

# Recruitment, Staffing, and Retention Strategies for the Rosemount Volunteer Fire Department

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## Background

Rosemount is a small city in Dakota County with a (2010) population of 21,874 ("Community Profile," 2012). Most residents work outside of Rosemount. The City's fire department is entirely operated by volunteers.

In a community survey, most respondents were satisfied with the fire department but were not in favor of paying higher taxes to expand or improve the fire department (Morris Leatherman Company, 2014).

Currently, the department has 46 volunteers and 2 fire stations.

Firefighter training takes about 2 years.

The stations receive approximately 600 calls per year.

In 2013, 24% of calls were fire related and 57% were medical.

## Project Description

The City of Rosemount Fire Department asked for assistance in identifying strategies and approaches to better attract, recruit, and retain volunteer firefighters.

## Method

### Review of Current Research

- Journal publications, research documents, government publications
- News and popular print/media sources
- Firefighter articles/magazines

### Benchmarking (National, State, Local)

- Benchmarking literature
  - Researchers, government agencies, news articles
- Information gathering
  - Interviews/surveys of other fire departments
  - Demographic data of these departments assembled via the web

### Site Visit

- Oct. 12, 2014 at the Annual Rosemount Fire Department Open House

### Fire Chief Interview

- Conducted Oct. 21, 2014 at the fire station

### Survey of Rosemount Volunteer Firefighters

- Based on literature review
- Conducted online via Qualtrics
- Participants were Rosemount Volunteer Firefighters, sample size of 33

## Rosemount Comparison with Local Fire Departments

Number of VFFS	46	32	39	76	32	100	48
Number of Stations	2	1	2	3	1	5	2
Percentage Non-Fire Calls	76%	60%	74%	95%	60%	90.9%	--
Call Response Quota	30%	10%	--	30%	35%	30%	30%
Non-Fire Roles	no	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no
Number of Female VFFs	1	0	1	9	1	12	1
Total Number of Firefighters	46	32	39	76	32	100	48

## Site Visit



Photos by Maureen Soules, 2014

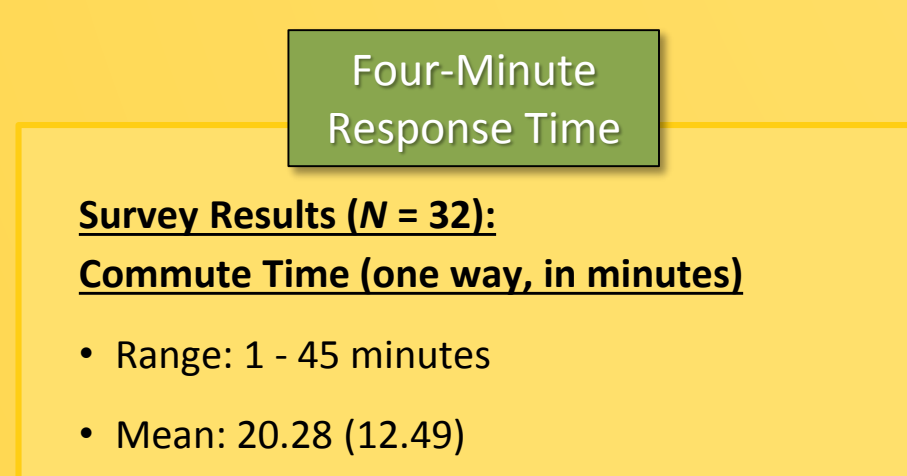
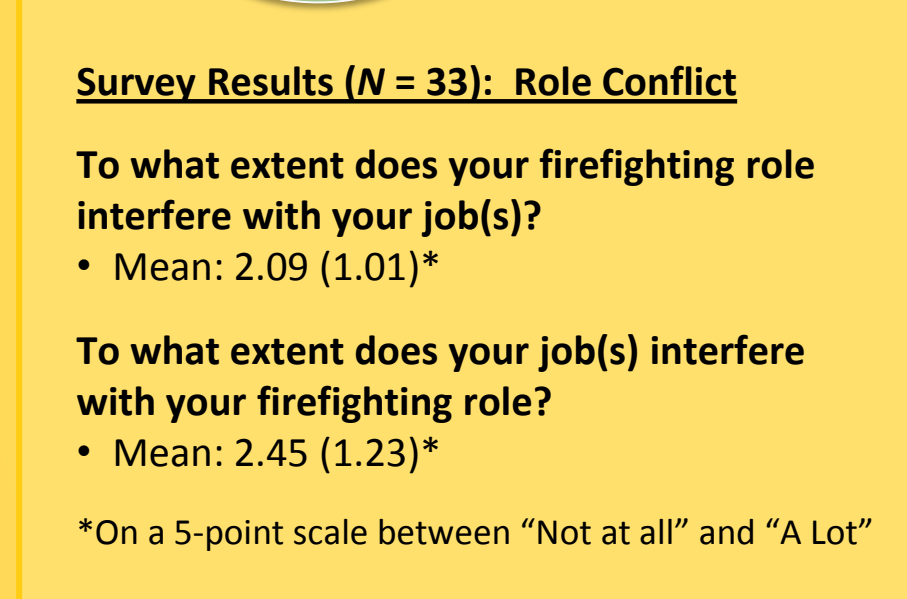
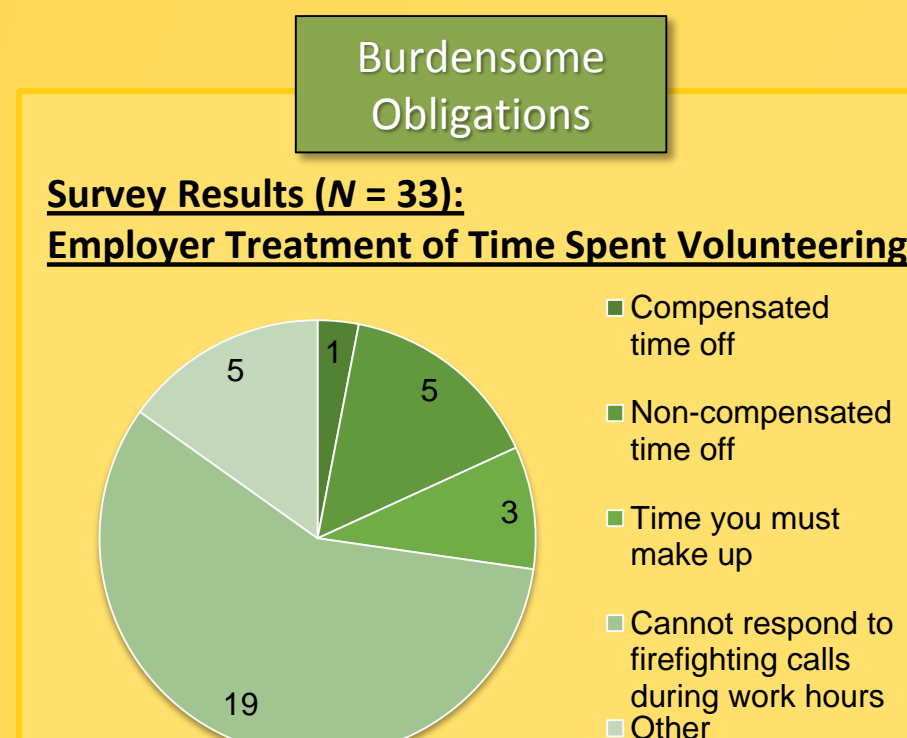
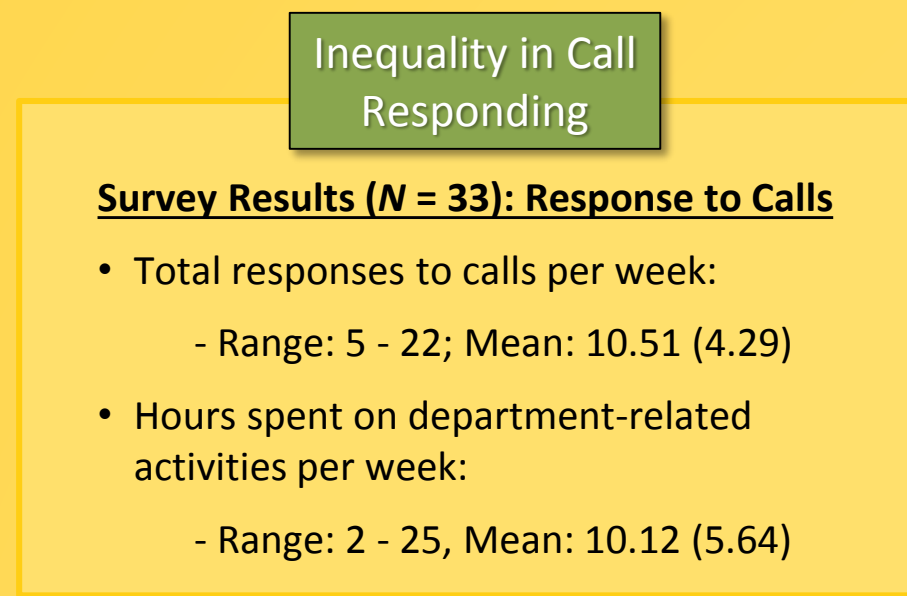
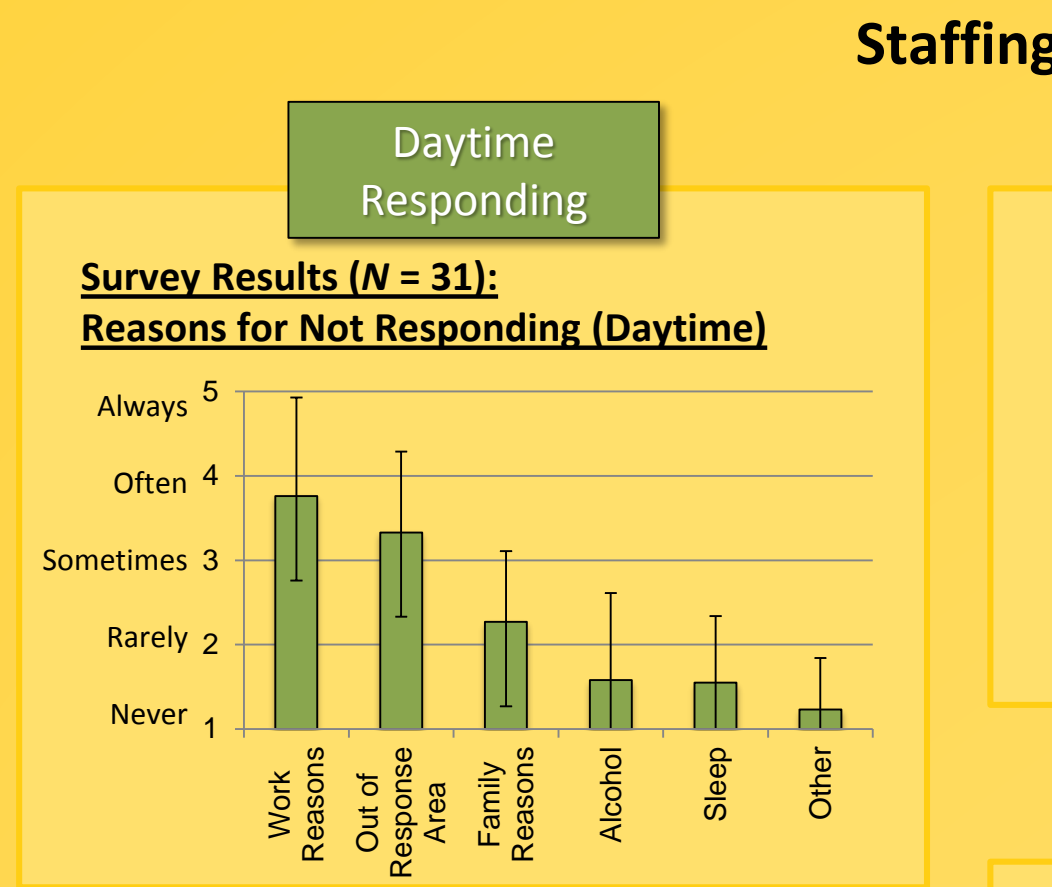
We would like to thank Chief Richard Schroeder for giving generously of his time and providing us with valuable information and insight for this project.

Special thanks to the Rosemount volunteer firefighters who participated in our survey.

Special thanks to the students of PSY 5707, Fall 2014 Semester, who assisted on this project: Maureen Soules, Jeffrey Braun, Jessica Brown, Catherine Cantieri, Elizabeth Cokeing, Geordin Crist, Karen Froistad, Casey Giordano, Nicole Haffield, Shiyi Han, Bo Hopkins, Eric Leingang, Evan Lish, Hunter Moore, Jennifer Nguyen, Stormy Peterson, Dylan Sorman, Jingyuan Tian, Xianyong Xu



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## Staffing

### On-Call Shifts

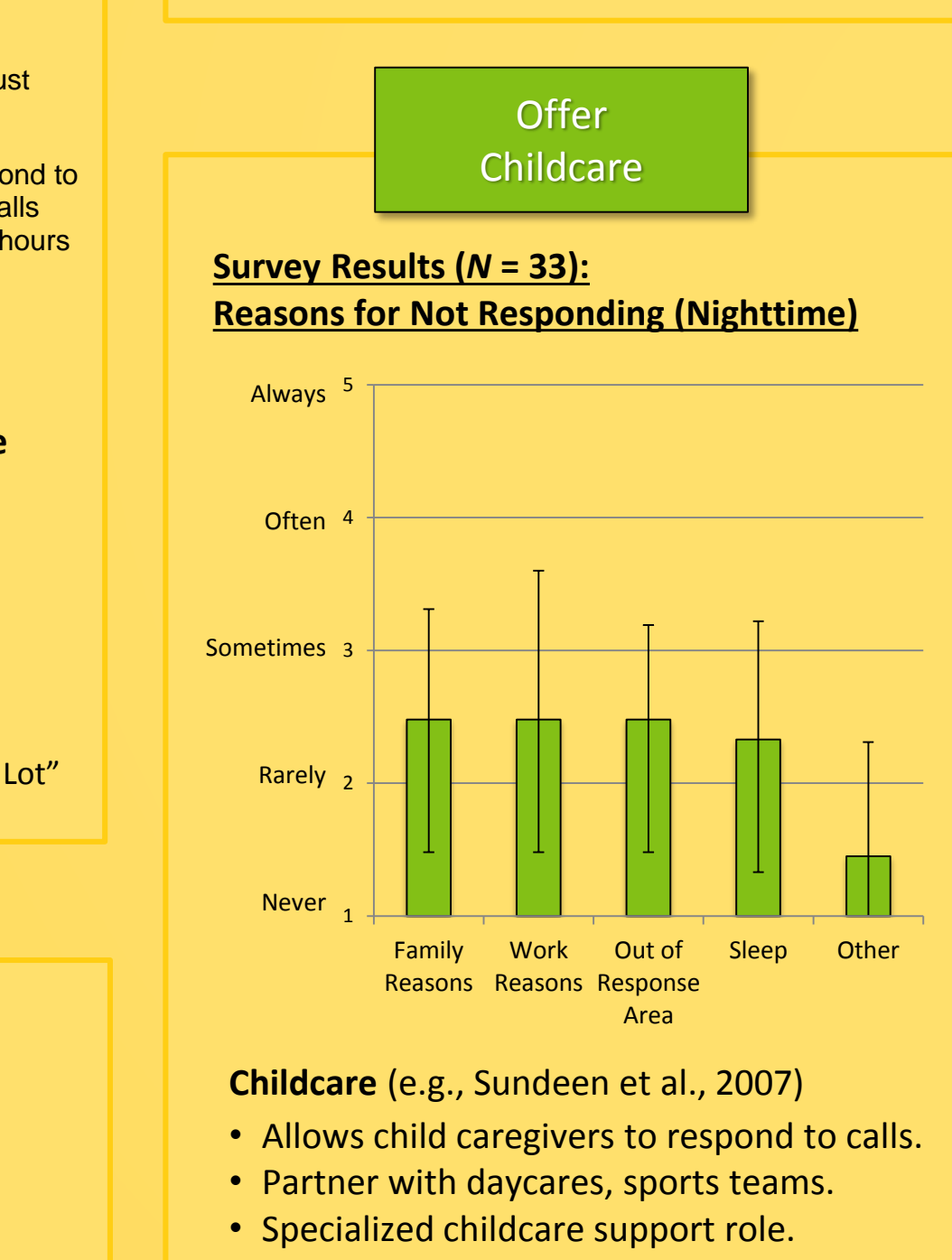
- Teams of firefighters are assigned to certain time windows in which they are obligated to respond to calls.
- Reduces uncertainty in when to expect calls and increases flexibility in the schedule when not on shift (e.g., U.S. Fire Administration, 2007).

### Duty Crews

- Firefighters on standby at the station during the shift to respond to calls.
- Reduces uncertainty in when to expect calls and increases flexibility in the schedule when not on shift (e.g., U.S. Fire Administration, 2007).

### Cooperation from Employers

- Allow firefighters working in Rosemount to respond more flexibly to calls.
- Minnesota Statute 43A.321 – Volunteer firefighters can leave work to respond to a call without losing wages but have to remit their earnings to their employer (Revisor of Statutes, State of Minnesota, 2014).



## General Recommendations

### Assessment and Program Monitoring

- Ongoing evaluation (e.g., Mallick, 1998)
  - address dynamic environment
  - ensure effectiveness/utility of programs
- Conduct regular assessments on departmental issues (e.g., University of Pittsburgh Guide to Best Practices)
  - climate of department
  - attitudes of department members
  - interviews of firefighters leaving their roles

### Specialization

**Specialization of volunteer firefighter roles** (e.g., Birch & McLennan, 2007)

- Split job roles
- Split the training of the various job roles
- Split the calls that go out according to the job roles

**Survey Results (N = 32): Why Do People Stop Volunteering?**

Reason	Frequency
Time requirements	18
Work-family conflict	7
Conflict with regular job	2
Too much responsibility	1

### Non-Active/Support Role Development

- Utilize all community members and their given skill sets (e.g., Rielage, 2011)
  - secretarial/record-keeping (Aldridge, 2003)
  - equipment check and maintenance (Aldridge, 2003)
- Women more interested in volunteering for non-firefighting roles (Birch & McLennan)

**Survey Results (N = 32): Why Do People Not Volunteer?**

Reason	Frequency
Lack of Information/Understanding	9
Time Commitment	5
Reimbursement	4
Negative Aspects of the Job	4
Difficulty of the Job	3

## Recruitment

### Low Applicant Numbers

**Need to Meet Growing Demand**

- Population: 14,619 in 2000 to 21,874 in 2010 ("Community Profile," 2012)
- Fire department has not attained slated 50 firefighters.
- Approx. 5 to 6 applicants are hired out of 10 to 12 per year.

**Need for Greater Community Awareness**

**Survey Results (N = 24): What Could Be Improved?**

- Improving community relations
- Participation in community events
- Better funding for PR
- Recruitment

**Women Firefighters: Benchmarking Results** (e.g., International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services, 2014)

- In 2008, only 4% of firefighters were women
- 84% of men and 47% of women pass the physical ability tests
- 17% women in comparable jobs requiring strength/stamina
- 80% of women firefighters say equipment does not fit well.

**Physical Testing**

- Physical ability is correlated with job performance: 0.51 (Henderson, 2010)

**City of Rosemount Position Responsibility**

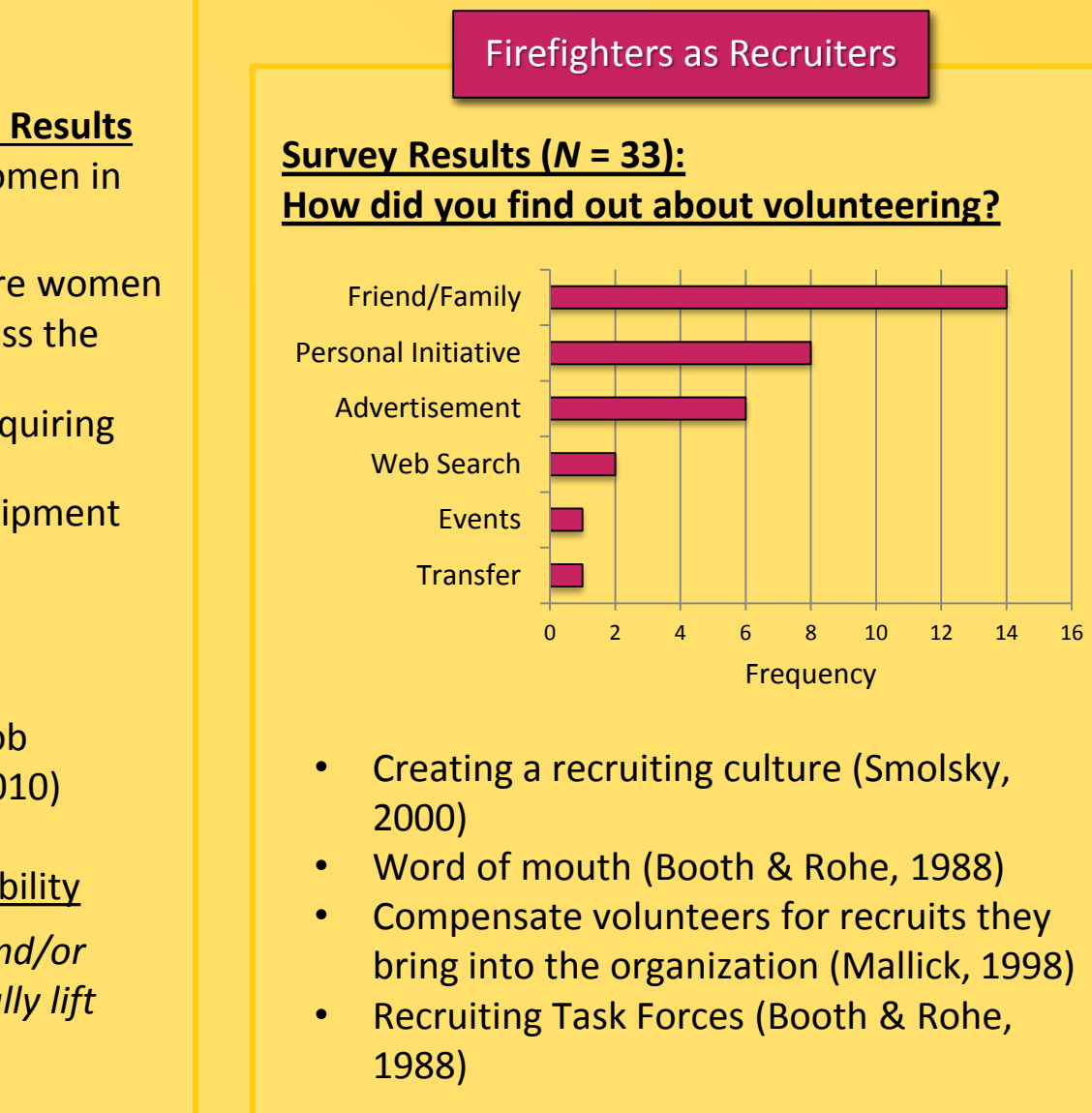
"The employee must frequently lift and/or move up to 25 pounds and occasionally lift and/or move up to 125 pounds."

### Offer Incentives

- Health benefits (e.g., Aldridge, 2003)
- Tuition Assistance (e.g., Mallick, 1998)
- Tax exemption/incentives (Smolsky, 2000)
- Housing allowances (e.g., Cote et al. 2014)

### Community Involvement

- Functional Recruiting (Birch & McLennan, 2007)
- Creating and expressing a fun culture (e.g., Chlaromonte, 2006)
- Personal approach to recruiting (Haug & Gaskins, 2011)
- Increase exposure (Rielage, 2011)



### Pre-Test Training Programs

- Pre-test training can significantly improve pass-rates for women from 34.6% to 52.6% (Hulett et al., 2008).
- Provide physical training through gym membership discounts, personal training, etc. (e.g., Chapman, 2011).

### Cadet Program

- Raise awareness of volunteer firefighting (e.g., Mallick, 1998)
- Utilize the high school population (e.g., Chapman, 2001)
- Auxiliary tasks (clean trucks, clerical work)
- May continue volunteering as adult firefighters (e.g., Aldridge, 2003)

### Recruit Women

- Target recruitment towards women (stay-at-home moms)
  - Target daycare centers, gyms
- Ensure climate is inclusive for women (Hulett et al., 2008)
- "Why Not You?" campaign
- Bring in female firefighters to discuss misperceptions of women's firefighting abilities

### Advertisement/Marketing

- Utilize local media (Haug & Gaskins, 2011)
- Utilize social media (Leamond, 2014)
- Update and maintain website (Baum & Kabst, 2014)
- Yard signs and banners (e.g., Forbes & Zampelli, 2012)
- Target community organizations/facilities for recruitment (Forbes & Zampelli, 2012)

## Affordability / Effectiveness Comparisons of Recommendations



## Retention

### Realistic Job Preview

- Increases retention when addressed for both firefighters and family
- May include a detailed job description with list of specific job tasks and training/scheduling expectations
- Expectation Lowering Procedures (Jex & Britt, 2008)

### Modify Training Delivery

- Adjust timeline and format
- Offer partial online training and testing (e.g., Smolsky, 2000)
- Tiered training for specialization

### Focus on Recognition

- Tied to social identity and sense of belonging (e.g., Aldridge, 2003)
- Length-of-service and behavior-based awards (Smolsky, 2000)
- Recognition of family members (Haug & Gaskins, 2011)
- Letters of commendation to employers and media exposure (U.S. Fire Administration, 2007)

### Provide Incentives

- Health benefits (e.g., Aldridge, 2003)
- Tuition assistance (e.g., Mallick, 1998)
- Tax exemptions (Cote et al., 2014)
- Community discounts (e.g., Aldridge, 2003)

### Increase Feedback and Communication

- Provide an outlet for anonymous feedback to the chief (University of Pittsburgh Guide to Best Practices)
- Provide minutes/updates from meetings and trainings
- Make copies of Standard Operating Guidelines available
- Provide regular feedback on performance to all volunteers

### Promote Counseling

- External counseling may be more effective
  - e.g. Employee Assistance Program (e.g., Cote et al., 2014)
  - Share the Load Program (National Volunteer Fire Council)
- Counseling for family members
  - mitigate strain on families (e.g., Laurel et al., 2008)

## Conclusion

We have identified 20 strategies to address the challenges of staffing, recruitment, and retention faced by the Rosemount Fire Department. It is our recommendation that the most effective and affordable recommendations should be prioritized for implementation.

Some of these recommendations can be implemented immediately while others will require long-term planning.

Despite our recommendations for change, the department is doing a phenomenal job and providing a high level of service to Rosemount in the face of on-going challenges.



Photo by Deniz S. Ones, 2014