



*Prepared by  
Legislative Policy and  
Research Office*

# **FIRE FIGHTER CAPACITY WORKGROUP WORKGROUP SUMMARY**

November 18, 2022

## WORKGROUP MEMBERS

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**Representative Paul Evans**, House District 20, Chair  
**Senator Lynn Findley**, Senate District 30  
**Representative Dacia Grayber**, House District 35  
**Representative Jami Cate**, House District 17  
**Representative Greg Smith**, House District 57  
**Representative Rick Lewis**, House District 18  
**Evan Source**, Staff, Representative Paul Evans  
**Emily Teixeira**, Staff, Representative Dacia Grayber  
**Mike Harryman**, Office of Governor Kate Brown  
**Doug Grafe**, Governor's Wildfire Programs Director  
**Mariana Ruiz-Temple**, Oregon State Fire Marshal  
**Mariah Rawlins**, Office of the State Fire Marshal  
**Travis Medema**, Office of the State Fire Marshal  
**Karl Koenig**, Oregon State Fire Fighters Council  
**Nicole Palmateer Hazelbaker**, Oregon Fire Chiefs Association and Oregon Fire Marshals Association  
**Garrett Mosher**, Oregon Fire Chiefs Association and Oregon Fire Marshals Association  
**Genoa Ingram**, Oregon Volunteer Firefighters Association  
**Dave Busby**, Oregon Emergency Managers Association  
**Cord Von Derahe**, Battalion Chief  
**Ben Stange**, Polk Co. Fire District No. 1 (Chief)  
**Scott Stanton**, Umatilla Co. Fire District No. 1 (Chief)  
**Jack Carriger**, Stayton/Gates Fire Districts (Chief)  
**Bob Horton**, Jackson Co. Fire District No. 3 (Chief)  
**Roger Johnson**, Sisters Fire District

**Adam Hanks**, Jackson County Fire District No. 3, Rogue Valley Fire and Rescue Alliance  
**Darrell Fuller**, Volunteer Firefighter, Red Cross Volunteer  
**Amanda Sullivan-Astor**, Associated Oregon Loggers  
**Mallorie Roberts**, Association of Oregon Counties  
**Mike Shaw**, Oregon Department of Forestry  
**Julie Olsen**, Department of Public Safety Standards and Training  
**Kayla Ballrot**, Department of Public Safety Standards and Training  
**Brooke Bell-Uribe**, Department of Public Safety Standards and Training  
**Rebecca Nance**, Oregon Employment Department  
  
**Jay DeFillipo**, Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs  
  
**Sean McCormick**, Oregon Military Department  
**Paula Simone**, Central Oregon Community College  
**Lisa Ransom**, Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries  
**Erin Seiler**, Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries  
**Samantha Siegner**, Oxley and Associates  
**Lauren Smith**, Oregon Farm Bureau  
**Hasina Wittenberg**, Special Districts Association of Oregon  
**Elizabeth Howe**, Northwest Insurance Council  
**Kyle Williams**, Oregon Forest and Industries Council  
**Mike Eliason**, Oregon Forest and Industries Council  
**Roger Beyer**, Oregon Small Woodlands Association

## OVERVIEW

Beginning April 26, 2022, and continuing through September 20, 2022, The Honorable Paul Evans, Chair of the House Wildfire Recovery Committee, assembled the Firefighter Capacity Workgroup to explore the challenge(s) of maintaining adequate firefighting capacity across Oregon’s unique structural and natural terrain. Through hybrid workgroup meetings, in Salem and via MS Teams, and virtual sub workgroup meetings, workgroup members discussed firefighting capacity, position types, operations, and budget distinctions across large, medium, and small population centers. The workgroup also commissioned a [volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention survey](#) and vetted options for sustainable funding [available upon request of LPRO or LRO].

## TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The table below represents a summary of the workgroup’s efforts to identify and address issues surrounding: firefighter recruitment and community engagement; equitable resource allocation across fire districts; firefighter capacity supports; and volunteer firefighter standards and training. These recommendations garnered broad conceptual support and do not necessarily indicate a consensus or majority support.

### Recruitment and Community Engagement

Topic	Background/Description	Proposed Solutions
<p><b>ITEM #1: Targeted Populations and Recruitment Strategies</b></p>	<p>Important segments of the population are underrepresented in career and volunteer fire service positions. Identification of targeted populations and tailored recruitment strategies aim to increase fire service participation and ensure fire crews are demographically representative of the populations they serve.</p> <p>Many of these individuals may need opportunities and supports to discover their potential interest in the fire service. Others possess the interest and/or will to become volunteer firefighters, yet encounter barriers to participation.</p>	<p><b>Youth Recruitment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop junior “pre-apprentice” programs for high school students who may have an interest in firefighting (e.g., Amity’s cadet program educates high school students on firefighter basics).</li> <li>Pair programs with scholarship opportunities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Public Employee Volunteerism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore paid leave as a mechanism to engage public employees in volunteer firefighting.</li> </ul> <p><b>Underrepresented Populations Recruitment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through apprenticeship programs, recruit individuals who meet DEI objectives established by the Governor for statewide employment and public service, and DEI objectives within individual departmental aspirational ratios.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider paying these individuals 73% of starting firefighter wage for two years with a mid-year bump.</li> </ul>
<b>ITEM #2: State/Regional Support for Recruitment, Marketing, and Branding</b>	Smaller fire departments often lack adequate personnel resources dedicated to recruitment efforts. Some departments could benefit from the shared resources of regional or state coordination.	<p>Establish state or regional coordinators for fire service marketing, branding, and recruitment to support those departments that want the assistance. These positions would assist fire departments and chiefs with recruitment strategy development and implementation; outreach to community colleges, high schools, underrepresented groups, and others; and development of innovative marketing and branding strategies.</p> <p>Provide additional funding for marketing materials and product branding.</p>
<b>ITEM #3: Community Engagement</b>	Routine, enhanced familiarity within a community of the impact of first responders and their commitment to community safety could build enthusiasm for future potential volunteer service members.	<p><b>Fire Department-Community Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain engagement between local fire departments and their communities to raise the level of awareness and faith in first responders.</li> </ul> <p><b>Subject Matter Expert Tour</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a tour of subject matter experts (e.g., ISO representatives) to engage community leaders on a variety of key issues like insurance and fire ratings.</li> </ul>
<b>ITEM #4: Cultural Supports for Volunteer Firefighters</b>	There is variability in the social and cultural supports volunteers receive, particularly in navigating how to fit demanding volunteer work into their lives in a sustainable way.	<p>Prioritize meaningful welcomes, onboarding, check-ins, and team integration of new volunteers.</p> <p>Establish mentorship programs that pair long-term volunteer or career firefighters with new volunteers.</p>
<b>ITEM #5: Incentives to Minimize Financial Burden of Volunteering</b>	Volunteering can be expensive. In addition to potentially missing work without pay and additional childcare expenses for calls and trainings, volunteers often spend out-of-pocket for volunteer-related travel, cell phone use, and expenses due to injury.	<p><b>Financial Incentives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hourly pay or stipends for trainings, calls, and/or events</li> <li>Time off work for training, calls, and/or events without needing to use vacation time</li> <li>Cell phone reimbursement</li> <li>Fuel/mileage reimbursement</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tax deductions, benefits, or credits</li> </ul> <p><b>Retirement Incentives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to LOSAP plan benefits</li> <li>• Access to pension benefits through the Public Employees Retirement System (e.g., Minnesota volunteer firefighters are eligible for a lump-sum defined benefit plan)</li> </ul> <p><b>Insurance Incentives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oregon Health Plan eligibility</li> <li>• Workers’ compensation and disability insurance coverage</li> </ul> <p><b>Scholarship Incentives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College scholarships</li> <li>• Reimbursement for tuition and books</li> <li>• Student loan forgiveness</li> </ul> <p><b>Methodology Options</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earmark, or use as an index, unemployment rate for calculating financial compensation for training, calls, and/or events</li> </ul>
<p><b>ITEM #6: Incentives for Employer Support of Volunteers</b></p>	<p>Some recruits may question whether their employer will support their volunteerism and/or may need assurances of employment protection in order to volunteer.</p>	<p><b>Employer Tax Credits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide employer tax credits for supporting employee volunteerism (e.g., tax credits equivalent to half of employee wages for time away for training or responding to a call).</li> </ul> <p><b>Business Community Outreach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore fire department partnerships with local businesses to encourage employer support of volunteer firefighters.</li> </ul>

**Firefighter Capacity Supports**

Topic	Background/Description	Proposed Recommendations
<p><b>ITEM #7: State Funding for Baseline Paid Fire Department Staff</b></p>	<p>Many of Oregon’s fire departments/districts are entirely staffed by volunteers, particularly in more rural areas.</p> <p>In addition to traditional fire response, departments have become increasingly responsible for emergency medical services and other hazards. As responsibilities and demand have grown, numbers of volunteers have declined.</p>	<p>Provide state funding for three paid positions in every fire department/district in Oregon, including a paid fire chief, training officer, and emergency medical services staff.</p>

**Resource Allocation**

Topic	Background/Description	Proposed Recommendations
<p><b>ITEM #8: Population-Based Resource Allocation</b></p>	<p>Fire departments/districts have different financial resources and jurisdictional needs, which impact availability and allocation of resources.</p>	<p>Consider population-based (nonratio based) solutions/allocation of resources, perhaps by county, to accommodate jurisdictional differences.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• &lt;2,000</li> <li>• &lt;5,000</li> <li>• &lt;20,000</li> <li>• &lt;50,000</li> <li>• &lt;100,000</li> <li>• &gt;100,000</li> </ul>

**Volunteer Firefighter Standards & Training**

Topic	Background/Description	Proposed Recommendations
<p><b>ITEM #9: Flexibility in Training Locations and Schedules</b></p>	<p>Trainees are often challenged with leaving full-time employment to participate in trainings that may last 4+ weeks or 90+ hours and may require significant travel from home.</p> <p>There are currently several DPSST/fire department partnerships that provide regional training services, and OSFM is currently investing <a href="#">Senate Bill 762 (2021)</a> funds into regional training centers in Gold Beach, Central Oregon, Ontario, and possibly other locations.</p> <p>Many departments consistently explore different training scheduling options to support trainee needs.</p>	<p><b>State-level Fire Academy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer Firefighter 1 Fire Academy at DPSST campus (approximately four weeks in duration on a set annual schedule).</li> <li>• Offer Firefighter 1 and 2 Fire Academy at DPSST campus (approximately eight weeks in duration on a set annual schedule; perhaps once or twice per year).</li> </ul> <p><b>Regional Training Facilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop additional regional training facilities around the state.</li> <li>• Continue to prioritize partnerships with departments that already have a workable location/facility/site.</li> <li>• Continue to invest in OSFM’s regional training and logistics center efforts by continuing <a href="#">Senate Bill 762 (2021)</a> funding into the next biennium.</li> <li>• Offer grants for lodging expenses where applicable.</li> </ul> <p><b>DPSST Training Capacity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund additional DPSST coordinators and trainers to support additional training requests (e.g., state-level fire academies, additional regional trainings, or additional local department training requests).</li> <li>• Continue improved DPSST instructor/participant pod training ratios and moving individuals through trainings without significant lag time for participants.</li> </ul> <p><b>Fire Department Training Grants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a grant program to enhance training resources for departments (e.g., infrastructure, classroom modules, props).</li> </ul>

		<p><b>Fire Department Training Capacity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund fire academies at the local department/district level with DPSST employees or with local DPSST-contracted certified trainers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Flexibility in Training Schedules</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Departments and regional training facilities should continue to explore alternative training schedules, including quarterly trainings, or condensed trainings (e.g., Friday/Saturday/Sunday)</li> </ul> <p><b>Hybrid Trainings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore offering hybrid trainings to achieve certain firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) standards (e.g., Firefighter 1 and EMT basic).</li> </ul> <p><b>Expedited EMT and Paramedic Trainings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore building an expedited EMT curriculum model in partnership with Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and community colleges (e.g., similar to the Arizona program).</li> <li>• Consider creating paramedic program options with shorter durations and more weekly hours.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ITEM #10: Training Standards</b></p>	<p>Approximately 85% of Oregon fire departments follow the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) baseline standards. Many of those departments report satisfaction with the shared baseline, accompanying increased training support, and minimization of liability.</p> <p>However, for some, NFPA training standards may inhibit potential volunteers from successful engagement and completion due to the significant time investment required.</p>	<p><b>Status Quo: AHJ Determination and NFPA Standards</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain status quo of the “authority having jurisdiction” (AHJ) determining whether to follow national NFPA standards including Firefighter 1 baselines (the vast majority currently do), and whether to require additional community-specific standards and/or certifications on top of the baseline standards.</li> </ul> <p><b>Nonentry Standard</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a new nonentry standard below the Firefighter 1 level for localities where there could be significant positive impact on recruitment and/or better match with unique district needs. Consider pilot program and sunset date.</li> </ul>

	<p>Training standards also may not align with the unique needs of local departments/districts. For example, communities may need Emergency Medical Services (EMS) or wildland training more than interior structure training in certain rural areas, or nonentry protocols may be more common with increased response distances and times.</p>	<p><b>Best Practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire departments/districts and DPSST should continue to explore best practices to achieve NFPA standards.</li> </ul>
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