research on the topic of volunteer recruitment and retention should include the differences in retention between all volunteer and combination departments. Another area of study should be on the correlation between compensation amounts and productivity. Finally, future researchers should consider studying in detail the effects of economic trends on volunteer membership. Volunteer membership has been on an active decline over the past 20 years according to contemporary sources presented in this research. This combined with the fact that the majority of fire departments in the United States have a volunteer component (Burch, 1995), poses a significant challenge to the American fire service. It can be surmised from the data that the trend of declining membership will continue for the foreseeable future, which should motivate fire service leaders to be vigilant in their pursuit of solutions to this problem.

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Appendix A

Interview Questionnaire

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION
INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE
Executive Fire Officer Program
Ted M. Poszywak

Name: **Jerry Casteel**   Title: **Assistant Chief**
Name of Department: **Horry County Fire/Rescue**
Address of Department: **2560 North Main Street, Suite 2, Conway SC 29526**
Phone Number of Department: **(843)248-1223**

1. Please describe the responsibilities of your current position:
   Under limited supervision, assist the Fire Chief by managing the daily administrative functions of the Department. Responsible for providing the best possible control in emergency situations in order to protect the lives and property of those in need of assistance. Assigns work loads and establishes work schedules; directs and supervises duties of assigned staff. Oversees the overall function of the Maintenance, Materials Management, Information Technology, and Volunteer Services Divisions. Supervisory duties include; instructing; assigning, reviewing and planning work of others; maintaining standards; coordinating activities; and allocating personnel. Oversees the selection process for new employees. Acts on employee problems, promotes, disciplines, and recommends discharges and salary increases. Approves employee transfers. Manages assigned budget.

2. What other positions have you held since July of 1993?
   Fire Captain
   Battalion Chief

3. What was the number of incidents your department responded to in 1993?
   Approximately 9,500.

4. What was the number of incidents your department responded to in 2003?
   12,246

5. How would you classify your department's staffing from the following categories?
   Career ☐   Volunteer ☐   Combination ☒

6. How many volunteers did your department have in 1993?
   Approximately 350.

7. How many volunteers does the department currently have?

204

8. When did your department hire the first full-time personnel allocated solely to fire suppression? *1993* How many did they hire? *14*

9. How many full-time suppression positions does your department currently have? *209. This includes 126 employees of the EMS department that have cross-trained as firefighters as the result of a merger between the EMS and fire departments in 2001.*

10. Briefly describe the progress of hiring full-time suppression personnel in your department year by year.
    14 positions were approved in 1993. 19 additional positions were approved to provide daytime staffing at certain volunteer stations in 1997. In 1999, 8 positions were approved for ISO purposes. An additional 12 positions were added in 2000 to add 24-hr staffing in one station. In 2001 an additional 16 positions were added to convert 2 additional stations to 24-hr status.The last addition was in 2002 when 14 positions were added.

11. What was the dollar amount allocated to salaries in your department in 1993?
    Approximately $900,000.

12. What is the current dollar amount allocated to salaries in your department?
    $4,908,682.00

13. Briefly describe the duties of volunteer firefighters in your department.
    Responds to emergency calls promptly and actively carries out the tasks required to perform emergency operations and functions. Performs routine preventative maintenance on equipment, apparatus/vehicles, and facilities. Completes records, reports and forms as required by the department and/or local, state, and Federal regulations. Performs fire prevention on both fire and medical education activities. Assists with fire investigations when necessary. Drives and operates emergency apparatus/vehicles.

14. Have those duties changed since 1993? *No* If yes, how have they changed?

15. What actions will your department take in the future if volunteer membership continues to decline and call volume continues to increase?
Through a county funded Volunteer Improvement Program, the department uses various media outlet to advertise for volunteer positions. We also plan to start a recruitment program in the local high schools and colleges and hire a full-time volunteer recruiter to manage our recruitment program. However, if volunteer membership is not increased, the department will need to look at adding additional full-time positions in the future by increasing taxes.

Appendix B

Feedback Form

Cover Letter

Horry County
Fire/Rescue
Operations Bureau
2560 North Main Street,
Suite 2
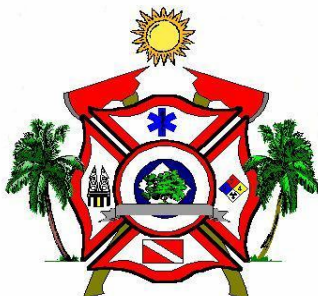
Phone: (843) 248-1223
Fax: (843) 248-1593
E-Mail: poszywak@horrycounty.org

Dear Member;

I am currently representing our department in the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. This is a 4-year process designed to prepare future fire service leaders in such things as personnel management, effective leadership, and planning. A large portion of this program consists of a research project that must be completed within 6 months after completion of each class. For my first research project, I am researching volunteer recruitment and retention programs for our department.

Attached you will find a simple 4-question survey designed to give me feedback on what programs you as a volunteer are looking for from our department. Please take a few minutes of your time to complete this survey, keeping your responses as honest as possible. Remember they are simply your opinion and they will remain anonymous, but they will help me to recommend programs that will directly benefit you. When filling in your ratings for questions 3 and 4, please remember to only use each number once, and you should end up with a sequential list of what programs you believe to be the most beneficial

Please either e-mail or fax the completed survey to my office by December 23rd. Remember, this is an anonymous questionnaire, so please do not put your name or any other personal information on the survey forms. I will be happy to discuss the results of my research with you when it is completed. If you have any questions regarding the survey, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you in advance for your help with my research.

Respectfully,

Ted M. Poszywak
Assistant Chief

Appendix B

Feedback Form

Data Sheet

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION SURVEY
Executive Fire Officer Program
Ted M. Poszywak

1. In terms of priorities, which area does the Horry County Fire/Rescue Department place more emphasis on? (Circle one)

   a. Volunteer Recruitment *4 (18.3%)*
   b. Volunteer Retention *1 (4.5%)*
   c. Both Equally *12 (54.5%)*
   d. Neither *5 (22.7%)*

2. Of the following, which programs does your department/station utilize for volunteer recruitment and retention?

ITEM/PROGRAM	YES	NO	Don't Know
Standardized application process	☐ *21 (95.5%)*	☐ *1 (4.5%)*	☐ *0 (0%)*
Written policies and procedures	☐ *19 (86.4%)*	☐ *2 (9.1%)*	☐ *1 (4.5%)*
Advertising program (classified ads, TV ads, etc.)	☐ *7 (31.8%)*	☐ *13 (59.1%)*	☐ *2 (9.1%)*
Standardized training program	☐ *20 (91%)*	☐ *1 (4.5%)*	☐ *1 (4.5%)*
Supplemental pay (paid-on-call, part-time, pay-per-call, bonus, etc)	☐ *21 (95.5%)*	☐ *1 (4.5%)*	☐ *0 (0%)*
Job fares, local school recruiting, etc	☐ *1 (4.5%)*	☐ *12 (54.5%)*	☐ *9 (41%)*
Supplemental health insurance	☐ *0 (0%)*	☐ *16 (72.7%)*	☐ *6 (27.3%)*
Supplemental retirement (CD's, IRA's, 401K, etc.)	☐ *5 (22.7%)*	☐ *12 (54.5%)*	☐ *5 (22.7%)*
Incentive, awards, and recognition program	☐ *12 (54.5%)*	☐ *9 (41%)*	☐ *1 (4.5%)*
Cadet/Junior firefighter program	☐ *5 (22.7%)*	☐ *14 (63.6%)*	☐ *3 (13.7%)*
Other:	☐ *0 (0%)*	☐ *0 (0%)*	☐ *0 (0%)*

3. Of the programs listed below, which in your opinion would be most effective in **recruiting** new volunteer members? (rate in order of importance, 1 = highest, 2 = 2nd highest, etc. until all are rated)

ITEM/PROGRAM	RATING
Cadet/Junior firefighter program	6 27.3%
Supplemental retirement (CD's, IRA's, 401K, etc.)	6 27.3%
Supplemental health insurance	9 41%
Job fares, local school recruiting, etc	8 36.4%
Monetary compensation	9 41%
Education Programs (tuition reimbursement, etc)	4 18.3%
Other: (please list below) *Better Leadership Qualifications*	1 4.5%
Consolidate/Reduce Training	*1 (4.5%)*
Instill Pride	*1 (4.5%)*

4. Of the programs listed below, which in your opinion would be most effective in **retaining** current volunteer members? (rate in order of importance, 1 = highest, 2 = 2nd highest, etc. until all are rated)

ITEM/PROGRAM	RATING
Supplemental retirement (CD's, IRA's, 401K, etc.)	6 27.3%
Supplemental health insurance	8 36.4%
Monetary compensation	10 45.5%
Training Programs	5 22.7%
Equipment	6 27.3%
Facilities	5 22.7%
Education Programs (tuition reimbursement, etc)	4 18.3%
Other: (please list below) *Enforcement of Chain of Command*	1 4.5%
Consolidate/Reduce Training	*1 (4.5%)*
Instill Pride	*1 (4.5%)*