

Fire Service Summit – Full Report

Introduction:

Over 120 fire service personnel representing departments and organizations from across South Carolina participated in the Fire Service Summit on November 12, 2008. The participants reflected an almost equal representation of volunteer, combined, and career fire departments. The purpose of the summit was to solicit ideas for strategies to address six strategic issues identified by the Fire Service Strategic Planning Committee.

Participants attended three 45-minute issue sessions at which they gave suggestions for strategies on addressing a particular issue. Six staff members from the University of South Carolina's Institute for Public Service and Policy Research facilitated the issue sessions. Different facilitation methods were used by the facilitators, depending on the number of participants at the session and the specific issue being addressed. There was a substantial amount of overlapping discussion and suggestions across several of the issues. Each facilitator summarized the discussions for his or her issue.

Issue 1: Standardization – establishing minimum certification requirements for all fire service personnel and adopting standardized inspection processes and forms

There was consensus among the summit attendees that there should be minimum standards established for fire service personnel. However, there was disagreement on how that should be achieved. About two-thirds of the attendees favor a statewide standard. There also was disagreement on whether the standards should be enacted into state law. Specific suggestions for establishing minimum standards included:

- Follow/adopt NFPA standards
- Follow OSHA
- Establish standards using a standards committee or board
- Have LLR establish the standards

About a third of the attendees favor locally established standards, either at the department or county level. Some in this group would endorse a minimum state standard, with additional requirements set by the department or county. The primary concern of those favoring locally-adopted standards is the time and cost impact of statewide standards on all-volunteer departments. About two-thirds of the attendees favor "across-the-board" standards for all firefighting personnel, regardless of whether they are career or volunteer. Approximately one-third favored differential or multi-tiered standards that would allow all volunteer and mixed departments a better chance of compliance.

Many of the participants had recommendations regarding specific elements that should be addressed by the standards. Those included:

- Background/criminal records check with more stringent requirements
- Physical and health screening
- Minimum education requirements
- Minimum age requirements

There were a number of suggestions for minimum training requirements. This topic was the focus of issues #3 and #4 and specific suggestions for addressing training requirements are summarized in those sections of the report.

A number of concerns were raised regarding the implementation of standards. Those issues included:

- If the standards are law, who will enforce them?
- Where will the funding come from to implement the standards?
- How will all of the required training be delivered? (see Issues #3 and #4)
- Will current employees be “grandfathered”?
- Will there be recertification requirements?

There was general agreement that statewide standards and forms for inspections should be adopted. One of the reasons given by those opposed to statewide standards was that differences in county codes would cause difficulties in adopting standard forms and practices. Frequent comments among those favoring statewide standards included:

- Processes and forms should be established by the State Fire Marshal
- Forms should be tailored to aid in NIFIRS data collection
- Standard codes should be adopted by the Building Codes Council, with more fire service representation on the Council
- Fire inspectors also need to be certified
- Forms should be user-friendly and available electronically

According to participants, other processes and forms needing standardization included:

- Standard citation form
- Standard forms for sprinkler systems
- Standard forms for pre-incident planning

Specific comments, ideas and suggestions provided by the groups -

OSHA

- There should be standards on the certified firefighter (1152 and hazmat)
- OSHA should establish statewide minimum certification standards

NFPA Standards

- Adopt the national standards as set forth in NFPA standards
- Create a regulatory agency to oversee the implementation of those standards
- Minimum level of training: NFPA 1001- FF1 set by the state as recommended standard, not law
- Minimum certification requirements for fire service personnel have been established through the NFPA 1000 series. These have been designed to be minimum national consensus standards. This covers most positions from FF to FO, fire inspectors, fire plan examiners, trainers and PubEd personnel. The value of national consensus standards is just that – standardization. Meeting these minimum standards sets a minimum bar level. I see no need for establishing other minimum standards at any other level- why reinvent the wheel?
- Yes, it is needed for certification, by following NFPA when possible; my issue is being able to get volunteers trained to that level.
- Firefighter I standards should be established as a minimum for all firefighters in this state
- Minimum standards for fire marshals/inspectors based on NFPA 1031, mandated

- There should be minimum certification requirements: follow NFPA guidelines as minimum bar
- Use NFPA as a standard; it should be a standard not a law
- Minimum standards (IFSAC, NFPA) are in place. SC needs to stop tweaking them
- Follow NFPA Standards, no need to reinvent the wheel for training Adopt NFPA standards for FF1
- Chief Level offices- background checks are done now age...(?) are already established 1845
- Require a statewide physical fitness standard for all firefighters- of course a grace period to meet- if not retrained for a position that meets their physical capability
- Minimum national standards of FFI, FFII, OSHA, Haz-mat ops, and medical 1st responder standards for firefighters should be based on current nationally recognized standards.
- OSHA, FFI, FFII Hazmat ops., medical first responder ; high school graduate or GED, Background clearance through SLED
- Follow NFPA Standards for firefighters including medical and fire employment process
- Adopt NFPA standards
- Standards for personnel: standards already exist for personnel, training safety education
- Adopt NFPA standards

Statewide Standards

- Make IFSAC FF II the minimum standard for being certified, enact as a state law
- Minimum standards should be legislated with funding attached
- Standardization of certification requirements for all fire service personnel; yes there should be minimum requirements based on the nationally recognized standards.
- Set training standards for the state (i.e. time limits for assignments and skills done a certain way); not just by individual departments.
- Set state minimum standards based on national standards that are used on a regular basis. This does not mean just use a published standard but a standard that is widely used in the U.S. should be attainable.
- This should be used to set minimums for firefighters, officials, and chiefs, and should be law.
- Statewide standards for firefighters should be set through the fire chief (i.e. levels of training, definition for each level, etc).
- State credentialing with state issued ID for all levels
- Adopt a standard for firefighters similar to law enforcement/EMS by utilizing current fire school advisory committee to recommend legislation
- Best practices
- All firefighters should meet the same certification throughout the state. State legislation, with recommendations from a fire service committee, should be set and discipline (enforce) these standards. No exceptions
- Establish state certification for all specialty areas to include minimum standards – set by peer review
- Statewide standards would be better for firefighters
- We do need standards but not laws
- I believe we need to have a standard statewide.

Minimum Training Levels

- Standardized rapid intervention crew training to all firefighters
- Allow mutual aid department to assist dept. to meet law with rescue requirement and function similarly with another departments resources
- Need for a minimum level of training, should be at least firefighter I to serve in fire service regardless of being a volunteer or career firefighter
- We are all doing the same job; we should all be trained to the same level
- There should be a standardized state training requirement certification issued by the SC Fire Academy. State law that gives the fire chief authority to certify needs to be abolished. IFSAC certification is one great feather in the cap, but really doesn't do anything for SC. The IFSAC certification tests have become increasingly difficult to pass. It discourages people. Standardized certification issued by SC Fire Academy should be used. Exactly what delivery process is the next step/question?
- Standards should be agreed on by a committee of paid, volunteer and combination fire department representatives and presented to the state legislature.
- South Carolina must set forth a minimum standard across the board for firefighters so all firefighters have a set standard no matter where they go.
- The standard needs to be the same for volunteer and career, but so that the volunteers are not pushed to the wayside
- There also needs to be some type of incentive for the volunteer and employer for allowing them to get the training needed.
- Training certification for all levels of firefighters and officers.
- Recertification for firefighters should be established using C.E.U's, as determined by the state.
- Standardization should be the same for all career, vol., and combination departments.
- There should be minimum standards for firefighters in the state of SC. I believe that SC LLR should/must regulate all professions, we must have background checks, drug screens, and certification for all involved. We should begin with the associate degree as the minimum educational requirement for career firefighters.

Local Standards

- Standardization should not be law. Each chief should set the standard for their department.
- There is no need for standardization of forms. Basic equipment forms are already standardized by ISO
- I don't think that it is up to the state to tell the departments what each department should have as training certification. Some departments in the state may have different needs from others
- Where is funding coming from?
- When you say a law, who is to answer when one does not follow the law? Fire Chief, Training Officer, etc.?
- Standards should be set by individual departments to meet their needs. They should not be mandated by law.
- Standardized forms for reporting processes are a good thing
- Depends on the area of the state as there are different needs in different areas of the state.
- There should be standards. Let fire departments in the state and the fire academy decide this in a group effort.
- Standards for personnel should be established by the chief of the department
- Establish minimum firefighter standards at the national level
- Laws usually incur some penalty for non-compliance.

- If a jurisdiction's elected leaders choose not to comply the fire chief would be liable. No laws!
- We need consensus standards set by the fire chief
- We do not need new laws!

Specific Certification Requirements

- 18 years old
- 1152 basic firefighter
- Registration and credentialing are good ideas, NCIC background checks instead of SLED check.
- Require this before being placed on a roster or enrolling in classes
- State issued picture IDs
- Establish a requirement list which will support firefighter safety and effectiveness. This should be a list of required training benchmarks
- Certification requirements to include a physical fitness test on an annual basis for current firefighters
- Establish minimum requirements for the fire service to be a member:
 - Be at least 18 years of age
 - Not have been convicted of a felony in any jurisdiction in last 10 years
 - Be fingerprinted
 - Certify departments
 - Use NFPA standards as guides
 - Council members by government (state) 11 max members
 - 6- by Gov
 - 2- by Lt. Gov.
 - 1- state fire marshal
 - 1- by LLR/OSHA
 - 1- by DHEC
 - Set minimum required to be on council
- 16 years old → FFI
- 17 years old → FFII
- 18 years old → EVDT
- Require: FBI background check
- Age requirement, criminal background check, standards for fully paid fighters
- Standards for firefighter health screening and education
- Minimum firefighter qualifications should be 18 years old and graduate from SCFA's 1152 course, 100 hours max. SLED background check for all firefighters and fire departments employees
- Min. age requirement
- Fitness levels determined by approval programs
- Criminal history/clean driving record
- Min. education requirement (progressive)
- Min. time in requirement for promotion
- Must have a criminal background check done through state but extended to federal
- Must have a basic level of training prior to being allowed to participate in firefighting
- Pre-employment/ pre-acceptance: physicals followed by annual physical as well as CPAT or JRPAT, background check, and a clear criminal history. Driving record with no more than 4 points lost. No DWI less than 10 years. Minimum high school/GED and college requirements for officers.

- Must start at age 15 to 16, non life threatening to get them hooked
- Must have basic fire through Firefighter 1 in 1st 3 years
- Vol. environment: time for experience before FFII
- Firefighters with 25 years experience or over age 45 should not have to go back for training/re-certification but have yearly refresher training.
- Solves problems recruit school trained that have not pump fire scene or feel for what goes on
- Background checks
- Physical abilities- yearly physical training levels
- Should cover: age, training, education, background checks
- No criminal history- convictions
- Minimum educational expectations
- Minimum training/ skills expectations
- Minimum age
- Minimum physical fitness expectations
- Must take full time US
- Part time (paid) (vol.)
- Full FBI background check
- Education
- Health screening
- Funding
- Min. age of 18
- College degree (2 years)
- Minimum education
- Criminal background check
- Age
- Driving record
- Possible interview process
- Entry test- see what levels students are
- Yearly evaluations for all
- Minimum standards
- 1152 fundamental of interior structural firefighting + Haz-mat ops.
- Min age 18
- Background to include out of state offenses
- Mandate (standards) by (implementing) sanctions
- If your agency does not comply you cannot be in the SC Firefighter's Association
- Look into restriction of 1% funds for non-compliant agencies
- Do not let legislature pass a law, it will not be good for the fire service
- Physical and drug testing
- Pre-employment vol. required
- Ability/agility required
- Minimum age of 18 years old with a clear SLED background check with clean health screening
- No criminal records, do a SLED/background check
- Has not been in the same fire dept. and out within the same year
- Keep out the attitudes
- Have to participate in meetings, trainings, and # of calls
- Teach NFPA standards; promote and put them into play

- Minimum age for “explorer” “junior” and other “apprentice” type programs→ these feed the fire service
- Free up these persons through legislation, etc., to assist at scene after training
- Recognized this training

Differential Standards

- Can not make it a law
- Who’s going to monitor this?
- Remember SC is 80% volunteer and some departments can’t put gas in trucks to run calls. So if they have to spend more for class they couldn’t afford it.
- I think it would push some of the good volunteers away
- Standardization is a good thing across the board
- Minimum criteria for firefighters should be established on a statewide basis, however foremost the minimum criteria must take into account limited time of volunteers when achieving the minimum. The criteria must be result oriented rather than exclusionary based on 1 or 2 skills
- Minimum standards may need to drop a level lower than the IFSAC testing. This may enable a 2 tier system while enabling necessary skilled training to perform at what level the community desires of its volunteers. as opposed to career levels
- Can not make it law
- Remember we are 80% volunteer- we can not be to stringent on them
- Law enforcement has a requirement for full time (firefighters) and another that is less stringent for reserve/ part-time/ volunteers.
- Consider allowing certification criteria to be “signed off” by chief- much like the “VIP” we currently have.
- Standardization without a way to monitor/ control it will not work- who would do this?
- Standardized “baseline” and paths to follow with regards to jurisdictional boundaries, i.e. some departments are heavy in Haz-mat; others are not
- Different focus for volunteers is needed in their communities. Create dual education tracks. One track provides minimally needed knowledge and skills. Teach in 40hours. Other track follows NFPA requirements
- Standards are needed; we must remember differences between volunteer and career
 - Time
 - Funds
 - Availability of classes
- Too stringent of standards may limit departments that are volunteer and their ability recruit new people
- Training requirements need to be fitted to the volunteer firefighter
 - Time to give training is limited
 - Must work more than one job
 - Where will funds come from?

Reciprocity

- We need a better mechanism to recognize out-of-state or previous experience etc. I think this creates a road block to standardization of training
- It needs to also be user friendly for the volunteers without compromising standards

- There should be a minimum standard all firefighters meet- but there needs to be a better way to make this happen- reciprocity
- There needs to be a fair and reasonable way to make this happen for all entities career, volunteer, or combination.

Needs Assessment

- Conduct a needs assessment of all FD's (not association executive committees) to get the true picture of what the FD's want for minimum standard
- Survey departments and find which skills new firefighters just out of 1152 are lacking; add additional teaching hours in these areas

Training Delivery

- Independent study→ web based modules for all training that does not have a practical skills test
- Training standards should be:
 - Attainable
 - Equal
 - Should have a delivery system that is user friendly, technologically enhanced, and using technology to our benefit
- A better way of recognizing training from other counties or departments
- Establishing a basic requirement for all SC firefighters to include minimum requirement of CEU's per year for training. Possibly looking at college courses to supplement CEU's for training
- Set a course of standard and through training across the state. Do this by making classes more available around the state
- We need to figure new and inventive ways to bring the training to volunteers so they can meet the same standards as career- "fire does not care whether they are career or volunteer"
- In order to get standardization of certification you must change or remove the clause that authorizes the fire chief to deputize anyone to be a firefighter or officer, and driver
- Firefighter certifications should require continuing education hours to maintain certification beyond 5 years
- The SCFA must take radical steps to modulate certification courses and make it easier for volunteers departments to certify in-house through SCFA instructors

Recertification

- Needs standards
- Firefighter certification and fire chief recertification
- Recertification of basic firefighter competencies
- Should be required for structural firefighting, pump operator, haz-mat tech, etc.
- Recertification requirements, continuing ed., in-house training used to recertify
- Time and cost factors for sending students to training classes
- CEU credits to keep certification current. To maintain and regulate by LLR "listed performance requirements signed off by the chief and sent to LLR to document recertification requirements."
- Have departments require firefighters to do skills and tests monthly and turn in results into an organization to keep files on for a minimum of 10 years. This could be done electronically for cost
- Don't leave out standards for support personnel
- There is no data to support a direct correlation between firefighter safety and annual recertification, why recertify?
- Recertification should be up to each fire chief

Grandfathering

- 1st of all we don't need a law
- Needs grandfathering in this standard of old 11-31 and 11-52, let each department that can go above this
- Grandfather must be established

Standard Board

- A board should be established to recommend or set minimum standards after public comment
- Minimum standards should be based on existing national standards. NIMS, locally after considerable study and public input
- A recurring review must be established to ensure they are kept current
- Standard board needs to be developed

Issue 2: Fire Service Cohesion – achieving agreement on a legislative agenda for the fire service and speaking with one voice to the legislature and the public

Each of the three groups agreed that this is an important issue and that speaking with one voice is critical to fire service progress and success. It was suggested by some that, while this is an important goal, there may not be common ground on all issues across all stakeholder groups.

While there was agreement that there needs to be cohesion and one voice, there did not appear to be consensus about which group should take the lead. Some felt that it should logically be the SC Firefighters' Association since everyone belongs to that group. In addition, the SCFA has a lobbyist and the means to communicate across all other groups via its Website.

On the other hand, some felt that the SC Association of Fire Chiefs should take the lead since chiefs are ultimately responsible and accountable. Some were concerned, however, that not all chiefs will circulate information. Some might filter it given their own policy preferences.

It was noted that one barrier to achieving cohesion was the fact that not all firefighters attend meetings or read material that is provided. Further, not all firefighters have access to e-mail or Websites. There is no single best way to communicate with the more than 17,000 firefighters in the state.

From the conversation it did seem clear that there are already mechanisms in place to address this issue and to improve communications and thus move toward more cohesion, at least on some issues.

Strategies specifically mentioned that using existing structures were:

- Use the Joint Council to coordinate communications and the message
- Require the lobbyist hired by the SCFA to be more proactive in getting input from all associations
- Schedule an annual meeting of all firefighters to begin developing a legislative agenda for the upcoming year
- Using existing association Websites and links between the Websites to foster communication
- Consider using a newsletter (although this is costly)
- Consider use of "blast e-mail" (although not all firemen have access to e-mail)

It was clear that not everyone in the groups seemed to be aware that there was a lobbyist on board or that the Joint Council had been reactivated. In addition, there seemed to be a lack of understanding about the strategic planning process (design and involvement). This, of course, is a reflection of the general lack of communication among the stakeholders and the challenge of communicating across the entire "fire service."

Specific comments, ideas and suggestions provided by the groups -

First, decide who and what the "one voice" is

- Need one central focal point to make all contact with the legislature
- The "mishmash" of initials and acronyms all speaking independently has not been successful. Independent groups should coordinate with a focal point to address legislative issues.
- Need to create allies, not adversaries (front end communications vs. back door tactics)
- Acceptance that all departments are not paid. Provisions need to be made for volunteer and combination departments.
- Make all departments in South Carolina "combination departments." Do away with "all volunteer" and "all career" designations.

Address the need to improve communications

- How do we get the word out to 17,000 firefighters? What percentage do we reach now?
- Better communications among the various associations
- Fire/Legislative newsletter
- Create a common communication tool for all associations and stakeholders
- Better communications
- All fire service organizations have to hear the same message so we are one
- Come to the understanding that there is more than one opinion in the state
- Information needs to be delivered to everyone in all associations
- Open communications
- Better communications
- Reach out to each fire department
- Communicate through all associations
- Communicate to all stakeholders prior to moving forward on an issue
- Encourage participation from all members
- Better system of information sharing and feedback. Maybe computerized polling or questionnaires
- Communicate to the fire service, via the associations, the need and how to deliver the message to our state representatives
- Educate the fire service before you ask for support or communication to the public or legislature
- Focus fire service groups to combine agendas so they speak with one voice
- Networking
- Meet and agree on what we are asking for
- Develop research or utilize research methodologies
- Prioritize goals and objectives (by Joint Council and State Fire Marshall)
- Webcast meetings
- Use technology – Websites
- Constant communications

- Important issues must be communicated
- Troubleshoot quickly when we hear grumbling
- Tell it to ourselves before we try to tell the legislature
- Public information should be coordinated for a single message
- Standards that all can live with...commitment from all involved
- Education – explain the legislative issues – find the common ground
- More education for the public – public service announcements
- Open communications with the various associations through qualified leadership
- Issues must be distributed in a timely manner, not at the last minute
- Better communications of legislative concerns from the top down to all members of the various organizations (make all members aware of legislative issues)
- Better publication of issues we all face collectively
- Use “blast e-mail” communications with all fire service members
- Have Fire Fighters Association legislative expert visit with and communicate with other associations’ executive committees

Use the Joint Council to foster cohesion and communications

- Joint council with all the players at the table
- Some type of joint council – one person speaking for each group
- Have a single legislative agenda developed by a committee made up of all stakeholders
- Any issue that will be brought forward must have all politics removed, so that it is beneficial for the public as well as the fire service. Politics = Kingdoms
- Voices have to speak for the fire service as a whole; no “own agendas” at the state level
- Issues cannot require one central controlling entity (except legislature)
- Come together under the SC Association of Fire Chiefs
- We need one organization as the “lead” group and filter all communications through it
- One fire organization with branches, i.e., an umbrella
- Legislative committee composed of members of each association
- Designate one person to speak for the fire service so the issue doesn’t get convoluted
- Support, report, moderate, all legislative activities together through the joint committee of all associations
- Have one fire service association based on the IAFC model and place the special interest groups in sections
- Annual legislative planning session, invite all parties
- Form a committee to reach out with the Association of Fire Chiefs
- Unite with the Association of Fire Chiefs
- Regional representation instead of departmental
- One voice from a special group or body with representatives from the different state fire groups, i.e., the Academy – EM Office – SPD – Forestry
- Re-establish Joint Council of Fire Service Associations
- Appointed group from all associations
- Consolidate associations’ board – representative from each board meets with legislators
- Joint council from each association can speak with one voice
- Utilize the fire service joint council
- Legislative committee from each association meets to come up with the agenda
- Revitalize the joint council for the state to speak as a common voice to the legislature

- Representation from each association or group to meet as a board or panel to deliver the agreed upon message
- Establish regularly scheduled meetings (quarterly) of a joint fire service council that includes representatives of the various associations

Strategic Planning Process as a strategy

- Understanding the whole process
- Establish a strategic planning process
- Assign executive committee to design comprehensive ideas to be presented at county chief's organizations
- Soliciting input from all fire departments, associations, and affiliated agencies to develop state-wide strategic plans
- Have each association compose a list of priority issues
- Set priorities
- Staying focused on specific issues
- Conduct a needs assessment of all of the fire departments to document the real issues facing departments. Do an initial assessment and then annual assessments to track changes and or improvements.
- Seek consensus among all associations to achieve common goals
- Hashing out various agendas to see common ground
- Involve town manager, county administrator, commission chairmen, etc. up front before decisions are made
- Involvement at local level with politicians
- Include legislators in association meetings
- Invite out politicians (state senators and representatives) to our (read: all fire service organizations) meetings
- More out-reach from state associations to individual fire departments
- Transmit issues in a timely manner to all classes of departments
- Communication from the associations on their issues...makes dealing with local representatives easier
- All associations should be informed of meetings prior to the day before
- All information passed on to association board members should be passed on to members
- Better communication through closer associations of fire groups
- Educate firemen about the pros and cons of solutions (sprinklers for example)
- Address issues and prioritize
- One voice – equal representation on the committee (the strategic planning committee)
- Stop duplicating efforts and/or committees

Find ways to work together

- Education on issues for different agencies
- Promote involvement
- Arrange meetings so that major fire service organizations meet one day together each quarter to become one
- Solidarity
- With one voice all fire services can be heard
- All fire services working together for the common good of all citizens of the state

- Need common goals
- Involve all chiefs so that they are a part of the decision making process during development of legislative issues

Maximize the use of the Lobbyist

- Hire a lobbyist to work the state house
- Leadership – choose one voice to lead all fire service organizations to the legislature and the public
- Legislative issues funneled into one channel – for example, Firefighters’ Association has a lobbyist so information should go through them
- Funnel all legislative-related issues through a single legislative contact – the Firefighters’ Association lobbyist
- Lobbyist is the legislative agent
- Common legislative agent to represent all
- Have a single lobbyist to represent all organizations
- Legislative agent
- Current fire service lobbyist must be accountable to find consensus on all legislative issues between existing fire service associations
- Work closely with the lobbyist and presidents of each association – they must speak collectively as the “voice”
- Lobbyist for the fire service may include a lobbyist from each association
- Use associations to assign lobby personnel to represent fire departments
- Give equal weight to all sectors of fire service (career, volunteer, rural, metro, etc.)
- Ensure fair representation for all types of departments and associations

Other ideas

- Make the Fire Academy more accountable to the Fire Service Training Council
- Combine fire service organizations into one
- Leadership – we need leadership from the top on a statewide level. The State Fire Marshall should report directly to the Governor, not LLR.
- Increase public awareness utilizing a PR campaign with cooperation of state associations

Issue 3: Officer Training – establishing minimum training standards for supervisory personnel and ensuring the maximum utilization of Fire Academy training resources

A vast majority of the participants in each of the three groups favor or support having minimum training standards for all officers (volunteer and paid) and stated that these standards should be based on the knowledge, skills and abilities needed for these positions. Many of the participants indicated that the training standards should be modeled on national standards, such as NFPA. The fire service must consider the needs and interests of the volunteer firefighters and the paid firefighters when developing these training standards.

A common theme in all of the groups was that the infrastructure must be in place for this to be successful. Some of the most frequently shared ideas were:

- A board must be created to determine the minimum training standards for each position
- Training standards for officers must be mandated and should be required for promotional opportunities
- Technical colleges must be used to offer the training classes regionally
- Distance learning must be incorporated
- Re-certification must be included

Several of the participants stressed the importance of including all officer ranks in the training standards. They also believe formal education and experience should be considered in meeting the standards. Several of the participants indicated the need to include leadership and management courses for each of the officer positions. Oftentimes, volunteer and paid firefighters are promoted early in their tenure without regard to supervisory capabilities. Several participants suggested a mentoring or shadowing program for officers would also be beneficial. The participants believe the combination of these two would help officers be more successful.

The discussion focused around two major themes; the need for minimum training standards and appropriate and effective mechanisms to deliver the training necessary to meet the standards. The feedback related to these themes is detailed below.

Specific comments, ideas and suggestions provided by the groups -

Consider Course Delivery

- Diversify delivery of courses
- Provide training that can be broken into blocks to accommodate the large number of volunteers in the state; add on-line courses
- SCFA must develop a distance learning program to facilitate the established standards
- Web-based and satellite (ETV) offerings
- Have classes on-line
- Classes on internet and ETV
- Fire Academy should offer distance learning of some classes via internet
- On-line training
- Flexible training hours
- Fire Academy should increase the number of instructors (with command experience) able to teach the courses
- Fire Academy courses delivered in the field and in Columbia
- Have more than one southeastern school
- Use the regional technical colleges for Fire Academy training programs and certifications
- Provide training courses through local technical schools instead of complete reliance on SCFA campus
- The training classes must be brought into the field in a manner that works with the volunteers' schedules
- Offer weekend courses and on-line courses
- Develop new teaching strategies
- Research new methodologies for training
- Continue to improve incident management training (i.e., the new virtual reality class, case reviews, tabletops, etc.)

- Outsource educational criteria
- Fire Academy should revamp officer training to include CEUs and also offer certifications for national speakers (real life experience versus only text book)
- Outsource
- Instructors who have real life experiences (not only those who work for the Fire Academy) are who are needed to teach classes
- Academy must get on board with facilitating officer training to attract more participation from volunteer, combination, and career departments
- Create a pool of credentialed trainers to assist with coordinating the training in each region
- Lower the minimum needed before an officer or leadership class cancels – need more instructors
- Combine some courses with shorter hours, use of props
- Reduce minimum class sign-up standards
- All officer training should be offered in all areas of the state, not just at the Fire Academy in Columbia
- More utilization of higher education systems for Officer training– USC, Clemson, Technical Schools
- Fire officer training should be done through a combination of on-line courses, college courses and classroom training

Benchmark – Learn From Other Organizations

- Look at other sources that have supervisory training and see what does work and what doesn't. The pool of personnel may not be there for hard lining.
- Benchmark with other departments
- Neighboring ideas
- Benchmark officer training program against other established organizations
- State standardization that could possibly mirror national standards (volunteer versus paid)
- NFA – Fire Officer 1041
- NFPA – 1021
- Use standards from OSHA, Council of Government, NFPA as guides
- Training to minimum basic NFPA 1021 requirements. Using Officer I through Officer IV programs.
- Fire officer standards have been established by NFPA. Follow the recommended national professional qualifications
- Based on national standards
- Meet the requirements defined in NFPA STD 1021 Fire Officer qualifications by assigning all classes necessary as prerequisites for taking Fire Officer I IFSAC courses
- Minimum standards should be set to a national standard for each officer position
- Follow national consensus standards for officers in classes designed by the Fire Academy
- Utilize IFSAC standards
- Change Academy programs to meet the needs/competency requirements of officers – follow NFPA officer standards
- Follow NFA's professional development model
- OSHA should adopt minimum standards by accepting established national consensus standards
- Meet NFPA standards

Curriculum for Training Standards

- More management/leadership classes
- They should have more training to help them be leaders, not just firefighters
- Development program for the well-rounded officer
- Actual leadership training taught by competent, experienced fire officers
- Utilize ICMA's management course – Managing the Fire Service
- Supervisory training without fire
- People management course
- Develop courses on coaching and sound tactical decision-making
- Supervisory classes that are not fire-related
- Public speaking and instructor training
- Short class on how to draft a budget and deal with finances
- HazMat Ops; Rescue Ops; Strategy and Tactics
- Management issues specific to fire service (budget, personnel, etc.)
- Require training on OSHA regulations, risk assessment, public liability and harassment
- More emphasis on what officers are held legally liable for
- Hands-on training for fire ground operations and policy writing
- Classes that will better train fire officers for fire ground operations, not how to conduct business meetings as in Leadership I
- Fire ground simulations courses
- The Fire Academy needs to revisit their offerings in officer training, leadership, management, risk management, etc.
- Stop the redundancy in officer classes

Implementation

- A small group of diverse fire service leaders make the final decision based on input from all areas of the SC Fire Service
- Develop a SC Fire Service Council to establish standards for minimum officer level training. The Council should be comprised of Fire Academy faculty, Fire Service Association members, and members at-large.
- Mandate levels of training through legislation
- Mandated or legislative requirements will meet significant resistance from volunteer officers
- Have a long-term goal for implementation
- Draft legislation with attached funding to ensure minimums are followed
- Timetables for accomplishing standards (volunteer versus career)
- Phase in training over a reasonable period of time – set realistic goals for implementation
- Implement it quickly! We are behind other states that are already years in front of us.
- Set initiation date – from that date forward anyone with an officer designation will meet minimum standards for his/her specific officer level
- Limited grandfathering for chief officers
- Over a three-year period existing officers must comply with set minimum officer standards for each level

Education and Experience Should Be Considered

- Training + education + years of experience = good officers
- Providing a course of study for the candidate to include classroom and simulation coupled with actual experience
- Minimum years of service requirements should be considered
- An emphasis should be placed on both training and education. State could offer more management educational opportunities through state supported schools and market those to the state fire service.
- Training does not necessarily mean education. We need to move toward educational requirements for promotion in and through the ranks.
- Officer training should include education along with training
- Promote higher education among officers (i.e., Associate degrees for company officers, Bachelor degrees for higher ranking officers)
- Promote higher education requirements for officer ranks. Incorporate degree requirements into job descriptions. Allow SCFA training to easily transfer to college credits.
- Consider fire service courses at local technical schools (certificates or degrees)

Training Standards Must Apply to All Levels of Officers

- Officer training standard for all
- Standard training should be required for all officers at each level
- Credential all fire officers
- Standard criteria for each officer level
- Standards for each level of officer, elected and appointed
- There should be a state minimum (standard) of training for every line officer position in your department
- Minimum requirements at each level before and at officer level (pre-requisite)
- Fire Service must set forth an agreement that officers meet the standard or benchmark to serve in that particular officer level
- Certificate driven mentality
- Require a minimum of Fire Officer I for any person classified by an agency as a “fire officer”; define the term “fire officer”
- South Carolina should mandate minimum certification requirements for Fire Chiefs

Minimum State Requirements – Some Discretion at Local Level

- Establish a minimum recommendation for each level of officer
- Have baseline standards for each position and let the chiefs determine mitigation and other tactics that may vary from department to department
- Fire Chief establishes minimum training standards for supervisory personnel
- Let each department or county set the standards, not a state standard
- Let the department come up with baseline
- Ability to fine tune the standards to suit the needs of your individual department

Consider the Diverse Needs and Interests of Volunteer and Career Firefighters

- Must be aware of the diversity of the fire service (volunteer and career)
- Consider the demographics (i.e., volunteer, paid, large department, small department, service areas)
- Has to be a realistic standard that the small rural departments can achieve

- We are 80% volunteer; remember that when making a standard
- Make standards where they can be achieved by volunteer and career personnel
- Different standards should apply to rural versus urban departments and volunteer versus career departments
- Must be achievable for all firefighters and be acceptable state-wide

Training Standards Must Be Based on Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Needed for Each Level

- Must be based on job analysis
- Identify critical skills and knowledge an individual must have to safely perform as an officer
- Set minimum promotion standards for each officer level that are competency based
- Create position descriptions for supervisors; what they are responsible for accomplishing in the different ranks

Training Standards Should Be Linked To Career Paths

- Develop career path based upon description
- Develop a career path for fire service personnel to accomplish the competencies needed for fire officers
- Establish a chain of progression for each rank that must be obtained before you are eligible for that position (state-wide)
- Develop training paths for line officers and up

Develop a Mentoring Program for Officers

- Require a more defined amount of “acting” in the position with a qualified, competent person (of a higher rank) riding and providing feedback
- Mentoring program for officers
- Providing a mentor
- Shadow program

Recertification

- Recertification must be required for all officers
- Certification should be required for all current officers; recertification should be required every so many years to keep up the skills
- Continuing education
- CEUs for supervisors (2 or 4 hour blocks)

Other Suggestions

- Training made available with no stipulation
- Create an officer academy where a process is in place to assist with honing knowledge, skills and abilities in a line setting
- To enter as an officer, a firefighter should be trained to at least a Firefighter II standard
- SCFA should offer Fire Officer I, II, III and IV routinely (IFSAC or Pro-Board)
- Make classes relevant and/or adequate to the need of the entry level officer to executive officer
- Provide monetary incentives for higher education levels (tax relief, LOSAP's)
- SCFA sponsored and endorsed officer candidate schools
- Present the benefits of standard training to give a positive attitude
- More classes for officers

- Make classes easier
- Support for officer training at the department level
- Officer training at the department level
- Provide sanctions such as forfeit of 1% funds. Sanctions of suspension in certain organizations. Determine which entity will enforce.
- Establish a continuing education system for fire officers
- Make in-house training and SCFA training more compatible
- State training standards will take some pressure off officers
- Prepare personnel for positions before they are put there
- Develop more training for officers

Issue 4: Firefighter Training – establishing minimum training standards for firefighters and ensuring the maximum utilization of Fire Academy training resources

There was a strong consensus among the participants that minimum training standards are needed. This being said, there was a fairly lively discussion about which standards should be adopted. There was some sentiment for “grand-fathering in” individuals with significant firefighting experience and years of service. The most frequently cited options were:

- NFPA 1001 and 1002
- OSHA
- Completion of 1152, 1153, and 1154

Another question addressed was who should determine the standard/s and who should enforce the standard. Although it was understood that, at the departmental level, it is the chief’s responsibility to ensure that the standards are met there was consensus that there needed to be an entity with statewide authority. The options identified were:

- A legislatively created “fire standards council” with representation from identified groups and with both gubernatorial and legislative appointments
- State OSHA
- South Carolina Fire Services Council

There was a very strong consensus that the establishment of meaningful minimum training standards without the adequate infrastructure (funding, sufficient instructors, diverse and trainee “friendly” delivery mechanisms) would be doomed to failure. The particular needs and challenges of providing training for volunteers, particularly in the rural areas, were broadly recognized. This being said, the participants provided a number of ideas and options related to delivery mechanisms.

Specific comments, ideas and suggestions provided by the groups -

Delivery Mechanisms:

- In-house training using both Academy and local instructors
- Increase the number of instructors
- Increase the minimum size of Academy classes to reduce the number of classes cancelled
- Secure a funding source to support enhanced training
- Provide free training

- Link with high schools to do fire service career development in the Pathways to Success effort
- Increase the number of courses offered on a regional basis
- Use technology to deliver training (as appropriate), including
- On-line course
- Videos
- Video conferencing at sites around the state
- ETV
- Developed written materials that can be used for self-paced training
- Provide regional testing options monitored by Academy regional coordinators
- Break up the curriculum into modules to facilitate completion of training and testing of identified components of the overall curriculum
- Deliver the practical, skills based components on an on-site basis
- Increase the number of retest opportunities
- Utilize the resources of the technical colleges

Issue 5: Firefighter Recruitment/Retention – achieving qualified applicant pool for fire service openings in South Carolina and reducing turnover of current personnel

There was general agreement that the fire service has to do a better job attracting young people to the profession. Several of the suggestions collected from participants addressed being active in high schools through junior or explorer programs. Another theme that emerged was the need for better pay and benefits. The need for more accessible training, especially for volunteers, also was suggested.

Many of the suggestions for improving retention in the fire service were similar to the recruitment strategies – more accessible training and better pay and benefits. Other suggestion themes from participants were the need to establish career ladders and more recognition for good performance.

Specific comments, ideas and suggestions provided by the groups -

Recruitment

- Start in High Schools
- Advertise
- Explorer programs-scouting
- Talk to high schools
- Have an active junior firefighter program
- High School explorer program
- Pay for higher education
- Benefits
- Pay
- Advertising for opportunities in being a firefighter (centralized statewide/nationally)
- Retirement benefits
- State and federal tax break for volunteers
- Partnerships with local technical colleges for training and education in community
- Job fairs
- A family affair
- Word of mouth

- In house testing program, i.e. Physical fitness
- Create handout materials
- Guidelines on recognizing highly motivated individuals
- Make training programs more conducive to volunteer's lifestyle
- Better training
- Written entrance exam
- Increase minority candidates
- Personality profile
- Explore possible scouts
- High schools
- Public education
- Incentives
- Sell ourselves
- Raise bar/ quality
- Advertisements
- Compensation
- Training availability-before affiliation with a department.
- Tech schools
- Age appropriate
- High School shadow programs
- Community service workers
- Military discharge
- Find the "good ones"
- Hire "person" not "qualifications"
- Job Fairs
- Recruit for Diversity
- Education scholarships
- Get them while they are young
- Raise the standards, then recruit
- Use new technology to recruit
- Pride in service
- Sell the fire service
- Benefits
- Build relationships/word of mouth
- Incentives
- Workers comp
- Reinforce positive images
- Use current personnel as source
- Use volunteers/non-fire fighters

Retention

- Better Benefits
- Understand volunteers/flexibility
- Local Training?
- Assist with administration
- Match skills with needs
- Alternatives for course delivery

- Use abilities/keep involved
- Involve families with department
- Training/more active learning
- Recognize people
- Say “thank you”
- Keep occupied while awaiting training
- Mentoring Programs
- Tuition reimbursement
- Take ownership for service
- Take advantage of individual interests
- Tax incentives
- Longevity rewards
- Career Path
- “Buy-in” to mission
- Listen
- Benefits
- Pay
- Job security
- Stop “trading” with their depts.
- Keep them interested
- Medical/healthcare options
- Promotion
- Tax incentives
- Expose to responsibility for the new firefighter to understand if it is something they are interested in
- Expose to other aspects/skills of firefighters
- Self-satisfaction
- Pride
- Establish career paths for each level of fire service
- Fund and support higher education for those who seek executive positions
- Employer support for volunteer firefighters
- Management classes on keeping personnel healthy, safe, creating good work environment
- Federal tax credits
- Better training/training standards
- Career ladder for both career and volunteer
- Volunteer incentive money
- Issue traditional style helmet for those that obtain minimum requirements for entry
- Make retirement better/retirement benefits
- Reduce turnover
- Quality training
 - Keep involved
 - Additional benefits/incentives
 - Set standardized pay scales
 - Fair treatment
 - Tangible thank you and achievement awards

Issue #6: Public Education/Prevention – increasing the opportunities to educate the public about fire safety and influencing the design of buildings to prevent fire occurrence

There was consensus among the participants in the three groups that it is important to educate the public about fire safety and place a greater emphasis on fire prevention. Many of the participants' strategies suggested working collaboratively with other groups to increase prevention knowledge, disseminate safety information, and influence structural designs.

During the sessions, it was apparent that fire safety education is an important issue to the group. Several strategies addressing this issue were discussed. Some of the ideas cited include:

- Educating students at all grade levels
- Working with the general public including civic groups, churches, senior citizen groups, fraternities and sororities, and businesses to deliver fire safety information
- Utilizing the public service announcements and other media to communicate fire safety information
- Providing regional fire and life safety representatives to aid local departments in their education initiatives

In every session it was mentioned that the culture of South Carolina's fire service must change in order to promote prevention and education. Some participants believe that the current approach focuses more on fire suppression and not prevention. In order to change the current mindset, it was suggested that a top down approach be utilized, beginning with the leadership and working down the ranks to individual firefighters.

Specific comments, ideas and suggestions provided by the groups -

Education

Schools

- Provide more prevention education at the grade school level. Go into the school. Fire safety day changes in summer time. Offer summer fire education classes
- Offer public education courses through vocational schools and fire academy
- Provide education in schools as required subject matter such as history. This can be done through state mandates
- Focus on K-6, every kid, every classroom a standard fire prevention message
- Teach every engineering student a fire/life safety course by a certified instructor
- Firefighters must have the ability to educate students in all levels of education. Find common ground to relate with students. Reach all three levels
- Mandate public education programs in schools and fire departments. This can be through legislation
- Statewide Freddie Program continuation – require all school systems to adopt. This can be done by mandating laws.
- Statewide, proactive leadership for all public education from state level

General Public Education

- Perform public open house at fire station and at common areas for the public
- Target civic groups and other community service organizations (i.e. fraternities, sororities, etc.)
- Be aggressive in approaching senior citizen facilities
- Work with businesses to educate employees of fire hazards in your area
- Educate the public on home sprinkler systems (NFPA 13D)
- Create more funding for public education positions in departments through fees

Firefighter Training

- Teach basic firefighters entry level skills in presenting basic fire safety programs. Empower students with knowledge by teaching them importance of prevention.
- Every firefighter has a standard class of public education on fire/life safety
- Require public education programs for promotions
- Voluntary compliance does not work. Require training for prevention/public education in firefighter training (1151 now required)
- Require all firefighters to attend at least Fire and Life Safety Level 1 through mandates
- Develop and implement Fire and Level Safety Levels II and III
- Adopt/offer Level I, II, and III programs

Information Sharing

- Create a statewide database with classes taught at stations to share information taught throughout the various fire departments so that there is not as much duplication of efforts
- Create statewide database to share education ideas and resources
- Merge the SC Fire Marshals Association and the SC Fire/Life Safety Educators Associations to increase training opportunities and reduce duplication of effort. This relates to Issue #2 (Cohesion) with unified voice on prevention and code enforcement issues.

Educational Information Delivery Mechanisms

- Use media marketing for fire safety education to public (e.g. YouTube)
- Use public service announcements (PSAs) to target civic groups and general public
- Build relationships with local media to get things done through them by working with them
- Partner with newspapers and media outlets with weekly/monthly fire prevention topics (PSAs, columns, etc.)
- Utilize organizations such as Fire Corps to teach classes
- Deliver fire prevention/education on TV or in schools
- Inform public of what we are doing, how, and how their tax dollars are working through public service announcements

Regional Representatives

- Regional fire and life safety educators to help all departments. This can be achieved through laws and mandates
- Hire regional representatives for fire and life safety so they can help local departments educate schools. Employ through State Fire Marshal's Office

Prevention

Influencing Building Design

- Work closely with county building permit department to review plans before issuing a permit and final inspection certification by building a bond between both organizations
- Establish clear minimum design and safety standards in fire code, building code, etc. and consolidate all of the DHEC, Fire Marshal, pyrotechnic, etc. regulations into one
- Have college students able to take required code enforcement classes to assist with design and safety factors while building is in design
- Educate fire service as lobbyist for fire prevention and fire code enhancement on design and construction end
- Have or teach design professional to design all buildings with sleeping units to prevent fire occurrence with sprinkler systems, smoke detectors, heat sensors, and manual fire extinguishers
- Have or teach fire service professionals to lead by example (related to topic above)
- Design integration with field application

Prevention Education/Awareness

- Have homeowners insurance require homeowners to attend annual fire prevention classes. This can be done through partnerships with insurance companies and local and state governments
- Offer discounts on homeowners insurance for prevention course
- Provide assistance with risk assessment to help communities identify their specific risks
- Departments should place more emphasis on fire/safety prevention and life safety
- Empower students and firefighters with prevention knowledge that suppression is defensive mode and prevention is the offensive mode
- Career progression in fire service to include prevention/code compliance dynamics across all three disciplines from recruit to retirement

Partnerships/Outreach

- Establish a partnership (memorandum of understanding) with Society of Fire Prevention Engineers chapters in and around the state
- Create an internship program (i.e. Fire Marshal shadowing) to expose students to various aspects of the fire service
- Recruit and train employees and volunteers for prevention mission

Fire Service Culture

- Change attitudes of fire service about the importance of education. This can be done through training
- Change culture of fire service...start from top to bottom
- Emphasize during current training programs that public education is the most important part of a firefighter's job
- Change the mentality of the fire chief to promote prevention and education to their members. This can be done through education and personal interactions