



Building Resilient Infrastructure in Communities (BRIC)

Maine Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM) and UMaine Collaboration

Fire Assessment Status Update & Preliminary Findings

Study Context & Limitations

- Goal- to better understand the fire service role and needs related to:
 - Community Safety
 - Recruitment & Retention
 - Workforce Membership
 - Capacity Norms
 - Information Systems
 - Support Mechanisms (Financial, Policy)
 - And more...
- Point-in-time snapshot of 2025-2026 period
 - But conclusions will be crafted to pertain to trends into the future
- Change will Occur:
 - Some elements will benefit from routine update, such as the Workforce Census

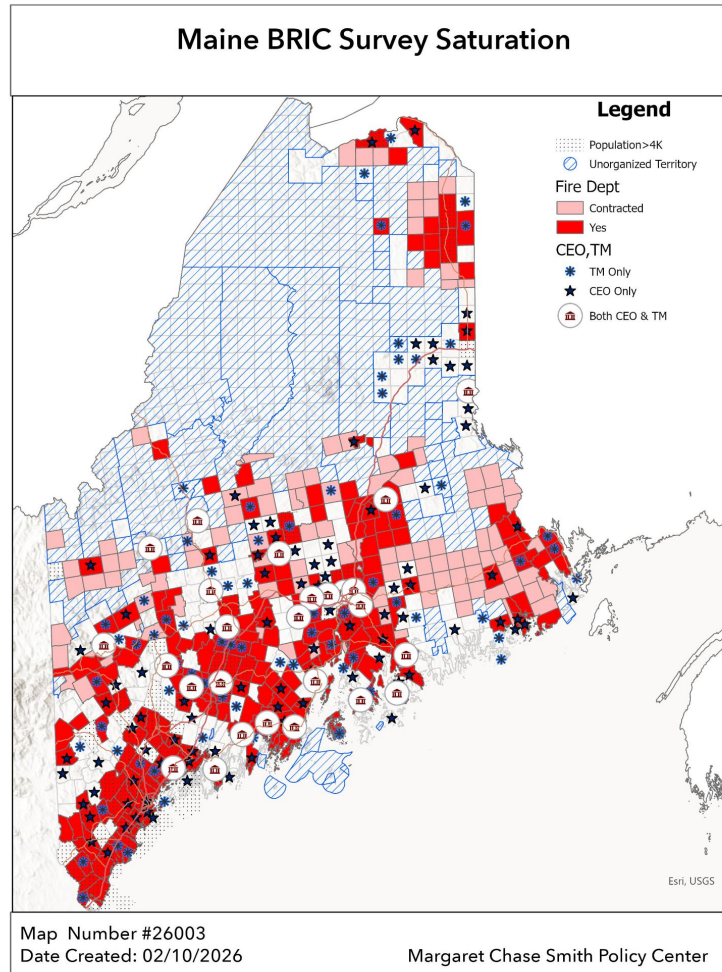
Survey Development & Distribution

- Collaboration with the OSFM, UMaine, & expert practitioners/stakeholders
- Represents expansion of regional pilot study methodology.
- Distributed to 347 entities, with 219 total respondents; 63% response rate
- Rosters from 155 departments yielded 4,464 firefighters
- Follow-up interviews and surveys to code enforcement officers and lead municipal administrators/town managers.
- DATA PENDING FINALIZATION - findings shared today preliminary.

Study Entities by the Maps

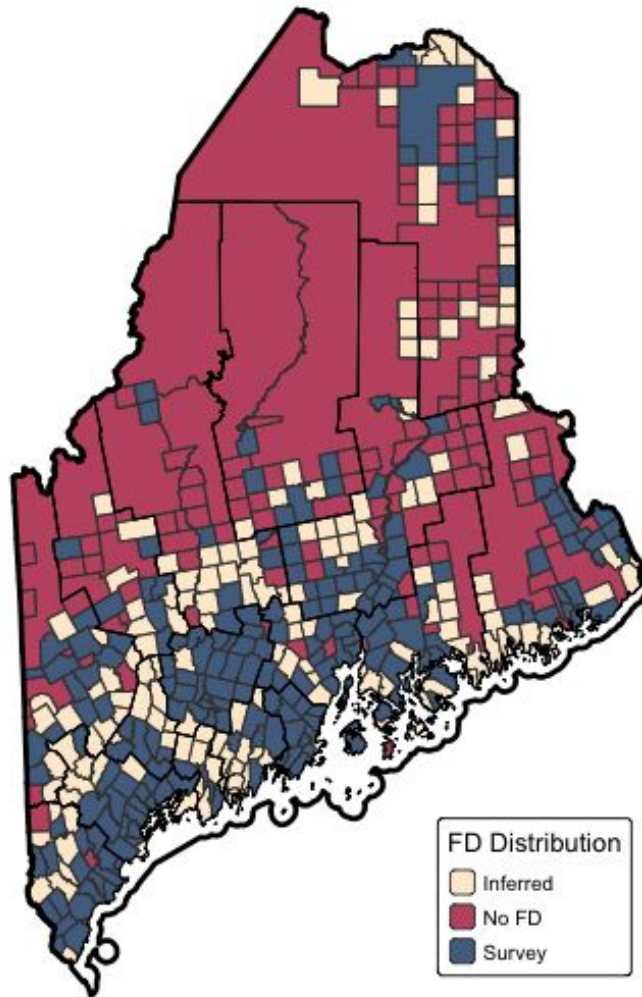
State of the State: All Survey Respondents

Participating Fire Departments,
Code Enforcement Officers,
and Town Managers



Estimated 377 Maine Fire
Departments

Surveyed 219 Maine
Fire Departments



Demographic Characteristics of Fire Resources

Fire Department Staffing Structures in Maine

Department Context	Est. Percent of Maine Fire Departments
Fully Career	6% (n=14)
Combination (Career & Volunteer)	34% (n=75)
Volunteer (w/ Compensation)	42% (n=92)
Volunteer (w/o Compensation)	18% (n=40)

94% of Maine Fire Departments rely on some degree of volunteerism.

“Right now, we have five full-time positions, including myself. It’s one firefighter, per shift, working 24 a day, and then they work with a per diem — so, part time firefighter. And that makes up the staffing. And then we have about 16–18 call company members.”

-Androscoggin Fire Chief, interview

Members' Certifications and Departmental Affiliations

Firefighters <i>NOT</i> Associated with Multiple Departments	Statewide Percent
Interior Certified (n=2,149)	67%
Pump Operator Certified (n=2,210)	69%

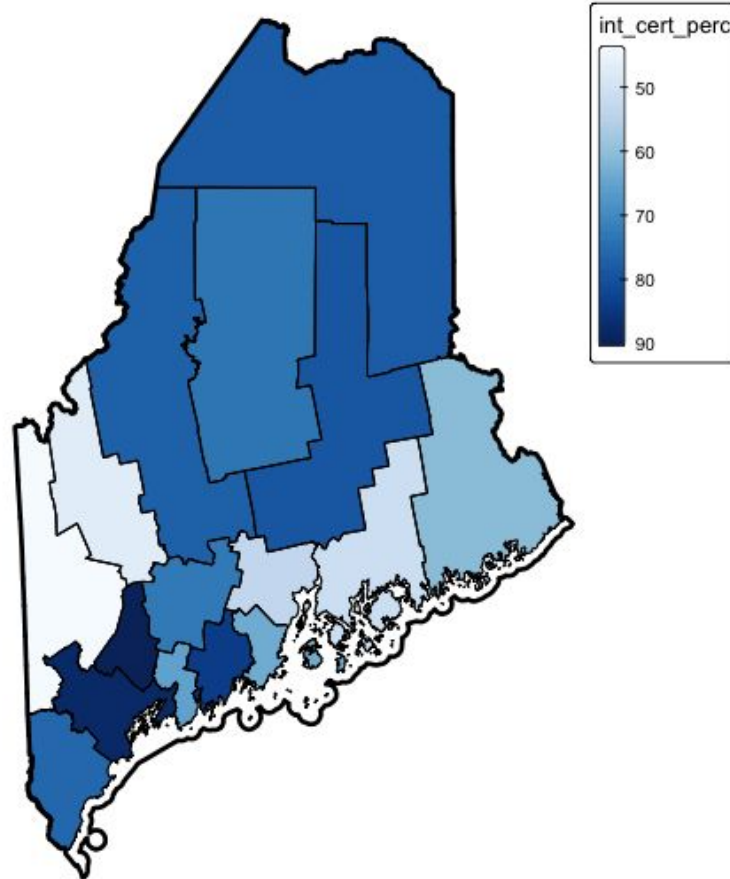
Firefighters Associated with Multiple Departments	Statewide Percent
Interior Certified (n=1,144)	90%
Pump Operator Certified (n=1,100)	86%

“I started out here [a volunteer department] as a firefighter, went to lieutenant, and then to chief from there. And I work career fire and EMS in [a combination department] as well as I am a member in [another volunteer department] next door.”

-Knox County Fire Chief, interview

Interior Certified Members Across Counties

*“Being a call company,
most work a full-time job,
thus no time for training.
They offer very little
training in Western Maine.
You have to drive a long
way to get it.”*
-Oxford County Fire Chief,
survey



Interior Certified Members Across Counties

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County	% Dept. Interior Certified	County	% Dept. Interior Certified
Androscoggin (n=224)	90%	Kennebec (n=575)	73%
Cumberland (n=970)	88%	Sagadahoc (n=101)	66%
Lincoln (n=37)	84%	Knox (n=193)	64%
Penobscot (n=440)	79%	Washington (n=183)	61%
Aroostook (n=234)	78%	Waldo (n=182)	53%
Somerset (n=57)	77%	Hancock (n=322)	51%
York (n=635)	76%	Franklin (n=34)	47%
Piscataquis (n=134)	74%	Oxford (n=140)	43%

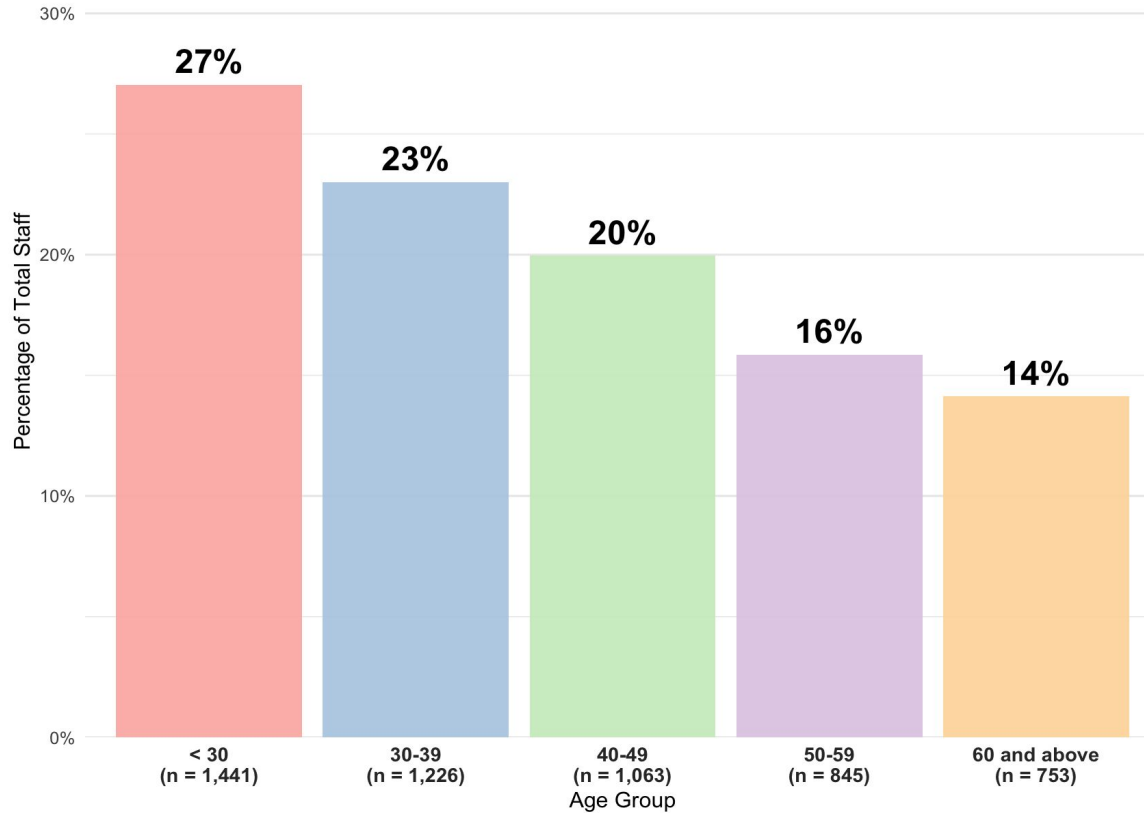
Certified Pump Operator Members Across Counties

“There are [trainings] that happen, but you’re going to Bangor, Portland, Auburn, sometimes Augusta, which aren’t bad... But still, everything is a travel.”

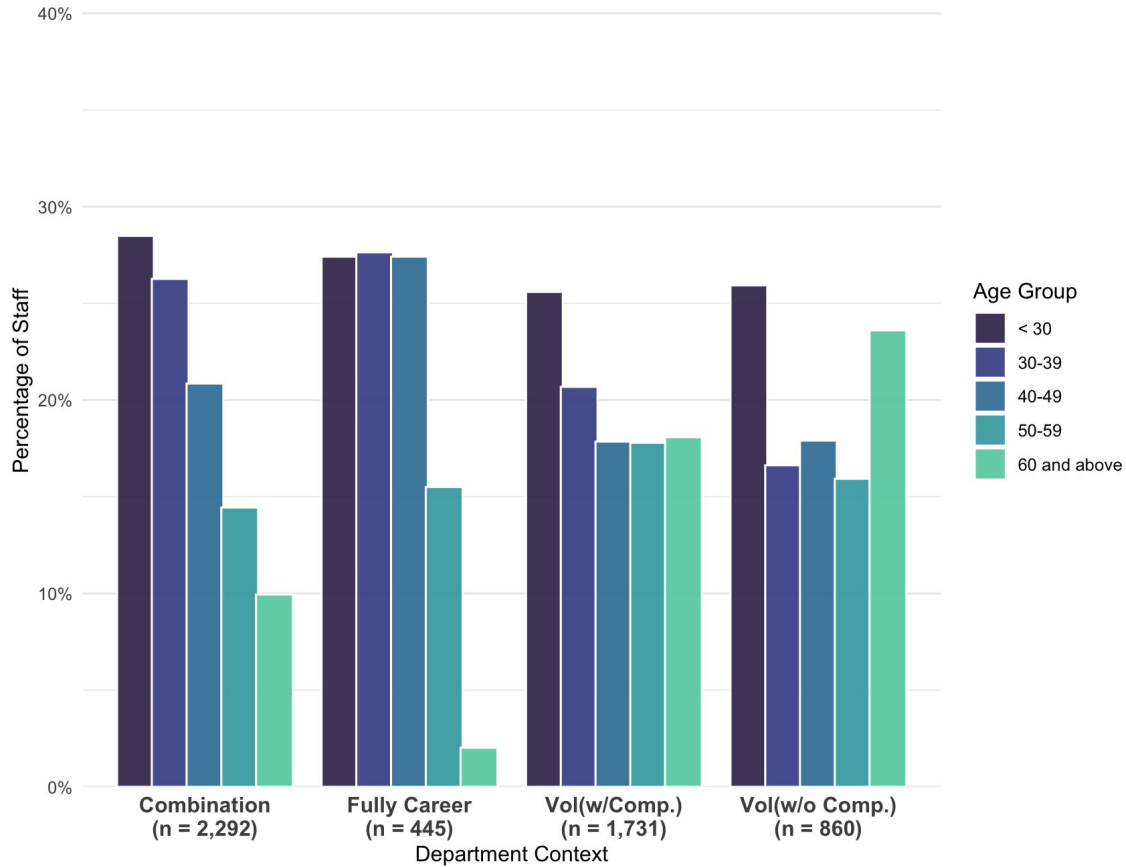
-Oxford County Fire Chief, interview

County	% Dept. Pump Operator	County	% Dept. Pump Operator
Cumberland (n=970)	86%	Aroostook (n=224)	68%
Androscoggin (n=224)	84%	Hancock (n=322)	68%
Penobscot (n=440)	80%	Knox (n=193)	67%
Somerset (n=57)	75%	Sagadahoc (n=101)	65%
Washington (n=183)	75%	Franklin (n=34)	62%
Kennebec (n=575)	73%	Waldo (n=182)	59%
Piscataquis (n=134)	72%	Lincoln (n=37)	57%
York (n=635)	69%	Oxford (n=140)	54%

Age Distribution



Age Distribution by Staffing Structure

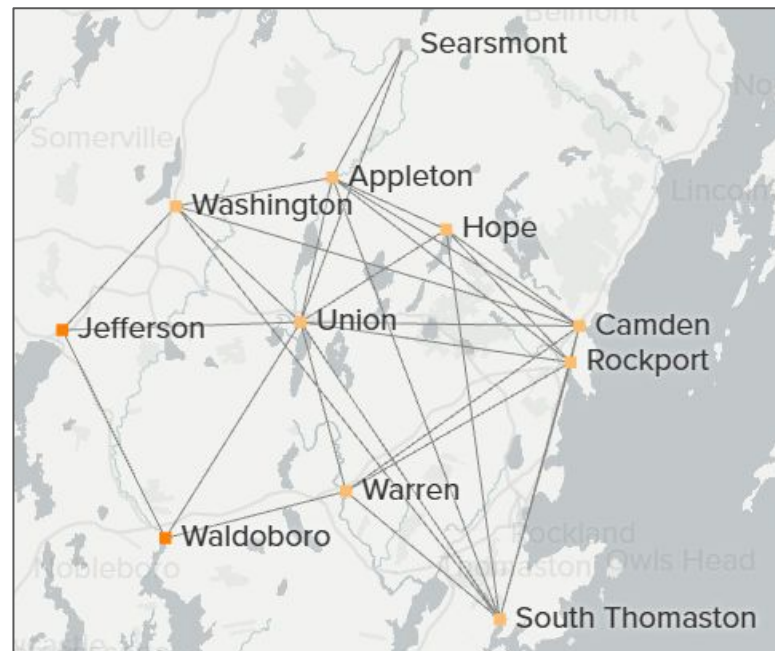
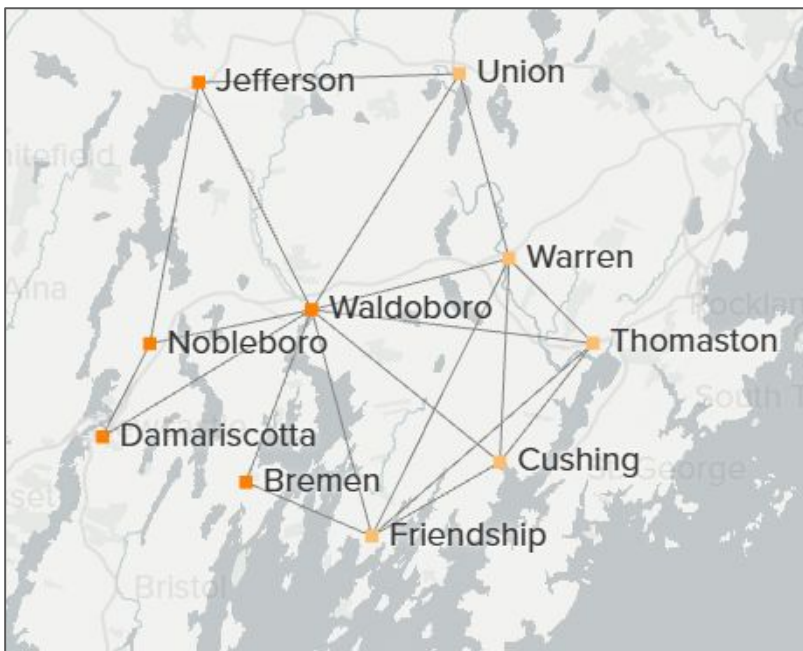


Primary Staffing Challenges

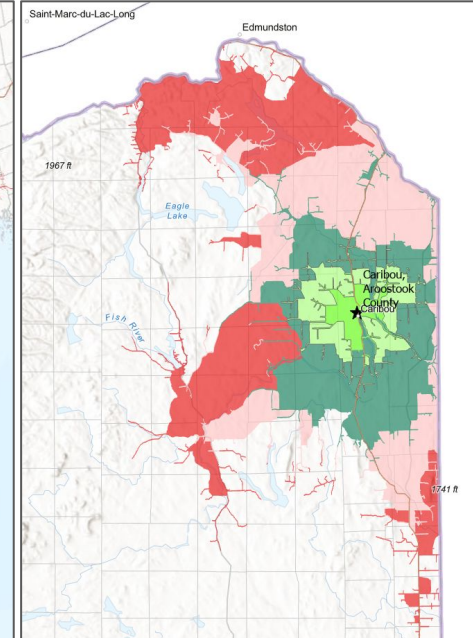
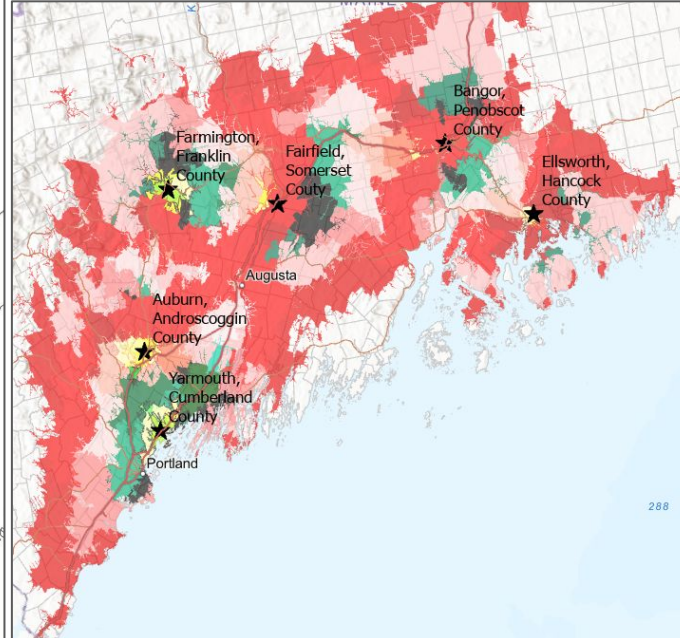
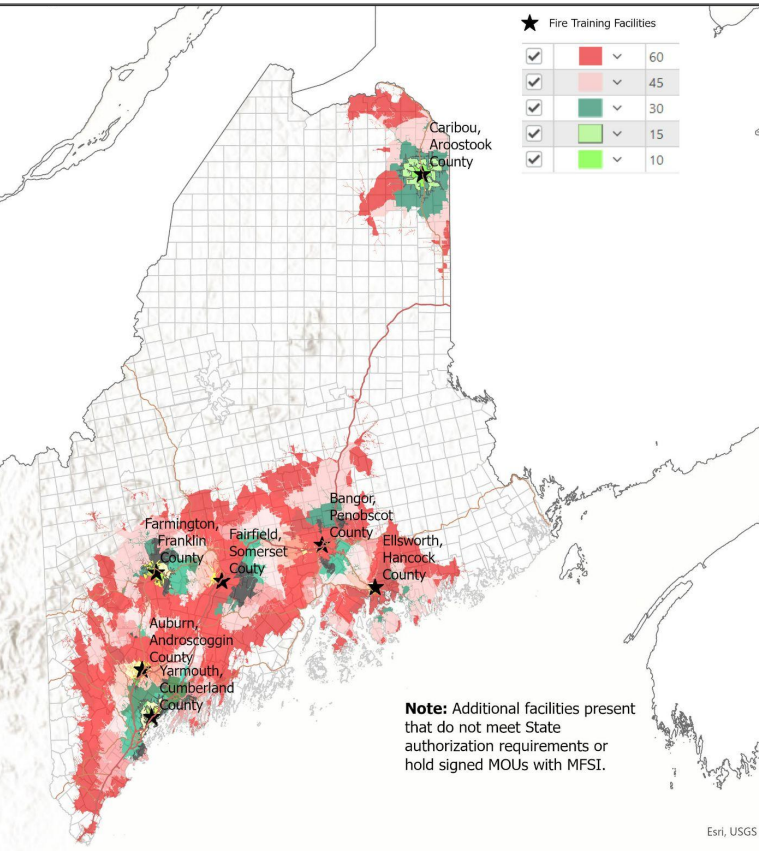
- **Maintaining adequate, consistent personnel coverage.**
 - Staffing stable, but unable to meet rising community need
 - Volunteer availability during daytime hours
 - Efforts to recruit and retain younger members
- **Meeting & maintaining up-to-date training.**
 - Often juggling multiple jobs and family life, esp. younger members
 - Distance to training opportunities

Revealing Relationships: Mutual Aid

<https://embed.kumu.io/584fb278ad040210fe6d082a0ac5007d>



Approved Maine State Fire Training Facilities — Drive-time distance



Methods currently used to improve staff and volunteer recruitment

- Social media most common, especially Facebook.
- Print and physical materials (newspaper ads, sign boards, banners, town newsletters, etc.)
- Face-to-face (job fairs, open houses, general word of mouth, etc.)
- Partnerships with local secondary and vocational schools and community colleges (i.e., live-in programs)
- Compensation and benefits restructuring (i.e., wage studies → pay rate changes)

‘Burgeoning Career Departments’ and the ‘Buyer’s Market’

“I took a resignation the other day. The guy has been here for a bout nine years. He was to the west of here in a small town. That small town is adding career staff. He’s going to be making the same money, the same pension, basically the same vacation, same schedule, and he’s going to be able to drive ten minutes to work. A third of the call volume — boutique fire service. You don’t have to deal with overdoses. Make the same money, and probably sleep overnight. Having these towns build themselves up... It’s become a buyers’ market if you are an employee.”

—Cumberland Co. Fire Chief, interview

“I mean, we’ve had a few people leave here to go to those... I’ll call them bourgeoning career departments. They’ve been volunteer all the way along. They haven’t been able to get the volunteers that they need, so they’re starting to pick up these small individual people. They might have one to seven full-time employees, and they’re just kind of in that adolescent period, and we’ve had a few people that leave to go to those positions.”

—Androscoggin Co. Fire Chief, interview

Volunteer Departments as ‘Training Grounds’ for Future Career Firefighters

Volunteer Fire Dept. Perspective	Career Fire Dept. Perspective
<p>“We’re not a full-time department. [...] We’re helping them get to that [certification] level, and then they’re going to a full-time department. I don’t blame them. <u>We’re a training ground for the full-time departments.</u>” <i>-Knox County Fire Chief, interview</i></p>	<p>“<u>The best feeder program has always been the volunteer departments.</u> If you don’t have that link, I don’t know where we get that. [...] We have to have a feeder program coming out of those, and I don’t know how you backfill that as those volunteer departments dry up and disappear.” <i>-Androscoggin Fire Chief, interview</i></p>

Key Data Insights

- Most (60%) departments are volunteer, and 94% departments rely on some volunteerism.
- 74% of firefighters are interior certified, & 74% of ME firefighters are pump operator certified.
 - Firefighters associated with multiple departments are more often interior and/or pump operator certified.
- Maintaining up-to-date training was a primary staffing concern, with many noting time and travel commitments as a burden for volunteers.
 - Daytime availability for volunteers with other full-time jobs
 - More members live out of town due to rising housing costs
 - Motivating and retaining younger members
- Approximately 30% of ME firefighters are above the age of 50, with 14% being 60 or older.
- As “burgeoning career departments” develop in small towns, dynamic changes are emerging around residency requirements, the volunteer-to-career training pathway, and applicant availability’s effects on volunteer, combination, and career departments.

Key Deliverables

Outputs & capacity enhancements underscored by this work:

- Regular updating of workforce census & registry
- Regular updating of distribution analysis of department and personnel-related resources
- Mapping of transportation infrastructure & fire resources
- Update analysis of call, training, response, & mutual aid activity
- Cost-benefit analysis of issues & interventions, for example:
 - Regionalization efforts
 - Training & workforce development opportunities
 - Loss & damage, etc.
- Multimedia data tools for state leadership & fire practitioners

Next steps

- Cont'd. estimation of total fire service population (including departments that did not respond to the survey)
- GIS data integration (mapping!)
- Conclude follow-up interviews
- Ongoing survey analysis (natural hazards, CRR, code enforcement, town management, etc.)
- Compilation of final report.

Stakeholder group, survey respondents, and
interview participants...

THANK YOU!!