

## INTRODUCTION

The Connecticut Fire Chiefs Association (CFCA), in partnership with the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), is pleased to be in the second phase of its Volunteer Workforce Solutions (VWS) program, which works with national, state, and local organizations to support initiatives focused on the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Phase II is funded through a 2013 FEMA SAFER grant.

In an effort to share recruitment and retention ideas that have or have not worked, the Volunteer Workforce Solutions program created and sent a 'best practices' template to the fifteen participating departments in Connecticut who attended the Symposium in the Sun last November in Florida. A meeting was held on Friday, November 13, 2015 in Florida where attendees were given the chance to share with the whole group, their responses.

This report is a summary of what was shared from the various departments. The information is being made available to all departments as a means to enhance volunteer recruitment and retention strategies and efforts.

Quote from Chief Mitchell:

"Recruiting and retention has been a growing issue for a numbers years. Getting these 15 departments involved was a good thing to hear. It's great to know what's working and what's not. This is information I can take back to the grants people."

## DEPARTMENTS

### **Broad Brook**

**Department type:**

**Department size:**

**Previous challenges:**

"Our community assumes we are a paid department, so they don't understand our needs. The department realized it had a [recruiting] problem, but not everyone was able or willing to do the work needed, and we were further hampered because we lacked the full support from our officers/leadership."

**Program benefits:**

"We put a committee together to run this program, and started off great, meeting twice a month. But we started losing momentum with the holidays, vacations, and family obligations, and as is often the case with committees, the lion's share of the work ends up getting dumped on the person who put the committee together. ... We decided to have one recruiting event each month, where we attend a town event and set up a table or bring a fire truck. We also wanted improve camaraderie, and help retention so we added monthly family events as well. ... The worst thing for us is when we get too many [potential members] interested, and we can't get the interviews done in a timely manner. So we created a community service division, and leave it up to them to get things done. That has streamlined the process and resulted in an improved, systematic approach."

## **Cromwell**

**Department type:**

**Department size:**

**Previous challenges:**

“People don't realize we are a fire district, not part of the town. ... We were doing the traditional recruiting efforts, holding an open house in October, and we put in a lot of work and a lot of effort—and we had 50 people show. This is our second time with the program, and we learned a lot the first time, so this time when we had the open house we held it in June, the Saturday the week school ended so we weren't competing against sports or other obligations—and we had 200 people show.”

**Program benefits:**

“It took a few tries to find the right person personality-wise, but eventually we found the right fit to run the program. In this day and age, you need to play to people's skills. Then we made it everyone's job to do recruiting. We encouraged all our members to get out and introduce themselves to anyone they don't know. ... We got out with the local colleges and were teaching safety classes in the community, handing out info every time. We started going out to many, many events, and not only does it help with recruiting, but it gets people on our side should we need something. ... We added 13 new recruits. But, we made them attend four drill nights over four weeks, strictly as observers. That way we can gauge their level of commitment without spending any money on them. We've also adjusted our SOPs so we can have exterior only members—people that can drive a truck and operate it front to rear, but not be certified to do interior operations. Then we also make sure we train our company officers so they are not allowing unqualified people to enter dangerous situations.”

## **Killingworth**

**Department type:**

**Department size:**

**Previous challenges:**

“We're an expensive town to live in, so the younger generation doesn't really have the money to move in here. ... We do an annual mailing every year. That helps us with donations, but we don't really see a jump in recruits.

**Program derivatives:**

“We have a very good fire prevention program and we do a good job recruiting juniors in the schools, and then they tend to bring their friends. We send two or three juniors to the state fire academy every year. We've tried a mentor program with adults, but recruiting juniors works best. Two-thirds of our officers started as juniors. We have a great junior advisor, and that makes all the difference.”

## **Middlefield**

**Department type:**

**Department size:**

**Previous challenges:**

"We are a small town with limited [recruiting] targets. We need to get a list of people who just moved to town."

**Program benefits:**

"Social media is our new avenue, and we went full force with it. We're feeding local awareness and letting people know there is a need. ... Everywhere we go, we bring recruiting materials. ... Our mentor program has done well. Existing members take new ones under their wing. It's better for recruits and rekindles older members. ... You get out of the program what you put in. We've given much effort and have gotten good results. In looking at the program, it's caused our staff to bring up things we hadn't previously thought about. ... We've made washing machines available for members at the firehouse. It's minimal cost and brings members in for a few hours."

**Old Mystic****Department type:****Department size:****Previous challenges:**

"We lost the middle class of department—the officers and drivers. We get people trained, and they either become an officer or get sucked up by paid department, and the union doesn't let them two-hat. ... We were getting a good amount of volunteers but we didn't know how or why. We're just now asking where they're coming from. ... We found out too late that there was a bad apple who was ripping new members and chasing them away. ... We're not good at saying 'no,' and so we commit to many community events and then get stuck trying to figure out how we're going to staff them. As a result, we spend a lot of time on recruiting. ... Our district serves two towns, which is very convoluted, as many items get sent into committees with both of them."

**Program benefits:**

"We've been doing well with the word of mouth. We have the highest training standards in our area, which is a double-edged sword. We get a lot of members from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and the Navy base, and they like that structure. But some people just don't want all that training. ... We've added more family events to make it easier on our members, and we've tied recruiting to everything we do."

**Rocky Hill****Department type:****Department size:****Previous challenges:**

"Our cadet program was working until OSHA changed rules. We're trying to adapt now. ... We lack local awareness in that people don't realize we are a volunteer organization."

**Program benefits:**

"Word-of-mouth continues to work best for us."

## Somers

**Department type:**

**Department size:**

**Previous challenges:**

“Potential members tend to lose interest when they realize how much time is expected. And then when we do get young people trained, we tend to lose them to fulltime jobs at the hospitals or paid EMS services.”

**Program benefits:**

“We ran a newspaper ad and learned that more and more people are not reading the paper anymore. We held an event at the supermarket and got a lot of interest, but 80 percent of crowd was 60 or older. Most of the new members we’ve gotten have come from word of mouth. But, our retention has improved. We’re making things more personal, staying more in touch.”

## Stamford

**Department type:**

**Department size:**

**Previous challenges:**

“We represent five volunteer departments that were independent entities for so long, so it has taken a long time to get them to work together. ... Most people in town have no clue how the fire service works there. ... The average time a volunteer gives us is four years. One for training and three years of service. ... If you don’t have things for them to do once they sign up to volunteer, you are going to lose them.”

**Program benefits:**

“We standardized the process to help the four participating volunteer departments, and simplified the process to make it easier for people to join. We want to keep things transparent. People will go through 16 to 18 weeks of training, and that will allow them to learn about each department so they can decide which one they want to go with. We want to get everyone trained the same way under the same standards so they become interchangeable.”

## Trumbull Center & Long Hill

**Department type:**

**Department size:**

**Previous challenges:**

“We represent three separate districts, in what is a somewhat convoluted system, but it works. Previously each had its own recruiting programs, and they still do, but we’ve also combined efforts. We sent out a mailer that had a listing of all three departments, and people had to figure out where they fit. ... We think it’s a waste to go after 16- and 17-year olds, because they’re getting ready to go to college, so we want to reach them younger. We tell them there’s no other place where you can get a test-run for a career like volunteering in a firehouse. ... We want firefighters, but we’ll also happily accept those who

can handle other tasks, like administration, computer IT, etc. Our future is to free officers and hard-chargers from admin duties.”

**Program derivatives:**

“We got an increase in applications because of the grant, but we don't have the manpower to stay on top of it, and unfortunately we had people falling through the cracks. ... Previously we did exit interviews for people who served for long periods, but now we’re doing them for people who start the process but don't finish so we can see what went wrong. You need to force yourself to keep working at this program. If you let yourself slow down or ignore it, it will become a habit.”

**Wolcott**

**Department type:**

**Department size:**

**Previous challenges:**

“Traditional recruiting avenues have been drying up. ... Changing culture is a challenge. We had members who didn't want new people coming in because it would ‘change the firehouse.’ ... We have people moving to town who have [emergency response] training, but we don't know they are there unless they reach out to us.”

**Program benefits:**

“We didn't add events, we just incorporated recruiting to all the places we were already going. It’s about marketing. You just have to keep repeating the point and getting more touches with the target audience. ... We got 30 responses off a Craigslist ad. They weren’t all in our area, so we ended up sending 12 potential members to other departments. ... We get people who are eager at first, but filling out an applications is not buy-in, and we realized we were taking too long on the process.”

**Q&A**

**1. WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN TERMS OF VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT/RETENTION?**

**SOCIAL MEDIA/TECHNOLOGY**

We’ve added a formal website, Facebook page, and Twitter account, and all have been very successful in getting the message out to the masses. **We try to update our activities on these sites to provide information to those who may be interested.** We also continue to provide handouts and buck slips at all of our public education and fundraising events. These efforts spread the word to as many as possible with a minimal effort. [Middlefield](#)

We had a four-week radio ad program funded by a grant, and we’ve updated our application so we can better track how applicants heard of us/why they decided to join. We also just received our first online interest submission, and that individual is currently in the application process. [Old Mystic Fire Department](#)

Recently **we experimented with a Craigslist job posting**, clearly stating we are a volunteer department but that we provided free training and certain benefits as well. There has been a surprising response, although the wide net of regional ads made us turn down well over half the responses because they were not even close to our area. One person who replied did come to the station, showed interest, and is in our onboarding process now. [Wolcott Fire Department Company 2](#)

### LIVE EVENTS

We've seen the most success by **being actively involved in the community and attending various community events**. These efforts to be seen at community events have generated a noticeable word-of-mouth buzz about us, and have helped increase the amount of people who are interested in joining our organization. [Long Hill Fire Company #1](#)

Recently we have been speaking with officials at two **local universities about actively recruiting from their areas**, and we have seen several interest forms generated from those discussions as well. [Long Hill Fire Company #1](#)

For recruiting, we have put out flyers during our fundraising events (pancake breakfasts, fire prevention, etc.); put an ad in our local newspaper; placed large signs at the entrance to the local supermarket and the town fair; put out flyers at local businesses; and staffed tables at the local supermarket on a Saturday with flyers, etc. [Somers](#)

Our **best recruiting tool has been word-of-mouth**. According to other area departments, we provide the highest level of training both in-house and in regard to training opportunities through other sources. Having strong command structure as well as duty shifts has also attracted members, as they are able to come at a set time and get guidance and leadership. Due to our reputation, local career-only departments refer people looking to volunteer to us. We've also gained members through public safety events where we had applications, new member orientation packets, decorations with our logo, and handouts from Volunteer Workforce Solutions (VWS) for them to read a brief introduction about us and the process of volunteering. [Old Mystic Fire Department](#)

We've gotten the word out at summer concerts, talent shows, the church pumpkin fest, the parks and rec fall fest, opening day for Little League, lunch at the high school, and basic word-of-mouth. [Rocky Hill Fire Department](#)

We had our first **public safety open house** in April 2015 with the assistance of VWS, which brought a large number of area residents into the firehouse to meet with firefighters and see the equipment.

[Wolcott Fire Department Company 2](#)

### ADJUSTING OUR WAYS

In our organization, we had many members who fulfilled firefighting requirements while also contributing to the company's special events, fundraising efforts, and recruiting events. We've seen success by **offering a category called "corporate member,"** which allows people to join our organization to assist in some of those special events, thus freeing up our active firefighters to strictly focus on our fire protection efforts. [Long Hill Fire Company #1](#)

We have been trying to implement a **mentor program** to aid new members with information on various activities and thus get them immediately involved. [Somers](#)

We feature a collective effort centralizing and standardizing the recruiting process for four independent fire departments. We developed one application and one medical evaluation form to replace four separate ones, as well as incorporated a standardized interview process that is conducted by a committee comprised of one member from each department. We also have public outreach through scheduled recruiting events at local schools, colleges and public assembly/community events, along with direct public interaction at various locations in the region. [Stamford Volunteer Firefighters Association](#)

We recently experimented with the two new families who moved to our area by **writing a direct letter to new residents**, explaining what we do, and how they can volunteer. Two letters went out on our letterhead, including a business card, and encouraging them to contact us for more info. We had one reply, resulting in a new application for our cadet program. We would like to expand this and do a personal mailing to all new property transfers in our area. [Wolcott Fire Department Company 2](#)

A concerted effort has been made to **be more welcoming and supportive of new applicants** as they consider applying, and once in the process, prospective members have been invited to come and observe drills before applying in order to get them excited about the opportunity. [Wolcott Fire Department Company 2](#)

### **JUNIOR PROGRAM**

Historically, our two most successful volunteer recruitment tools have been our **junior firefighter program and word-of-mouth recruitment**. Many of our past and current members began their volunteer careers as junior firefighters or were recruited by friends or acquaintances who were already members. [Killingworth Volunteer Fire Company](#)

### **FINANCIAL INCENTIVES**

Our town provides a **pension program and tax abatement** of up to \$1,000 to our members who meet certain, specified participation requirements. Another useful recruitment and retention tool has been a clause in our company bylaws that waives most participation requirements for members while they are attending college or are on active duty with the U.S. military. [Killingworth Volunteer Fire Company](#)

Retention is aided by a **stipend program** that depends on responses to calls and drills. [Somers](#)

### **TRADITIONAL AVENUES**

Every year we send out an **annual drive request** in the form of a trifold brochure featuring our department. Since being part of the VWS, we have been using the buck slips to help promote ourselves along with the flyers and donation requests to support our “Do you have what it takes?” theme. We also use the marketing materials to post billboard signs on roads in our community; staff open house tables at public service events, birthday parties, safety days, and open houses; and A-frame boards with marketing materials. [Cromwell](#)

Posters, brochures and buck slips were displayed at local businesses as passive recruitment techniques. We still display “Everyday Hero” banners at the firehouse. We displayed recruitment material at the Wolcott Fair, and all other department events such as fundraising dinners, etc. Small **“volunteers wanted” signs were bought and affixed** below the yellow DOT fire department street signs near the firehouse. [Wolcott Fire Department Company 2](#)

## **2. WHAT ISSUES WERE YOU SEEING IN RECRUITING AND RETENTION THAT YOU WANTED TO ADDRESS?**

## MARKETING

We basically needed to get the word out [that we needed help with membership] to as many people as possible. Typically we tried to do that in house, but **struggled to reach the public**. Social media was an avenue that was previously never explored, but we found that many people find it an easy way of obtaining information. [Middlefield](#)

In a word: marketing. We **needed to let our community know** that we need members. [Broad Brook FD](#)

We believe that **the citizens of the town don't understand that the fire department still utilizes volunteers**. New people coming from out of town often believe there is 24-7 fulltime staff. [Somers](#)

## INCREASED ENGAGEMENT

For many years we attended community events for no other reason but to be present and fulfill a request to attend. Recently we changed our approach and we now **actively engage people** at community events for the purpose of recruiting and to explain the jobs we perform. We also discuss the importance of the volunteer fire service in the community and how they could assist us in our mission. [Long Hill Fire Company #1](#)

The number of meetings, drills and other activities that we hold can be confusing to new members, so we **needed to have mentors aid them** in understanding this information, and also try to be sure that they have completed all necessary entry-level paperwork and training. [Somers](#)

We **developed a town-wide recruit training class** that reviews the basics of firefighting. We are currently developing a duty shift document that will discuss roles and responsibilities for that program. Trumbull Volunteer Fire Co. has a live-in program that works very well, and the other two districts would like to move into that direction. [Trumbull Volunteer Fire Company No. 1](#)

We historically relied on the recruitment method of people coming to us because of a familial relationship or friendship of a current member. Rarely did someone unaffiliated with a current firefighter make the effort to knock on our door. As numbers of active responders fell, we **tried to actively reach out into the community** to recruit those who may have been interested, but never felt they were welcome to apply. [Wolcott Fire Department Company 2](#)

## BEING MORE FLEXIBLE

We were seeing a decline in volunteerism, both in terms of members joining and members being able to spend time at the department. To combat this, we **added duty nights** to make it easier for members to schedule times to volunteer, **increased training opportunities**, and **interviewed members on what motivates them to be a part of our team**, and all that has helped us see an increase in members joining. We also have members are going through transitions in their personal lives, such as marriage and parenthood. We've been **working to include more family-oriented events** to allow members to participate with us, while still spending time with their families. Furthermore, we had no system in place to track how applicants found the department, and have since added a section to our applications to help us track what practices are getting us most interest/members. [Old Mystic Fire Department](#)

Exposure to our community base. Our department has **become very community-oriented**, as we are a stand-alone fire district. The intention over the past few years has been to educate our community about the services that we give along with the educational support we can provide. The department has



taken a huge stride in community service not only through fire and EMS provisions, but local educational classes in CPR, first aid, and, soon-to-be-released, our citizens fire academy as well. [Cromwell](#)

A collective effort was designed to better coordinate the entire recruitment process, to reduce redundancy and duplication of effort, as well as eliminate the competition for new members. The increase in public outreach was needed to better inform the public of the need for new volunteer firefighters in our community and simplify the process for those seeking to join a local fire department. [Stamford Volunteer Firefighters Association](#)

### 3. WHAT HAVE BEEN THE RESULTS/BENEFITS? HAVE YOU SEEN AN INCREASE IN MEMBERSHIP?

#### YES!

Presently we have added eight new members to our ranks, all of whom are enrolled in the state-sanctioned Firefighter 1 class. These individuals are good examples for all and have provided new energy to the company. Their enthusiasm is contagious to others as the new members are asking existing members for direction and advice. We have also instituted a mentor program for each of these new members. Once again, this provides more experienced members a chance to interact with the new members. [Middlefield](#)

We have seen an increase in membership of six new applicants this year. Of those, only one was a “traditional” applicant—one who knew one of our current members. The remaining five were at least in some way led to us by a combination of recruitment efforts we made this year. (We lost one potential member due to his inability to commit time due to a changing college schedule.) Three of these new probationary members had no prior fire service experience and are proving to be good candidates for regular membership. [Wolcott Fire Department Company 2](#)

Yes, we have seen an increase in our membership from those who have joined since we began the process with VWS and the IAFC. [Long Hill Fire Company #1](#)

We have seen nine new members, of which five are very active. Of those five, three will be enrolled in FF1 training soon. [Broad Brook FD](#)

We have seen an increase in membership over the last few months. The real bonus is **our town is just realizing we are volunteers** as we are out in the public recruiting and telling our story more than ever before. [Trumbull Volunteer Fire Company No. 1](#)

Yes, 15 new members (11 regular and four cadets). Each station has seen approximately three or four new members. [Rocky Hill Fire Department](#)

#### MAYBE

While we have had new members join the department (fire and EMS) in the past few months, I cannot say that it specifically was related to the new marketing material. Recent members have been due to word-of-mouth or because they are friends of department members. Retention has improved with new members. They are getting the information they need and seem to be more involved early in the process. [Somers](#)

We have been seeing an increase in new membership, however due to us only recently adding the section on the application asking how the applicant found out about us, we don't have accurate statistics regarding what has caused the increase. We have been able to pass out more information and applications at public safety events that were publicized using grant money, and documents from the grant as well as promotional materials to help gather people's attention to visit our booths. [Old Mystic Fire Department](#)

#### OVERALL BENEFITS

The exposure that we have gained has helped tremendously. **We have been able to gain support from the community** for approval of such items as new stations, communication upgrades and the purchase of new apparatus and equipment. The most important feature, however, is our ability to gain new membership from the community. [Cromwell](#)

**Our efforts have increased the level of interest in joining a local volunteer fire department**, which resulted in an overall increase citywide in the number of new applicants. At the same time they have also reduced competition and equalized the distribution of new members among the four participating departments, thereby strengthening the volunteer fire service as a whole for our city. [Stamford Volunteer Firefighters Association](#)

#### 4. WERE THERE ANY PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH ANY OF YOUR INITIATIVES?

##### ADJUSTING RULES

The main problem we had was that our by-laws limited the number of new members to five, and we had to revise that to adjust to the numbers that applied. It took some time, and as with any change we had some opposition as some felt we couldn't train that many new members, but it did pass and we did revise some of the procedures for their training. After every training drill, the entire group meets with one of the officers to review what was conducted and ensure they understood everything that was presented. We previously trained new members in a one-on-one scenario, but this seems to be working well. [Middlefield](#)

Updating each department's by-laws to allow for a standardized recruitment process was a major hurdle. We found there was a high level of resistance to change in this area, mainly because of a tradition of independent action by each department. This problem was addressed by the association president attending the monthly meetings of our local department to deal with the concerns of each department's membership. **Complete transparency and a thoroughly prepared plan of action** were key in gaining support. [Stamford Volunteer Firefighters Association](#)

##### TIME

The only difficulty we have seen may be specific to our community. Trumbull has three separate fire departments, so we've taken a collective approach to recruitment. From the beginning of the VWS process, we assembled a committee of folks from all three departments so that we are all working together on this initiative. The specific difficulty we faced is scheduling, and making sure there are representatives from all three organizations available at recruitment events. [Long Hill Fire Company #1](#)  
Retention still needs work in terms of having enough experienced members to act as mentors—obviously you can't have a new person act as a mentor, and it also takes a person with the right social skills to make that position work. [Somers](#)

Time. The one big issue we realized we needed was time, because **this is at least a part-time job**. With so many programs that we want to do, we can only do one item at a time and it can take six months to a year to get there. If we hired the right person in a paid position that focused on recruiting, I think we would end up in a better spot quickly. [Trumbull Volunteer Fire Company No. 1](#)

A major concern for us with any event is **having enough members to properly staff it**. We are invited to many events, and couple that with new members attending trainings for certification, we seem to be stretched thin trying to meet all events we are requested/invited to attend. We have been working to include recruitment activities into our public safety events so that we can do more with less time away from our families, department mission, and responsibilities. [Old Mystic Fire Department](#)

### **PUSHBACK**

Yes, department involvement. At times it seems our **recruiting efforts are not fully embraced** by the membership. We need the full support of our officer/leadership, as well as our longer serving firefighters. [Broad Brook FD](#)

As with anything, our biggest challenge is **the acceptance of something new** or change to the original program. We had to go through several individuals before finding the right person to handle the program. Once the individual was chosen, we had to thoroughly educate him on the overall goal of what we were trying to achieve. The overall goal was acceptance and support from the community, and really opening the door to allow them to become part of the organization. People should be part of the solution, not part of the problem. [Cromwell](#)

Buy-in from the department members as a whole has been difficult. We have had different levels of participation from other fire companies in town, and even inside our own company change is difficult at times. As is common in volunteer departments, we operate under **bylaws and tradition that can be difficult to change**. Getting all the moving parts of the application and on-boarding process to work together toward recruitment efforts is needed. Prospective members tend to be wary of entering into an unfamiliar group, and need to feel welcome and encouraged throughout the process. [Wolcott Fire Department Company 2](#)

## **5. HAVE YOU HAD PEOPLE SHOW INTEREST BUT NOT GO THROUGH THE ENTIRE TRAINING/ONBOARDING PROCESS? IF SO, WHY?**

### **TIME**

We had a few who registered on the website but could not commit to the time needed. We have guidelines regarding attendance and training in our bylaws that they were not able to meet at this time. We hope that at some point in the future they are able to commit to these duties. We also lost one member who started but for time constraint reasons could not keep up with the training. [Middlefield](#) Over the years some people have shown interest but have not gone through the entire training/onboarding process. We do not always know the reason, but it usually has to do with a lack of time. [Killingworth Volunteer Fire Company](#)

Yes. This is due mainly to the time commitment required to complete the necessary training and in some cases, a departments' individual required level of participation by its membership. For us, we believe that **changing how a person volunteers** is key to solving this issue. As with our recruiting, we have begun to standardize training that will enable us to use our personnel more efficiently through a duty

staffing program. Requisite training and participation levels will be addressed through this program, and we believe staffed apparatus will ultimately provide a greater level of service to our community.

[Stamford Volunteer Firefighters Association](#)

### GOOD QUESTION

We have had a handful of folks that completed interest forms that did not make it to the interview process. It is our belief they chose not to continue in the process due to their own decisions and there was nothing that the department could have impacted differently. [Long Hill Fire Company #1](#)

Yes we have, and it is not known why. But, we have come to the conclusion that **we as the fire department need to determine why**. We have recognized we need to do exit interviews of members old and new, and are in the process of figuring out the logistics of doing such. [Broad Brook FD](#)

We've had one or two people where this happened. Not exactly sure why it did as they tend to just disappear without letting us know they are leaving. A bigger problem is losing young members after they have been fully trained and have become productive. They start to obtain fulltime jobs, often in the EMS field, and become too busy to volunteer. [Somers](#)

Yes. Not sure. Recruits not showing up for physicals and couldn't be reached after contacting applicants after application was submitted. [Rocky Hill Fire Department](#)

### INTERNAL FACTORS

Yes. In most cases it has been changes in family or work requirements, however we have had members who decided that emergency response was not for them. We have lost members due to concerns with how they were treated, and since that time, we corrected the issue and re-educated members on how to help a member join our team, and make them feel important and as if they belong. This was a very serious topic for us, and unfortunately management was unaware of the interaction(s) until after losing prospective members. This was swiftly handled and included a member resigning due to discipline, and we have since **seen an increase in members who were avoiding the department** come back now that the negative influence was removed. [Old Mystic Fire Department](#)

### OTHER

We had 18 hits from the VWS website where interested parties recorded their info. At least one or two dozen more people contacted us directly with interest in the organization. Many of these people we had to redirect to other area departments that were closer to where they lived. Of those who actually applied, one member withdrew from basic FF1 training after two weeks as he could not make the time commitment, but some our other new members have shown excellent participation rates in both call response and drill attendance. They will be attending FF1 training in the spring. [Wolcott Fire Department Company 2](#)

## 6. HOW MUCH TIME WAS SPENT IN THE RECRUITING EFFORTS AND WAS IT COMMENSURATE WITH THE ACHIEVED RESULTS?

We spent many hours going to places to ask if we could leave the pamphlets and literature. The time now is considerably less as we continue to monitor these sites for activity and record the results.

[Middlefield](#)

We are trying to average two or three recruiting events per month. This was something the committee agreed upon early on in the process when we developed our marketing plan. These events are in addition to those on our original marketing plan. [Long Hill Fire Company #1](#)

We started highly motivated and put in about 10 to 12 hours each for our five-person membership committee. Our efforts became fragmented as the year progressed due to personal commitments and lack of support from the rest of the department. [Broad Brook FD](#)

It is difficult to quantify the amount of time we spend on recruiting efforts as they are frequently incorporated into other activities, such as fire prevention, public relations, and fundraising. In terms of our junior firefighter program, the time demands are considerable, although most members would agree that the results are worth with the investment. [Killingworth Volunteer Fire Company](#)

We don't have a specific number to share. One of our members has spent a great deal of time putting out the flyers, signs, etc. Given that we have not seen any new applications as a direct result of this work, I cannot say that the effort has been worth it. However, we will continue to try new methods (we're planning a day handing out flyers at the recycling center), so it is hoped that this direct contact with the public will help our cause. [Somers](#)

We spend two or three hours per week doing this, but could have spent 40 hours with ease. There is so much more to do but the volunteers work fulltime during the day. We would like to visit people at Fairfield University and Sacred Heart University to pitch our live in program as well as the duty shift. [Trumbull Volunteer Fire Company No. 1](#)

We currently don't have hard-fast numbers due to us not having a means to track what made someone join until recently, and due to combining recruitment efforts in to all aspects of our day-to-day operations. We have **seen an increase in membership, and lessons learned through this program have helped**. We look forward to better understanding and tracking the effectiveness of our recruiting and retention so we can either fix strategies that are less effective, or place more effort and emphasis on winning strategies. [Old Mystic Fire Department](#)

Recruitment is ongoing at all times by all members. I wish I could say that there were definitive hours but there are not. We just held our annual Halloween event where we had a recruitment table at the entrance of our haunted house to seek new members. The desired results have not been achieved, but we continue to strive forward. [Cromwell](#)

On average we spend 16 hours per month on public outreach at various venues and locations throughout the region. We devote approximately 20 additional hours per month to scheduled events at local schools, colleges and community events. We believe that we are falling short of our goals for the level of effort expended. **From the outset of our combined efforts we realized that this project would be a work in progress and that we faced a number of obstacles**. As such we evaluate our program regularly and seek out what has been successful for others. [Stamford Volunteer Firefighters Association](#)

We spend at least two hours per week updating our advertising online, our Facebook page, contacting interested parties, and more in an ongoing effort. Work on open house days, booths at the fair, tours of the firehouse, all add up to a lot of man-hours from the membership. I do believe the effort was worth

the results and will continue to do the same, but it is obvious **the more effort in, the better results out.**  
[Wolcott Fire Department Company 2](#)

## 7. IS THERE ANY OTHER INFORMATION YOU WANT TO SHARE WITH THE GROUP?

Our stance early on was to “hit the ground running” and try to be present as much as possible in the community while spreading the word about our ongoing recruitment efforts. We believed **the best way to impact recruitment was to be present in the community** and explaining what we do to assist them every day. [Long Hill Fire Company #1](#)

We have noticed that **the more you hand out materials, make a presence at events and educate the community of your needs, that the more apt you are at recruiting and getting support** from the community. Many people within the community do not realize the needs of the local fire department. [Broad Brook FD](#)

In talking with other departments, there is a direct correlation between the population of a town and the number of people willing to volunteer. Being a small town (about 10,000 people), it is more difficult to get sufficient numbers. Also, even if you get volunteers, it is difficult to get a lot of their time to run shifts or do other activities because of kids, work, etc. [Somers](#)

The program was very successful in so many ways from recruiting to working with department in town. The other part that was great is when we all sit in a room and open up to find out what other departments are doing. **We have cross pollinated so much over the last year and it has been fantastic.**  
[Trumbull Volunteer Fire Company No. 1](#)

I believe this second stage of the program is allowing us to better understand the effectiveness of this program and our recruitment and retention program as a whole. One major issue we have is lack of statistical information regarding our success/failures when dealing with recruitment and retention. We have since added a means of reaching out to potential volunteers, updated our application to better track reasons for joining, and it may be a great step in the future to have a means to formally meet with, and interview members who are becoming less active, or are choosing to end their membership. This may expose failures in our methods that we can improve upon. [Old Mystic Fire Department](#)

This is an ongoing process and I hope that through the network we can all share our ideas to help each other achieve a healthy membership. [Cromwell](#)

For us, **consistency and flexibility are the key components of our efforts.** We remain focused on our goals but keep open to new ideas on how to reach them. Along with that, because we are comprised of four independent organizations, it is paramount to balance the needs of each participating department with the goals of the overall effort to maintain their “buy-in” or feeling of ownership in the effort and thus their commitment to the process. [Stamford Volunteer Firefighters Association](#)

I would like to explore the options of **getting a list of certified firefighters** from the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control. This is public record, but they do not have a searchable database or list that they provide. Other trade certifications such as EMS, contractors, etc., all have searchable lists so mailing them can be done for recruitment efforts. I’d love to be able to mail all the existing FF1-certified people who live in my town. Many people move into a town years after serving another department and

never make the effort to reach out. If we could tap into this population it could help one of the largest issues with new members—the upfront training hours needed. [Wolcott Fire Department Company 2](#)

This program has brought the three fire districts closer and has them moving in a similar direction as it relates to recruiting. We have an established meeting each month to discuss recruitment items and usually other topics are brought up at this time. The program has accomplished much more than just recruiting, **it is helping make our department in Trumbull better in every way.** [Trumbull Volunteer Fire Company No. 1](#)

We discovered and discussed training as it relates to new recruits; live-in programs and duty-shift programs in town; holding our first tri-department holiday event for families of firefighters; and having a three-department membership application, all using the same background check company. **The administrative side of the departments have never worked as closely as they do now.** [Trumbull Volunteer Fire Company No. 1](#)

Although some of our junior firefighters ultimately become members, a significant number do not. Many simply choose to settle down elsewhere, a situation not helped by the scarcity of affordable housing in town for young people just starting out. [Killingworth Volunteer Fire Company](#)

Age has been a factor. Our department has many different divisions—fire, EMS, auxiliary, and fire police—that allow for all citizens to partake. We recently **created an “exterior firefighting” position** to assist outside the fireground. These folks attend an interior training program that allows for them to drive apparatus and complete limited duties on the fire scene. [Cromwell](#)

The **waiver of participation requirements** for college students and active service military personnel has been an important bridging mechanism for many of our junior members after they graduate high school. It allows these individuals to become regular members and maintain their affiliation with our organization during their college or military years. It allows them to participate in company activities during breaks and vacations and maintain social contact with other members. This seems to increase the likelihood that they will again become active members, if and when they return to Killingworth following college or military service. [Killingworth Volunteer Fire Company](#)

Our junior firefighter program has existed since the 1950s and, although it may have been instituted as a recruitment tool, it is not clear that this was its original purpose. Regardless, this long-standing component of our organization does tend to generate new membership. [Killingworth Volunteer Fire Company](#)

Our pension and tax abatement programs were specifically developed as recruitment and retention tools and, although they may play a role in attracting new members, their more prominent effect is to help motivate existing members to maintain a certain level of participation. [Killingworth Volunteer Fire Company](#)