

**Virginia Department of Fire Programs
Virginia Fire Services Board
Fire and EMS Findings and Recommendation From Previous Studies**

**FIRE & EMS FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM
PREVIOUS STUDIES**

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
THEME 1: ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	3
THEME 2: DELIVERY OF SERVICES (COMMUNICATION).....	5
THEME 3: PERSONNEL AND TRAINING	7
THEME 4: ADMINISTRATION, POLICY AND FINANCE	9

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Executive Summary

The enclosed “*Fire & EMS Finding and Recommendation from previous studies*” document consists of findings and recommendations for Virginia’s Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) providers. The information contained in this report is not to be construed as legal advice or as a binding recommendation. This report is intended to provide guidance for Virginia’s fire and rescue stakeholders along with local governing bodies in order to build on strategies currently working while also observing opportunities for improvement. It is believed that strategic focus on these areas will enhance the overall quality and coordination of the fire and rescue service delivery to the communities served.

These findings and recommendations were obtained through a comprehensive evaluation of the Fire and EMS Studies conducted by the Virginia Fire Services Board and the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. Each study’s committee was comprised of representatives from the Virginia Fire Services Board (VFSB), the Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VD FP), the Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) and the Virginia Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS). On all studies, local governing bodies requested a review of several areas of responsibility within their region’s fire and rescue services.

Common areas in need of improvements include, but are not limited to;

- **Theme 1:** Organizational Development
- **Theme 2:** Delivery of Services (Communications)
- **Theme 3:** Personnel and Training
- **Theme 4:** Administration, Policy and Finance

The themes above provide a central focus for how localities can better serve their citizens. These principles will serve as a guide for localities to effectively identify and evaluate various areas of service delivery. The end goal of this findings and recommendations document is to ultimately improve the quality and coordination of fire and rescue services within each Virginia jurisdiction.

**Virginia Department of Fire Programs
Virginia Fire Services Board
Fire and EMS Findings and Recommendation From Previous Studies**

Theme 1: Organizational Development

Goal: Provide an effective management structure that is charged with administrative and operational responsibilities so that each locality is able to increase performance and improve morale.

1) Centralized Authority for Fire and Rescue

- I. Localities should examine the feasibility of hiring a career Chief/Director of Fire and EMS/Rescue Services as the central position responsible for the coordination and authority for all fire and rescue issues.
- II. The position should be codified through a local ordinance outlining specific responsibilities and expectations.
- III. A Fire-Rescue Oversight Committee should be established to provide recommendations to the Chief/Director of Fire and Rescue Services on ways to improve overall fire-rescue service delivery.
- IV. An organizational chart should be generated and distributed to all affected parties.

2) Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

- I. Localities should develop a recruitment and retention program with incentives for volunteering.
 - a. Establish or re-establish a High School Program. High School programs can be a valuable tool for recruiting younger members into the Fire and EMS/Rescue services.
 - b. Establish a Volunteer Coordinator to assist the Fire and EMS/Rescue organizations with recruitment and retention of volunteers.

3) Emergency Response Zones and Station Locations

- I. Localities should critically analyze their current Fire and EMS/Rescue districts along with station locations and adopt all warranted changes.
 - a. Ensure all residents throughout the area receive the same level of protection from the closest and most appropriate responding department.

4) Strategic Plan and Unified Mission

Virginia Department of Fire Programs
Virginia Fire Services Board
Fire and EMS Findings and Recommendation From Previous Studies

- I. Given accurate data, leadership within the fire and rescue services organization should analyze the current level of service as related to Fire and EMS/Rescue service delivery.
- II. A gap analyses should be preformed to measure the distance current levels of EMS/Rescue service delivery and desired service levels.
- III. Localities should develop a data-driven strategic plan for Fire and EMS/Rescue services to identify expectations and increase performance levels.
- IV. Strategic plans of individual Fire and EMS/Rescue organizations should include a unified mission and vision, in line with the City/County/Town.
- V. Measureable goals must be included in the strategis plan.
- VI. Stakeholders, fire and rescue personnel, members of the Fire-Rescue Oversight Services Committee and locality leadership must each play an integral part in the development of this strategic plan in order to meet stakeholder’s expectations and foster commitment.
- VII. A neutral party should be considered to facilitate this process.

5) Increased Fire Prevention Activities

- I. Localities should enact/adopt the Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC) through a local ordinance.
- II. Localities should enforce the SFPC.
 - a. Assign the duties to a designated Fire Official, i.e. Chief/Director of Fire and Rescue Service.
 - b. Employ a Fire Marshal to enforce the fire codes, to conduct fire inspections and investigations, and to coordinate public fire and life safety education.
 - c. Where unable to adopt the SFPC, the locality should consider entering into a MOU/MOA with a neighboring jurisdiction to perform the Code inspection and enforcement.

Virginia Department of Fire Programs
Virginia Fire Services Board
Fire and EMS Findings and Recommendation From Previous Studies

Theme 2: Delivery of Services

Goal: To develop a service delivery strategy that identifies the types of services provided, area to be serviced, and the delegation of authority to perform those services.

1) Improved Dispatch System

- I. The local governing body should hire an Emergency Communications Coordinator to oversee the Emergency Communications Center (ECC). This individual should be independent from law enforcement and fire and rescue functions.
- II. Localities should establish an Emergency Communications Advisory Committee to work with the ECC Coordinator to thoroughly analyze its dispatch system and update the standardized protocols, response zones and the overall ECC system.

2) Levels of Interdepartmental Communications

- I. Localities' should host a strategic communication session with a skilled mediator to assist in developing effective communications between the Fire and EMS/Rescue departments, the communications center, emergency services personnel, and the localities' Administration.

3) Communications

- I. Identify service capabilities and develop a closest station response policy and deployment matrix for the remaining areas of the community.
 - **Infrastructure:** Localities should update their communications infrastructure to ensure adequate and consistent communication capabilities throughout its jurisdiction.

4) Cooperation

- I. Localities should work with neighboring Counties/Cities/Towns to implement a call patch system between the respective Emergency Communication Centers.
- II. Localities should continue to strive for excellence by continuously re-evaluating response protocols and zones.

5) Service Delivery Statement

Virginia Department of Fire Programs
Virginia Fire Services Board
Fire and EMS Findings and Recommendation From Previous Studies

- I. Establish a service delivery statement similar to a mission which in writing articulates how services will be delivered. This will establish a certain level of expectation which can also be used as a measuring tool.

6) Standard Operating Procedures/Guidelines

- I. Develop and implement locality wide Standard Operating Procedures/Guidelines (SOPs and SOGs).

7) Liabilities

- I. Localities and their Fire-Rescue Oversight Committee should establish a Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) training and policy to ensure training compliance and re-evaluate compliance with applicable laws related to employment and volunteering.

**Virginia Department of Fire Programs
Virginia Fire Services Board
Fire and EMS Findings and Recommendation From Previous Studies**

Theme 3: Personnel and Training

Goal: To enhance the professional development of fire and rescue personnel.

1) Personnel

- I. Localities should employ a Chief/Director of Fire and for the supervision and coordination of all fire and rescue services.
- II. Localities should establish and/or implement an EMS contract or hire EMS personnel to meet the immediate EMS need.
- III. Localities should establish a working EMS Supervisor to provide supervision of day-to-day EMS.

2) Consolidation of Smaller Departments

- I. Local governing bodies should explore the option of consolidating and renaming volunteer departments to maximize limited resources and personnel.

3) Recruitment and Retention

- I. Localities should adopt a locality-wide recruitment and retention plan and provide increased leadership towards the recruitment of volunteers as well as the enforcement of standards for both career and volunteer personnel.
- II. Examine the feasibility of establishing a Volunteer Coordinator position to support existing volunteers, tasked with:
 - i. The development of a recruitment and retention program should take into consideration the needs of current volunteers and identify motivational factors to keep this population engaged and committed to the fire and rescue service.
 - ii. The program should also include some level of incentives that are consistent across the Fire and EMS/Rescue organizations.

4) High School Program

- I. Localities should work with its School Board to establish/re-establish the high school program that provides juniors and seniors the opportunity to take fire and EMS training.

5) Coordinated Training Program

Virginia Department of Fire Programs
Virginia Fire Services Board
Fire and EMS Findings and Recommendation From Previous Studies

- I. Localities should establish a Training Committee to coordinate Fire and EMS/Rescue training with its Fire and EMS Training Coordinators.
 - II. The Training Committee should work with the Chief/Director of Fire and Rescue Services to develop and implement a single set of position-specific minimum training standards.
 - III. Localities should work to increase the number of instructors and consider implementing a cross training program.
- 6) Continuity of Leadership and Succession Planning**
- a. Localities should develop a program that emphasizes the value of leadership and interpersonal relationship skills within the fire and rescue organizations and focuses on growing new leadership within the jurisdiction.

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Virginia Fire Services Board
Fire and EMS Findings and Recommendation From Previous Studies**

Theme 4: Administration, Policy and Finance

Goal: To effectively deliver superior fire and rescue services to constituents in an effective and efficient manner.

1) Funding and Accountability Practices

- I. Localities should annually evaluate the needs of the Fire and EMS/Rescue services, implement revenue recovery to support contract or paid service delivery, and consider alternate funding possibilities from within and through grants.
- II. Complete a yearly locality-wide needs assessment for the delivery of Fire and EMS/Rescue services.
 - a. Develop a base funding allocation system upon the priorities set through the needs assessment and quantitative data,

2) Standardization and Central Purchasing

- I. Localities should survey the Fire and EMS/Rescue organizations to identify equipment commonalities, to establish equipment and apparatus standardization, and to centralize purchasing to ensure cost efficiency.

3) Fleet Management

- I. Localities should create a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) with a Critical Priority List of fleet replacements.
- II. The Fire-Rescue Oversight Committee should develop a single set of specifications for future apparatus purchase, refurbishment and replacement.