

Identification of Barriers that  
Restrict Cooperative Working Relationships  
in Mason County  
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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 the appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions or writings of another.

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Abstract

Mason County Washington receives emergency fire and EMS from fourteen different Fire Districts. The Fire Districts range in size and complexity yet they must all work together to provide emergency services. Over the past sixty years the working relationships among the Fire Districts as a whole has become strained. The problem is that numerous interpersonal, cultural and political barriers restrict cooperative working relationships and emergency capacity among all Fire Districts in Mason County.

The purpose of this research is to identify the interpersonal, cultural and political barriers that restrict cooperative working relationships and emergency service capacity in Mason County and to identify solutions on how to overcome these barriers. A descriptive research method was used, to include literature reviews, interviews and a survey to identify the barriers present and to identify what can be done to overcome these barriers.

A review of the research results identified that lack of trust, turf protection, lack of leadership, historical/political disagreement and failure to communicate were the main barriers to collaborative working relationships among Mason County Fire Districts. Research review was encouraging in the fact that a strong majority of internal stakeholders identified value, need and desire for collaborative working relationships among the Districts. Many of these stakeholders were forthcoming in presenting positive and workable solutions on overcoming these barriers.

It is recommended that District leaders step up and lead the way to improving working relationships and build a solid foundation of trust within Mason County. Leaders should implement planning to deliver a vision and path toward building collaborative relationships. External and internal communication should be exponentially enhanced and agency interaction among the Fire District memberships should be expanded at every opportunity.

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## Introduction

Just over 60,000 citizens that reside within the 1000 square miles of Mason County Washington rely on 14 individual Fire Districts for emergency services. These Fire Districts range in size and complexity but they must all rely on one another for operational and emergency support.

Fire Districts in Mason County began to emerge in the 1940's and since that time a complicated network of working relationships has emerged among them. The state of these working relationships has a direct impact on the quality and efficiency in which Mason County residents receive emergency services. These working relationships ebb and flow with the transition of District leaderships and memberships, but the contentious issues of turf protection and lack of trust continually threaten to undermine the emergency service product in Mason County. The current status of many of the working relationships among Fire Districts in Mason County is less than optimal and as such Mason County emergency service levels suffer.

These working relationships require immediate attention and nurturing by all Fire Districts, but in order to be successful the core problem must be defined and analyzed.

The problem is that numerous interpersonal, cultural and political barriers restrict cooperative working relationships and emergency capacity among all Fire Districts in Mason County. The purpose of this research is to identify the interpersonal, cultural and political barriers that restrict cooperative working relationships and emergency service capacity in Mason County and to identify solutions on how to overcome these barriers. A descriptive research method will be used to answer the following questions: (a) What are the real and perceived interpersonal, cultural and political barriers that restrict cooperative working relationships and emergency service capacity among Fire Districts in Mason County?, (b) How do these barriers

impact emergency service capacity and service delivery in Mason County?, (c) What steps can be taken to overcome these barriers?, (d) How would Mason County emergency service capacity and delivery benefit from overcoming these barriers?, (e) What role does Mason County Fire District 2 play in the erection of these working relationship barriers in Mason County?, and (f) What future role can Mason County Fire District 2 play in helping to eliminate these barriers?

### Background and Significance

Mason County Fire Protection District No. 2 is located in Washington State on the Olympic Peninsula. The Fire District provides emergency services for 110 square miles of geographic territory. The majority of the Fire District is located in northern Mason County. A 2010 partial merger process added a small area of jurisdiction to the District's northern border and extended the District's jurisdiction into neighboring Kitsap County. The Fire District is neighbored by three separate Mason County Fire Districts to the south and west and two separate Kitsap County Fire Districts to the north and east. The Fire District's geography is unique in that it is nearly split into two halves by the Hood Canal.

Mason County Fire District No. 2 provides a full range of fire, rescue and medical emergency services to include ALS and medical transport service. The Fire District also provides fire prevention, fire inspection, fire investigation and community outreach services. There is no third service provider within the Fire District. The Fire District has an emergency responder membership of 22 career personnel and 78 volunteers. Working in combination, the District's membership attends to nearly 2000 annual requests for emergency service. The membership also works to provide automatic EMS response to neighboring Mason County Fire District 8 through use of an automatic aid agreement. The Fire District operates on a \$3.4

million dollar annual operating budget and it implements a traditional fire service organizational structure. The District is led by an elected five member Board of Fire Commissioners

The Fire District serves a resident population of 18,000. This population size nearly doubles in the summer time as vacationers from metropolitan Seattle, King and Pierce Counties make their way out to the numerous bodies of recreational water and forestland found within the District. The Fire District consists of a small suburban core surrounded by vast expanses of rural territory. 22 individually recognized neighborhood communities reside with the Fire District, most being quite small in terms of geography and population.

With 1051 square miles of geography Mason County is a moderately sized County. The County maintains a resident population of 60,700 and it ranks 20th out of 39 counties in terms of population density in Washington State. The Counties population makes up less than 1% of the State's population, (US Census, 2010). Mason County has one incorporated City and four designated urban growth areas.

Mason County maintains its closest neighboring relationships with Thurston County to the south and Kitsap County to the north. Thurston and Kitsap Counties are significantly smaller than Mason County in terms of geography but both Counties maintain a population base over four times that of Mason County with 250,000 residents each.

Emergency services in Mason County are provided by 14 individual Fire Districts and a single private EMS service that provides emergency medical care and transport in nearly half of Mason County. The Fire Districts are independently administered by 14 elected Boards of Fire Commissioners. Each Fire District maintains independent administrative and operations staffs. The Fire Districts range in geographic size from just over two square miles to nearly 200 square miles. Fire District emergency call volumes range from less than 100 annual requests for

emergency assistance to over 5000 annual requests. Fire District annual operating budgets range from less than \$100,000 to nearly \$6 million dollars. A majority of the Fire Districts in Mason County are comprised of an all-volunteer membership. The two largest Fire Districts maintain a balanced combination career/volunteer membership model. Mason County Fire District No. 2 is the second largest Fire District in Mason County in terms of population, annual budget and emergency call volume.

Fire Districts in Washington State are legal governmental subdivisions of the State for the purpose of law and process application. However Fire Districts do not receive direct oversight or governance from any outside entity including Mason County or the State of Washington. Fire Districts are governed by locally elected Boards of Fire Commissioners and they receive primary funding from local property taxes.

The majority of the Fire Districts in Mason County were formed between 1945 and 1965. Fire Districts were initially created to protect isolated communities that were only connected by long and winding two lane roadways and traveling paths. While Fire Districts were initially created to protect individual communities they soon came to realize that the size and nature of emergency events and District resource limitations would require Fire District cooperation

The past and current working relationships among the 14 different Mason County Fire Districts has been and continues to be extremely difficult to describe. From their onset Fire Districts have maintained differences in personalities, operations, management, opinion, culture, competition, ability to fundraise and public trust. These differences have all played a role in souring District working relationships, often times to a detriment on local emergency services.

Over the past 70 years the names and faces in Fire District leaderships and memberships have changed but efforts to overcome these differences have had mixed results. These

differences, real and perceived, have erected complex barriers that cloud collaborative working relationships among the Fire Districts. These barriers impede day to day collaboration, consolidation efforts, technological improvements, resource allocation and emergency service enhancements. They also undermine responder and public safety and weaken Fire District efforts in mitigating fire and hazard risk.

The impact of having poor working relationships among Fire Districts in Mason County is most profound when reviewing the emergency service capacities in neighboring Kitsap County. A series of resource sharing efforts and consolidations allows for the provision of emergency services to over 250,000 people with only four fire protection districts and a city fire department. Kitsap County Fire Districts boast administrative and operational enhancements and efficiencies through cooperation that result in reduced emergency response times, reduced ISO ratings, equipment improvements, professional credentialing, safety enhancements and elimination of effort duplication.

If the fire service in Mason County is to realize the benefits and public value that can be achieved with improving cooperative working relationships it must first undertake the difficult task of trying to define the complicated matrix of barriers that stifle these relationships. The significance of this research will manifest itself in its ability to uncover, identify and communicate these barriers in a way that can lead to cooperative working relationship repair and relationship enhancement in Mason County.

With interpersonal relationships forming a basic foundation for all working relationships, barriers to these relationships present a very complex adaptive challenge. The direction and conceptual assistance provided in Unit 8 of the National Fire Academy's Course-Executive Development (NFA ED) will be used to build a framework for overcoming this challenge. The

NFA ED course encourages the emersion of leadership principles and practices from its candidates in light of such challenges. NFA ED Course concepts of a) balcony observation, b) concise problem identification, c) self-role identification, d) data gathering, and e) diagnostic and action step brainstorming will all employed as a means to help accomplish the United States Fire Administration strategic goal of improving the nation's fire and emergency services' capability for response to and recovery from all hazards.

### Literature Review

Identifying and defining the barriers that harm some of the working relationships among Mason County Fire Districts is no easy task. In many circumstances these barriers have been built over many years and passed down to new generations of fire service personnel. These barriers are diverse and often specific to select individuals, groups or circumstances. A working barrier among two Fire Districts in Southern Mason County may be non-existent in Northwest Mason County as different dynamics exist.

There is no practical way that this ARP can identify every dispute and circumstance that has worked to weaken many of the working relationships over the years in Mason County.

Rather the intent of the ARP is to identify commonalities or themes among the barriers that may serve as the cornerstones for eroding past, present and future working relationships.

It is important to note that all working relationship barriers demonstrate a link to interpersonal relationships, communication and leadership in some way. During the ARP development process the characteristics of leadership, trust, communication (lack of) and difference constantly lingered. With interpersonal relationships and dynamics infused among the research questions posed, they are a prudent part of the literature review process.

With lives and property at stake in the emergency service industry it is imperative that we work together, in almost seamless fashion in order to deliver the best possible outcomes. As emergency events evolve in size and complexity it is evident that no agency, regardless of size, can be assured that it solely can handle it all, (Swinford & Tokle, 1988). Cooperative working relationships are a must and the inability for Fire Districts to mutually work together has the ability to cost lives, property, and significantly endanger the safety of emergency responders (Schliek, 2006). It is interesting to note that many of the mission and value statements among the Mason County Fire Districts are mirror images of one another (online review, 2013) but the differences in how the agencies work together to carry these statements out varies widely. One of the scenarios where poor working relationships are easily identified is in Fire Service consolidations. Consolidations require a solid foundation of interpersonal dynamics if they are to be successful. Barriers to cooperative working relationships also serve as barriers to consolidations.

In his 2012 analysis of the potential for consolidation of fire agencies in Skagit County, Washington, Richard Curtis identified a fear of change, disparate cultures and loss of power, control, and authority as the top barriers to consolidation efforts. Similarly, in Curtis Bremner's 2012 analysis of training program consolidation in Vancouver, British Columbia he identified trust, fear of the unknown, lack of communication, and fear of change as four of the top five potential barriers for program consolidation. Both consolidation effort reviews identified fundamental human and interpersonal dynamics as barriers.

The role of interpersonal dynamics among working relationship barriers are further expanded on by Marya Axner (2013) in which she identifies the following challenges to organizations working well together.

- People sometimes believe that individual effort is more beneficial than cooperation
- People are often mistrustful
- People sometimes don't have the necessary communication skills for working together
- Discrimination keeps people and organizations isolated from each other
- A lack of strong leadership can hinder the formation and continuation of successful group interrelationships
- People may internalize a sense of powerlessness that makes them unable to take initiative to form working relationships

These challenges identified by Axner are prevalent in Mason County emergency services and formulate many of the barriers that we experience today. It is interesting to note that Axner's challenges highlight human tendencies and they are heavily dependent on matters of communication.

Axner continues in identifying four unique types of positive working relationships among organizations; a) networking, b) coordination, c) cooperation, and d) collaboration. Collaborative relationships are the most beneficial as they expand organizational capacities but they are the hardest to obtain due in part to the challenges previously presented. Axner states that, "In collaborative relationships, people begin to see each other as partners rather than competitors. This shift in view is profound in a society that has had so much emphasis on individualism."

Collaborative relationships are the type of working relationships that are commonly discussed and envisioned in Mason County emergency services. Unfortunately, at present time competition is not an outlier among Mason County Fire Districts. In Mason County we must make a concerted effort to realize and address these working relationship challenges if we are to collectively reap the rewards that collaborative relationships offer.

Leadership plays a central if not dominant role in the state and condition of working relationships among organizations. Leadership sets organizational standards and helps to

establish organizational norms and expectations. Leadership is the attainment of accomplishment through others (Boyd, 2010). Leadership helps to establish a vision and a set of progressive goals. Organizational leadership has the greatest ability to implement organizational change and as such leadership, or lack thereof, has the most profound level of influence on working relationships. Organizational working relationships are a direct reflection of leadership and vice versa (Boyd, 2010).

When two parties wish to form a positive and healthy relationship both parties must place value on that relationship. Strong leadership will identify and communicate this value which will lead to flourishing relationships, (Zarcinas, 2012). When leadership undermines or fails to identify value among relationships, they will soon falter.

So often we see leaders that are quick to place blame for ailing relationships when in reality these leaders have the most profound level of influence on the relationship. Often time leaders verbally state that they see value in the working relationships around them but their actions do not back up their words. Value must be demonstrated in every aspect if it is to be sincere and effective in forming positive relationships (Zarcinas, 2012).

On the positive, leaders have the ability to positively influence others and they have the ability to change culture and norms that may lead to antagonistic relationships. Leaders have the ability to pull organizations and their internal and external working relationships out from the status quo. Leaders can foster an environment of cooperation and collaboration. Leaders can make change and they can facilitate continued communication among others. Leaders can identify problems and identify ways to fix them. Leaders can help others around barriers to which they cannot get themselves around. Leaders can make change where change appears impossible, (White 2013).

On the negative, leaders can hinder communication. They can tear down others and they can maintain unhealthy status quos. They can be destructive in goal setting and they can fail to help others. Leaders can isolate organizations and they can look the other way when problems present themselves. Leaders can encourage and maintain unhealthy norms and they can get mired down in details in which they fail to identify big picture concepts. Leaders can fend off change and they can fail to identify deterioration in the relationships around them. At worst, leaders can have no impact, (Anderson 2013).

On a macro level the United States and Iranian relationship points to an extreme example of the degree of influence that leadership can have on a working relationship. Since 1979 Iran has had a long standing international trade embargo and international trade sanctions in place, (Johnson & McMahon, 2013). These sanctions negatively impact millions of people both in Iran and around the world. Recently, sanctions have increased as a continued stalemate among leadership on policy and values lingers, (Lobe, 2013). Over the past three decades numerous leaders from around the world have had difficulty in helping to alter the status quo. They have been unable to help others around barriers and to counter deepening problems. Often time leaders have entrenched national positions and fostered environments of distrust that have decimated positive working relationships. Working relationships have regressed to a point where attempts to improve them presents a threat to personal safety. Entrenchment on positions and norms has become a lifeline.

As disagreement among leaders continues, national populations line up with their leaders to blame stalemates on outsiders. In a recent gallop poll of Iranian Adults surveyed 73% of respondents felt that another country was responsible for the sanctions against Iran. In the same poll only 10% felt that the Iranian government was responsible, (Younis, 2013). By

continually placing blame on others national leaders fail to exercise the positive power that they bestow.

Table 1: Gallup Poll Results from February 7<sup>th</sup> Poll

<i>Which of the following groups do you hold MOST RESPONSIBLE for the sanctions against Iran?</i>	
Asked of Iranian adults	
	<b>2012</b>
The U.S.	47%
The Iranian government	10%
Israel	9%
Western European countries	7%
The United Nations	7%
Someone else	3%
No one	0%
Don't know/Refused	17%
Dec. 16, 2012-Jan. 10, 2013	
GALLUP®	

As people we want to trust our leaders and we look to support the values and vision that they put forth, even when they may be off base. This tendency can be both a blessing and a curse. Leaders must realize the level of influence that they have on others and use that influence to demonstrate the value placed in the working relationships around them. Leaders have to understand what their role is in a relationship and stop looking to find fault in others. Leaders have to recognize their ability to alter long standing status quo. Leaders must implement a degree of change that will promote working relationships to a non-competitive collaborative state that will positively affect others. As coined by Voltaire (1832), “with leadership comes great responsibility.”

As we take a look at the role of relationships in agency consolidations and on the world stage we can realize that the problems that affect these relationships are not unique to Mason County or the fire service for that matter. Most of the literature reviewed pointed to a problem that comes with the dynamics involved in human interaction. These dynamics transcends professions, agencies and two Fire Chiefs trying to work together in Mason County. People communicate, trust and accept the differences in others in so many ways. We must be cognizant of this fact and not shun others for going about in different ways. In Mason County the solution is not in trying to fix the past but rather attempting to improve how well emergency responders and leaders relate to one another, on both a personal and professional manner.

Axner's list of challenges is very sage and is at the core of the barriers that plague Mason County working relationships. The next step to improving Fire District relationships is in understanding that these challenges exist and collaboratively working to overcome these challenges. Doing so will be a benefit to all.

### Procedures

The ARP was conducted using a descriptive research method. The procedures used for providing the data necessary to answer the ARP's research questions included a literature review, data gathering and evaluation, survey distribution, questionnaire distribution and interviews.

Initial data gathering began with a review of records and documents relating to cooperative working relationships in the private and public sector. These documents were located at the North Mason Timberland Library, at the National Fire Academy Learning Resource Center and at the Kitsap Regional Library. Census data was gathered from the US Census Bureau's 2010 census collection. Information and statistics relating to Kitsap, Mason and Thurston Counties were found on their respective government websites. Information and

statistics relating to individual fire protection jurisdictions were obtained through local fire agency and County government websites, hard documents requests and staff questioning and interviews.

Data analysis included a review of Fire District tax collections, budget documents, service capacities, jurisdictional boundaries, organizational structures, and interagency agreements.

The ARP employed the use of a confidential survey of internal Fire District stakeholders. The survey consisted of 100 survey questions as presented in Appendix G. The survey's questions were constructed following an in depth roundtable brainstorming discussion on working relationships among several members of Mason County Fire District 2 on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The discussion session was held in order to expand the depth and scope of survey questioning and to introduce numerous perspectives within survey questioning. The survey and survey questions were created in such a way that respondents could remain anonymous in order to provide candid and sensitive information. 95 of the survey's questions contained a multiple choice option with eight of those questions allowing for a narrative response. Five survey questions allowed only for a narrative response. Survey questions that required a narrative response were aimed at providing data for research questions b, c and f. They were created in a manner that would limit survey author influence on responses.

The survey was created with the assistance of the online survey construction and distribution tool Survey Monkey. The survey was electronically distributed to all the Fire Commissioners, Chief Officers, Line Officers and line membership with valid email addresses in Mason County's 14 Fire Districts. These internal Fire District stakeholders were selectively chosen as they were determined to have the greatest depth of insight and experience with the

working relationships among Mason County Fire Districts. All Mason County Fire Districts were included in the survey distribution due to the fact that the presence, construct and complexity of cooperative working relationships was determined to be unique for each Fire District in Mason County. All internal Fire District stakeholders were included as it was determined that they all have a degree of impact on cooperative working relationships among the Fire Districts. Members of the Mason County Medic One private ambulance company were not selected for survey distribution. In total, the survey was distributed to 378 recipients. The distribution included a cover letter that identified the request for survey, the reason for the request and the survey objective. Two separate electronic reminder notices were sent to all survey recipients who had not previously completed their surveys.

The ARP employed the use of personal interviews. Interviewees were selected to represent a sample cross section of internal Fire District stakeholders in Mason County. Groups interviewed include Fire Commissioners, Chief Officers, Line Officers, and line membership, both career and volunteer. Individuals interviewed include Mason County Fire District 8 Fire Chief Frank Chaffee, Mason County Fire District 2 Assistant Fire Chief Scott Cooper, Mason County Fire District 4 Fire Chief Bob Burbridge, Central Mason Fire and Emergency Services Chief Tim McKern and Mason County Fire District 18 Fire Commissioner Frank Phillips. Interviews varied in duration between 45 minutes and one hour in length. All interviewees were asked a series of 10 pre-determined questions, as presented in Appendix A and they were given an opportunity to expand on answers when it was determined to be relevant to the ARP research questions posed.

The research effort for this ARP included several notable limitations in its scope. The survey and interviews were limited to internal stakeholders that currently serve with a respective

Fire District in Mason County. Surveys were not distributed to past District members and internal stakeholders. Past stakeholder respondents may have lent additional insight to the posed research questions but it was the researcher's intent to strictly maintain a descriptive rather than historical research method as a means to identify present day barriers.

The research was also limited in the fact that larger Fire Districts in Mason County with larger memberships had a greater impact on result percentages. The results produced are heavily influenced by Mason County Fire District's 2, 4 and 5 as they maintain the largest membership bases among Mason County Fire Districts. They also maintain an internal email system which provided a larger population for survey distribution. Many of the smaller Fire Districts lack electronic messaging systems.

The research was also limited by the number of personal interviews conducted. Within 14 Mason County Fire Districts exists numerous unique cooperative working relationships but time and scheduling constraints would not allow for an interview process that would provide for review and analysis of each intra-District relationship. Similar time and scheduling constraints on administrative resources within the smaller Fire Districts would not allow for the acquisition of all requested documents to include budgets and written working agreements. Time and logistic constraints would also create limitations in which only internal Fire District stakeholders with a valid email address would receive a survey.

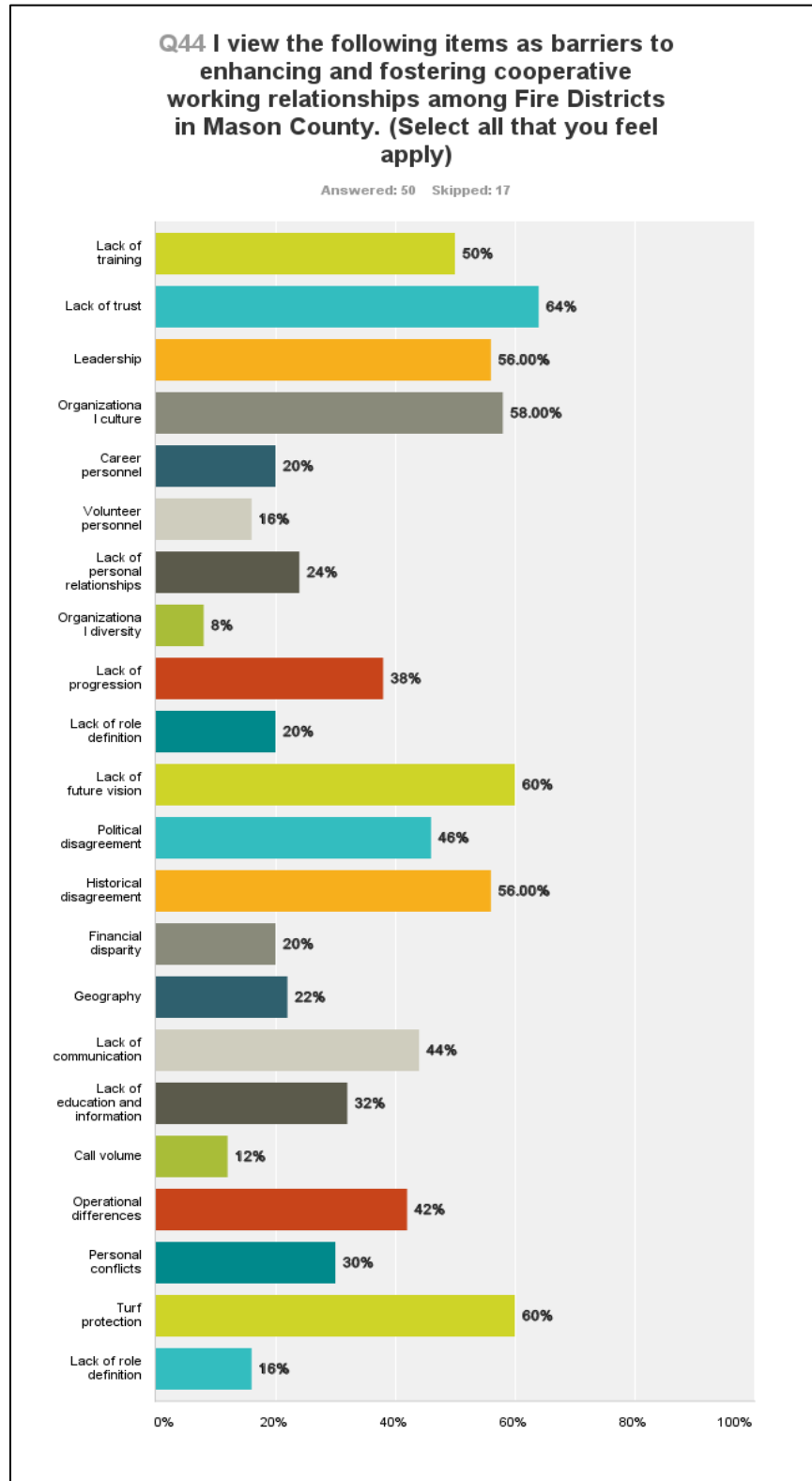
## Results

The Applied Research project presented six individual research questions. The results of the research aid in the exploration of these questions in the following manner.

*Research Question A) What are the real and perceived interpersonal, cultural and political barriers that restrict cooperative working relationships and emergency capacity among Fire Districts in Mason County?*

The data and results obtained through the internal stakeholder survey and the personal interview process is most relevant in lending insight to the research question posed. Numerous barriers that restrict working relationships were identified by those surveyed. The following six barriers were identified with the highest frequency among those surveyed; a) lack of trust (67%), b) lack of future vision (60%), c) turf protection (60%), d) organizational culture differences (60%), e) leadership (56%), and f) historical disagreement (56%). All survey suggested barriers and their percentage for identification among those surveyed are identified in Table 2.

Table 2: Internal Stakeholder Survey Results Question 44



Survey respondents were asked to provide additional information on potential working relationship barriers among Mason County Fire Districts and what may be at their root cause. The following results were obtained. 77% of those surveyed identified that historical disagreements threaten Fire District working relationships. 76% of those surveyed identified that a lack of regular training among neighboring Fire Districts threatened working relationships. 63% of those surveyed feel that neighboring Districts do not perform to the same standard as their Fire District. 56% of those surveyed do not trust the leadership in neighboring Fire Districts. 47% of those surveyed have felt criticized when working with a member of another Fire District and 44% of those surveyed feel that the relationship status between career and volunteer members hurts working relationships among Fire Districts in Mason County.

A review of personal interview data notes that restrictive working relationship barriers most frequently noted by interviewees were a lack of trust among Fire District leaderships, lack of communication, historical disagreements, lack of leadership participation at group events and turf protections among the Fire Districts. It should be noted that historical disagreements and lack of trust were identified by all those who were interviewed for data collection.

*Research Question B) How do these barriers limit emergency service capacity and delivery in Mason County?*

Narrative data obtained through the internal stakeholder survey and the personal interview process is most relevant in lending insight to the research question posed.

A review of interview data, most notably question e of Appendix A identifies that service capacity is significantly limited by working relationship barriers in Mason County. Central Mason Fire and EMS Chief Tim McKern notes that our ability to respond to emergencies in a

fast and efficient manner suffers when we can't get along as emergency service providers.

Mason County Fire District 2 Assistant Chief Scott Cooper notes that barriers to working together in Mason County increases costs and often causes emergency incident commanders to think with hesitation when requesting neighboring aid and assistance during an emergency.

Chief Cooper also feels that these barriers produce differing levels of service throughout Mason County that threatens responder and public safety. Mason County Fire District 4 Chief Bob

Burbridge states that Mason County emergency services will never realize their full potential for effectiveness until these barriers are overcome. Mason County Fire District 8 Fire Chief Frank

Chaffee states that these barriers force Fire District leaders to direct more time and effort towards conflict and less on service delivery and enhancement.

A review of the narrative comments provided by internal stakeholders in survey Question 62 (Appendix B) also provides valuable data and insight that assists to understand restrictive barrier impacts on emergency services. A representative sample of these comments is provided in Table 2. For a full list of narrative comments refer to Appendix B.

**TABLE 3:** A sampling of narrative responses received from those surveyed on the impact of negative Fire District Relationships on emergency service delivery.

- *“MACECOM run cards are changed to remove mutual aid at the cost of service to the citizen.”*
- *“Patient care is routinely, although much less now than before, compromised by other districts failing to call for help especially when the call is right near our border and we could be there quickly (if not quicker).”*
- *“Ego gets in the way of taking care of the citizens and doesn't allow some district's personnel better training opportunities etc., because their board or chiefs have too big of an ego to listen to someone else with the purpose of providing better care to the people they serve.”*
- *“It (emergency service) is impacted greatly because when you are on scene together there is awkwardness and discomfort. I am tired of going to the neighboring district to help with fire calls and standing around until the incident is over and all they want us to do is roll up their hose. It's not right if they don't need us send us back to cover our own district, don't keep us their till the end just to roll up hose. We train just as hard as career firefighters. The only difference between us is they get the big*

*paychecks and that's their job. We do this cause we love it and do it in our free time not because we are getting paid to do so."*

- *"I think the final product is alright, what the patient sees."*

- *"I feel sometimes the client doesn't get the proper help they need because of lack of communication and cooperation"*

- *"Mason County citizens do not receive fair and equitable service from the fire and EMS service providers. Revenue and budgets span the entire spectrum causing a gross difference in leadership down to the provider."*

- *"Inefficient delivery of service"*

- *"Patient care"*

- *"Negative working relationships amongst fire districts decreases the potential level of service the communities could be receiving. This could be because of border issues, lack of training, different SOP's, lack of personal relationships, etc. All of those things reduce the potential care or service received."*

- *"Negative relationships impact the overall delivery of service to our citizens. It can also create unnecessary workloads and dangers to our responders."*

- *"Routine service delivery is minimally impacted because in-district resources handle the situation. Negative working relationships are more obvious in larger events where coordination and sharing of resources are needed. Rapid and cost effective handling of these larger events is directly proportional to positive working relationships, trust, alignment of goals, and clear communication."*

*Research Question C) What steps can be taken to overcome these barriers?*

Narrative data obtained through the internal stakeholder survey and the personal interview process is most relevant in lending insight to the research question posed.

A review of interview data, most notably question f, Appendix A identifies that there are multiple steps that could be taken to overcome working relationship barriers in Mason County. Central Mason Fire and EMS Chief Tim McKern views the ability to instill truth, integrity and ethics into Fire District working relationships as essential in overcoming these barriers. He and every other personal interviewee identified constant and more frequent communication among Mason County Fire Districts as necessary in getting past historical disagreements.

During his interview Fire District 4 Fire Chief Bob Burbrige placed stress on the importance for Fire District leaders to change the frame and lens in which they view circumstances and problems so that differing perspectives in different Districts may be respected and understood. Fire District 18 Fire Commissioner Frank Phillips stressed in his interview the need for Fire District leaders to participate in joint meetings and to learn as a group. Commissioner Phillips also commented on the need for Fire District Commissioners to become more engaged and knowledgeable in the activities and situations that affect their local Fire Districts. Central Mason Fire and EMS Chief Tim McKern commented on the need to rebuild lost trust among Fire District leaders and to let the historical ghosts of the past go.

All those interviewed indicated that neighboring Districts, their members and their leaderships, must work together on a much more frequent basis so that the basic premise of understanding and getting to know one another can occur.

A review of the narrative comments provided by internal stakeholders in survey question 45 (Appendix C) also provides valuable data and insight that assists to understand what steps may be taken to overcome restricting barriers. A representative sampling of these comments is provided in Table 3. For a full list of narrative comments refer to Appendix C.

**TABLE 4:** A sampling of narrative responses received from those surveyed on what steps may be taken to overcome working relationship barriers among Fire Districts in Mason County.

- *“An open discussion of what is in the best interests of Mason County residents.”*
- *“Merge the county into 3 or 4 districts. Allow all those that choose to learn and participate the opportunity, but give the citizens’ real response and value from the monies paid toward Fire/EMS response.”*
- *“Aggressive steps taken to increase multi-agency involvement. A training facility would be the best way to accomplish this.”*
- *“Communicate, educate, train, remove borders, meet, envision all with a focus on the communities needs and improving service.”*

- *“An increase in honesty among leaders. Develop a plan for the future that defines each agencies role.”*
- *“Hiring the right Chiefs.”*
- *“Formal and informal communication. Formal being workshops and visioning exercises. Informal being training, drilling, social, public event interaction between districts.”*
- *“Minimum training requirements for Chief Officers and those in positions to become IC.”*
- *“Better communication between neighboring districts. Have once a month or quarterly group training sessions. Create a group Mason County Fire website that lists training schedules from all Fire Districts. Give all members access for viewing and communicating with each other.”*
- *“Keep meeting and talking at Commish, Chief and Training levels.”*
- *“Frequent and ongoing joint training.”*
- *“Perhaps ‘trade’ personnel for training. Have line officers serve in other districts for short periods of time to observe and report on areas to work on to improve skills.”*
- *“For the commissioners and fire chiefs to develop a Mason County strategic plan with regards to future RFA and/or merger development. Have an open and honest discussion regarding the benefits of not only a county wide BLS system, but looking at the benefits to reducing duplication and enhancing service by reducing the number of fire districts.”*
- *“Open communications. Group trainings.”*

*Research Question D) How would Mason County emergency service capacity and delivery benefit from overcoming these barriers?*

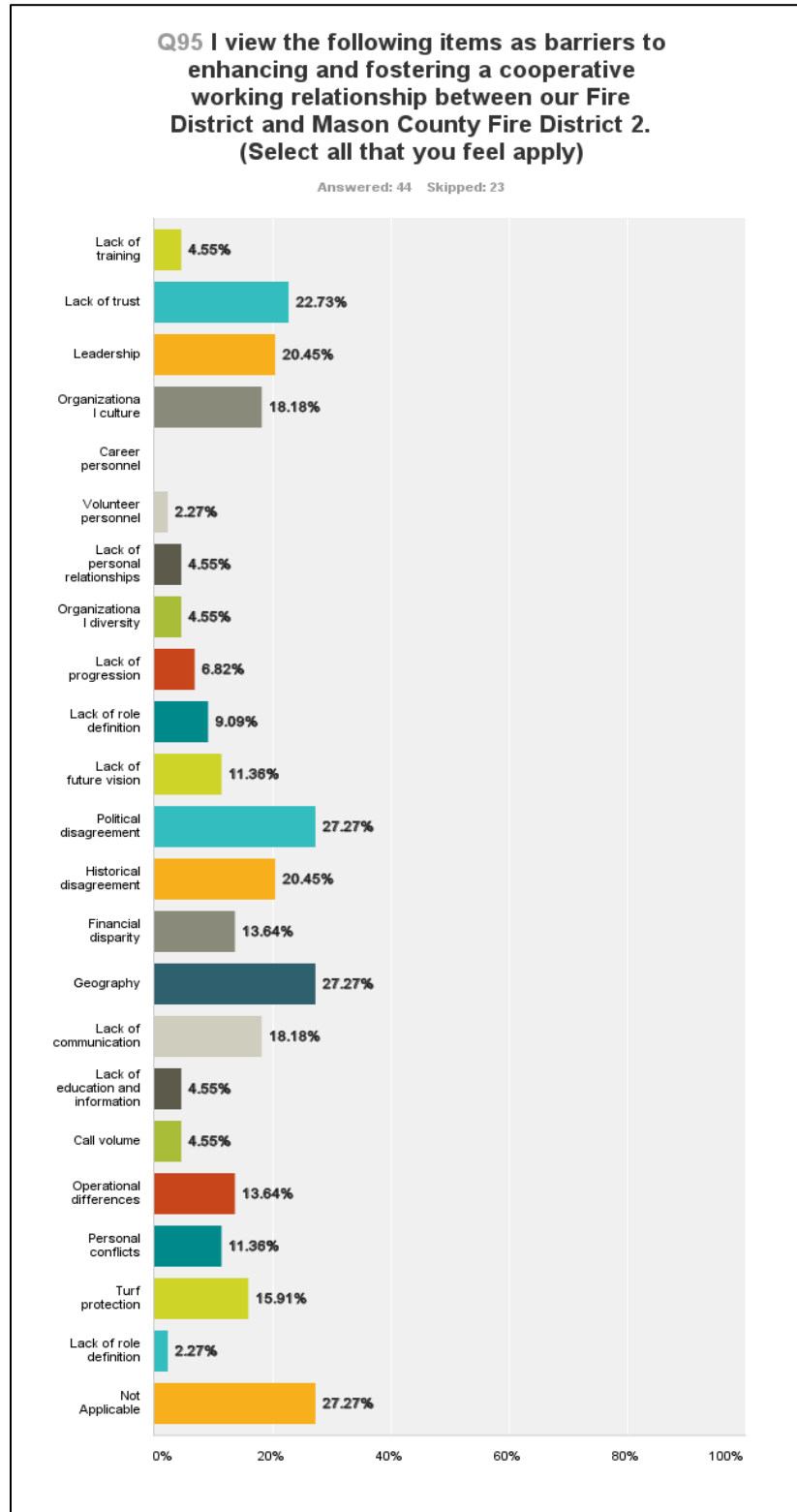
The results obtained through all manners of research were unanimous in providing an answer to the research question posed. The results identified that emergency service capacity will be significantly improved by overcoming working relationship barriers. Some of the specific improvements identified by those interviewed were seamless operations, faster emergency response times, safer working conditions, faster emergency mitigation, resource sharing and efficiency in use.

*Research Question E) What role does Mason County Fire District 2 play in the erection of these barriers in Mason County?*

As the second largest Fire District in Mason County, Mason County Fire District 2 plays a unique yet significant role in the overall state of working relationships among Mason County Fire Districts. A majority of those surveyed found Mason County Fire District 2 to be easy to work with and found value in working with Fire District 2 however the results of survey question 95 provides the most valuable data in lending insight to the research question posed.

Survey respondents identified geography, political disagreement, lack of trust, leadership and historical disagreement as the top five barriers in cooperatively working with Mason County Fire District 2. All suggested working relationship barriers with Mason County Fire District 2 and their percentage for identification among those surveyed are identified in Table 5.

Table 5: Internal Stakeholder Survey Results Question 95



A review of the narrative comments provided by survey respondents in question 97 also provides additional data and results to the research question posed. A full list of comments is listed in Table 6.

**TABLE 6:** Narrative Responses from those surveyed on identifying what barriers Mason County Fire District 2 plays in erecting barriers in working relationships with other Fire Districts in Mason County

- *“I think our RFA process is demonstrating how the process can be beneficial and positive.”*
- *“Good Communication.”*
- *“Offer numerous opportunities.”*
- *“Leader.”*
- *“Mason 2's leadership has a long history of shady tactics when it comes to working with other districts. You cannot foster working relationships with individuals you cannot trust.”*
- *“Some fire districts to the south of MCFD2 believe that MCFD2 is more "aligned" with Kitsap County interests than that of Mason County. MCFD2 has common interests and a working relationship with Kitsap but they can communicate/demonstrate that this interest and relationship has benefits to all of Mason County.”*
- *“Communicate and discuss other Department's issues prior to derailing that Department's efforts.”*
- *“None; FD 2 sets the bar and example leading the way in creating progressive relationships.”*
- *“The relationship between your administration and the bargaining unit employees. They can't take a piss without asking permission. Why would we want to be part of that?”*
- *“Include small departments when doing grants.”*
- *“Any paid staff will intimidate a volunteer staff.it just happens. Play nice and treat others how you would want to be treated.”*
- *“Perhaps past historical issues may still be a barrier and will have to be overcome.”*
- *“They should take the lead”*
- *“None.”-7 respondents*

*Research Question F) What role can Mason County Fire District 2 play in helping to eliminate these barriers in the future?*

Narrative data obtained through the internal stakeholder survey and the personal interview process is most relevant in lending insight to the research question posed. A review of the interview data, most notably personal interview question I of Appendix A identifies that Mason County Fire District 2 needs to support the needs of other Fire Districts in a positive and progressive fashion. Fire District 2 needs to overcome shortcomings made in past political and leadership decisions that caused for a reduction of trust and respect with other Fire Districts. Fire District 2 must continue to participate in a joint yet equitable fashion with other Districts and it must work to increase the amount and quality of communication with others. Fire District 2 must realize that other opinions that emerge should be given merit and that its own way of conducting business and operations is not always the only or best way of doing so. Fire District 2 must allow for the ideas and opinions of others to emerge and take hold.

A review of the narrative comments provided by survey respondents in survey question 97 (Appendix E) also provides valuable data and insight in answering the research question presented. A full list of these narrative comments is provided in Table 7.

**TABLE 7:** Narrative Responses from those surveyed on identifying what barriers Mason County Fire District 2 may take in working to eliminate barriers on positive working relationships among the Fire Districts in Mason County.

- *“Be a facilitator. Start the conversation in an open way. Don't present it as "your idea" but rather, one possible solution toward improvement. Make inter-operability and efficiency of service the center-piece.”*
- *“Continuing to encourage interdepartmental cooperation including training and working together.”*
- *“MCFD 2 should make sure they stay out of political issues in other departments. I hope the district has grown and learned from the past.”*
- *“Partnership and Cooperative.”*

- *“I believe the successful RFA will be tell-tale.”*
- *“A leadership role based on history and the progressive education offered to its members.”*
- *“Go for Broke and build a model with less districts and a true consolidation of efforts in the county.”*
- *“Lead by example.”*
- *“Doing a great job.”*
- *“MCFD2 should remain a positive role model, MCFD2 should be a good listener as well as leader, MCFD2 should be fair and consistent in its leadership amongst the other fire districts, MCFD2 should demonstrate clear follow-through on its commitment to positive working relationships - don't start something you can't or won't finish.”*
- *“Discuss and understand other Department's issues prior to interfering with their consolidation efforts.”*
- *“Do what they do now.”*
- *“Continue on same course.”*
- *“Mediator with some of the smaller West County departments and the larger departments that are surpassing them in training and operations.”*
- *“Nothing positive to say here.”*
- *“Respect for the smaller districts and include them.”*
- *“Keep up the quality work. Proof is in actions not words. You're a talker...most your people are doers.”*
- *“As stated before, lead by example/and take the high road, but be aware that some may not want to be led, but you can, show them the way.”*
- *“Keep doing what you are doing.”*
- *“Take the lead”*

## DISCUSSION

In order for Mason County Fire Districts to be successful, progressive, efficient and effective in delivering emergency services they have to maintain healthy and collaborative relationships with neighboring jurisdictions. Over the years numerous barriers have come forth, which have handicapped these working relationships. But it is encouraging to see in the ARP results that survey respondent stakeholders from all over Mason County identify a strong need to remove these barriers and to work better as a collaborative emergency service team. It is also

encouraging to see that over 85% of respondents identified the working relationships with their Fire District and neighboring Fire Districts as either good, above average, or excellent.

Dr. Steve Zarcinas, (2012) points out that it is imperative that leaders identify value in working relationships and that those leaders communicate these values to others. Zarcinas points out that without real value working relationships will falter. In a review of survey results it is again encouraging to see that 80% of respondents view themselves as promoting positive working relationships, 88% of respondents view their leaders as promoting positive relationships and over 80% of respondents feel better off at emergency scenes with the help of their neighboring Districts. These results indicate that internal stakeholders identify value in their working relationships.

In his 2012 analysis of fire agency consolidation in Skagit County, Washington, Richard Curtis identified a fear of change, disparate cultures, and the loss of power, control, and authority as the top barriers to consolidation. In a similar analysis of training program consolidation among two separate agencies Curtis Bremner (2012) identified fear of the unknown, lack of communication, and fear of change as four of the top five potential barriers for program consolidation. In looking at the ARP survey results over 90% of respondents identify value in consolidating with neighboring agencies. The survey also identified that the top four barriers to agency consolidation were leadership, lack of trust, increase in future service costs and disparate cultures. Surprisingly, 79% of respondents said that they did not fear a loss of role in the event of an agency consolidation.

It is interesting to note that the similarities among respondent answers in both data sets. It is also interesting in that all but one of the identified barriers in the combined analysis centers

on interpersonal relationships. It is important to point out that in the survey's results on consolidation relationship, value is again recognized and the role and importance of prudent and trustworthy leadership is highlighted.

In her analysis of barriers to working relationships Marya Alexander (2013) identified the following barriers/challenges to organizations working well together;

- People sometimes believe that individual effort is more beneficial than cooperation
- People are often mistrustful
- People sometimes don't have the necessary communication skills for working together
- Discrimination keeps people and organizations isolated from each other
- A lack of strong leadership can hinder the formation and continuation of successful group interrelationships
- People may internalize a sense of powerlessness that makes them unable to take initiative to form working relationships

In the ARP survey results the top six barriers to agencies working together were identified as lack of trust, turf protection, lack of future vision, historical disagreement, leadership and organizational culture differences.

Alexander's observations on organizational relationship challenges and the survey results are in lock step with one another. The similarities lend to a notion that while many of the individual circumstances that have soured working relationships are unique to Mason County, the actual barriers and challenges are not. If Mason County emergency services are to be successful in getting over these barriers they must be cognizant of the interpersonal challenges presented by Alexander.

Mason County emergency services should feel relief in knowing that overcoming these challenges does not require trailblazing as numerous groups and organizations have encountered and overcome this same challenge set.

In Younis' 2013 published results on Iranian population blame for trade sanction impact on Iran we can see that the people of Iran have rallied around their leaders. They share values and vision with their leaders as they place blame on other nations and national leaders. Iranian leaders have encouraged the vilification of outside parties and led by example in placing blame on these outsiders. Leaders have failed to place value on external working relationships and as a result so have the people of Iran. The people of Iran do not trust other national leaderships despite the immense need for assistance and collaboration.

In the ARP survey results it is evident that respondents place value on collaborative working relationships. It is also interesting to note that nearly 90% of respondents view their leadership as promoting positive working relationships; however results from several survey questions identify significant distrust among respondents with leaderships in other outside agencies.

Fortunately the state of working relationships in the Mason County emergency service community is far better than those in Iran and the international community. But it should be observed that similarities do exist. Mason County Fire District leaderships must first learn to communicate and trust one another. Leadership differences should be dealt with and philosophical and trust gaps bridged so that the agency memberships can rally behind their leaders in support of outside agencies instead of interagency ridicule. Survey results are clear in pointing out that if agency leaderships fail to unite behind a common vision, fail to have trust and mutual respect for one another and fail to stop competing with one another, then overcoming

working relationship barriers becomes impossible. It would appear that agency relationships are very much at the whim of agency leaders. Without their desire to improve these relationships in a collaborative fashion future efforts will fail to provide any momentum forward.

Some of the survey results appear to contradict one another. The survey results received indicate that positive changes in working relationships among the Fire Districts is positive, necessary and welcomed by stakeholders. While many of the respondents identified that the perception of turf protection is a major barrier to overcome, additional survey results do not support such a notion. Many respondents also identify a lack of trust in outside agencies as a barrier to working together but results show that respondents trust that an agency will back them up when they are needed at an emergency.

When reviewing the survey results it is important to try and parcel out real and perceived barriers. Collective survey responses indicate that the most significant barriers to working together are in leaderships that cannot get along and in the differing of cultures within agencies. These barriers easily allow for suspicion and distrust both inside and outside a Fire District.

Some of the most important information came from the comments section portion of the survey in which pressure and responsibility was placed on agency leaderships to overcome differences and to find common ground for what is in the best interest of the agency. I suspect that many of these comments come from respondents who take pride in their work, who seek a better way of doing things and who do not succumb to the challenges presented by Axner.

Many times we are amazed at the thoughts, ideas and solutions that children can present in light of very complicated problems. Their ideas and solutions do not come from a difference in intellect when compared to adults, but rather a difference in perspective. When parsing out

survey responses it is interesting to note the differences in survey results among Chief Officers and line staff. Chief Officers cite lack of trust and turf protection as barriers with a much higher propensity than line staff. Line staff survey comments routinely look to their leaders for improving relationships and do not see lack of trust to be as big of a barrier. It is comforting to know that all groups surveyed know that these relationships are essential and that the road to improving these relationships may not be as complicated as first thought.

The survey results highlight the significance that Mason County Fire District 2 (MCFD2) plays in several of the ARP questions presented. I am pleased to know that most survey respondents view MCFD2 as promoting positive working relationships and that most respondents trust MCFD2 leadership. I will admit that it is troubling, but not a surprise, knowing that trust with MCFD2 and its leadership is circumspect among a sampling of those surveyed. These results identify a need to attempt to restore trust in areas where it has previously been lost. I will also admit that some of the comments concerning MCFD2 and its leadership were tough to read, but in the end they hold merit and play an important role. A thorough review of their content identifies several opportunities for relationship improvement.

I am pleased to know that most survey respondents view the MCFD2 culture as positive and they desire to work with MCFD2 in a collaborative fashion. I am also pleased to note that not a single respondent identified MCFD2 as being difficult to work with. Nearly all respondents believe that historical disagreements with MCFD2 can be overcome to facilitate working relationships. Respondents also identify that working relationships with MCFD2 has value. Over 86% of respondents wish to partner with MCFD2 whenever possible in the future and 66% of respondents want MCFD2 to keep doing what it is doing to promote good working relationships in Mason County.

There are many positives in regard to MCFD2 in the survey results but there are also opportunities for growth and improvement. MCFD2 and its leaders have interfered with the past affairs of other Districts in a way that did not demonstrate quality leadership or exceptional professional conduct. These interactions, while being motivated by good intent have harmed the degree of trust among some individuals and groups outside its borders. These interactions and relationships have suffered from poor communication, failure to find common ground, and leadership inexperience.

MCFD2 must not try and dominate conversations. MCFD2 should try and include outside ideas when possible. MCFD2 must role model the behavior that it would like to experience in return from neighboring Districts. MCFD2 must understand that it has an opportunity to help rocket launch Mason County emergency services into the 21<sup>st</sup> century but it has to do so with the aid and collaboration of the County's other 13 Fire Districts. In Mason County the 14 Fire Districts are a team and MCFD2 has to be a team player. Survey results identify that MCFD2 has the ability to be looked to as a leader with Mason County, but in order to do so in must operate in a way that is beyond reproach.

### Recommendations

Mason County Fire Districts have a firm foundation in which to start the working relationship repair process and to work on building strong, productive and collaborative external relationships. There are several positive signs that emerge as stakeholders cite relationship value and desire for collaboration. Stakeholders desire change in the status quo and do not appear to resist it. This is an essential requirement for effective change.

Before recommending action steps it is recommended that a review of the past and current relationship between the Mason County Fire Districts and the Mason Sheriff's Office be made. Within this working relationship many parallels and potential solutions for relationship building exist. 10 years ago the status of this relationship was deplorable to a point where emergency responder and citizen safety were at risk. Many of the working relationship barriers described in the survey results were found to an extreme within this relationship.

Within this relationship trust, communication and respect were an all-time low. New and emerging leaders in all the respective organizations took steps to immediately work and place value on this delicate yet essential relationship. Value statements by leaders were constantly made and communicated, and actions were backed up by words. Leaders from all organizations went out of their way to form communication networks and to identify the needs of others. Compromise was no longer an exception but rather the rule.

While relationship repair didn't happen overnight, there was a slow cultural shift in all organizations. Working together the relationship between police and fire became a collaborative endeavor that everyone benefitted from. What was once a deplorable relationship with no signs of life or possibility for turnaround is now one of the strongest emergency service relationships in the State of Washington. Over the past 10 years staff and personnel rosters have turned over and most Mason County emergency service workers have experienced nothing other than a healthy and positive working relationship between the agencies.

Do the working relationships among Mason County Fire Districts have the same potential for improvement as the relationship described ? There are many lessons to be learned from the transformation of a dangerous relationship between the Mason County Fire Districts and the Mason County Sheriff's Office.

The four recommendations from the research process as a means to improve working relationships among Mason County Fire Districts are; 1) planning, 2) communication, 3) action, and 4) constant review.

1) Planning. The leaders among the Fire Districts must learn to trust and work with one another. They must come together to form a collective team instead of competitive foes. Leaders must work beyond their jurisdictional boundaries to realize and establish a collective vision for the future status of interagency relationships in all Mason County. They must work in planning to build a road map towards this vision and they must demonstrate buy in and value in throughout the planning process. Planning should identify ways to overcome barriers and roadblocks toward working together. Planning needs to be collective and incorporate all ideas. It should identify organizational differences and it should implement a model in which to overcome these differences. Planning should identify the path towards positive cultural shifts and toward interagency collaboration. Planning needs to put the past to rest and to restore trust among leaders and organizations. An effective plan will find both leaders and agency memberships rallying behind a common set of values and mission.

2) Communication. Agency leaders, Fire Chiefs and Commissioners, must form additional lines for both formal and informal communication. Chiefs and Commissioners should meet more than once a month for formal association meetings and learn to work with one another on a very frequent basis in the pursuit of mutual goals. Communication should be open and honest and should have built in mechanisms in which to keep lines of communication open during disagreement and/or misunderstanding. Communication should center on sharing insight instead of attempting to elicit secrets. Leaders should identify competing and companion

interests and identify ways to effectively communicate both. Agency leaders should role model communication models and methodologies to subordinates.

Expanded communication should also be exercised among and across agency memberships. Members from differing organizations should not be meeting for the very first time at emergency scenes, as is now common practice. Members should be training together and sharing experiences using both formal and informal communication methodologies. An opening of communication at all levels of Fire District membership will lead to a cultural blending process that will fend off unhealthy District competition and adversity to organizational differences.

There should also be an increase in communication between agency leaders and their memberships. This communication should express the value that is to be placed on interagency collaborative working relationships. It should also express respect for agency differences and desire for positive change. Leaders must lead by example in pursuit of these relationships, understanding that not everyone may follow initially, but eventually strong leadership will produce desired organizational results. If leaders cannot and do not change in their communication and expression of values, there can be no chance at changing the organizations values.

3) Action. Agencies must work together, train together, brainstorm together, socialize together and increase the level and scope of interaction. As emergency responders in Mason County we all have similar interests and these interests should be identified and exploited. Work projects should be joined. Information should be shared. Problems should be collectively solved and trust should be built. Mason County Fire Districts need to work as an action team and not as individual units that interact with others only when absolutely necessary. Action involves doing

more together at any activity and at any and every level in the organization. If a Fire Chief has a question, the first call shouldn't be to the Districts attorney, it should be to the Fire Chief next door. Agency leaders need to take the action steps necessary to help and collaborate with one another.

4) Constant Review. Through planning, communication and action agency leaders must constantly review the effectiveness and direction of efforts to improve agency relationships. They must determine when changes in direction are necessary. It is so easy to slip back into positions of the past and positions of comfort when change is occurring. Constant review must invoke a mechanism that disrupts the enticing invite of the status quo.

Agency leaders must hold subordinates and peers accountable for being progressive and productive in the relationship building process. Benchmarking needs to be employed to measure progress made towards established goals. Positive results from these efforts should be communicated agency and county wide to constantly demonstrate that the fourteen Fire Districts in Mason County are much stronger as a unified team.

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Appendix A

Below are the interview questions that were posed to all interview subjects;

- a) How do you view the current state of working relationships among the Fire Districts in Mason County?
- b) How well do you currently work with your neighboring Fire Districts?
- c) What do you see as positives emerging from the cooperative work among the Fire Districts in Mason County?
- d) How do these barriers impact emergency service delivery in Mason County?
- e) What do you feel are the top barriers among the agencies working together in Mason County?
- f) What do you feel can be done to overcome some of these barriers?
- g) What role do you feel that leadership plays in the working relationships among the Fire Districts?
- h) How do you view your relationship with Mason County Fire District 2?
- i) What can Mason County Fire District 2 do to improve its working relationships with other Fire Districts in Mason County?
- j) Anything additional that you would like to add to the interview?

Appendix B

Comments obtained from survey respondents from survey question number 62. This question read;

In your opinion how is Mason County emergency service delivery impacted by negative working relationships among Fire Districts in Mason County?

- *“MACECOM run cards are changed to remove mutual aid at the cost of service to the citizen.”*
- *“Patient care is routinely, although much less now than before, compromised by other districts failing to call for help especially when the call is right near our border and we could be there quickly (if not quicker).”*
- *“Ego gets in the way of taking care of the citizens and doesn't allow some district's personnel better training opportunities etc., because their board or chiefs have too big of an ego to listen to someone else with the purpose of providing better care to the people they serve.”*
- *“It (emergency service) is impacted greatly because when you are on scene together there is awkwardness and discomfort. I am tired of going to the neighboring district to help with fire calls and standing around until the incident is over and all they want us to do is roll up their hose. It's not right if they don't need us send us back to cover our own district, don't keep us their till the end just to roll up hose. We train just as hard as career firefighters. The only difference between us is they get the big paychecks and that's their job. We do this cause we love it and do it in our free time not because we are getting paid to do so.”*
- *“I think the final product is alright, what the patient sees.”*
- *“I feel sometimes the client doesn't get the proper help they need because of lack of communication and cooperation”*
- *“Mason County citizens do not receive fair and equitable service from the fire and EMS service providers. Revenue and budgets span the entire spectrum causing a gross difference in leadership down to the provider.”*
- *“Inefficient delivery of service”*

- *“Patient care”*
- *“Negative working relationships amongst fire districts decreases the potential level of service the communities could be receiving. This could be because of border issues, lack of training, different SOP's, lack of personal relationships, etc. All of those things reduce the potential care or service received.”*
- *“Negative relationships impact the overall delivery of service to our citizens. It can also create unnecessary workloads and dangers to our responders.”*
- *“Routine service delivery is minimally impacted because in-district resources handle the situation. Negative working relationships are more obvious in larger events where coordination and sharing of resources are needed. Rapid and cost effective handling of these larger events is directly proportional to positive working relationships, trust, alignment of goals, and clear communication.”*
- *“Not impacted.”*
- *“I know there have been issues amongst other fire districts that have hampered service delivery and keeps ‘blindness’ up with neighboring districts and responders.”*
- *“Delays in responding with adequate equipment and trained personnel. Sometimes disagreements in protocols to follow, issues with who should take the lead.”*
- *“We have moved to out of county resources to ensure a response (through better staffing) and better trained responders. This can have a negative impact through longer response times however a better on scene experience.”*
- *“More is put in who responds than what would be the best response”.*

Appendix C

Comments obtained from survey respondents from survey question number 45. This question read;

What steps do you feel can be taken to overcome some of these barriers (to working relationships)?

- *“Everyone must get a win for their community to allow the process to gain momentum.”*
- *“Train together regularly and be honest in after action reviews as opposed to being political or we will never progress and have a reason to train towards a common goal.”*
- *“Interdepartmental drills. Countywide skills adoption (we all do basic tasks the same way). A regional training center where districts can meet and co-mingle. The leadership has to make this a priority; I feel it is a top-down problem. If chief officers change their position it will roll into middle management and down onto the floor.”*
- *“Better OPEN/HONEST communication”*
- *“Good Communications.”*
- *“Ongoing training track at Chief/Commissioner level at their monthly meetings. EVERY month have some sort of training or lesson from OUTSIDE the county on working together, partnerships that work, what happens when ego gets in the way, desired outcome based planning, simple etiquette lessons. This would have to be done in baby steps on a monthly basis. Probably a quicker solution would be to recruit and educate forward-thinking people for the commissioner positions and move forward from there.”*
- *“Is everyone coming together and keeping to one standard and enforcing it to be the same throughout the county.”*
- *“Open, honest discussions.”*
- *“Better leadership”*
- *“I feel districts should try to drill together. They should also work on their mutual aid agreements some relationships are ridiculous... Canceling mutual aid before they know if they need them or not.”*
- *“More cooperative communications. Starting with the BOC and then to the chief officer level.”*

- *“District 16 needs a new chief.”*
- *“Commitment of the leadership to achieve a trusting environment.”*
- *“An open discussion of what is in the best interests of Mason County residents”*
- *“Merge the county into 3 or 4 districts. Allow all those that choose to learn and participate the opportunity, but give the citizens real response and value from the monies paid toward Fire/EMS response.”*
- *“Aggressive steps taken to increase multi-agency involvement. A training facility would be the best way to accomplish this.”*
- *“Communicate, educate, train, remove borders, meet, envision all with a focus on the communities needs and improving service.”*
- *“An increase in honesty among leaders. Develop a plan for the future that defines each agencies role.”*
- *“Hiring the right Chiefs.”*
- *“Formal and informal communication. Formal being workshops and visioning exercises. Informal being training, drilling, social, public event interaction between districts.”*
- *“Minimum training requirements for Chief Officers and those in positions to become IC.”*
- *“Better communication between neighboring districts. Have once a month or quarterly group training sessions. Create a group Mason County Fire website that lists training schedules from all Fire Districts. Give all members access for viewing and communicating with each other.”*
- *“Keep meeting and talking at Commish, Chief and Training levels.”*
- *“Frequent and ongoing joint training.”*
- *“Perhaps ‘trade’ personnel for training. Have line officers serve in other districts for short periods of time to observe and report on areas to work on to improve skills.”*
- *“For the commissioners and fire chiefs to develop a Mason County strategic plan with regards to future RFA and/or merger development. Have an open and honest discussion regarding the benefits of not only a county wide BLS system, but looking at the benefits to reducing duplication and enhancing service by reducing the number of fire districts.”*
- *“Open communications. Group trainings.”*

- *“Meeting regularly at all levels, the commissioners, Chiefs and even the volunteers thru joint training”*
- *“Minimum standard set by the County Chiefs as to the knowledge base needed to be a Chief. There are some chief officers that have insufficient training to fulfill the responsibilities of the position.”*
- *“More mutual aid training.”*
- *“We don't trust you. Hard to overcome that.”*
- *“More time working together. Less gossiping about each other. Transparency when things go well or not so well.”*
- *“Code of ethics for chief officers on county wide basis.”*
- *“More community events as well as county wide training. Social gatherings by way of fundraising or community pride gatherings.”*
- *“Lead by example/and take the high road, both clichés, but hard to fight.”*
- *“Drop the personal agendas and look to the needs of the citizens first.”*
- *“County mandated consolidation”*

Appendix D

Comments obtained from survey respondents from survey question number 67. This question read;

My main concern with consolidation with other Fire Districts is \_\_\_\_\_?

- *“I don't think other fire districts' personnel trust my department leadership. I also think that leadership roles that would need to exist in the new organization would be filled by people less qualified than myself or others.”*
- *“Lack of leadership”*
- *“don't trust the leadership of my dist”.*
- *“training and operational standards”*
- *“Lack of regional leadership, limited options”*
- *“Commissioners are to stuck in the past”*
- *“Convincing others of the positives of the idea.”*
- *“The politics of getting everyone to agree on an adequate plan as well as insure adequate financing.”*
- *“not concerned.”*
- *“I do not have a concern, it is the right thing to do.”*
- *“None of these. I have experienced consolidation and it works!”*

Appendix E

Comments obtained from survey respondents from survey question number 97. This question read;

What role (if any) do you think Mason County Fire District 2 can and should play in working to eliminate barriers to positive and progressive working relationships among Fire Districts in Mason County?

- *“Get your house in order first, Then lead by example. If you step on some Dist. toes to hard and to fast this may blow up in your face.”*
- *“Be a facilitator. Start the conversation in an open way. Don't present it as "your idea" but rather, one possible solution toward improvement. Make inter-operability and efficiency of service the center-piece.”*
- *“Continuing to encourage interdepartmental cooperation including training and working together.”*
- *“MCFD 2 should make sure they stay out of political issues in other departments. I hope the district has grown and learned from the past.”*
- *“Partnership and Cooperative”*
- *“I believe the successful RFA will be tell-tale”*
- *“A leadership role based on history and the progressive education offered to its members.”*
- *“Go for Broke and build a model with less districts and a true consolidation of efforts in the county”*
- *“Lead by example”*
- *“doing a great job”*
- *“MCFD2 should remain a positive role model, MCFD2 should be a good listener as well as leader, MCFD2 should be fair and consistent in its leadership amongst the other fire districts, MCFD2 should demonstrate clear follow-through on its commitment to positive working relationships - don't start something you can't or won't finish”*
- *“Discuss and understand other Department's issues prior to interfering with their consolidation efforts.”*
- *“None”*

- *“continue on same course”*
- *“Mediator with some of the smaller West County departments and the larger departments that are surpassing them in training and operations”.*
- *“Nothing positive to say here.”*
- *“respect for the smaller districts and include them”*
- *“Keep up the quality work. Proof is in actions not words.your a talker...most your people are doers.”*
- *“As stated before, lead by example/and take the high road, but be aware that some may not want to be led, but you can, show them the way.”*
- *“Keep doing what you are doing.”*
- *“Take the lead”*

Appendix F

Comments obtained from survey respondents from survey question number 97. This question read;

What role (if any) do you think Mason County Fire District 2 should play in promoting a sharing and/or consolidation of resources among Fire Districts in Mason County?

- *“Be your self Say look what we are doing would you like to join in”*
- *“I believe once the RFA is complete, other districts (especially MCFD6) will likely come to us to open the discussion. I think we should continue to market this idea of consolidation fairly aggressively, even going to the Board of Commissioners if necessary to point out the benefit to the public not only as potential customers and patients but also as tax payers.”*
- *“On going sharing of resources”*
- *“admin of the SAFER grant is a really good start!”*
- *“Presenting successes and achievements of partnerships”*
- *“provide leadership, clarify ability to work with non-neighboring districts”*
- *“Lead it, but realize that commissioners are the bigger issue”*
- *“Leader”*
- *“keep up the good work”*
- *“MCFD2 should be a leader in this area - as one of the larger fire districts within the county with excellent progressive visionary and trusted leadership, MCFD2 has an opportunity to clearly present the benefits of consolidation along with the level of effort and risks so that leaders and the general public can make an informed decision.”*
- *“Communication and Idea sharing. We are all on the same page, we just sometimes don't know it.”*
- *“None”*
- *“continue to push for it”*
- *“Everyone needs a cheerleader. Talk of the ease and benefits of the RFA”*
- *“No role, stay up in the North end”*
- *“invest the time to lead the way, will not happen quickley, esp with a lack of vision by some chiefs”*

- *“Be available when called upon.”*
- *“The position it is presently in, and somehow empowering others to recognize and desire that a more progressive and professional unity of emergency services in Mason County is a goal that is worth attaining.”*
- *“See #97 above.”*
- *“Show the way of consolidating”*
- *“As an equal partner.”*

## Appendix G

Internal Survey Results (Do to size the results have been attached in electronic format on compact disc. A written copy of the 106 page Appendix G is available on request).