

TRAINING TOPICS INTENDED TO ACCELERATE

Executive Development

Training Topics Intended to Accelerate the Learning Curve
for Fire District Commissioner Board Membership

Arlene F. Obtinario

Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

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

Signed: _____

Abstract

Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue did not have a new commissioner, training program in place. The board experienced a one- or two-member change every year for the past decade. The new fire commissioner had to learn the governance role by impromptu methods, which affected productivity. There was a need to identify subjects taught more effectively in a structured training program.

The research purpose was to develop the criteria for the topics necessary for inclusion in a formal, mandatory, self-instructional, board membership, training program.

Four research questions asked if state, county or individual fire service and other special purpose district associations/agencies had new public official training topics/programs in place.

A fifth question asked for the desired topics based on the answers received to the first four questions.

The research method used was descriptive. Forty-eight associations or agencies received questionnaires, 9 associations contacted via the Internet, and 385 individuals solicited by survey served to gather training topic ideas. The review of public official literature established the basic premise that public officials need training.

Results and recommendations identified five general areas of training for new fire commissioners: (1) finances, (2) human resources, (3) laws, (4) roles, and (5) purpose.

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Training Topics Intended to Accelerate the Learning Curve
For Fire District Commissioner Board Membership

INTRODUCTION

Many officials on commissions in Washington State do not have required role training on board membership. Mandatory role training for fire commissioners on fire district boards is also limited. More specifically, the Board of Commissioners (BOC) for Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue (PLFR) does not have a mandatory, formal and structured, board membership, training program in place or even an established list of basic required training topics.

In the last decade, the PLFR five-member commission has experienced commissioner changes by one or two members each year. Each time a new person joins the commission, another learning process must ensue and productive work time is lost in trying to assist the new fire commissioner in learning the governance role informally.

Because time and people resources are limited in this small combination fire district, the new fire commissioner must learn by observation and by haphazardly asking the right question at the right time, consequently much of the needed training is by chance.

The purpose of this research was to develop criteria for the training topics in a mandatory, formal, self-instructional program that could enable a more timely integration of a new commissioner into the fire commissioner, board membership role.

This paper titled “Training Topics Intended to Accelerate the Learning Curve for Fire District Commissioner Board Membership” utilized descriptive research. Two questionnaires and a survey were the predominant descriptive research means. State, county, and individual fire service organizations, and special purpose districts, such as hospital, water or library districts,

contact secured information on already established training topics and/or established training programs designed for new governing officials.

Four research questions laid the groundwork for gathering consensus on the criteria for identifying the key training topics for new fire commissioners.

- What board membership role training topics/programs have state fire commissioner/director associations in the U.S. initiated?
- Have any U.S. county fire commissioner/director associations identified board membership role training topics and/or initiated training programs?
- What board membership role training programs have individual fire districts in the USA initiated?
- Would board membership role training programs that other special purpose districts, such as hospital, water, and/or library districts, initiated provide insight into identifying pertinent training topics?

The research gleaned from the answers to these four questions would then provide answers to the fifth and final question.

- Based on existing training topics and/or existing training programs, what are the desired topics for inclusion in a board membership role training program for the new fire commissioners at Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue?

BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue (PLFR), a 30-member, combination fire district, is located on the Hood Canal in Jefferson County of the State of Washington. A five-member board of commissioners governs PLFR. In the State of Washington, a fire commissioner must be a registered voter residing within the boundaries of the fire district in order to hold office. The fire

commissioner position is a non-partisan, elected position. The term of office is six years. Should there be reason for a commissioner to leave office before the six-year term expires, the remaining commissioners have the obligation to appoint a commissioner to fill the vacancy.

In the normal course of business, in accordance with the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 52, which is the state law governing Washington fire districts, fire commissioner positions are on the ballot every two years. The structure of the law allows the voters the opportunity to review the governance abilities of at least one member of the commission every two years, so the potential for change on the commission is inherent in the law.

Since 1994, the PLFR commission has experienced membership changes of one or two commissioners each year. The reasons for these board membership changes have been election losses, deaths, resignations due to health issues, relocations to other residential communities, employment demands limiting the ability to dedicate the time needed to serve, and perhaps frustration with the organizational culture of PLFR.

Although PLFR has experienced frequent membership changes in the governance division of the fire district, the key management team, the fire chief and chief financial officer, has remained the same since July 1, 1997. Collectively, this two-member management team represents over 50 years of fire service experience, agrees on basic personal and business philosophies, and holds a shared passion for the fire service.

The management team believes it is necessary to serve the individual needs of the commissioners while ensuring the full board meets the requirements of the laws governing public agencies.

Under the current way of doing business and based on this management belief, impromptu meetings and informal discussions dictate the new commissioner's rate of learning

about governance. Management must be committed to accommodate these impromptu activities into deadline-oriented work schedules. This method of impromptu training creates a risk that other important learning may get overlooked and could force a new commissioner to be reactive instead of proactive in the governance process.

A 2002 incident of a newly appointed fire commissioner's inability to learn the governance responsibilities by this impromptu method, followed by the commissioner's abrupt resignation from the board in 2003, evoked a resolve by the management team to investigate and develop a better way to educate new commissioners.

During this same time, the PLFR Chief Financial Officer (CFO) received the advantage of attending the National Fire Academy's *Organizational Theory in Practice* study course. During that two-week training session, the CFO studied organizational theories that could assist in explaining why a person would leave an organization. More specifically, the studies helped to explain possible reasons for the recent departure of a PLFR commissioner. Studies of individual, group and organizational theories resulted in a basic understanding and awareness of how people integrate into groups and organizations and how the groups and organizations relate to the individual's personal needs of belonging.

In 2004, the CFO's acceptance into the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program offered the opportunity to continue the study of organizational cultures, team decision-making, and the management and transition of change while attending the *Executive Development* study course.

The process of evaluating various organizational topics and theories as a student of these two NFA courses increased the awareness that the current PLFR organizational culture of

impromptu training of new fire commissioners could actually be counterproductive to the basic reasons an individual joins an organization.

This process also exposed the fact that PLFR had, over a decade, unknowingly failed to identify the need to comply with one of the five USFA operational objectives, namely “to respond appropriately in a timely manner to emerging issues” (EFOP ARP guidelines, p. II-2).

Specifically, PLFR did not respond promptly to the constant turnover on the Board of Commissioners, which coupled with the fact that the district had no adopted process in place to assist in accelerating the learning curve of a new fire commissioner, created a training void that just kept repeating itself.

As an NFA change agent within the PLFR fire service organization, the CFO has identified the need to address this training deficiency. Consequently, the identification of training topic criteria for new fire commissioners would be the first step toward initiation of a mandatory training program for PLFR board membership.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first part of the research process started with a search in published public administration books for documentation to support a baseline need to train public officials.

The Handbook of Public Administration (Perry, 1989) included an exhibit titled *The Code of Ethics of the American Society for Public Administration*. This exhibit showed a listing of 12 ethical standards and numbers 9 and 11 supported the need to train public officials in their jobs.

Number 9. Accept as a personal duty the responsibility to keep up to date on emerging issues and to administer the public’s business with professional competence, fairness, impartiality, efficiency, and effectiveness. Number 11. Eliminate all forms of illegal discrimination, fraud, and mismanagement of public funds, and support colleagues if they

are in difficulty because of responsible efforts to correct such discrimination, fraud, mismanagement, or abuse (Perry, 1989, p.616).

Understanding and Managing Public Organizations (Rainey, 1991) included an excerpt from the Volcker Commission report of 1989 titled the “*Steps for Individual Leaders and Managers*” that identified the need to train and listed the important topics for public official training.

Public managers must know, rapidly learn about, or have help from people who know about at least the following: the organization itself and its policies and programs, legislative processes and structures, legal processes, including administrative law, and central management and oversight agencies responsible for governmental personnel, purchasing, budgeting, evaluation, and auditing (Rainey, 1991, p. 258 – 265).

The research process for this project then moved toward gathering samples of training topics used for training public officials in state and national associations.

Fire service information gleaned training topics from three state associations, namely the Washington Fire Commissioners Association (WFCA), the Oregon Fire District Directors Association (OFDDA) via Ms. Aubrey Gold, a Public Entities Support Specialist for Wilson-Heirgood Associates (WHA) in Eugene, Oregon, and the Fire Districts Association of California (FDAC).

The WFCA’s web site advertised that “The WFCA is a recognized fire service source of administrative education for [fire] districts” (2000 – 2004, membership benefits, ¶2). The advertisement stated provision of an annual seminar series that “. . . offers many important subjects including: interpretation of laws pertaining to fire districts, responsibilities and duties of commissioners, authority granted to the board, available funding, conduct of board meetings,

responsibilities to employees (whether volunteer or not) and other subjects vital to the successful operation of a fire district” (2000 – 2004, membership benefits, ¶2).

Ms. Gold (personal communication, August 30, 2004) stated that WHA offers commissioner training for OFDDA and listed the training topics as the “Top 10 reasons why a fire department is sued; Civil rights issues . . . a review of the federal and state protected classes; Reviewing the insurance market plan – which insurer and how much, Civil rights, and Ethics & Responsibilities”. Ms. Gold provided a follow-up (personal communication, November 9, 2004) which specified the 2005 training curriculum for OFDDA members and listed the training topics as “Duties & Responsibilities – Cultural Drift; Why We Write Policies & Break Them – Risk Management; Most Common Suits & How to Avoid Them – Civil Rights; (and) The Importance of SOP’s – Team & Staff Building”.

The FDAC’s web site advertised a new education program titled “Certificate of Achievement” which requires completion of four sections of study in order to earn this certificate, namely “Fire Protection District Planning; Laws, Regulations, and Codes; Organization and Allied Entities; and Current Issues” (2004, education registration, ¶1).

In addition to these three state fire commissioner/director associations, at least two states, California and Colorado have established state associations that include public official training for all special purpose districts. Some of the special districts listed as members of these associations were fire, airport, cemetery, drainage, hospital, irrigation, library, utility, water, recreation and waste management.

The California Special District Association (CSDA), as advertised on their web site, has also formed an alliance with the CSDA Finance Corporation and the Special District Risk Management Authority. As quoted from the web site, this alliance was formed in order to

provide “members with a single source for legislative services; educational training and workshops; advocacy; information resources; legal advice; networking; investment funding and management; property and automobile liability; and workers’ compensation” (2004, CSDA alliance, ¶1).

The CSDA also indicated their hosting of a Special District Governance Academy. As stated on the CSDA web site, “Citizen governance is the backbone of American democracy. The basic assumption of our governance system is that ordinary citizens who are elected or appointed to public boards reflect the beliefs, values and needs of the community. Equally important is that they bring those values to the board table and together, as a unified board, they will set a direction that is responsive to the needs and values of the community” (2004, CSDA’s special district governance academy, ¶1). And based on this CSDA assumption, the Special District Governance Academy includes 4 main topics of study, “Governance Foundations, Setting Direction & Community Leadership, Board’s Role in Finance & Fiscal Accountability, and the Board’s Role in Human Resources” (2004, CSDA’s special district governance academy, ¶2).

The Special District Association of Colorado’s (SDA) web site offered six regional workshops that included the following training topics: “Board Member Duties and Responsibilities, Tax Policy, Investment Rules, Strategies and Alternatives for Special District Funds, Record Retention, Trouble-Shooting Your Board’s Performance.” (2004, regional workshops, agenda).

The SDA web also showed an offer to members the ability to purchase a Board Member Manual at the cost of \$50. The advertisement stated that the manual is “a general survey and reference of statutory responsibilities for [a] member of the Board of Directors of a Colorado Special District” (2003, publications, board manual, ¶1).

The research for this project then branched out to find out what other public official associations, besides those directly associated with the fire service, are offering as training for their new public officials.

The National Association of Counties (NACo), based in Washington, D.C., published the *County Leadership Handbook* on their web site. The contents listed “Leadership Perspectives, Communications Know-how, Administrative Savvy, Information Technology, and Budget and Finance Basics” (2003, county leadership handbook contents) as key training topics for county officials.

The NACo also has a published *Code of Ethics for County Officials* (1991) and two of the 14 codes specifically addressed the need for financial and legal training. Respectively, those two ethical standards were “keep safe all funds and other properties of the county” and “faithfully comply with all laws and regulations applicable to the county and impartially apply them to everyone” (1991, code of ethics, ¶7).

The Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) has a “Newly Elected Officials Program” (2004, newly elected officials program, ¶1) advertised on their web site, but in order to gain specific information on the program, one must contact the Assistant Executive Director (AED) by telephone or email. The AED, contacted via email, did not respond which resulted in no identification of specific topics in this training program. One note of particular interest on that web site, which should involve further investigation, was the statement that “newly elected officials must complete this orientation [the Newly Elected Officials Program] to be eligible for [the] Certified Public Official (CPO) certification” (2004, newly elected officials program, ¶1).

The Association of Washington Public Hospital Districts (AWPHD) offered a 42-page document titled the *Public Hospital District Commissioner Guide* (2002, public hospital district

commissioner guide) on their web site. This guide, intended for training and reference material for hospital district commissioners, was compiled of five sections which included training subjects on “What Are Public Hospital Districts, the Structure of a Public Hospital District, The Role of Commissioners, Commissioner Meetings & the Open Public Meetings Act, and District Finances, and Regulatory Compliance” (2002, public hospital district commissioner guide, contents).

The AWPHD also conducted training courses via a web conference. One specific course was titled *Introduction to Public Hospital District Governance* (2004, publications & resources) which was a power point presentation visible on the Internet while the narration was audible over the telephone. This training program was an hour long and offered the accessibility for the student to ask questions either by typing them on the computer or asking when the phone line was open. There was no limit to the number of class attendees and the web conference conducted polling questions throughout the course such as “How many people are watching the web conference with you” (2004, publications & resources, ¶7). The results of the polling questions were available as soon as the course was completed. Specific study areas included the pertinent state laws governing hospital districts, the formation and duties of the board, and the establishment of policy.

The Washington State School Director’s Association’s (WSSDA) web site advertised the fact that the WSSDA starts their education process even before a person is elected to a school board. The WSSDA web site listed the accomplishment of twenty 2-hour, free candidate workshops conducted during the month of August 2003. These candidate workshops appeared in school districts across the state and “focus[ed] on educating candidates about the roles and responsibilities of school board service. Topics . . . [that were] covered include[d] state and local

education governance, current education issues, and the functions of the school board” (2003, workshops, ¶2).

The WSSDA also made available, via their web site or in print, a free brochure entitled *Serving on Your Local Board: A Guide for Candidates* (2003, workshops, information for school board candidates, ¶4). The brochure included information on the structure of a school board, “what a school board does, the requirements and responsibilities of being a school board member, and the traits which contribute to effective board service” (2003, workshops, information for school board candidates, ¶4).

And for the candidate who was elected to the position of public official, the WSSDA also provided, via their web site, the opportunity to download a 52-page training/reference document titled *Serving on Your Local Board: A Guide to Effective Leadership* (first printing August 2001; reprinted October 2001; revised July 2003). The parts of this guide listed the following subjects as pertinent information for the new public official to know:

- Education Reform: A Work in progress
- Statewide System, Local Governance
- The Governance Role of School Boards
- The Leadership Team
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Ethics for Effective Board Members
- The School Board and the Law
- Legal Requirements for School Board Meetings
- Employee Relations: An Active Arena
- A Legal Overview of Collective Bargaining

- The Alphabet Soup of Education Acronyms
- WSSDA: The School Directors' Own Organization
- Sources for State and Local Education Information
- Resolving Dilemmas: Two Examples of Challenging Issues
- Exercises
 - #1 Test Scores
 - #2 Levy Failure
 - #3 Expectations Exceed Dollars
 - #4 Executive Session (2001, 2003, contents)

A quote from this guide, which aspired to ensure effective school board leadership, captured the overall importance and demands of serving as a public official on any board or commission. The words in brackets in the following quote reflect how the quote would read if placed in a training manual for new fire commissioners.

You [fire commissioner/director] will not be expected to know everything about school board [fire district] service or the delivery of [fire suppression, emergency medical response, public safety] education in your district, the state or the nation as you offer to serve your community. It will be in your best interest, however, to learn as much as you can as quickly as possible. This overview is intended to help you get started and covers some of the high points for the conscientious citizen who is willing to take on the challenge (2001, 2003, foreword, p. iii).

In review, the findings and observations reflective in the training offered for public officials in these associations have positively influenced the overall research project's intent to identify the criteria for topics to include in a formal, new fire commissioner orientation program.

First, documenting the fact that state, county and national associations have recognized the need to train their public officials by creating actual handbooks and training courses validates the importance of continuing the work and planning on the PLFR project.

Second, reviewing the contents of these training materials has helped to identify the common themes for potential training topics, which generally seem to be about laws, roles and responsibilities, finances, and human resources.

Third, state or county associations and even individual fire districts could adopt the concept of offering formal academies and professional certifications as incentives or requirements for training fire service public officials. However, the most prestigious program would be one of national certification.

Fourth, it is obvious, by the training methods or systems utilized by these associations, current and future technology could open many doors to creative, stimulating, and professional training courses.

PROCEDURES

The basic steps used to gather the ideas, which affected the results, identified the new commissioner training topic criteria as listed:

1. established the research questions based on the hypothesis that a mandatory, formal training program for new fire commissioners could accelerate the learning curve of a new member in the governance role on a fire district board of commissioners
2. identified the research method as the descriptive research method
3. used the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center (LRC), Emmitsburg, Maryland for access to public administration publications

4. searched the Internet via *The911site.com* searching for sites of associations for public officials serving fire districts; viewed fire-related web sites for all 50 USA states searching the state fire marshal or state fire chief associations for links to associations for fire service public officials
5. searched the public official association web sites for new public official training programs and/or information for special purpose district associations and public official associations outside the fire service
6. circulated two questionnaires and one survey to gather data which would support the need for and/or ideas for training topics for new fire commissioners
7. determined the value of the responses to the two questionnaires and how the responses answered one or more of the research questions
8. categorized the survey results in order to identify prioritized opinions on which training topics would be valuable for new fire commissioners by color-coding each of the 444 topics. For example, every priority that had the words budget, finance, money, or a reference to fiscal management was marked with the color green. The tallied 'greens' for each of the six priorities were recorded on a master sheet. As the process continued, the use of different colors, highlighting key words, resulted in 12 main categories surfacing.
9. conducted a comparison of information gleaned from individual Washington State fire service personnel, individual Washington State fire districts, Washington State county fire commissioner associations, and one national and eight state public official associations (including three specifically formed to serve fire commissioners or fire directors)

10. based on the comparisons, decided on the key training topics for inclusion in a mandatory, formal new commissioner training program

The original intent was to submit a questionnaire to state public official associations asking for information on new public official training programs. Research on the Internet proved to be much less cumbersome with much better results than using a questionnaire because the larger organizations had training information easily accessible on web sites. The questionnaire method used locally, within the State of Washington's fire service, circulated via email and/or by the U.S. Postal service, because personal contact was necessary in order to gain information.

The first questionnaire circulated in April of 2003. An email or personal contact to the district secretaries of 28 fire districts of large, medium, and small sizes in the State of Washington (Appendix A) asking if *the fire district conducts a formal orientation program for newly elected and newly appointed fire commissioners*. Peers of the author were the recipients of the questionnaire circulation.

The second questionnaire circulated in late summer/early fall of 2004. A U.S. postal mailing sent to each of the 21 county fire commissioners associations in the State of Washington (Appendix B) (Appendix C) explained the author's involvement in conducting an ARP for *Executive Development* and listed seven questions for response.

1. *Does your association have a formal training program?*
2. *If your response is yes, what topics are included in the training program?*
3. *If your response to #1 is yes, is the training program mandatory?*
4. *If the training is mandatory, what is the timeline for completion of the training?*
5. *If your association does not have a formal training program in place, what training alternatives are offered?*

6. Does your association have subsidiary or affiliated associations, i.e., county, regional, etc. that offer training?

7. If so, what training topics are included in these training sessions?

The survey (Appendix D) circulated at the Washington Fire Commissioners Association 56th Annual Conference held in SeaTac, Washington during the month of October 2004. The author attended the WFCA conference in person and solicited survey completions in person. The survey was available to all conference attendees and the WFCA Executive Secretary Roger Ferris made public announcements requesting survey completion throughout the conference courses. There were 395 conference attendees.

The survey was a voluntary, narrative-type opinion survey asking for a listing of five or six subjects a new fire commissioner needs to know in order to be an effective board member.

One limitation was the fact that the responses to the two questionnaires and the survey were quite low. There was no effective way to ensure an increased participation in the voluntary process. The information gathered from the received responses proved valuable to the author in identifying the criteria for the new commissioner training program.

A second limitation was the fact that the responses to the voluntary, opinion survey were written, narrative responses and therefore required categorization in order to use the information in comparisons. The categorization process was tedious and left more to interpretation than is desirable in conducting a survey.

Another limitation in the research process included the fact that all 50 USA states have state fire chief, state fire marshal, state career and state volunteer fire fighter associations, yet very few states have elected fire service public official associations. Obtaining information on

state fire service public official associations was difficult because either they do not exist or they were not included as important links to other key fire service associations.

The author was able to identify Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington as states with associations for fire service commissioners/directors. An email contact (Ms. Gold, personal communication, October 29, 2004) suggested that New York, New Jersey, and possibly Kansas have state fire commissioner associations. Research did not locate supporting documentation for Ms. Gold's suggestion. The States of California, Oregon, and Washington were the only states that had training information readily available. Contact via email and by U.S. Postal mailing to the presidents of the Idaho State Fire Commissioners Association and the Montana Fire Districts Association requesting information on their training programs received no response. The Arizona Fire district Association, Inc. contacted via their web site on the Internet, showed no listings of training topics available. The National Association of Fire Officials (NAFO), based in Salem, Oregon, contacted by email and by telephone requesting information on membership and training programs, resulted in no information acquired.

RESULTS

Contact made via the Internet, email, U.S. Postal service, interoffice memorandum or in person resulted in involvement of 57 public official associations or agencies and 395 fire service individuals.

The 57 public official associations or agencies included 1 national association, 8 state associations, 21 Washington State county fire commissioner associations, and 27 individual Washington State fire districts.

Five of the 21 Washington State county fire commissioner associations contacted, responded (Appendix B) that no formal training programs for new fire commissioners were in place. The responders indicated their association memberships rely on the Washington Fire Commissioners Association for the formal training sessions for new commissioners. There was report of regional training offered on topics pertinent to localized needs as identified by consortiums of the county associations.

Fifteen of the 27 individual Washington State fire districts contacted by email or in person responded (Appendix A). Thirteen fire district responses indicated no formal orientation program for new fire commissioners. One fire district representative reported the use of a mandatory, basic safety orientation checklist as part of their accident prevention program, which included the fire commissioners. Another fire district's secretary reported being the senior attorney for Snure Seminars that presents a new commissioner seminar through the WFCA. Of the 15 responses, six district secretaries expressed positive support of a new commissioner orientation program.

The fire service individuals contacted were the 395 Washington Fire Commissioners Association 56th Annual Conference attendees. Table 1 shows the attendance breakdown as confirmed by Ms. Nora Eyllenfeldt, WFCA Office Manager by email (personal, November 2, 2004) and the number of the conference attendee responses to the survey and the percentage of survey responses returned.

Table 1.

WFOA Attendance Numbers Compared to the Numbers of Voluntary Opinion Surveys Returned

	Number	Surveys	Percent
Conference Attendees	attended	returned	response
Commissioners	218	66	30%
Fire Chiefs	57	7	12%
Executive Directors	4	0	0%
District Secretaries	40	9	23%
Association Affiliates	76	3	4%

The review of the 85 survey responses, which listed 444 prioritized training topics, resulted in the identification of 12 key words for use in the categorization process. The following lists the 12 main training topic categories as identified in the survey process: (1) roles, (2) finances, (3) laws, (4) purpose, (5) meetings, (6) listen, (7) human resources, (8) planning, (9) policies, (10) insurance, (11) community, and (12) miscellaneous. The miscellaneous category included priorities listed one time only on all completed surveys.

Each of the 444 priorities placed in one of the twelve categories determined that five topic categories received 322 of the 444 priority listings or 72.5% of the total listed priorities.

These same five topics ranked and clustered as the one, two and three priority topics received 196 of 251 priority listings as one, two and three or in other words, the top three priorities. The same five training topics equaled 78% of the top three priorities. Table 2 provides

an overview of the comparison of the five topics individually. This comparison shows survey results evaluated in two ways and confirms the importance of consideration of these five topics for the training topic criteria.

Table 2.

Survey Topics Categorized by Frequency of Response in Comparison to Actual 1, 2, or 3
Priority Ranking

Training Topics	Response frequency	1, 2, 3 Ranking
Finances	90	67
Human Resources	75	28
Laws	71	40
Roles	45	34
Purpose	41	27
N	322 of 444	196 of 251
Percentage Value	72.5%	78%

The numbers of years of fire service, as listed by 82 WFCA survey respondents, equaled 1,607 years. The service years ranged from less than one year to a total of 52 years reflecting an average 20 years of service.

Review of the training topics listed by the one national and the eight state public official associations revealed four common training themes for new public officials. These four common areas of training were:

1. the laws governing the service district
2. the role and responsibilities of the governing official
3. the management of the finances
4. the interaction with the human resources of the service district

The 20 responses to the 48 questionnaires circulated to individual fire districts and county fire commissioner associations in Washington confirmed that formal training programs for new fire commissioners at the individual fire district and county levels are limited in the State of Washington.

Answers to the five original research questions were determined as follows:

- (1) The board membership role training topics and/or programs that have been initiated by state fire commissioner/director associations in the U.S. cover four main areas:
 - the role and responsibilities of the commissioner/director
 - the financial management of a fire district
 - the study of the laws pertaining to the formation of, the purpose of, and the governing of a fire district
 - the interaction of the human resources within the fire service
- (2) The county fire commissioner associations in the State of Washington have not adopted formal training programs for fire commissioners. These county fire commissioner associations rely heavily on the Washington Fire

Commissioners Association for training. Internet research on county associations outside Washington State revealed the inability to find fire service Internet links.

- (3) Board membership role training programs by individual fire districts in the State of Washington are nearly non-existent. Pursuit of information on individual fire districts outside Washington State failed because fire service Internet links was unidentifiable.
- (4) Looking outside the fire service for training programs in associations for public officials of all special purpose districts, for county public officials, for school board directors, and for hospital board directors provided insight into identifying pertinent training topics.
- (5) Based on the research of available training for public officials both inside the fire service and outside the fire service, five main training topics surfaced for inclusion in a board membership role training program for the new fire commissioners at Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue. The five topics included:
 - the role of a commissioner
 - the finances of a fire district
 - the laws pertaining to a fire district and the commissioner
 - the purpose of a fire district
 - how the commissioner should interact with the human resources of the fire district

DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

A review of the advertised training available for public officials from the national and state associations indicated that the individual survey responses were more inclusive and specific than the data gathered from the associations off the Internet.

Based on the five training topics from the survey, categorized as finances, human resources, laws, roles, and purpose, a comparison resulted as follows:

- Washington Fire Commissioners Association (WFCA)
Laws, roles, finances, human resources
- Oregon Fire District Directors Association (OFDDA)
Laws, roles, human resources
- Fire Districts Association of California (FDAC)
Laws, purpose
- California Special District Association (CSDA)
Finances, human resources
- Special District Association of Colorado (SDA)
Roles, finances
- National Association of Counties (NACo)
Roles, finances, laws
- Association of Washington Public Hospital Districts (AWPHD)
Roles, finances, laws, purpose
- Washington State School Director's Association (WSSDA)
Pre-election candidate training: roles, laws, purpose

Post-election public official training: laws, roles, human resources,
purpose

This brief comparison could imply a lack of available training by the associations in the five general areas as categorized from the survey. It is plausible that depending on election times and current events affecting the fire service, the associations are concentrating on offering key training subjects when timing for the training is most crucial and important to association members and the web site advertisements would reflect such.

Because of the extensive experience of the survey responders, an average of 20 years in the fire service, their recommendations for topics warrant attention and support this researcher's viewpoint that a new commissioner orientation program would be beneficial.

The low response from the fire district secretaries to one question, asking if their fire districts had an orientation program in place for new fire commissioners, could imply a belief that such a program is unnecessary. The fact that eight of the 15 respondents expressed support or already had a program in place implied otherwise.

One general implication of initiating a new commissioner, training program with the possibility of establishing mandatory public official certifications could mean that the governing officials would be better equipped to govern a fire suppression and emergency medical services business based on standards, certifications, licenses, and protocols. Certifications required at all levels of the professional divisions of a fire district should make good business sense and could possibly strengthen proactive approaches to the myriad of issues facing fire district governance and management.

The implications of these comparative results for Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue reflect the need to make a decision as to the detail required by PLFR in the new fire commissioner orientation program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Review of the research results has identified a minimum of five desired training topics for inclusion in a board membership role training program for the new fire commissioners at Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue. Recommendations for training topics for the new training program are as follows:

- Fire district membership roles & responsibilities
- Fire district finances
- Fire district laws
- Human resources in the fire district
- Fire service purpose & fire district historical overview

Recommendations for subsequent steps are as follows: Complete the first draft of the new training program by early spring 2005 in order to allow time for edits. Ensure adoption of the new training program before January 1, 2006, which is the date a new fire commissioner would take office in the next election cycle. Design the training program to be self-administered in order to ensure that all new fire commissioners receive the same information in the same format. Establish a maximum time allowed for studying the material that would fit with the need to accelerate the learning curve of a new fire commissioner.

Recommendations for future research include the study of implementation of Washington State fire commissioner training academies and/or fire commissioner certification programs. This process could begin in Jefferson County in an attempt to establish a protocol for

the state. Ideally, this county training program should be ready for implementation by January 1, 2006.

Also, design and initiate a pre-election, candidate awareness program for the citizens registered to run for the office of fire commissioner. This program could begin in Jefferson County in an attempt to establish a protocol for the state. Ideally, this county training program should be ready for implementation by September 1, 2005.

Once the county and state programs are established, recommend researching the available avenues that could serve as conduits to sharing the new commissioner training programs nationwide. Two potential avenues might be the National Fire Academy (NFA) and/or the National Association of Fire Officials (NAFO).

References

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Fire districts association of california

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National association of counties

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Washington fire commissioner association

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Washington state school directors' association

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Appendix A. Question to list of 27 Washington State Fire Districts

An asterisk denotes response to the question. Co is the abbreviation for County. FPD is the abbreviation for Fire Protection District.

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Chelan Co FPD 1* | 21. Pierce Co FPD 3 |
| 2. Chelan Co FPD 7* | 22. Pierce Co FPD 12 |
| 3. Clallam Co FPD 3 | 23. Snohomish Co FPD 1 |
| 4. Clallam Co FPD 4 | 24. Snohomish Co FPD 12 |
| 5. Grant Co FPD 10* | 25. Spokane Co FPD 3 |
| 6. Jefferson Co FPD 1* | 26. Spokane Co FPD 8* |
| 7. Jefferson Co FPD 2* | 27. Thurston Co FPD 7* |
| 8. Jefferson Co FPD 4* | |
| 9. Jefferson Co FPD 5* | |
| 10. Jefferson Co FPD 6* | |
| 11. King Co FPD 4 | |
| 12. King Co FPD 16 | |
| 13. King Co FPD 20 | |
| 14. King Co FPD 26* | Snure Seminars |
| 15. King Co FPD 36 | |
| 16. King Co FPD 45* | |
| 17. Kitsap Co FPD 1 | |
| 18. Kitsap Co FPD 2* | |
| 19. Kitsap Co FPD 10* | |
| 20. Kitsap Co FPD 18* | |

Appendix B. Questionnaire to list of 21 WA State County Fire Commissioner Associations

An asterisk denotes response to the questionnaire.

1. Clallam County Fire Commissioners Association*
2. Columbia Basin Chiefs & Commissioners*
3. Cowlitz County Fire Commissioners Association
4. Grays Harbor County Fire Commissioners Association
5. Jefferson County Fire Commissioners & Secretaries Association*
6. King County Fire Commissioners Association
7. Kitsap County Fire Commissioners Association
8. Lewis County Fire Commissioners Association
9. Mason County Fire Commissioners Association
10. Pierce County Fire Commissioners Association*
11. Skagit County Fire Commissioners Association
12. Snohomish County & Island County Fire Commissioners Association*
13. Southeastern Counties Fire Commissioners Association
14. Southwestern Counties Fire Commissioners Association
15. Spokane County Fire Commissioners Association
16. Stevens County Fire Commissioners Association
17. Thurston County Fire Commissioners Association
18. Tri-County Fire Commissioners Association
19. Whatcom County Fire Commissioners Association
20. Whitman County & Adams County Fire Commissioners Association
21. Yakima County Fire Commissioners Association

Appendix C. Sample cover letter for questionnaire to county fire commissioner associations

Greetings!!

As a matter of introduction, I am Arlene Obtinario. I am the Financial Officer & District Secretary for Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue, Port Ludlow, WA. I have served as a fire commissioner in my county and I am a Past President of the Washington Fire Commissioners Association. My fire service experiences span 25 years in the State of Washington.

I have just been accepted into the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) and I am doing an applied research paper for the first course, *Executive Development*, of the 4-year EFOP.

My research is to identify necessary subjects for orientation of a newly elected or appointed fire official. My research is intended to gather ideas nationally and possibly even internationally, so any information you may have on how I may contact other associations would be extremely helpful.

Consequently, as either an Executive Director, President, or Secretary of an association for fire commissioners or fire directors, I am asking for the following information:

1. does your association have a formal training program?
2. if your response is yes, what topics are included in the training program?
3. if your response to #1 is yes, is the training program mandatory?
4. if the training is mandatory, what is timeline for completion of the training program?
5. if your association does not have a formal training program in place, what training alternatives are offered?
6. does your association have subsidiary or affiliated associations, i.e., county, regional, etc., that offer training?
7. is so, what training topics are included in these training sessions?

Please feel free to respond to my questions via any one of the following methods:

Email: jcfd33@waypt.com

Fax: 360-437-0117

Phone: 360-437-2899 work 360-797-7216 home 360-477-0603 cell

Mail: Arlene c/o PLFR, 101 South Point Road, Port Ludlow, WA 98365

I am also interested in obtaining a copy of your association's Code of Ethics for fire officials, if available.

Thank you so very much for your assistance in my project. I appreciate any and all information you are willing to share. Have a super day! Take care! Be safe!

Sincerely and Respectfully, Arlene.

Appendix D. Sample voluntary opinion survey conducted at the 56th Annual Washington Fire Commissioners Association Conference

Please check 1 box:

Commissioner _____
 Chief _____
 District Secretary _____
 Other? Please identify _____

of Years of Fire Service? _____

Please list, in order of importance & in your OPINION, 5 or 6 subjects

a new fire commissioner needs to know

in order to be an effective Board member:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Comments:

Thank you for taking your time to complete this survey!