

Santa Cruz County

Fire Department Advisory Commission

25 October 2021

Review and Recommendations for Retention and Recruitment of Fire
Volunteers







Overview of Scope

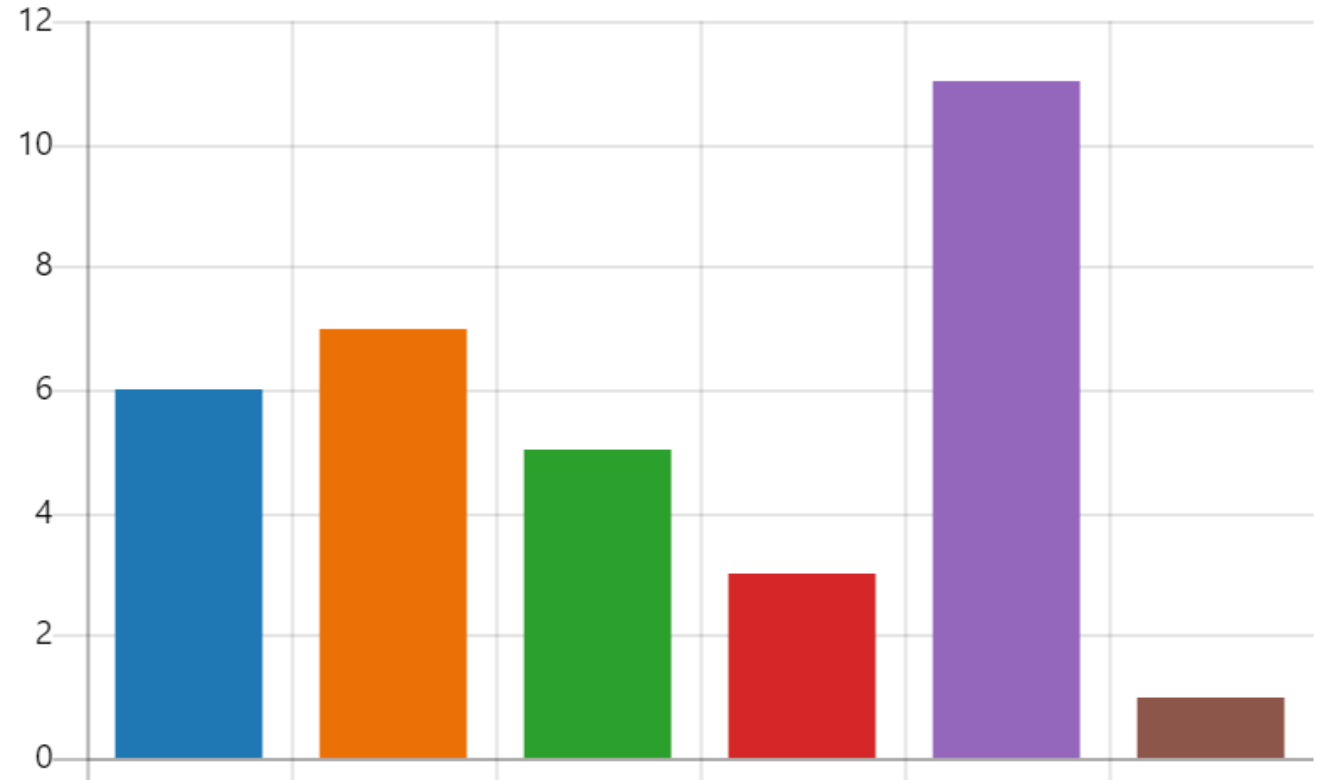
- Interviewed Chief about current Survey and Scope
- Surveyed current County Fire volunteers
- Researched Industry Best practices (CSFA & Volunteerfirefighter.org)
- Researched Butte County (similar agreement with CALFIRE)
- Researched Volunteer Fire Department On-boarding Process
 - Zayante, Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond, Felton, and Branciforte
- Types of Volunteer Roles (understanding roles)

Survey Focus

- Overall County Volunteer Firefighter Program
 - Likes & Dislikes
- Recruitment of Volunteers
 - Improvements and outreach recommendations
- Strengthening the Volunteer Program
 - General Improvement recommendations
 - Training Program
- Retention of Volunteers
 - General Improvement recommendations

Survey Results

 Company 29 South Skyline	6
 Company 32 Boony Doon	7
 Company 36 Loma Prieta	5
 Company 37 Davenport	3
 Company 41 Corralitos	11
 None or other	1



33 Responses out of 70 Volunteer Fire Fighter 47% response rate

Recruitment Survey Results

Current System

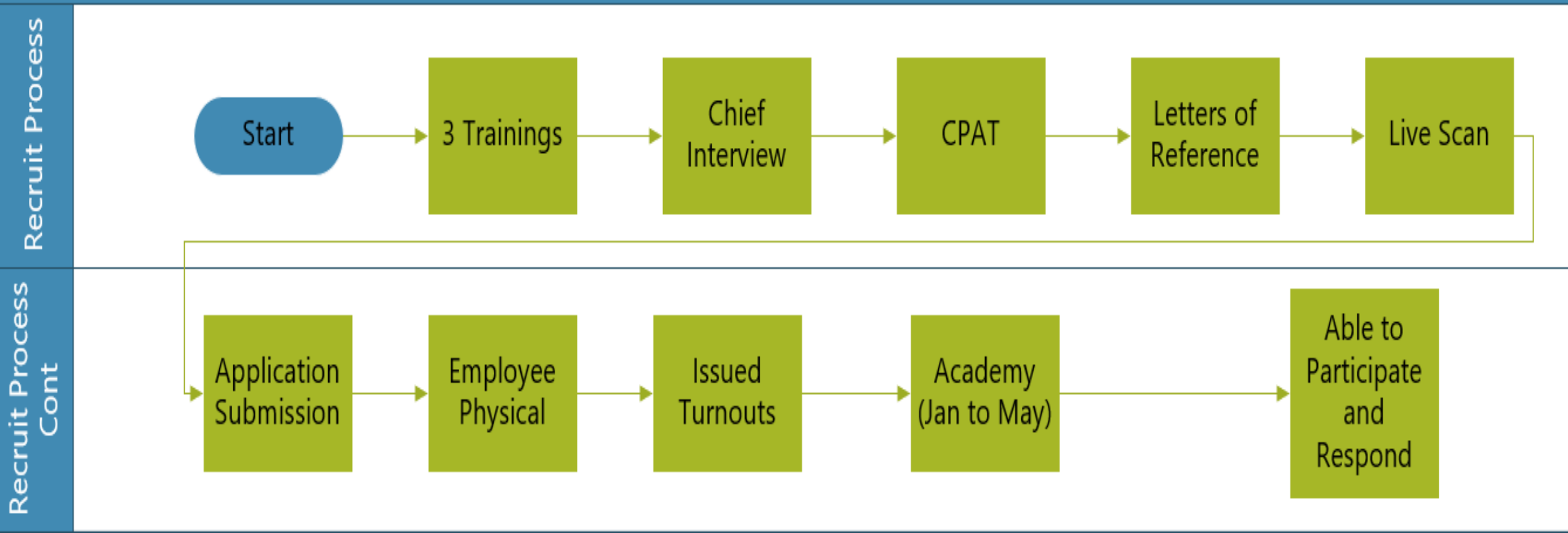
- Companies must do their own recruiting
- Volunteers Companies must manage all paperwork & process for new recruits
- Expand number of EMR's & scope
- Continue FF1 Cert Academy (Career Track Volunteers)
- Initial training is burdensome (Non-Career Volunteers)

Outreach Suggestions

- EMT Schools
- Explorer Program (SCOUTS) young Firefighter Program
- MPC & Cabrillo Fire Tech Students
- Put up Flyers
- Market as steppingstone to career
- Combine with existing County Volunteer Center for onboarding process
- Offer Education Incentives
- Offer referral recruitment bonus to existing Volunteers

Current Onboarding Process

Current Recruit On-Boarding Process (2 months to 14 months)



Survey Responses on Barriers Onboarding Process

Survey results

- Hiring paperwork is outdated
- Recruiting process is lengthy (2-14 months depending on start date)
- Academy (initial training) is very long, overly formal, and schedules are difficult for working adults
- Application process is neither simple nor straightforward
- Quality of applicants – Not typically long-term volunteers
- Onboarding process is confusing and difficult to track
- Each volunteer company has a different process
- Each volunteer company is fully responsible for guiding and tracking new recruits through the process

Strengthen Current Volunteer Program Survey Results

- General Improvements
 - Expand Cross Training with other Volunteer Companies
 - Involve Volunteers in more community events
 - Develop specific tasks for Volunteers such as fuels reduction, defensible space inspections, community education.
 - Allow Volunteers to respond with all state stations on State equipment in County
 - Provide a single online Calendar for all company trainings & events, allow changes by Company Officers
 - Add a Sleeper Program
 - Assign a BC/Captain to be responsible for the County Fire Volunteer system
 - Provide administrative support to the Volunteer companies
 - Update the Volunteer handbook - it is outdated, incomplete, and no longer accurate
- Training Program
 - Many survey responders like the training program for existing firefighters
 - Driver training needs focus and better pathways for Volunteers
 - Online platform is needed for Firefighter specific skills
 - Incentives to get people to show up to trainings
 - Use qualified Volunteers as instructors

Retention of County Fire Volunteers

Survey results

- Mimic successful structures of other county volunteer fire departments
- Focus recruitment on those who will actually stay with County fire versus jumping to CALFIRE as soon as possible.
- Make driver training and path to drive water tenders easier.
- Implement a mentorship program
- Higher stipends for response, stipends for engine checkouts or other duties that are required of Volunteers such as Recruitment
- Add shift stipend
- Recognition for time (years) as a Volunteer
- Build Out-of-County teams with Volunteers
- Provide tangible responsibilities/duties for Volunteers

Industry Best Practice for Volunteer Fire Departments

- California State Fire Fighter Association
- National Volunteer Fire Counsel
- Volunteerfirefighter.org
- Case Example Texas Fire Volunteer Company
- Case Example Tennessee Fire Volunteer Company

Industry Best Practice for Volunteer Fire Departments

- Accept Volunteers Quarterly
- Establish Mentoring Program
- Allow Multiple Volunteer Levels
 - Volunteer Support Staff (for onboarding and clerical help & Station duties)
 - Firefighters
 - EMT's Medical
 - Firefighter EMTs
- On-line Training Program (Both self-paced and live interactive instruction for cognitive training)
- Volunteer Incentive Point System
- Outreach Campaigns

Butte County as a Model

- 22 Fire Stations
 - 16 Volunteer Companies
 - 9 CALFIRE Stations
 - 130 volunteers
- Volunteer Roles
 - Support member (Butte has 10-12 of these folks. Only 4-6 days of training required)
 - Emergency Medical Services Only – Emergency Medical Technician (Ride on Equipment)
 - Engine and operator (Truck drivers who run Water Tenders. Some pump training required)
 - Firefighter with Public Safety First Aid
 - Firefighter with Emergency Medical Technician
- Single point of Contact for Interest in becoming Volunteer
- Academy 3 months and online classes. This is *firefighting basics* not CALFIRE basic.
- Use of Standardized Taskbooks

Recommended Action

Direct the Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Subcommittee to work with County Fire to advise on the implementation of improvements in the following areas:

1. Improve Recruitment through the following:

- Application/Onboarding process
 - Single, standard process for all potential recruits (Volunteer Center?)
 - Update the application on-line fillable form
 - Assign a single contact point (specific person/group) to be responsible for guiding & tracking new recruits through the process
- Redesign Initial training program to allow for multiple tracks
 - Career focused volunteers (FF1 CERT)
 - Non-Career Focused (basic fire fighting, skills sheets, online)
- Quarterly/semiannual onboarding of new recruits
- Develop an outreach campaign strategy

Recommended Action

2. Improve Retention through the following

- Create Volunteer Support Positions
- Create specific duties and responsibilities for Volunteers
- Expand Cross-training of CALFIRE and County Fire Stations and Companies
- Develop a Mentorship program for new volunteer firefighter, responder, officers
- Develop Length of service awards and financial incentives for top responders
- Collaboration with Company Officers on anything that affects the Volunteers from improving training to equipment selection.
- Inclusion with CALFIRE in trainings and responses on state engines.
- Fast track water tender driver trainings.