

Fire and Rescue Department

LOB #235:

VOLUNTEERS

Purpose

The Volunteer Liaison's Office resides within the Personnel Services Bureau. The mission of the Volunteer Liaison's Office is to provide and facilitate communication, collaboration and coordination, to provide interoperability through access to the personnel, equipment, and facilities of the 12 Volunteer Fire Departments (VFDs) that reside within the Fire and Rescue Department (FRD). This office is focused on enhancing efficiency in delivery of services to the community in both the public service domain through fire and life safety education, and emergency medical and fire services through the use of volunteer resources. The 12 volunteer Fire Departments have a long standing Partnership with the FRD and the County. This significant partnership is defined in the Management Agreement Committee (MAC) agreement which was approved by the Board of Supervisors in 2012.

The 12 Volunteer Fire Departments provide assistance to the FRD in the following areas:

- **Operational Contributions:** Volunteers are trained to assist with fire suppression and emergency medical services as part of a combined career/volunteer system. There are on average, over 400 highly trained operational volunteers who are serving in the system, including 15 Paramedics. Volunteers provide service by placing additional units in service during peak service demand periods or by riding in a supplemental position on minimum staffed vehicles. Trained volunteers provide stand-by medical assistance at multiple events including Celebrate Fairfax, Herndon Festival, Wolf Trap performances, community fairs and 10K runs, band competitions, high school all night graduation parties, and high school football games. In addition, volunteers staff canteen units that provide firefighter rehab at multiple alarm fires and other incidents where personnel are on scene for extended periods or are subjected to weather extremes. There are also over 260 administrative volunteers who assist in the management of the 12 volunteer departments as well as in fundraising.
- **Capital Facilities:** Nine of the County's 39 fire stations, valued at over \$28 million, are owned and maintained by the volunteer organizations. These include stations 2, 5, 8, 10, 13, 14, 17, 22, and 23.
- **Apparatus:** The 12 VFDs own about 28 percent of the FRD's major apparatus (90 units valued at \$15 million). They provide front-line units for 15 fire stations, including those stations owned by the VFDs as well as apparatus for stations 1, 12, 19, 21, 37, and 38. In addition to front-line units, VFDs own vehicles that may be placed in service by operational volunteers or used as part of the reserve fleet for any station in the County.
- **Citizen Programs:** The Volunteer Liaison's Office manages the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and Fire Corps Programs of the Virginia Citizen's Corps. Last year, FRD ran over 200 students through the initial CERT class, while offering another 300 seats in extracurricular classes related to emergency preparedness.

Description

The Volunteer Line of Business can be divided into two distinct programs; the main core program is the support of the 12 volunteer departments. The secondary program is the managing of the Community Emergency Response Team program. There are a myriad of moving parts that go into both programs to ensure a smooth and efficient operation.

The Volunteer Liaison's Office performs the following roles for the volunteers from the 12 volunteer departments: HR Manager (coordination of volunteer recruiting, all volunteer human resource matters and information technology issues), insurance processor (the coordination with the Occupational Health Center and Risk Management, and outside insurance companies), tax adjusters (coordinate and process personal property exemptions and interface with the Department of Taxation), fill the role of support staff

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for the Volunteer Fire Commission, liaison between the FRD leadership and the volunteer leadership, authors of the Volunteer Policies and Procedures manual, asset manager (track and inventory all volunteer EMS and suppression personal protective equipment), benefit managers, and counselor. In addition, the Offices manages purchases and reimbursements for all 12 volunteer departments.

The Volunteer Liaison's Office also funds the personnel costs associated with volunteer training; including the Volunteer Training Coordinator's salary and the hourly wages for the 56 part-time non-merit academy adjunct instructors. This includes all Academy-based training; introductory training, initial certification training, recertification training, and specialty training. Supplemental funding for supplies and equipment to facilitate these programs is provided through the Academy's budget. This includes books, office supplies, expendable training supplies, equipment, facility and training prop maintenance, and apparatus.

Much of the work mentioned above is captured in the FRD volunteer personnel database, and the Fairfax County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association database. On September 5, 2015, the following volunteers were active in the system: 382 Operational Volunteers, 291 Administrative volunteers, 160 Trainees and 78 Applicants.

This LOB also manages the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program as members of the board appointed County Citizen Corps Council. Responsibilities include preparing funding requests, budgets, recruiting plans, coordinating citizen registration, class scheduling, training, and recertification of participants. Staff works closely with Fiscal Services to purchase equipment and necessary tools to run the program and stay within budget.

The majority of work performed to manage the programs takes place at the FRD Headquarters building during normal business hours. However, since most volunteers have day jobs, many of the face to face interactions take place at night and on weekends, requiring attendance at one or two after hour meetings per week. Also, because of the volunteer work schedule and due to current reliance on electronic media, many of the electronic correspondence occur after hours as well.

The efforts of the Office of the Volunteer Liaison help to strengthen working relationships between the volunteer and career organizations and to ensure a safe and effective working environment.

Benefits

One of the major benefits of this office is it provides a single point of contact/conduit between the 12 individual volunteer departments and the Fire Chief. This helps ensure the 12 departments operate as a single entity to fit seamlessly within the larger combined department.

Another benefit is by working with the Volunteer Training Coordinator, volunteers are able to meet or exceed their training requirements and goals, meeting and exceeding their yearly requirements. Collaboration also exists with the Occupational Health Center (OHC) making sure that every operational volunteer goes through the same yearly physical as the career personnel to ensure a safe and healthy individual.

A successfully run partnership leads to an increase in Volunteer hours and by default, units in service which benefits the residents of Fairfax County. Another benefit of a well-run partnership is the ability of the volunteer departments to purchase apparatus. Every front line unit the volunteers purchase through fundraising efforts is one less unit the taxpayers have to buy. Also, the Ready Reserve (additional) units in service, helps decrease run time, and during incidents, adds capacity. In addition, volunteers own 9 stations and are often able to procure additional supplies and equipment purchased with donations.

Mandates

This Line of Business is not mandated.

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Trends and Challenges

Since 2007, the number of administrative volunteers has stayed relatively steady, while the number of operational volunteers have shown a steady growth. As more volunteers are available to put units in service or ride on career units, the number of units put in service per year will also continue to grow as well as the total number of operational hours.

A challenge to operational hours and riding times is the number of training hours required. Due to additional mandatory training, and the additional length of the classes, training hours have increased at a faster rate than operational hours. Since volunteers only have a limited amount of time to dedicate to the system, the additional training time makes it more difficult to ride units.

One of the other challenges faced is recruitment. As per the regional average, for every four volunteers entering the system, only one will remain after one year. To keep the number of operational and administrative members steady or on the slow rise, over 300 applicants must be processed per year. The other related problem is retention; with an average length of service of five years. If length of service time is increased it will allow for a more experienced cadre of volunteers to put more units in service. It will also allow FRD to save money on training. In order to accomplish increased retention, a Length of Service Awards Program was initiated to encourage members to stay beyond five years. This program is in effect in many surrounding jurisdictions, and has shown to be a proven incentive for volunteers to extend their career.

The next biggest challenge is funding. As the price of apparatus has drastically increased, and due to factors such as the weak economy, fund drives have not been as successful, some of the volunteer departments can no longer supply the County with the same front line apparatus as in the past. The same holds true for the facilities, as the stations have aged, so has the cost of maintaining them. Over the past few years, several volunteer department were unable to afford to maintain the stations themselves, and turned the properties over to the County. It is thought that the remaining departments owning their own facilities are stable enough, and there are no station turnovers planned for the immediate future.

Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #235: Volunteers			
FUNDING			
<u>Expenditures:</u>			
Compensation	\$363,935	\$372,330	\$453,992
Operating Expenses	860,391	1,003,401	840,386
Total Expenditures	\$1,224,326	\$1,375,731	\$1,294,378
General Fund Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	\$1,224,326	\$1,375,731	\$1,294,378
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
<u>Positions:</u>			
Regular	3 / 3	3 / 3	3 / 3
Total Positions	3 / 3	3 / 3	3 / 3

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Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Total number of volunteer background checks processed annually	388	270	300	300	300
Number of operational volunteers	330	385	395	405	405
Total operational hours annually	91,808	97,829	87,768	90,000	95,000
Number of times Volunteer staffed units are placed in service	1,697	1,739	1,520	1,650	1,700
Residents completing initial Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) class	189	212	231	240	250

A background check is the first step in the hiring process, allowing staff the opportunity to meet the applicants and have a discussion to start determining their suitability to volunteer. While only the first step in the applicant process, it is a good indicator of the workload to come in terms of scheduling, training, and physicals. Per the national average, out of the total number of applicants, only 25 percent make it through the first year.

Both the Operational and Administrative volunteer's personnel data and records need to be kept up to date by staff. For operational volunteers, they need to be current on all mandatory training, mandatory annual physical, and certifications. While FRD has seen a nearly 20 percent increase in trained volunteers over the last 3 years due to a SAFER grant funded recruitment campaign, it is anticipated numbers will now stabilize. The volunteer force is made up of a very diverse population, in part due to the EMS only program; women make up 40 percent of all volunteers, and 20 percent are minorities based on the reported EEO classifications.

The "Total operational hours annually" metric represents the sum of all operational hours the volunteers contribute per fiscal year. It is reported and tracked in the online Volunteer Management System (VMS) designed for and managed by the Fairfax County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association. All volunteer shifts have been recorded in this database as of July 1, 2007. The number of volunteer hours will fluctuate depending on the volunteer's availability and the number of volunteer opportunities available to the volunteer. However, it is anticipated as new volunteer's gain more experience, the total number of operational hours will increase. In addition to actual Operational hours, the Operational volunteers dedicate on average another 44,000 hours annually for training. For every hour put in by an operational volunteer, there is an equal amount expended by an Administrative volunteer. Administrative volunteers help run the corporations and fundraising efforts of each department, without their contribution, volunteers would not be able to maintain facilities or purchase apparatus.

The number of units staffed will vary upon the availability of ready reserve apparatus and the availability of volunteer officers and aides needed to put units in service. As more volunteers gain experience and move up through the system to become aids and drivers, it is expected this number will increase.

The final metric represents the number of residents who took the 25 to 30 hour basic CERT class taught at either the Fire and Rescue Academy or at an outside venue. This class must include all the DHS/FEMA CERT modules in addition to Fairfax County specific subjects. Along with scheduling residents for the initial CERT class, FRD trains approximately 300 students per year through extracurricular CERT classes. Since 2004, FRD has managed more than 100 CERT classes.