# County of Fairfax, Virginia

**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: February 14, 2017

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Edward L. Long Jr.
County Executive

SUBJECT: Transmittal of Consultant's Report
*Fairfax County Fire & Rescue Department, Organizational Climate Review Report, February 2017*

Fairfax County is committed to sustaining a work culture that encourages a positive, healthy, and safe environment, develops committed and engaged employees, and is managed equitably and with regard for the wellbeing of all staff. The County is committed to reviewing and critiquing policies and practices, and open to engaging stakeholders and seeking opportunities for improvement. Two recent relevant examples are the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) *Use of Force Policy and Practice Review* requested by the Colonel Edwin C. Roessler Jr., Chief of Police, and Chairman Bulova's action and the Board's endorsement in establishing the Ad Hoc Police Practices Review Commission. Both initiatives resulted in significant recommendations for review and action.

With a similar objective, and a candid expectation of findings and recommendations, the Board directed the County Executive to retain an independent, third-party consultant to perform an organizational assessment of the Fire and Rescue Department and evaluate the work environment and culture in the Department, focusing on issues related to discrimination, bullying and harassment, and retaliation. The scope further included an assessment of the working environment regarding equal employment issues, workforce morale, internal communications, EEO training, prevailing attitudes regarding EEO responsibilities, leadership, and the sufficiency and effectiveness of existing agency complaint and review procedures. The objective of this assessment was to make recommendations for improvement.

Following a selection process, the County Executive engaged the Titan Group, a division of Gallagher Benefit Services, Inc., to perform the assessment. To ensure objectivity, confidentiality, and trust in the process the consultant's work was

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coordinated through the County's Internal Auditor, with work plan and progress updates and the report (attached) submitted to the County Executive.

Preliminarily, it is important to note that this assessment was never intended to be an investigation, but rather a cultural evaluation based on the perceptions of department members. The expectation was that the results would provide guidance and recommendations, based on perceptions within the Department, to facilitate improvement in the culture of the organization. In addition, although certain terms with a legally defined meaning are used by the consultant in its report, the consultant carefully noted that the terms are not used in their legal sense. Indeed, the consultant noted at the inception of its work on this project that it was not making any legal determinations about any of the matters expressed in the report. For the County, however, perception is important in forming next steps.

The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, led by Chief Richard R. Bowers Jr., is a large, complex, combination career and volunteer all-hazards paramilitary style organization providing fire prevention and suppression, emergency medical services, technical rescue, hazardous materials response, and water rescue. It has served and protected the community well and has a well-deserved reputation within the County, across the region, nationally, and internationally, the latter primarily through the highly regarded Virginia Task Force 1, the County's Urban Search and Rescue team. Comprised of over 1,400 uniformed staff, approximately 185 civilian staff, and more than 300 operational volunteers the Department is the largest fire and rescue department in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Department has multiple work sites, including headquarters, support sites such as the Academy, and the 38 fire stations located strategically throughout the county that operate 24 hours per day. Most assigned uniformed personnel work together in the stations in close quarters in 24-hour shifts, supplemented by operational volunteers.

To foster broad inclusion and participation the consultant gathered input and perspectives from as many Department members as possible, including uniformed, volunteer, and civilian members. They accomplished this through conducting an online confidential survey offered to all members, a limited number of one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Personnel were selected randomly for the planned one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Some additional one-on-one interviews were then done with personnel who specifically asked to be interviewed. Finally, as some members expressed complaints and confusion regarding department and County grievance and complaint procedures, the consultant selected 16 members who had previously filed a grievance or complaint for one-on-one interviews and eight agreed to be interviewed.

A core tenet of the information gathering process was the promise of confidentiality to participants to encourage fuller participation and mitigate concerns expressed by some members about potential retaliation. Again, this is an important point to note as this effort was <u>not an investigation</u>, but a cultural assessment based on the perspectives of department members to inform any next steps. For the County, however, perception is

important in informing our next steps, which will include prevention, training, improved communication, and policy enhancements and development.

In conducting the assessment, the consultant was also requested to:

- Review relevant Fire and Rescue Department and County policies and procedures.
- Visit representative fire stations as well as other Fire and Rescue Department support facilities for better understanding.
- Research professional organizations for relevant comparison benchmarking data and any best practices.
- Consult subject matter experts.

The online survey was distributed to department members via email, kept open for three weeks, and had a 62% response rate. There were 65 one-on-one interviews conducted at 18 different work sites, and 33 members were part of the focus groups.

The consultant's assessment identified five core themes or "drivers" for the Department's culture most prevalent in participants' responses and comments. These are defined and explained further in the report with recommendations for improvement, but the "drivers" with a brief synopsis of some findings are:

1. Dedication
   Noted to be high overall across the department. Members expressed pride in the department and the mission, and acknowledged the benefits of working for the County. The low attrition rate is noted in the study and a high number of survey respondents acknowledged job security, that they have not considered leaving the department, and, most importantly, that they "leave work with a feeling of satisfaction about my job."

2. Leadership
   There were general positive comments about station level commanders and civilian supervisors, but concerns were raised about senior level leadership, particularly about perceptions of lack of trust, lack of accountability, and a fear of retaliation. Concerns of lack of open, transparent communications were also raised. Members want not only feel good type messaging, but also authentic, "honest" communications about incidents, critical issues, and complaints.

3. Bullying/Harassment/Discrimination
   The consultant's assessment, based on survey responses, one-on-one interviews and focus groups, is that it is perceived by some members that these do exist in some areas of the department and need to be proactively addressed by the department and the County in changing the culture.

4. Conflict Management
   This focused primarily on perceptions of a lack of trust in and a lack of understanding of department and County grievance and discipline processes, and a perception that discipline is not applied consistently and is unfair. There were also perceptions that conflict exists between uniformed staff and volunteers, between uniformed and civilian staff, and between those with a traditional fire suppression mindset and those in the EMS/paramedic field. The need for enhanced cultural competencies training and awareness was also noted.

5. Hiring/Promotions
   Department members expressed concerns that hiring practices do not identify quality applicants with the experience, motivation, and skills to succeed, and that competitive selection practices and processes for staff positions and promotions, although noted to have improved the past few years, have been perceived as unfair and not equitable, and requiring review and revision.

While the focus of this assessment has been on the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department some similar cultural concerns have been raised elsewhere across the country in the fire and rescue service. One of the challenges in performing this assessment and in going forward is accurate benchmarking data. The department compared relatively well in some employee demographics benchmarked against similar fire and rescue services nationally, but slightly lower in the percentage representation of Hispanics in the department and of women in senior command positions. However, the national comparative data for that latter category is from a smaller sample size than the other comparative data.

The relatively lower representation of women in the fire and rescue services, at all levels, is an issue not only here, but nationally. One of our focal points going forward will be identifying additional available industry benchmarking data and any best practices, as well as internal discussion with department members, particularly women, to better understand core issues, root problems and the department's culture to assist in the formulation of any strategies to increase these representations and address other issues.

Like many similar public safety organizations, the Fire and Rescue Department is a paramilitary style agency with a long legacy of traditions and culture. Some traditions are good, and instill pride for the members in themselves, the department, the service, and the mission. However, concerns were expressed by some department members that some outdated traditions and beliefs are being held onto by some, which was perceived as blocking needed cultural change. Cultural change can be difficult, but desired behaviors and values must be driven and modelled by senior leadership, and there has to be accountability at all levels.

The report notes that Chief Bowers has been leading cultural change within the department for the past three years, but that there have been "pockets of resistance." It is important though that he fully engage and include his senior commanders and leaders to build and maintain a cohesive team approach. The consultant has recommended leadership development for Chief Bowers and the senior command leadership to include:

- Leadership training and executive coaching.
- Establishing and strengthening leadership and cultural competencies for senior command team.
- Holding senior commanders accountable, to include appropriate discipline action if warranted.

Internal communication can be challenging in any organization, and as stated previously, the department is a large, complex agency with multiple shifts and work sites. There are also generational differences in members who may prefer information shared in different ways. It is clear though from the assessment findings that department members want increased senior leadership visibility and more direct, consistent, transparent, and "honest" communications across the organization, cross-rank and cross-specialty, and between uniformed, volunteer, and civilian staff.

One difficult communications issue to balance is that some want more information on specific discipline cases, to include any discipline given to a particular employee. Personnel matters involving identifiable individuals, though, are confidential and are not shared. This, of course, can lead to perceptions of cases being handled differently. Related too to consistency and fairness of discipline, some requested a disciplinary matrix be developed. Department of Human Resources (DHR) staff is reviewing, and considering a similar approach with more guidance within categories of misconduct.

**Actions:**

To ensure accountability and appropriate follow-up on the recommendations of this report an Executive Review Committee has been established to include the County Executive, Deputy County Executive for Public Safety, County Attorney, Director of Human Resources (DHR), the Director of the Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs (OHREP), and the Director of the Office of Public Affairs (OPA).

The Executive Review Committee will use this assessment as a foundation, but will also be seeking additional relevant department, County, and comparative data and information to review. Data to be reviewed will be varied, but will include complaints filed with OHREP, investigations and dispositions, discipline patterns and trends across the department, benchmarking of basic recruit Academy hiring practices and graduation rates, staff positions selection data, promotional examination data, average career tenure of uniformed women versus uniformed men, etc.

Along with members of his senior leadership team, Chief Bowers will report to and work closely with the Executive Review Committee. Additional stakeholders or subject matter experts will be consulted as necessary.

Several initiatives are already underway. For example, Chief Bowers and members of his staff have met with Cathy Spage, DHR Director, and members of her team to begin a review of the hiring process and promotional examinations. Bullying policy development, discussed below, has also been a focus.

As a next step, Chief Bowers will be tasked with reviewing this assessment in detail, and working with department and County staff to develop and present an action plan to the Executive Review Committee by May 1, 2017. It is encouraged and expected that he will form work groups to address different issues, and to include appropriate stakeholders, including employee groups, diverse department members, and partners such as DHR and OHREP. Diverse in this context shall include, but not be limited to, race, gender, rank, assignment, tenure, suppression/EMS/prevention/training, and uniformed, volunteer, and civilian members.

As the consultant's findings bear out, department members have pride in the department and their mission. All should be treated with respect, and members' opinions and perspectives should be sought out and valued. Teamwork and trusting relationships are imperative, and open and frank engagement and dialogue are the foundation upon which to build.

Related to this theme of inclusion, the assessment reports that perceptions of potential retaliation exist within the department for speaking out or offering suggestions or expressing or filing grievances. Examples include transfers perceived to be for retaliatory, not operational, reasons. To the extent that it is determined to exist, retaliation will not be tolerated, and all members will be encouraged to report any and all instances in which they believe they have been retaliated against.

To the extent that they are determined to exist, harassment and discrimination also have not, and will not, be tolerated. Workplace bullying will, of course, also not be tolerated. Significant research and work by the Workplace Bullying Work Group has already been completed in the area of addressing workplace bullying – a growing national problem – and the County is now well-positioned to immediately implement a comprehensive strategy to address reports of workplace bullying.

The following outlines key actions associated with incorporating a bullying component into the Personnel Regulations:

1) Proposed changes, similar to the following, will be brought forward at the next Personnel and Reorganization Committee meeting for consideration:
   - Chapter 2 (Definitions) Define bullying and consider the consultant's example in drafting the County's definition of the term.

- Chapter 15 (Employee-Management Relations) Enhance existing language to specify that employees may meet with staff in OHREP, DHR, Civil Service Commission, and County Security without fear of reprisal.
- Chapter 16 – (Conduct and Discipline) Add bullying as a prohibited behavior in the Standards of Conduct.
- Chapter 17 – (Grievance Procedure) Include bullying and conduct intended to deter reports of bullying behavior in the County's grievance procedure.

2) Multiple strategies will be used to ensure a successful rollout and sustained implementation of the County's approach to addressing bullying, including:
   - Training: Online training for all employees is currently under development, with an expected rollout date of March 2017. Major topics include: the definition of bullying, how bullying affects the workplace, examples of what is and is not considered bullying, and the steps to take if bullying is experienced. Additional training will be provided for agency Human Resources staff and staff responsible for addressing allegations of bullying.
   - Ensuring multiple means of accessing assistance: Civil Service Commission, OHREP and DHR staff will be supporting this effort and are working to finalize respective roles and responsibilities associated with the complaint intake and investigation processes.
   - Reinforcing the importance of preventing bullying and maintaining a productive work culture:
     - Collaborate with agency leaders to effectively introduce and periodically reinforce the importance of addressing bullying.
     - Explore means of promoting accountability and sustaining a positive work culture by:
   - Strengthening relevant language in performance evaluation templates.
   - Evaluating initiatives designed to build employee engagement and support continuous strengthening of the organization's culture.

In summary, and as stated previously, the health, safety, and wellbeing of all of our County employees and volunteers is important, and all deserve to be treated with respect. Public safety is one of the County's priorities, and the men and women who serve have a challenging mission to perform, and it is a collective responsibility to ensure that the Fire and Rescue Department continues to be one of the finest in the country and is recognized as an exemplary workplace with a welcoming and supportive environment and culture for all members. This report provides recommendations and opportunities for improvement as a strategic foundation to work collaboratively to achieve that objective.

This report will be made available to department members and the public. Additional updates and information will be provided to the Board once the action plan is developed and as work progresses.

Attachments

cc: Elizabeth D. Teare, County Attorney
David M. Rohrer, Deputy County Executive
Richard R. Bowers Jr., Chief, Fire and Rescue Department
Catherine M. Spage, Director, Department of Human Resources
Kenneth L. Saunders, Director, Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs
Sara J. Simmons, Executive Director, Civil Service Commission

## Notice of Disclaimer

The County Executive for the County of Fairfax, Virginia, engaged the Titan Group, a division of Gallagher Benefit Services, to assist him in evaluating and arriving at a decision regarding the possible need for alternative policies applicable to the working environment within the County's Fire and Rescue Department.

The views and opinions expressed in the attached Organizational Climate Review Report dated February 14, 2017, are those of the authors and those who participated in the assessment. These views and opinions do not necessarily reflect the official views, opinions, policies or position of Fairfax County or any of its agencies. Examples of interviews, surveys, and focus groups performed, and any analysis thereof, are solely intended to be reflective of the perception and feelings of those who participated in the assessment. The focus of this report is to identify the perceptions and feelings of department members regarding their working environment and the formulation of recommendations. Legal definitions for terms used in the assessment and in this report were not provided to respondents. None of the terms used in this report are intended to be used in a legal context or assigned any legal meaning or significance. Information communicated in connection with the assessment was not investigated or evaluated for accuracy or validity, and this report is not intended to validate or invalidate the existence of bullying, harassment, discrimination, or retaliation in the workplace. Advice given by Titan is not intended to be nor should it be construed as legal advice.

**Fairfax County**

**Fire & Rescue Department**

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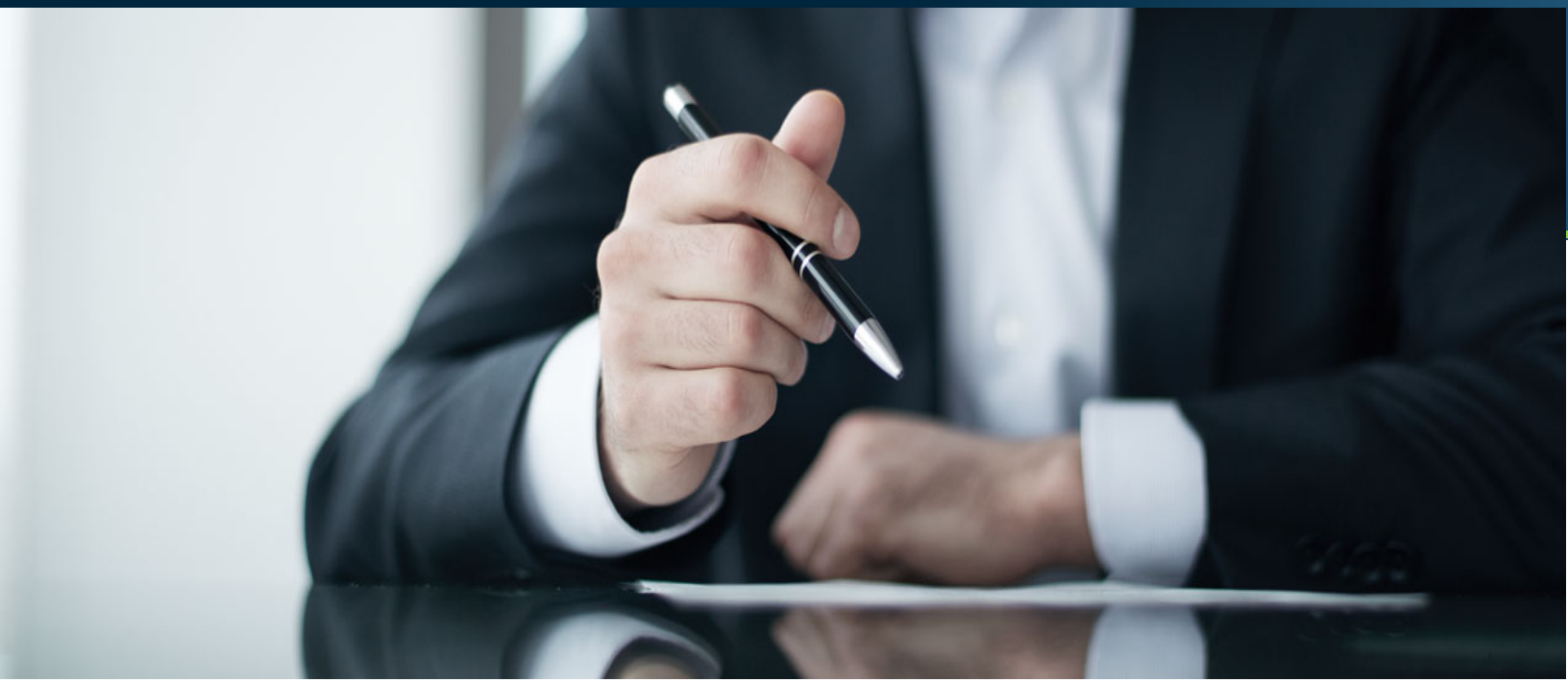
# Organizational Climate Review Report

February 14, 2017

COMPENSATION | LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT | RECRUITMENT | HR ADVISORY



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## Table of Contents

Executive Summary ..... 3
Methodology ..... 7
Background and Data Collection ..... 7
Findings and Analysis ..... 8
Cultural Themes ..... 8
Overall Findings by Data Source ..... 18
Recommendations ..... 24
Cultural Themes ..... 24
1. Dedication ..... 24
2. Leadership ..... 26
3. Bullying / Harassment / Discrimination ..... 29
4. Conflict Management ..... 32
5. Hiring / Promotions ..... 34
Appendix ..... 38
A. References ..... 38
B. List of Policies & Procedures Reviewed ..... 39
C. Cultural Assessment Survey Overview ..... 40

## Executive Summary

The County Executive for the County of Fairfax, Virginia, engaged Titan Group, a division of Gallagher Benefit Services (Gallagher), to conduct an Organizational Assessment of the County's Fire and Rescue Department (FRD). This study was directed at evaluating the working environment in the FRD regarding employee perceptions with equal employment opportunity issues, workforce morale, communications, and mental health assistance. Specific focus was placed on identifying any perceived issues of discrimination, harassment, and bullying. The ultimate goal of the assessment was to formulate recommendations for improvement.

Gallagher's Human Resources and Consulting division began the project in August 2016 and presented the final report in February 2017. The team consisted of seven members of the firm who all have experience in organizational assessments as well as survey design and analysis. The team prepared a work plan and communicated with the County committee via weekly conference calls and monthly in-person meetings to share findings along the way. The project approach incorporated three primary data collection methods and one secondary data collection method that included:

1. FRD member* one-on-one interviews (65 completed while visiting 12 work units)
2. FRD member on-line cultural assessment survey (62% or 1,495 completed)
3. FRD member focus groups (4 sessions completed)
4. Research papers from several industry associations [International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services (IAWFES), National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)] as well as other online resources

**member refers to employees, volunteers, civilian and field*

This multi-pronged approach to data collection allowed the team to identify broad themes that significantly contributed to creating the culture within the FRD. Gallagher created targeted follow-up questions to inquire further into specific areas within the identified themes.

For this report, "Leadership" or "Senior Command" is defined most often as Battalion Chief position and above.

(Please note that this document represents the opinion of the Gallagher consultants involved in the project and should not be construed as, nor is it intended to provide, legal opinion or advice. No in-depth investigations were conducted as a result of data discovered during this assessment. Consulting services provided by Gallagher Benefit Services, Inc. and neither Arthur J. Gallagher & Co., nor its affiliates provide accounting, legal or tax advice.)

Gallagher analyzed all data points and identified five critical themes that currently drive the culture within the FRD. These five overarching themes include:

1. Dedication
2. Leadership
3. Bullying/Harassment/Discrimination
4. Conflict Management
5. Hiring/Promotions

A very strong driver of the culture at the FRD is the **dedication** that members have for their work and the mission of the FRD. This shows up in the experience, commitment, and devotion of the members. They have strong job satisfaction, pride and loyalty for the FRD and, as a result, the average tenure of the members is long – 12.34 years. Annual turnover rates for the FRD are running approximately 3.5%, which is very low for the industry that typically sees upward of 10-20% (Kavetski, 2016).

The **leadership** theme is another driver of the culture. Specific to this study, poor leadership behaviors are driving a negative culture. These behaviors include a lack of accountability, lack of integrity, lack of consistency, and most importantly a lack of trust. The values and ethical behaviors that the Fire Chief is trying to implement are not consistently demonstrated by Senior Command (Battalion Chiefs and above). On the culture survey, over 28% of respondents specifically said that Senior Command is “not doing a good job.” This is further exacerbated by some members feeling that there is an atmosphere of retaliation and, as a result, they are reluctant to make suggestions or even raise issues.

Gallagher’s assessment is that **bullying and harassment** exists in some areas within the FRD workplace. Workplace bullying was defined in the assessment as a form of aggressive behavior where a worker intentionally and repeatedly causes another member discomfort. The behavior is often perceived as intimidation and may be accompanied by veiled or unveiled threats where the bully exerts control over another person. The Bullying Index from the survey revealed a 21% unfavorable response with at least 37% of respondents indicating either they personally experienced it or witnessed it in their workgroup. Over 23% of respondents believe they have either experienced sexual harassment or witnessed it in their workshop. EMS members reported feeling treated less favorably than other work groups.

**Conflict management** is another driver of the culture. Leadership feels undertrained in how to handle member issues and sometimes under-supported by their leadership when trying to administer disciplinary actions. Some members are confused as to what process to follow for what kinds of issues they have and some feel as if they do not trust the grievance and complaint processes because their perception is that “nothing happens even when I do complain.” Many feel the discipline process is unfair and inconsistent and they often are concerned about reprisals such as being moved to another fire station if they make a workplace complaint. Conflict also exists to an extent between career and volunteer members and EMS and other field workgroups.

The final major theme the team uncovered relates to the **Hiring and Promotion processes**. Survey results indicated that hiring for skills and fit into the FRD was the lowest scoring item out of all items rated at 3.06 on a 6-point scale. Members overwhelmingly feel that the FRD does not do a good job hiring candidates with the right experience or skill sets. By the time the candidate gets into training school (without an in-person interview) they are easily identified by

trainers as to who will and who will not make it through. Members also feel that the FRD does not hire individuals who represent the values of the FRD including accountability, decision making, problem solving, teamwork, grit, passion, perseverance, and hard work. Further, once the candidate gets through training some feel that recruits are not selected based on their qualifications.

Gallagher's research discovered that the demographic makeup of the FRD is as follows compared to industry norms.

**U.S. Fire Department Profile versus Fairfax County Fire & Rescue Department**

| | Industry Norm | FRD 2016 |
|---|---|---|
| Male[1] | 93% | 82% |
| Female[1] | 7% | 18% |
| Female Leaders[2] | 2.4% (~150 female leaders) | 1.8% (~3 female leaders) |
| Black[3] | 7.2% | 15.2% |
| Hispanic[3] | 9.4% | 7.6% |
| White/Other[3] | 83.4% | 77.2% |

[1] 2014 NFPA's U.S. Fire Department Profile (Haynes & Stein, 2016)
[2] 2005 IAWFES (IAWFES, FAQs, 2005); "Female Leaders" includes battalion chiefs and above, and career firefighters only
[3] 2012 4-Year Average; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), (NFPA, 2016)

The FRD employs a much higher percentage of blacks and women than the industry and this has been a focus of theirs for the last ten years. They employ a lower percentage of Hispanics and have slightly lower female representation in senior command ranks compared to the national average.

An implication for the hiring and promotional area is the ability of the FRD to recruit the talent they will need in the future. The Department of Labor (DOL) projects the rate of growth in employment for firefighters to be approximately 5% between 2014 and 2024 (BLS, Occupational Outlook Handbook: Firefighters, 2015). It is projected that EMTs and paramedics will see a substantial increase in employment between 2014 and 2024 at 24% (BLS, Occupational Outlook Handbook: EMTs and Paramedics, 2015).

The survey revealed that the promotional process includes many discrepancies and deep seated feelings of inequitableness. Some of these perceptions will exist regardless of the organization, however the survey results indicated this item scored a 3.63 ranking out of 6. The previous promotional process has changed to one that members now feel is more equitable. The current promotional process ranks qualified candidates for the positions of technician, lieutenant, captain I, captain II, and battalion chief, and promotions are awarded numerically. For staff selection, eligible candidates whose current rank matches the advertised position rank, may apply for consideration. The current promotional process for examinations and staff selection process are described in Appendix D.

Key recommendations to address each of these themes are provided in detail in the rest of this report and some of the more important ones are listed below.

1. Dedication
    a. Provide more recognition/celebration for loyalty, tenure and on-the-job measured performance
    b. Create an employment branding campaign
    c. Build stronger onboarding program
    d. Build stronger career path program
    e. Use "kitchen table" time for more informal communications

2. Leadership
    a. Establish leadership competencies for senior team
    b. Establish values and correlate behavior expectations
    c. Hold leaders accountable and provide consequences for non-compliance
    d. Provide leadership training and coaching programs
3. Bullying/Harassment/Discrimination
    a. Regularly educate FRD employees and volunteers on the definitions of bullying, harassment, discrimination, and retaliation; their requirement to follow County policies; and the consequences of non-compliance.
    b. Give leadership support to enforce discipline up to and including termination
    c. Conduct in-person situational training on topics to supplement online training for leaders
    d. Consistently enforce consequences for members who demonstrate these unacceptable behaviors
4. Conflict Management
    a. Continue to align resources with volume of calls i.e. EMS, rescue, fire
    b. Train all members together to decrease silos
    c. Simplify and clarify the process for airing concerns and filing a complaint and grievance
    d. Continue to use the Civil Service Commission as a third party to investigate complaints and educate members about this option
    e. Add in a check and balance for filed complaints
    f. Improve communication loop with complainant
    g. Create member grievance/complaint panel to review concerns files
5. Hiring/Promotions
    a. Revamp the hiring process to align with criteria for success
    b. Implement in-person interviews for final candidates
    c. Connect interviews to job description, values, competencies and culture
    d. Create peer interview panel consisting of high performers
    e. Offer the Coaching for Performance West Point Leadership course for all FRD leaders as part of the leadership training and development program
    f. Reeducate members on the promotional process and provide valuable feedback to those not selected

## Methodology

### Background and Data Collection

Gallagher's organizational assessment was conducted using a multi-pronged approach to gain a full understanding of the culture of the FRD.

For the first phase of the project, Gallagher consultants selected 50 FRD members for one-on-one interviews, representing a cross-section of member demographics. After the initial interviews began, 28 members approached Gallagher directly requesting to be interviewed, and even more members approached the FRD HR Department. In total, 65 one-on-one interviews were conducted between August 17, 2016 and September 22, 2016 and took place at 12 fire

stations and six other work locations. Those members who requested an interview but were not selected were given the option to speak with Gallagher at the end of the project if they felt that their voice still was not heard. A standard set of interview questions was created and used in each interview, tailored slightly based on the position of each interviewee.

Additionally, Gallagher consultants conducted interviews that focused on a review of the grievance and complaint procedures. Gallagher selected a cross-section of sixteen members to be interviewed who had filed a grievance or complaint within the last four years and eight members agreed to participate. The interviews were conducted between September 22, 2016 and October 7, 2016. A standard set of interview questions was created and used in each interview.

All FRD members were given the opportunity to participate in an online cultural assessment survey. The electronic survey was distributed via email and remained open from September 13, 2016 to October 4, 2016. The survey contained 47 close-ended items that were measured on a six-point Likert scale, as well as two open-ended items that allowed for written responses. The response rate for the FRD Cultural Assessment Survey was 62%, or 1,495 respondents.

Focus groups were conducted to investigate the critical drivers that were identified by the survey results. Using key demographic information derived from the survey results, Gallagher randomly selected members for the focus groups, and 33 members agreed to participate. The focus groups were conducted in-person between October 25, 2016 and October 26, 2016.

Gallagher also conducted a review of FRD internal complaint and grievance procedures. A list of the 21 policies that the Gallagher team reviewed can be found in Appendix B. Additionally, Gallagher reviewed information about the FRD EEO program and OHREP through various websites for clarity and consistency with OHREP and other County policies and procedures.

Lastly, Gallagher conducted external research to provide benchmarking norms and create a comparison point between the FRD and other fire and rescue departments across the country. The team consulted research data provided through the IAFF, IAFC, IAWFES, and NFPA, as well as other research links.

## Findings and Analysis

### Cultural Themes

From Gallagher's in-depth data collection and analysis, we identified five key overarching themes that significantly drive the culture at the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. These five themes are listed and an overview of the findings are described below.

**1. Dedication**

Though organizations define commitment and dedication differently, some common themes emerge. These themes include members' satisfaction with their work and pride in their employer, the extent to which people enjoy and believe in what they do for work and the perception that their employer values what they bring to the table. The greater a member's commitment, the more likely he or she is to "go the extra mile" and deliver excellent on-the-job performance. In addition, committed members are more likely to stay with their current organization.

This dedication to both the position and to the FRD can be seen through the turnover rates. Nationally, average turnover rates for this industry have been seen to range from 3.2% to 10.7% (Patterson, et al., 2010) and the average turnover rates for all public safety positions averages around 20% (Kavetski, 2016). However, the FRD's turnover rates are quite low in comparison. While the turnover rates have been increasing from 2014 to 2016, the turnover rates for the FRD range, on average, from 2.5% to 3.5%.

One finding from the culture assessment survey that is also important to note is the correlation between member dedication, job satisfaction, and tenure. Nationally, employees exhibit high job satisfaction at the beginnings and ends of their career. Employees first experience the 'honeymoon' period after starting their job, and then experience high levels of commitment after working with a company for many years. FRD members, however, show a high level of job satisfaction within the first six years of their tenure, but that satisfaction drops off after that time threshold. The highest levels of member dissatisfaction were seen in members who had been with the FRD for 20 years or more. This is an age group to consider focusing efforts to identify the key drivers behind this trend.

Throughout both the interviews and the culture assessment survey FRD members indicated very high levels of dedication to the fire service. Although the survey score for "engagement" is slightly below national norms, in general, the FRD received above national norm scores for the three survey questions: "I have not seriously considered leaving FRD for another job"; "I often leave work with a feeling of satisfaction about my job"; and "The Station Supervisor/Civilian Supervisor (i.e., Captains, Lieutenants) at FRD treats me with respect and communicates well." These questions are a solid indicator that the FRD is a place where people want to work and they like the work that they do. And, importantly, the relationship with many immediate supervisors is good.

By examining the interviews and survey responses, leadership was identified as a key issue for many that negatively impacts their overall dedication. We found that 28% of the survey respondents had an unfavorable response regarding how the FRD's Senior/Command Staff (i.e., Chief, Assistant Chief, Deputy Chiefs, Battalion Chiefs, Volunteer Chief, and Civilian Managers) are leading the organization. Their belief negatively impacts the positive regard members hold of the FRD experience and undermines member dedication to the FRD. Some of the lowest scored survey questions (compared to national norms) that define the source of member dedication were: "Senior/Command Staff takes appropriate action to address any reported misconduct"; "At FRD, I provide my opinions without fear of retaliation or retribution"; "Senior/Command Staff will use the info from this survey to make improvements"; and "The actions of Senior/Command Staff reflect their commitment to FRD's vision & values."

It is clear that the FRD has a supply of the "secret sauce" that makes an organization operate at a very high level. Some of that "sauce" is the generic strong service role of fire and rescue work. And some of the "sauce" is because the FRD is a quality organization that provides good training, a good work environment at the operational station and shift level, great equipment and related resources, and an overall good reputation.

The word cloud below depicts the most common themes members expressed in the open-ended survey item that asked them what makes them most proud to be part of the FRD:

*What makes you most proud to be part of FRD?*

"I am proud of the reputation our department has in the eyes of the citizens. We have over a long history built that reputation. We are not perfect and nobody is. There will be bumps along the way, however I believe our reputation is strong and I am proud of the trust the citizens have in us to perform and to do the right thing." (Survey Participant Quote)

## 2. Leadership

Leadership behavior and influence within the FRD was consistently mentioned as a driver of the negative culture within the FRD. Poor leadership behaviors have contributed to the creation of a lack of trust in some members that has directly influenced them to withhold suggestions and has also contributed to member fear of retaliation. Additional leadership behaviors that have negatively impacted the organization include a lack of accountability, unclear communication, inconsistency and a lack of integrity.

One of the key drivers cited from the survey results was "FRD's Senior/Command Staff does a good job leading this organization." The response was that 28% said that leadership did not do a good job of leading the organization. It was also noted both in the survey and in the onsite visits that there are great variances in the leadership from station to station and even from shift to shift within a station.

Leadership's impact on the organization falls into the following subsets and will be addressed separately: Trust; Lack of Accountability and Consistency; Values, Ethics and Integrity; Communication; Suggestions That Are Not Considered & Fear of Retaliation; and Leadership's Resistance to Change.

Trust in the senior leadership was consistently cited in both interviews and the survey as lacking in the current leadership team. Much of this lack of trust falls on Senior Command. Leadership philosophies stress that trust is the bedrock of a strong team for organizations that drive engagement and get results. In his book, The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team, Patrick Lencioni says that trust is the first step of the team pyramid. Without a foundation of trust, there cannot be healthy conflict, commitment, accountability, or results.

General lack of accountability from the top of the organization to the lower ranks was cited repeatedly throughout the survey comments, interviews and focus groups. This lack of

accountability, coupled in many cases with a lack of consistency in the application of policies and discipline, is perceived and observed through the entire FRD by all levels and can be seen as a contributing reason for the lack of trust and low morale throughout the FRD. Observations and perceptions include leaders who enforce and apply policies based on personal relationships with the offender, leaders who turn a blind eye to repeat offenders, and leaders who fail to uphold standards due to the work that is involved in enforcing disciplinary actions. A majority of the survey comments regarding a lack accountability and consistency were directed towards the senior leadership. One of the lowest 5 scores on the survey support this concern: “Senior/Command Staff takes appropriate action to address any reported misconduct.” This item received a 37% unfavorable rating, with a norm differential of 1.27. Survey comments also suggest that a general lack of accountability has existed within the FRD for many years. Whether real or perceived, the impact of lack of accountability and consistency has a far reaching and direct impact on all levels of the FRD.

The values and code of ethics in this, and any, organization must be consistently exhibited through the actions and decisions of its leadership in order to permeate throughout the organization and become part of the culture. Mark McKinney from the Antigo Fire Department states in his Executive Fire Officer paper, “Employees are looking for an employer that walks the walk and talks the talk. In these cases the leadership from middle management all the way to the CEO are expected to be honest and have integrity in their decisions and their actions” (McKinney, 2016). When members were asked on the survey whether the actions of Senior/Command Staff reflect their commitment to the FRD’s vision and values, member response was 28% unfavorable, which fell in the lowest five survey scores. When standards are communicated and encouraged, but are not demonstrated by leadership, it becomes difficult to instill accountability, communications are questioned, communications are not seen as honest or transparent, and trust is further eroded.

The lack of consistent clear, honest, transparent communication from leadership is seen to contribute to the frustration, confusion, fear and distrust felt throughout the FRD. FRD members repeatedly commented about the lack of communication observed between various relationships: Fire Chief and the deputies, leadership and staff, civilian and staff, and volunteer and staff. Comments from both interviews and focus groups indicate that there is a communication divide observed between the Chief and members of the Deputy level. Some FRD members feel that information is improperly withheld or disseminated as a means of exerting dominance.

Where there is fear and lack of trust, opinions and suggestions are often withheld. When asked the following question in the cultural assessment survey, “At FRD, I provide my opinions without fear of retaliation or retribution,” the unfavorable response was 35%, and one of the five lowest response scores in the survey results. Throughout the FRD, members expressed fears of speaking out, expressing their opinions and sharing information because of the perception of the potential for retaliation. These fears negatively impact member engagement and happiness.

There were many comments throughout the survey and interviews that mentioned a reverence and appreciation for the traditions that have accompanied the firefighting profession over the years including strong work ethic, brotherhood and accountability. While some of the traditions have been helpful in past circumstances and continue to provide some grounding today, many traditions are now outdated, cause conflict and stand in the way of improvements both in regards to technology and personal and professional growth.

Change is emotional and with those emotions often comes fear. It was noted by many FRD members that the much-needed changes are not happening because they are not supported by certain members of the leadership team who are entrenched in outdated traditions that no longer work in today's firefighting culture.

It should be noted that there are members of FRD leadership who hold the trust and respect of firefighters throughout the organization. There are also several shifts and stations that currently operate within a culture of trust, accountability and integrity. It is Gallagher's assessment that subcultures appear to exist within the FRD where there are leaders who lack civility, violate the County's Code of Ethics and use fear as a tool to assert their dominance over their subordinates.

"Senior Staff are completely out of touch and in denial of the core department problems. They distrust those in the field. They have lost the mission. Morale is so low due to the lack of formal discipline and accountability. It is hard to feel proud of your work when the organization continually ignores bad, threatening, illegal, hostile behavior from the line members, but it is deeply seen in senior staff. If you dare to [ask] questions, there will be ramifications. This cannot be addressed with the current Senior Staff in place. Their answers and solutions are merely lip service." (Survey Participant Quote)

### 3. Bullying/Harassment/Discrimination

Throughout the data collection—in interviews, the cultural assessment survey, and focus group sessions—some FRD members responded that bullying, harassment, and discrimination does occur. Importantly, we need to define Workplace Bullying, which we offer below:

*Workplace Bullying is a form of aggressive behavior where a worker intentionally and repeatedly causes another employee discomfort. The behavior is often perceived as intimidation and may be accompanied by veiled or unveiled threats where the bully exerts control over another person. Bullying can take the form of physical contact, words or more subtle actions. Like harassment, each individual sets his or her boundary in terms of what is comfortable and what is uncomfortable. Once defined, the employee should make the bully aware of the behaviors causing the discomfort and ask the bully to cease that behavior. If unable, the employee should report instances to the Human Resources Department and/or follow the grievance procedure.*

*Example: The leader of a meeting approaches a subordinate after the meeting and says "if you disagree with me or say anything negative about my decision, I will find out and make you pay."*

Gallagher developed a scientifically based Bullying Index, which is listed below. The chart is defined as follows:

- Column One: "Bullying Index Item" – the survey item, which is listed in order of performance by the national normative differential.

- Column Two: “FRD 2016” – shows the overall score (mean) on a six point scale. So, a higher score would be considered more favorable.

- Column Three: “Norm Diff.” – the normative differential is the difference between the overall score and the norm. In addition, statistical significance (+/- 0.09) is when the normative differential does not occur by chance. If the normative differential is highlighted in green that is a strong positive differential. If the normative differential is highlighted in red that is a strong negative differential.

| **Bullying Index Item** ***(in order of performance vs. national norm; statistical significance +/- 0.09)*** | **FRD 2016** | **Norm Diff.** |
|---|---|---|
| I work in an environment that is free of offensive behavior/harassment. *(Work Environment)* | 4.37 | **-0.87** |
| FRD’s work environment is one of friendliness and acceptance. *(Work Environment)* | 4.31 | **-0.46** |
| Colleagues in my department/location work well with each other. *(Teamwork)* | 4.88 | -0.06 |
| My colleagues at FRD treat each other with respect. *(Teamwork)* | 4.55 | -0.01 |
| I trust the people with whom I work. *(Teamwork)* | 4.77 | +0.04 |
| Everyone demonstrates behavior that supports how colleagues should work together. *(Teamwork)* | 4.10 | --- |
| I have NOT witnessed bullying (e.g. threats, intimidation, etc.) in my work group. *(Work Environment)* | 4.14 | --- |
| | | |
| **Bullying Overall** | **4.45** | **---** |

Based on the overall score of the Bullying Index (4.45), the FRD members feel that opportunities for improvement exist that would reduce the incidents of bullying, harassment, and discrimination. By improving the overall culture, the FRD can make a positive impact to reduce the perception of an environment that has bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

“There's unreported bullying, discrimination, harassment, and paper games where employees are bottle-necked into positions where administrative things like pay, hours, or benefits, can be put on the line and taken away if something is not done or asked of the employee to do. I've witnessed people gang up on one person as a means of ‘resolving’ a problem without considering the ethics or legalities of their actions simply because they're afraid of being held accountable themselves even though they were hired to be essentially in charge and manage said situation.” (Survey Participant Quote)

### 4. Conflict Management

Organizations are becoming more culturally diverse and members who possess the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to value the diversity among their coworkers will contribute to an organization designed to serve all stakeholders well. Cultural awareness or competence is consciousness of one's personal reactions to people who are different. It can be further defined as having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of others. It is the ability to understand the within-group differences that make each member unique, while celebrating the between-group variations that make our country a tapestry. Our assessment revealed that inconsistent cultural competence exists within the FRD.

In many workplaces, a key driver for members is the employer's ability to manage workplace conflict in a healthy and professional manner. This theme is true for the FRD as demonstrated in individual interviews, focus groups, and the online survey results. As shown below, the survey driver category Grievance was rated only 3.96, which is -1.04 below national norms and the survey question that asked if the FRD's grievance procedure and process is effective rated only 3.63.

| **Survey Category** *(in order of performance vs. national norm; statistical significance +/- 0.09)* | **FRD 2016** | **Normative Differential** |
|---|---|---|
| GRIEVANCE | 3.96 | **-1.04** |

| **Survey Item** *(in order of performance vs. national norm; statistical significance +/- 0.09)* | **FRD 2016** | **Norm Diff.** |
|---|---|---|
| FRD's grievance procedure and process is effective. *(Grievance)* | 3.63 | **-1.37** |

Throughout the assessment, FRD members shared widespread concern that discipline is handled inconsistently and therefore is unfair. In the culture survey, when asked "FRD's grievance procedures and process is effective," 41% of members reported unfavorable responses, which is higher than the national average. The Fairfax County Employee Handbook includes standards of conduct that are applicable to "[a]all employees regardless of grade, title of length of County service" (Handbook, p. 90). Violation of the Standards of Conduct, which cover leave and attendance, personal behavior and conduct, protection and proper use of County data, property, funds and records, driving, safety, and outside employment/conflict of interest, is grounds for disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Additional FRD specific policies and procedures also govern member conduct. While all members at least have electronic access to the Employee Handbook and are seemingly aware that rules exist, several members expressed the sentiment that the discipline process needs to be reviewed and rules need to be "created."

Since rules are not perceived by FRD members to be consistently enforced, it has led to questions regarding what rules, if any, exist and the perception that personal power and

relationships determine the fate of members, rather than established rules. Many members stated they do not believe that senior staff treats personnel fairly and equitably. Members repeatedly asked that all instances of misconduct be handled consistently. One member suggested: “Fire people for terminable offenses and do not rehire them.” The failure to establish clear rules, consistent discipline, and fair consequences for misconduct has undermined member morale.

The challenges supervisors face in effectively managing discipline has translated into the perception that leaders are not appropriately held accountable. The behavior of commanders who are observed as not following policy or not applying it is consistently tolerated and even promoted. Long tenured members are especially dissatisfied, which is an unusual trend seen in a workplace. While many factors certainly contribute to that dissatisfaction, the belief that workplace issues will not be addressed or will be addressed based upon favoritism or without regard to established rules likely contributes to the dissatisfaction of this important group of members.

When asked how senior command manages conflict, members reported that decisions are moved higher up in the organization. Leaders in positions below senior command believe they should have a role in establishing and handing out appropriate discipline to their team members, however they perceive themselves as sometimes being removed from the process. We should note that there may be legitimate reasons for senior command to overrule their decisions such as ensuring fairness and consistency in discipline across the organization and in such cases, clear communication for why they are overruling a decision should be provided to the leader who recommended the discipline. Paperwork is described as “going by their desk,” but leaders reported that they are not empowered to make disciplinary decisions. The system is also described as cumbersome to the point that leaders ignore behavioral issues to avoid utilizing the process. Numerous sources reported that transferring locations rather than enforcing discipline is a typical response to member misconduct. To the extent this concern is true, it obviously fails to effectively address behavior problems and the perception lowers the morale of members who observe no significant consequences to violating FRD and County standards. It is important to note that many members throughout our assessment repeatedly asked for accountability to be enforced at all levels within the FRD.

Discipline is often a confidential matter, so member perceptions about whether and what type of discipline was implemented often may not be accurate. It would be inappropriate for complete transparency to exist regarding disciplinary matters, although some members requested this. Instead, it is important for FRD members to clearly understand the rules that apply, and that will be enforced and acted upon, rather than transferred or ignored. Where information is not confidential, it may be shared with those involved in the situation. Communication of available information is important.

Members also expressed that conflict exists between groups of the FRD throughout our fact-finding process. Members expressed that conflict exists between EMS and firefighters, and also between career firefighters and volunteers. Members of both EMS and volunteer groups referred to feeling like “second-class citizens” in comparison to career firefighters and requested that they be treated the same.

The County and FRD tools for addressing workplace conflict are confusing even to long tenured members. In nearly every focus group discussion, the participants did not know the

difference between a complaint and a grievance or how they would be handled within the organization. The policies and procedures were described as “convoluted.” Both for everyday workplace conflict issues and the most serious conflict issues including complaints of all types of harassment, bullying, and/or discrimination, it is obviously important that members clearly understand where and how to raise their concerns. Greater confidence that concerns will be thoroughly investigated and appropriately addressed is essential to improving the confidence of members that leadership can effectively address workplace conflict.

One significant concern brought forward by many members is that there is not a clear path that will result in a fair resolution of a workplace conflict. Instead, it is perceived there will be negative consequences for members who bring forward their concerns. Rather than exposing themselves to further workplace confrontation, members described working around problematic coworkers/supervisors and location transferring as some of the solutions used to address workplace conflict. A real fear of retaliation and reluctance to report was found. We surmised that members feel as long as there is a lack of confidence that their leaders will “do the right thing” and/or that the conflict resolution processes are fair, members will be driven to seek workplace solutions externally.

Finally, we noted that only a few members who utilized FRD or County resources (FRD EEO or Fairfax County Office of Human Rights and Equity Protection) to address workplace conflict were willing to meet and further discuss their experience. This may be indicative of negative perceptions about the complaint and grievance processes. Until members believe the complaint and grievance system is fair and effective, it is unlikely they will utilize FRD or County conflict resolution systems to address problems within the work environment.

“The rules are applied differently for everybody.” (Survey Participant Quote)

**5. Hiring/Promotions**

Organizations know that they must have the best talent in order to succeed. Along with the understanding of the need to hire, develop, and retain talented people, organizations are aware that they must manage talent as a critical resource to achieve the best possible results. The FRD is believed to be a good place to work based on many factors, including pay, dedication, commitment, and purpose. In fact, finding applicants does not seem to be a problem for the FRD. What seems to be difficult is finding the right people for the job and cultural fit. Based on feedback from FRD members and research, a strong culture for fire and rescue departments across the country should include qualities such as dedication, commitment, accountability, decision making, problem solving, perseverance, and teamwork. We recommend that the FRD assess candidates for these competencies.

A key finding in our cultural assessment is that the hiring process should be reviewed because some members do not believe that it produces the kind of results that it should. Specifically, members and leaders want a hiring process that:

1. Ensures new hires are vetted to possess the skills to do the job and are a good fit within the FRD; and

2. Involves members in the hiring process and stresses the importance of hiring the right person for the job.

Our findings revealed that the hiring process is perceived to be “completely broken and unfair.” The hiring process, as a survey category, scored the lowest (3.06) in performance on the cultural assessment. Furthermore, as a survey item, 59% of survey participants feel that the FRD fails to evaluate candidates according to cultural fit.

The hiring process is perceived by members to be unfair and ineffective because the candidates who are hired are unqualified and many of the candidates who make it to training class fail out there within the first week. Furthermore, many members feel that the hiring process decisions focus more on diversity than on skill, ability, and cultural fit. Members expressed feeling that the FRD should make a greater effort to hire qualified individuals who live the values that are espoused at the Academy and are important to the FRD, including accountability, decision making, problem solving, teamwork, grit, passion, perseverance, and hard work.

Through our one-on-one interviews and focus group sessions, we found that members feel some candidates should not have passed through recruit school based on their inability to perform tasks, negative attitude, and unethical behaviors, such as cheating.

Gallagher learned that the selection and hiring process is an open and continuous process. It is our understanding that each candidate is required to complete the steps outlined below.

1. Application
2. Personal History Statement and Documents Review
3. Candidate Physical Abilities Test (CPAT) Preparation
4. CPAT Exam
5. Written Exam
6. Polygraph Evaluation
7. Medical Examination
8. Psychological Profile Evaluation

After the candidate has completed these steps, his/her file is reviewed by a selection committee comprised of a deputy chief, EEO officer, and HR representative. Face-to-face interviews are not included in the process, however we believe they are a critical part of hiring. Face-to-face interviews allow the interviewer to observe the candidate’s emotional response to questions, which will help provide understanding into whether or not a candidate is passionate about firefighting and would be a good fit. Fire and rescue departments across the country include interviews as part of their hiring process. The City of Phoenix, Arizona includes an oral interview as the third tier of the hiring process (Fire Fighter Hiring Process, 2016). The City of Winston-Salem, North Carolina includes an interview as the fourth phase of the interview process for those candidates who are in the “top band and/ or bands” (The Hiring Process, 2016). And the City of Richmond, Virginia also includes an interview as well in the pre-employment process (Fire and Emergency Services: Recruitment, 2016).

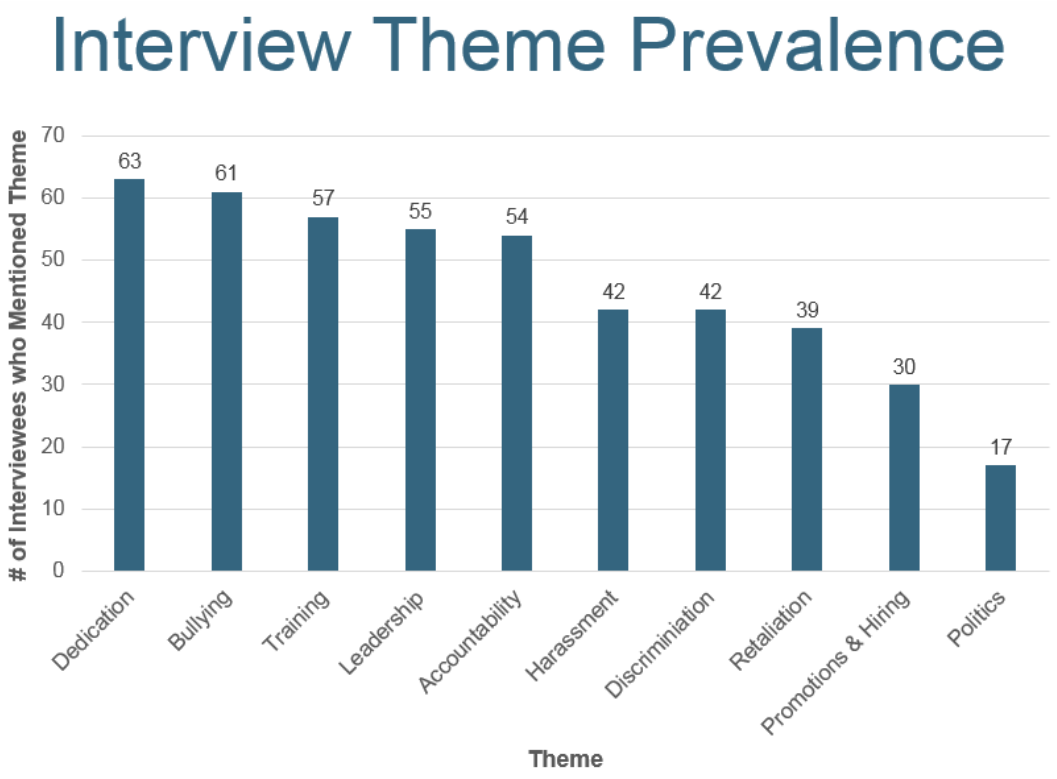
Another key driver identified in the cultural assessment was career growth. While overall, 84% of respondents feel favorable that the FRD has a work environment that allows growth

and development; qualitative data uncovered a perception of unfair treatment in the promotion process. FRD members feel that the promotion process is fairer now than compared to a few years ago. Things have changed for the better as there are fewer obstacles to promotions. Some members feel that there are opportunities to grow, while others, however, feel that they have been faced with unfair practices that have kept them from being promoted. Additionally, EMS members feel that they do not have the same promotional opportunities as do firefighters. There is a perception of isolation and inferiority among this group.

"We need to fix how we hire people - Our hiring process is broken. We do not hire for the best person for the job, but rather we hire to check a box. There is no ranking of a person's abilities (written score, physical time etc. do not matter.) and we do not have a formal interview process to evaluate a person to see why they want to be a part of our department. It is openly known that the FRD uses the current hiring system so they can hire to check the box or fill a quota, this is wrong for many reasons, first it's not fair to everyone that applies to work for the FRD, second it does not allow us to give the citizens the best 'product" for their money and lastly it creates a situation where we don't have the most fit person for the job, thus creating a risk to everyone on a call (FRD and civilian) and can lead to a higher injury risk ( look at the number of people on light duty/injury)." (Survey Participant Quote)

### Overall Findings by Data Source

Below are the most common themes that were identified during the one-on-one interviews. The themes are displayed by the number of interviewees that discussed the topic.



The culture survey also identified key themes. Based on multiple regression modeling, this analysis is used to identify and prioritize key drivers - survey items that most powerfully drive the culture at the FRD. Simply, this analysis identifies what topic the FRD should focus on to enhance its overall culture.

The chart below is defined as follows:

- Column One: “Key Drivers” – the listing of the survey items (key drivers) are in order of importance to improve the overall culture. Please note that the order is not determined by the normative differential.

- Column Two: “FRD 2016” – shows the overall score (mean) on a six point scale.

- Column Three: “Norm Diff.” – the normative differential is simply the difference from the FRD score and our national norm and serves as a point of reference. The normative differential is the difference between the overall score and the norm. In addition, statistical significance (+/- 0.09) is when the normative differential does not occur by chance. If the normative differential is highlighted in green that is a strong positive differential. If the normative differential is highlighted in red that is a strong negative differential. Gallagher’s normative data is comprised of industries including healthcare, light manufacturing, public sector, heavy manufacturing, higher education, professional services, software/information technology, and real estate/property management spanning every U.S. Census region and division. Our normative database generally enables us to reference between 300,000 and 400,000 survey respondents per item. Importantly, the normative differential is only to show a general comparison and is not the key determining factor for the FRD to action plan against.

## Key Drivers

| Key Drivers *(in order of influence of Culture)* | FRD 2016 | Norm Diff. |
|---|---|---|
| FRD's Senior/Command Staff does a good job leading this organization. *(Senior/Command Staff)* | 4.00 | -0.72 |
| My ideas and suggestions are seriously considered. *(Station/Civilian Supervisor)* | 4.27 | --- |
| The Station Supervisor/Civilian Supervisor at FRD treats me with respect. *(Station/Civilian Supervisor)* | 5.09 | +0.44 |
| FRD has a work environment that allows me to grow and develop. *(Career Growth)* | 4.64 | -0.01 |
| At FRD, I provide my opinions without fear of retaliation or retribution. *(Work Environment)* | 3.92 | -0.96 |
| FRD's work environment is one of friendliness and acceptance. *(Work Environment)* | 4.31 | -0.46 |
| At FRD, we manage and handle conflict in a healthy and professional way. *(Work Environment)* | 3.81 | --- |

The key drivers from the survey identified the key themes for the FRD to focus on to enhance its overall culture:

- Leadership – the most important driver to the culture is the survey item, "FRD's Senior/Command Staff does a good job leading this organization" (4.00/6.00). It simply means that members are looking for senior leadership to provide strong leadership, transparency, open and consistent communications, being visible, etc. Local leadership was also identified as a key driver to culture. The survey items "My ideas and suggestions are seriously considered" (4.27/6.00) and "The Station Supervisor/Civilian Supervisor at FRD treats me with respect" (4.64/6.00) highlight the importance for local leaders to be open to suggestions, listen and be respectful to members. The leader-member relationship is critical to evolve culture and improve engagement.

- Career Development – members are looking to have a work environment where they have the opportunity to grow and develop ("FRD has a work environment that allows me to grow and develop" (4.64/6.00)). This topic connects to promotions and hiring, which is an area for the FRD to focus on as it has a strong connection to engagement and cultural growth.

- Work Environment – this topic is focused on ensuring the workplace is free of bullying, harassment, and discrimination. The key drivers are the following survey items "At FRD, I provide my opinions without fear of retaliation or retribution" (3.92/6.00), "FRD's work environment is one of friendliness and acceptance" (4.31/6.00), and "At FRD, we manage and handle conflict in a healthy and professional way" (3.81/6.00). A culture that is comfortable, safe, and clear of retaliation is critically important.

The following two charts highlight what the FRD is doing well and what should be improved. The charts are defined as follows:

- Column One: “Survey Item” – the survey item, which is listed in order of performance by the national normative differential.
- Column Two: “FRD 2016” – shows the overall score (mean) on a six point scale.
- Column Three: “Norm Diff.” – the normative differential is the difference between the overall score and the norm and serves as a point of reference. In addition, statistical significance (+/- 0.09) is when the normative differential does not occur by chance. If the normative differential is highlighted in green that is a strong positive differential. If the normative differential is highlighted in red that is a strong negative differential.

## Areas of Strength

| **Survey Item** *(in order of performance vs. national norm; statistical significance +/- 0.09)* | **FRD 2016** | **Norm Diff.** |
|---|---|---|
| My job is secure at FRD. *(Career Growth)* | 5.04 | **+0.48** |
| The Station Supervisor/Civilian Supervisor at FRD treats me with respect. *(Station/Civilian Supervisor)* | 5.09 | **+0.44** |
| I have not seriously considered leaving FRD for another job. *(Engagement)* | 4.76 | **+0.43** |
| I often leave work with a feeling of satisfaction about my job. *(Engagement)* | 4.83 | **+0.10** |
| My Station Supervisor/Civilian Supervisor communicates well. *(Station and Civilian Supervisor)* | 4.84 | **+0.09** |

The strengths fall within two over the overarching key themes:

- Dedication – there is a strong dedication amongst the members at the FRD. This is highlighted by the following survey items “My job is secure at FRD” (5.04/6.00), “I have not seriously considered leaving FRD for another job” (4.76/6.00), and “I leave work with a feeling of satisfaction about my job” (4.83/6.00). The FRD should be proud of its workforce as the overall dedication to their job is extremely high and that it has a positive impact to your culture.

Leadership – local leadership is a key driver to improving the overall culture, and members recognize a positive impact the local leaders are providing members through the following survey items – “The Station Supervisor/Civilian Supervisor at FRD treats me with respect”

(5.09/6.00) and “My Station Supervisor/Civilian Supervisor communicates well” (4.84/6.00). This shows that members recognize some positive traits of the local leaders and should be expanded to further develop the overall culture.

## Opportunities for Improvement

| Survey Item *(in order of performance vs. national norm; statistical significance +/- 0.09)* | FRD 2016 | Norm Diff. |
|---|---|---|
| FRD's grievance procedure and process is effective. *(Grievance)* | 3.63 | -1.37 |
| Senior/Command Staff takes appropriate action to address any reported misconduct. *(Senior/Command Staff)* | 3.77 | -1.27 |
| At FRD, I provide my opinions without fear of retaliation or retribution. *(Work Environment)* | 3.92 | -0.96 |
| Senior/Command Staff will use the info from this survey to make improvements. *(Senior/Command Staff)* | 3.60 | -0.94 |
| The actions of Senior/Command Staff reflect their commitment to FRD's vision & values. *(Senior/Command Staff)* | 4.05 | -0.90 |
| When hiring, FRD evaluates candidates according to cultural fit. *(Hiring)* | 2.98 | --- |

The opportunities relate to the following overarching key themes:

- Leadership – most of the survey items that scored low relate to senior leadership and the key drivers to improve the overall culture. The survey items are as follows “FRD’s grievance procedure and process is effective” (3.63/6.00), “Senior/Command Staff take appropriate action to address any reported misconduct” (3.63/6.00), “At FRD, I provide my opinions without fear of retaliation or retribution” (3.92/6.00), “Senior/Command Staff will use the information from the survey to make improvements” (3.60/6.00), and “The actions of Senior/Command Staff reflect their commitment to FRD’s vision & values” (4.05/6.00). All of these survey times tie back to the overall theme of improving the connection that Senior/Command Staff have with their members. The culture is defined and driven by the actions, communication, and outcomes of the senior leaders. Ensuring the Senior Leaders are on the same page is essential to move the culture in a positive way.

- Hiring – although not among the key drivers, hiring is among the lowest scoring survey items, which means the FRD should look at the overall hiring process to ensure it is hiring members that meet the skills, character, and culture of the FRD. The following

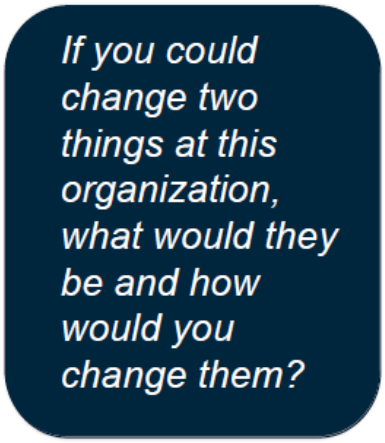
survey item highlights that fact, “When hiring, FRD evaluates candidates according to cultural fit” (2.98/6.00).

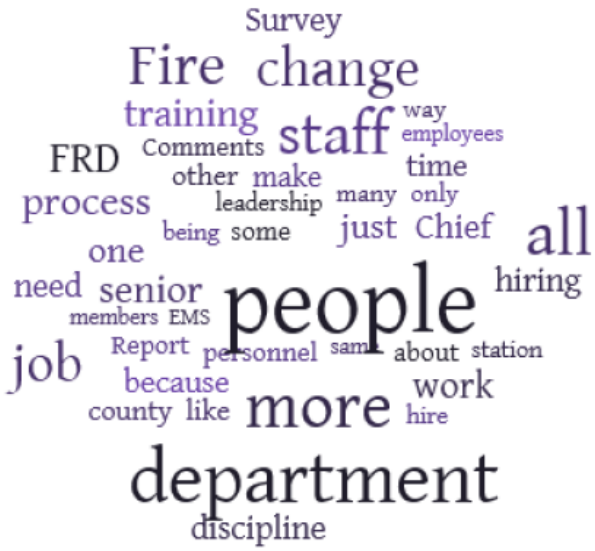
## Recommendations

### Cultural Themes

This section describes our recommendations for each of the five themes and were derived from our data collection, suggestions provided by members, best practice research and the team's experience. In addition to the recommendations below, we also suggest that the County create a cross-sectional committee to operationalize all recommendations provided with clear definitions for success.

In the survey, we asked participants an open-ended question, "If you could change two things at this organization, what would they be and how would you change them? Based on the prevalence of the responses, we created a word cloud that depicts the most common responses (the bigger the word the more often it was mentioned).




### 1. Dedication

Our recommendation is that the FRD "[does] not let the goodness of the dedication that is clearly there become tainted" (Eisenhauer, 2015).

Gallagher has determined that there is a very high level of dedication among FRD members and we encourage the County to continue to do the things that provide a place where people are excited and proud to work. For example, technical firefighting training, such as that offered at the academy, is valued highly for it leads to people saying and believing that no other fire department is "as good on the ground as the FCFRD." And, training at the local station level is valued because it builds a firefighting and rescue team that really works well when it really matters.

Many members commented that they believe they are well paid compared to other departments. This is a strong point that helps members stay with the FRD. When flexible schedules are also available, this is seen as extremely favorable, so long as it does not interfere with the minimal

staffing requirements needed. But, there is considerable opportunity for building on this core and making the FRD even better, especially by addressing some core issues related to the suggestions below.

1. Start at the top.

   "Walking the walk" is the single most effective member dedication strategy any organization can deploy. Members must see the leadership consistently demonstrating the characteristics and behaviors everyone else is being asked to display. If the FRD wants trust, teamwork, honesty, then leadership has to be clearly like this too.

2. Be more transparent.

   Leadership and management transparency has a direct correlation with a member valuing what management provides. Trusting members with sensitive information (obviously carefully expressed) gives them a sense of deeper investment in the FRD and helps to create a more cooperative team atmosphere, as opposed to an 'us versus them' perception of the leadership-member relationship. Sometimes it is OK to just say this topic is not yet ready to be shared. But silence is not a good route for gaining loyalty. Continue the good communication channels that already exist. Use 'kitchen table' time for more informal communications. Also, continue the transparency with the public as much as possible. Continue the regular posts on FRD social media accounts, including Facebook, Twitter, and the Fairfax Fire and Rescue Department blog, that update the public daily on the good work the FRD is doing both internally and in the community. This will further emphasize the dedication and devotion of the members.

   It is true that there are constraints on what can and cannot be communicated. For example, the particulars of a disciplinary action. But, it is essential members know that "bad" situations do not go unaddressed. This is a delicate, but very important balancing between confidentiality and accountability.

3. Offer visibility.

   This should manifest in two ways. First, top leaders must be accessible and visible so that members see them as approachable and available for guidance and assistance, rather than locked away and inaccessible. Provide more recognition/celebration for loyalty, tenure and on-the-job measured performance. Second, publicly recognize members for their contributions and achievements. This not only motivates each of those individuals to continue doing great work, but also their peers. Also increase visibility with members and their direct managers. Implement 'check-ins' with members and their direct managers to gauge individual member engagement during a member's first year at the 30-day, 60-day, and 90-day marks, and also at the 5-year mark to prevent the engagement drop-off that was seen in the survey results after 6 years of employment.

4. Say "thank you."

   Acknowledgement by leadership and among peers is the quickest way to build trust, restore strained relationships and energize the workplace. Members with supportive supervisors are more likely to stay with the FRD and are more dedicated. Participate in activities during Firefighter Appreciation Week, if not already doing so, and also acknowledge members who reach tenure milestones with the FRD. Continue to publicize

these activities through your social media accounts to demonstrate the members' commitment and dedication to the FRD to the community.

5. Be authentic.

   Genuine appropriate, professional relationships between members and leadership inspire trust and builds comradery. Explain why things are the way they are, without excuses but with openness about the FRD and the issues that are being faced.

6. Be flexible.

   Consider giving staff and field members some freedom to adjust their work schedules or location to better suit their needs as work needs will allow. For example, new mothers/dads or elder caretakers might need shift accommodation for some period of time; or assignment to a station that is nearer home (less cross county commuting) would be beneficial.. Facilitate this as much as the mission will allow. Increasing a member's control over his or her location and schedule will help increase engagement and commitment to the FRD. Of course, this needs to be in the context of the 24/7/365 nature of the business that requires no less than the minimal staffing required to be responsive. While this imposes constraints, running a pilot program is a good opportunity to find solutions.

7. Engage from day one.

   Filling out mountains of paperwork and sitting through a canned PowerPoint presentation on the first day at work is a surefire way to *kill* dedication. New members start with enthusiasm and curiosity, so capitalize on that momentum by putting them right to work, helping them to get to know their co-workers and/or pairing them with a mentor. Revise the current onboarding program as necessary. Acclimate them to the culture by making an excellent first impression and they'll fall in love with both the FRD and their work. Also begin promoting career path options starting when a member begins so that he or she can begin to visualize a long-term career with the FRD.

8. Volunteer together and play together.

   Doing "good" is good business. Organizations that support philanthropic causes by involving members and leadership in volunteer projects see a direct increase in dedication and productivity. Continue the community outreach programs that the FRD is already participating in, including Toys for Tots, Breast Cancer Awareness month, 'Fill the Boot', and Community Open House day to show that the Stations, Battalions, and the FRD as a whole are engaged in local projects beyond fire and rescue. Having fun together not only breaks up the routine but also encourages creativity and collaboration. Of course, leadership must also visibly participate, which further contributes to authenticity, visibility and communication.

## 2. Leadership

Leadership has a powerful impact on the culture, climate and success of any organization. If the organization is not clear on its vision, values and goals and if it does not model the behaviors that it wants to see from its members, there will be fear, confusion and a lack of trust throughout the organization. Strong leadership is instrumental to organizational strength and success, regardless of whether the organization's structure is bureaucratic or paramilitary. Strong leadership skills and behaviors that support authenticity, transparency and trust can be learned,

though it does not happen overnight. To initiate the change towards strong leadership, we suggest focusing on development for the Fire Chief and Senior Leadership, and also spreading leadership competencies throughout the organization.

**Chief and Senior Leadership**

Leadership most often happens from the top down. Members look to their leaders for accepted and rewarded behaviors and values, as well as examples of trust, accountability, consistency and respect. Respect must be shown across all interactions with boss, peers and direct reports. We recommend that the top leadership continue their leadership development and training immediately. We suggest that the leadership development consist of the following elements:

1. Consider using executive coaches for the senior leadership team. This would allow the leadership team to begin developing the behaviors and emotional intelligence needed to support them in leading the FRD through this time of change.
2. It is crucial that Chief Bowers strengthen the relationship with his leadership team and focus on connecting with and leading his direct reports. Many in this leadership team hold the perception that they are no longer consulted in issues that impact their role and feel excluded from issues that impact their ability to do their job. Transparency and trust is lacking from the senior leadership team as a whole. A strong, committed and cohesive leadership team will go a very long way in strengthening every level of the organization. The Chief has lead a cultural change within the department over the last three years and, as with most significant change in organizations, he has been met with resistance from some pockets. It is difficult to achieve successful change when the leadership team is not on the same page.
3. Begin assessments for the senior leadership team to get a baseline for their leadership development. Recommended assessments are a 360-degree assessment, which measures the perceptions of boss, peers and direct reports of individual leaders; as well as an EQ-i 2.0® assessment, which measures how often behaviors are influenced by emotions. Both of these assessments provide a clear report of current development strengths and growth areas.
4. Administer Patrick Lencioni's "5 Behaviors of a Cohesive Team" assessment and conduct a team building program to aid senior leadership in developing a strong team based on trust, conflict, commitment, accountability and results.
5. Continue to meet with senior command in regularly scheduled meetings to increase discussion and work on consistency within the themes mentioned in this section of the report.
6. Trust may be increased by taking appropriate disciplinary action up to and including termination for unmanageable leaders who will not implement the changes mandated by the County. FRD members need to see that the leadership is held accountable for non-compliance and that consequences are enforced. If you do not, the possibility of a backlash against both the Chief and the needed changes may occur. The 360-degree assessment and a Performance Improvement Plan for each leader will assist with this path.
7. Continue the Leadership Rotation program for the Deputies. This will provide cross-training and succession management at a high level and also prevent one person from becoming too established and comfortable in one role.

**Moving Leadership Competencies throughout the Organization**

A positive shift in the behaviors of FRD leadership will encourage a positive shift in the other levels of the organization as well. Steps for moving strong leadership throughout the organization include the following recommendations.

1. Establish values for the FRD by requesting input from multiple sources and groups to include firefighters, EMS personal, volunteers and leadership. Once these values are created, visualize them by placing them on walls in Massey, stations and on FRD printed items.
2. Once the values are created, identify the organizational strategy, goals and measurements that will lead to the desired results that will drive the FRD forward. The goals and measurements can be converted into matrices to introduce friendly competition between stations to drive improvement.
3. Introduce a reward system for those members who exhibit the values of the FRD and also institute disciplinary actions for failure to demonstrate the values.
4. Establish clear and operational leadership competencies based on a paramilitary organization for each level of the FRD and include these competencies in the performance management program.
5. Develop leadership training on challenging areas within the FRD. Two immediate suggestions would be change management and conflict management. This training should be made available to all management levels of the FRD and to all areas (Fire, EMS, and Volunteer) to provide consistency and encourage accountability. In an article written by Reid Wodicka in *Fire Engineering*, he explains, “Although all organizations experience disagreement and conflict, those that develop a strong level of loyalty within their membership can respond to problems and strengthen the efficacy of the organization in the long run” (Wodicka, 2012). This statement regarding loyalty is true for change management as well. In his article on “High Turnover among Public Safety Employees”, Brad Kavetski states that “Leadership classes should be available to up and coming leaders and even for mangers in current leadership roles. Through training, supervisors can become more effective leaders and ultimately create a higher functioning department where employees will want to stay” (Kavetski, 2016). Establishing a hands-on, multi-media leadership training at every level of the FRD will not only increase engagement and retention, but it will also provide consistency, clarity, reinforce values, and develop strong managers and leaders for the future of the FRD.
6. Lastly, establish avenues and ways to build social capital between leadership and direct reports. Have fun, enjoy planned social gatherings and impromptu activities. The better you know the people you work with and/or manage, the better you are able to know their motivators, values and needs. This leads to better leadership and influence.

### 3. Bullying / Harassment / Discrimination

The following four recommendations should be considered by the FRD to create a culture that will not tolerate any bullying, harassment, and discrimination:

1. The FRD should communicate to all members and volunteers the results of this cultural assessment. Important information to share should include the following:

    - Thank the participants on this important initiative.
    - Praise the overall survey participation rate – 62% or 1,495 out of 2,403 participants.
    - Praise the overall Cultural Score on the assessment survey – 4.33 out of 6.00, which scored in the 29th percentile of all organizations nationally.
    - Share the overall scores on each of the following categories: engagement, career growth, teamwork, station/civilian supervisor, work environment, senior/command staff, grievance, and hiring.
    - Share additional reported survey statistics such as workplace bullying at the FRD (37% of members have witnessed it), Senior/Command Staff does a good job of leading this organization (4.00/6.00 or 72% favorable and -0.72 below the national norm), members having the ability to share their opinions without fear of retribution or retaliation (3.92/6.00 or 65% favorable, and -0.96 below the national norm).
    - Share the key drivers to improving the overall culture that were identified in the survey: Dedication, Leadership, Bullying/Harassment/Discrimination Conflict Management, and Hiring/Promotions.
    - Outline the next steps, including a timeline, on the action planning process, to include developing and implementing action plans.

    Communication should be sent from the Fire Chief and County Executive as soon as reasonably possible. Importantly, this communication should not be the only communication that is sent, there should be follow-up communications that continue to share updates to the action plans and any improvements that have been made, holding everyone accountable to improve the overall culture and reinforcing the commitment to a safe and viable work environment.

2. The County has an existing process for investigating complaints of harassment, bullying, and discrimination as well as a grievance process. Complaints, which involve discrimination, may only be investigated by the OHREP. Complaints involving standards of conduct and non-discriminatory matters may be handled by the FRD. We recommend the County and FRD focus on two main actions to reduce workplace harassment, bullying, and discrimination:

    - Ensure that the workplace harassment, bullying, and discrimination policies are updated and communicated to all members. This policy should also be disseminated to all new members during the recruitment and induction phase so new members are aware of the importance and process.

- Take effective, timely, consistent, and appropriate remedial action if workplace harassment, bullying, and discrimination occur. Members and leaders are required to refrain from committing acts of harassment, bullying, and discrimination and we recommend appropriate and swift disciplinary action to be taken in response to these behaviors. Furthermore, members and leaders should all contribute towards creating and maintaining a work environment that is free from harassment, bullying, and discrimination.

Moreover, large enterprises, like the FRD, may need the assistance of OHREP to disseminate information and conduct formal training to ensure all members are aware of and understand the policy and procedures regarding harassment, bullying, and discrimination. This information should also be included in new member orientation. The reinforcement of these elements should include the following, and of course are subject to County policy:

- A clear and consistent policy statement about harassment, bullying, and discrimination.
- A clear definition of harassment, bullying, and discrimination. Members may have a different understanding or definition on each of these terms so a clear definition is critical.
- A clear definition of the difference between a complaint and grievance, providing clear examples.
    - Currently, “grievable” complaints of merit employees which receive a binding decision from a three- member panel of the Civil Service Commission include dismissals, unsatisfactory service separations, demotions, suspension; application of specific County personnel policies, procedures, rules, and regulations; acts of retaliation for participating in the grievance process or other protected activities; and discrimination against employees because of participation in protected political activities or the failure to participate in political activities.
    - Examples of “nongrievable complaints” that are to be handled by management outside the panel and/or grievance process are included in the Fairfax Personnel Regulations and the Employee Handbook. Some of these include concerns about the conditions of the job, “relations with fellow employees,” performance appraisals, oral and written reprimands, 120-day Performance Improvement Plans, and changes to wages, position classifications or benefits.
    - A member who believes that they have been the victim of illegal discrimination (based upon race, color, religion, national origin, gender, age, disability, and/or marital status) or retaliation may file a “complaint” with OHREP. It should be noted that the OHREP only investigates complaints of discrimination. Therefore, all complaints filed with the OHREP must allege violations of Procedural Memorandums 39-01 through 39-06, the County’s anti-discrimination policies. For example, an employee may file a complaint alleging that they have been subjected to explicit comments, in violation of Procedural Memorandum 39-01, the County’s policy on Sexual Harassment.
- Disciplinary rules and consequences against the harasser and against those who knowingly make false claims.

- Protective and remedial measures for the victim, including the reassurance of no retaliation.
- Promotional and educational programs that go beyond an online course (i.e. in-person training). This would include in-person, situation-based training and would focus on how to enforce the policies and not just education on the policies.
- Monitoring and communicating outcomes upon resolution of a grievance or complaint.
- Clearly outline to all members the overall process if you have a complaint or a grievance. Members should have adequate information to understand the availability and steps in the OHREP investigation process, the grievance process, and/or other management processes to resolve workplace issues that are not grievable and are not within the purview of OHREP. Members will be more apt to follow the process if it is clearly understood and it is more likely the concern will be appropriately managed.

3. Prevention is the most effective way to reduce harassment, bullying, and discrimination for an employer. Prevention measures include:

   - Cultural competence assessment - engage in a cultural competence assessment and training to allow members to both understand where they measure themselves and to train them on how to close the cultural awareness gap.
   - Communication – share the established guidelines through online training, in-person training, workshops, and various print and electronic media.
   - Education – organize the new-hire orientation to include harassment, bullying, and discrimination. Share real world experiences, steps in the process, and reinforce the importance of a harassment-free and safe work environment.
   - Training – provide specialized training for leaders to identify issues in the workplace and develop strategies for prevention. It may behoove the FRD to consider a Harassment Response Team, which would include peers as they would help investigate and even provide solutions for the complaint/grievance. We also suggest implementing an in-person situational training for leaders to supplement the online training so that leaders are better able to identify, prevent and discipline this behavior.
   - Socialization – as with any organization, building teamwork and ensuring members are on the same page is critical. With that said, we recommend additional social gatherings to improve the overall teamwork, especially when it comes with a paramedic and Firefighters. A good step has already been implemented by Chief Bowers by adding a paramedic on the firetruck. Additional avenues for building social capital within the FRD are critical because when there is overall cohesiveness, there will be less harassment, bullying, and discrimination. Ask the members for their suggestions around building teamwork as it will vary from location.

4. Finally, we understand that the FRD is a paramilitary organization, and thus change is more difficult than with other organizations. Interestingly, the United States Army has implemented a culture of change to positively impact cyber security, resilience, sexual assault, and leader development. For the Army to change, one of the most important aspects that were identified to facilitate change was for leaders to become advocates for the cultural change,

but not through lectures, PowerPoint slides, or online training. Instead, leaders who developed an evangelistic fervor to focus on the urgency and seriousness of cultural change were the drivers for the change. Importantly, involving FRD members in the change process will only enhance the process and the acceptance of the change. Real cultural change cannot be delegated, real change transforms through changed behaviors and the underlying beliefs and values via the actions of leadership.

### 4. Conflict Management

To develop increased confidence in the FRD's ability to manage workplace conflict, the FRD needs to evaluate and update relevant FRD policies and procedures and ensure they are consistent with County policies. When viewed side by side, current FRD and County policies and procedures are unclear and inconsistent regarding complaint procedures, the availability of alternative dispute resolution, and responsibility for investigations. Member (and leadership) knowledge of the current policies and procedures, and which policies apply in any given situation, is limited. Members report relying on coworkers and supervisors to understand applicable policies, rather than the actual policies. Best practice policies need to be adopted and members and leaders need to be educated on the revised policies and conflict management resolution options. This could include a peer review process for internal complaints and/or outsourcing the process to a completely impartial third party subject to appropriate confidentiality requirements.

Important policy and procedures to review include those related to member discipline. It is not surprising that in a paramilitary department such as the FRD, both members and leadership expect and desire clear rules and consequences for violating rules. An effective discipline process promotes compliance with rules through deterrence and encourages any necessary behavior change in a constructive and positive manner. Case-by-case decisions that are perceived as subjective, inconsistent and perhaps not well documented lead to a lack of trust and loss of respect for leadership and the process itself.

Member feedback throughout Gallagher's assessment included multiple requests to develop a discipline matrix. A matrix is simply an outline of progressive disciplinary actions that will be utilized in the event of conduct that violates the FRD's and/or County's standards of conduct. Disciplinary steps should be progressive and allow members the opportunity to modify their unacceptable behavior in all but the most serious situations. Members are likely to perceive discipline that is administered pursuant to an established matrix as equal and fair, rather than as subjective or based upon inappropriate factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, rank, seniority, friendship or due to FRD politics. A matrix should be built by the FRD and labor union in consultation with one another and should not be flexible. A clear discipline policy, which may include a discipline matrix, will help demonstrate the FRD leaders are accountable for their areas of supervision and acting with consistency and fairness when discipline is necessary.

While all relevant county-wide policies are revised regularly every two years, FRD should ensure that its Standard Operating Procedures encompass and are consistent with county policies and that prohibited conduct is clearly defined, together with examples that are easily understood by all members. Policies should specify the reporting options and procedures for members. It is important that these policies expressly prohibit retaliation and the potential consequences for any retaliatory behavior.

Member education on existing conflict resolution procedures is very important. Generally members (including leaders) did not express a solid understanding of how complaints are processed, the grievance process, or the reasons to utilize one process instead of another. Training members to understand their most fundamental workplace protections and to have solid knowledge of the procedures to resolve workplace concerns is necessary and important.

We understand the FRD EEO complaint process has been revised recently and that all discrimination or retaliation complaints now are being investigated by the County's Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs. Hopefully, this change will increase the confidence of FRD members that discrimination concerns are being investigated and analyzed impartially. Good communications with members who file EEO complaints also will enhance confidence in this revised process. FRD members need confirmation and confidence that their complaint has been received and understood, relevant witnesses and documents will be considered, and appropriate action will be taken to rely upon and fully utilize internal conflict resolution processes. Certainly not all information learned during an investigation is appropriate to be shared with the complainant, but communication that the matter has been reviewed and resolved, as well as all actions that impact the complainant, should be a standard step prior to closing any discrimination or retaliation complaint investigation.

We recommend evaluating whether the County of Fairfax grievance procedure is effectively meeting the needs of its members and FRD leaders. From the data collected, it is apparent members and leaders do not understand well the various processes to address workplace concerns. Neither the complaint nor the grievance process were described as procedures that allow the expression of concern about working conditions or workplace conflict without fear of reprisal. The perceived lack of an effective complaint process and grievance procedure damages the internal credibility of leaders and the organization as a whole.

As outlined in the County of Fairfax Personnel Regulations, the grievance procedure consists of three initial steps that require the member's immediate supervisor, division supervisor, and department head to assess a member's complaint. If the decision of the Department Head is not acceptable to the member, and the complaint is either grievable with a binding decision or is nongrievable with an advisory decision as provided in the regulations, the member then may request a formal hearing. This process requires members, who often may not have legal counsel, to follow the detailed procedural requirements of the grievance procedure at the risk of losing their opportunity to present their concerns. The opportunity for internal or information mediation is not clearly spelled out in the personnel regulations and the process seems to initially involve only decision makers who are likely to be perceived as supporting management. It may be possible to develop a more effective process that benefits not only the FRD but also the County generally.

Finally, some amount of conflict seems to arise due to organizational and structural barriers. Many members reported the perception that although the majority of FRD calls are medical emergencies rather than fires, a significantly greater amount of resources is being allocated to fire issues. Aligning resources with the volume of calls may increase perceptions of "fairness" and decrease workplace conflict. Establishing joint training opportunities for EMS and fire personnel also is likely to create stronger relationships and reduce workplace conflict.

Throughout the recommendations offered in the survey comments, FRD members requested that grievances be reviewed and handled by a third-party to ensure that they are handled fairly. FRD should educate and regularly inform its members of the existence of The County's third

party review panel for grievances, the Civil Service Commission, an appellate hearing body who adjudicates employee grievances. This commission serves as an unbiased checks and balance system to help build member trust that both grievances and complaints are handled appropriately.

Developing processes to effectively manage workplace conflict is not easy. The dedicated and skilled leaders of the FRD, together with County resources such as OHREP and County leadership, are very capable of improving current policies and procedures to reach this goal. Members and leaders are looking for policies and evidence that clear rules exist, they are applied uniformly and fairly, and opportunities to resolve concerns effectively and without risk of retaliation are available and known.

### 5. Hiring / Promotions

FRD turnover rates are quite low, on average, from 2.5% to 3.5%. Employment of firefighters is projected to grow 5% from 2014 to 2024 (BLS, Occupational Outlook Handbook: Firefighters, 2015), and competition for jobs will likely be strong. Employees are organizations most valuable assets. Making a good hiring decision is the most important decision you can make.

A 2009 study completed by human resource consulting firm Development Dimensions International (DDI) found that organizations with a sound hiring process and an effective hiring system ranked higher in financial performance, productivity, quality, customer satisfaction, member satisfaction and retention. Success is based on finding the right people for the right jobs.

One FRD member offered a recommendation for consideration and discussion that aims to improve the hiring and promotions process that demonstrates the ripple effect of hiring and promoting quality candidates:

*"*Make a better effort to hire and promote people who have demonstrated proficiency and commitment to achieve above and beyond 'only the basics" in Fire and Rescue - especially candidates who have had life experiences different than the "typical profile" of a professional firefighter (worked in the corporate or professional world, lived abroad, graduated from college, etc.) These people often have a more firm commitment to respect for diversity, mediation and conflict resolution, and working to improve the system as a whole. Many FRD personnel do not venture beyond their vision of their work as purely suppression, rescue, and EMS; and therefore they do not consider how they may be viewed by their colleagues or the general public whom they serve. This likely stems from the fact that the current system at the FRD does not encourage anything beyond "the basics" (tasks specified in the "Probie Manual" which recruits are expected to complete), or even the criteria which will be judged on promotional examinations. The FRD must expect more from all of its members with regards to interpersonal communications, judgment, education, and leadership. This can also be developed in-house as well: put more effort into research, development, community outreach, and other enrichment programs for the Department; both for members and the community. This will attract and retain better talent in all aspects of the department, which will increase the diversity of life experiences that is desired to improve the culture of the department*." (Survey Participant Quote)*

We recommend that the FRD hire not only for required skills, but also for traits and behaviors that will allow the candidate to be successful. Experience and education alone do not guarantee performance. Even the most skilled candidate will fail if he or she has a poor attitude. Emphasize hiring for and promoting the right behaviors and personality traits for your culture. Offer training to develop the FRD's desired skills. The current program of hiring without assessing the person outside of the application form fails to do this important task. Including in-person interviews with leaders and high performers will help assess a candidate's attitude and if they will be a cultural fit for the FRD. Consider creating an Employment Branding campaign that highlights the high levels of dedication in the FRD.

First, we recommend further review of the recruitment, selection and hiring process. Our objective in this study was to assess the culture so our assessment of the recruitment, selection and hiring process is solely in this context. Our findings revealed dissatisfaction amongst the members about the hiring process. Therefore, we recommend the following steps be considered in your recruitment, selection, and hiring process – specifically to include identification and definition of FRD competencies and face-to-face interviews.

1. Recruiting Team – this team is currently responsible for all applicant testing and selection, the applicant tracking system and the job posting approval process. We recommend this team is led by a human resources professional.
2. Selection Team – this team is responsible for reviewing the completed applicant file and making the hiring decision. This team should be led by an HR professional and include people within the FRD as well as Fairfax County staff outside of the FRD, who understand the roles and responsibilities of the position. This team would be responsible for maintaining the mission, vision and values in the selection process, as well as the core competencies for successful cultural fit. The selection team will be responsible for keeping job descriptions current to reflect duties and responsibilities, will develop interview questions for face-to-face interviews that support the FRD's values, and competencies; and be trained in essential interviewing skills and objectivity.
3. Review the job descriptions – HR and FRD members from the Recruitment and Selection teams collaboratively review job descriptions to ensure accuracy and to make necessary updates.
4. Identify core competencies necessary for a good cultural fit – in addition to job descriptions; competencies include organizational values and factors that would make a candidate successful in the organization's culture. Employers often value core competencies above actual job knowledge in some cases. These competencies could include communication skills; analytical and critical-thinking processes; negotiation and conflict resolution skills; and the ability to adapt to a number of different circumstances and interact with colleagues at every level in the organization. Core competencies are transferable skills that are useful in virtually any role, and it's important to ask questions that give candidates a chance to express them.
5. Develop standard interview questions to supplement existing exams and assessments – using the job descriptions, competencies models, and FRD values, develop a standard

list of interview questions. Cultural fit interview questions should be asked of every candidate in order to be consistent.

6. Continue the current search strategy for finding diverse, qualified candidates – use various channels including internal postings, website postings, member referrals, high schools, technical centers, colleges and universities to find the right candidates. All efforts should be in alignment with County regulations.
7. In-person interviews – all candidates interviewed must have completed the employment application and all exams and assessments required to meet job requirements. In situations where organizations receive a heavy volume of applicants for a job opening, face-to-face interviews are a valuable tool for narrowing the field and identifying the right candidate for job and cultural fit. We suggest creating a panel of high-performing FRD members and appropriate HR professionals and other County staff to interview the candidate to assess for cultural fit.
8. Complete an interview assessment – the hiring team should complete an interview assessment, a consistent method to select the best candidate for the position. For example, using the job description, list of skills, knowledge, experience, and education needed to be successful in the position. Interviewers should also discuss their overall impression of each candidate including, but not limited to, attire, attitude, timeliness, how well the candidate responded to questions, interpersonal skills, motivation, and enthusiasm.
9. Extend an offer – continue with current process.
10. Conduct background checks – continue with current process.
11. Arrange for new member orientation and onboarding process – continue current process working with the HR and FRD to provide the new member and their family with a thorough orientation process, including a cultural orientation. Continue to engage from day one to capitalize on new member momentum and excitement. Include periodic review of the orientation and onboarding process to ensure current and accurate best practices are in place.

**Promotional Process**

As with the hiring process, we recommend an in-depth review of the promotional process. Our objective for this study did not include a thorough review of the promotional process. Based on our findings, we understand at a high level, the promotion process to be as outlined below:

1. Field
    - Exam – assesses the minimum qualifications one must have for an operational position and is offered every 2 years; Exam development is 8-9 month process and is developed by a DHR and a committee of Subject Matter Experts from FRD; exam dates are posted 6 months in advance
    - Candidate must pass exam – ranked by exam score

- Promoted to position based on exam score and position vacancies

2. Internal Staff Promotions
   - Candidates on the promotional eligibility list are asked to submit a letter of interest
   - Candidate must be at required existing rank and promotion eligible
   - Positions posted on an informational bulletin with minimum preferred qualifications
   - Candidate interviews
   - Once the interview process is completed and a candidate is selected, the process can be closed

*We understand at the time of this writing, the promotional process is currently being standardized for uniform staff promotional procedures to mirror the county's civilian promotional process.

Specific recommendations include:

1. Clearly and often communicate the promotional process across the organization. If exceptions are made to the stated promotional process, then those exceptions should be communicated to members, especially those affected by the exception. Consider moving the testing that is administered for promotional consideration from every two years to every year.
2. The scoring results from each exam should be reviewed to see if there are trends related to questions or candidate exercises that are often answered or performed incorrectly. Refresher courses could be developed to address these areas.
3. Create a team of seasoned staff to serve as the exam committee who are committed to the promotional process, familiar with and educated on sound assessment practices. Committee members should have clearly defined roles and should meet with candidates.
4. Continue to offer the Coaching for Performance West Point Leadership course as a mandatory leadership skill for all FRD leaders, including station leaders. Some feel that certain battalion chiefs are better mentors and developmental coaches than others. As with any leadership skill, coaching for performance development and career progression is a skill that can be developed and measured. We recommend that this competency be included in the leadership training and development program.
5. When members are not selected for promotions, offer them feedback and areas for improvement so that next time the opportunity comes up they are able to improve their opportunity for success. Members don't feel that they are given enough constructive feedback for development.
6. Improve the performance evaluation system – members feel that the evaluation system is outdated and does not provide meaningful and constructive feedback for development.

## Appendix

### A. References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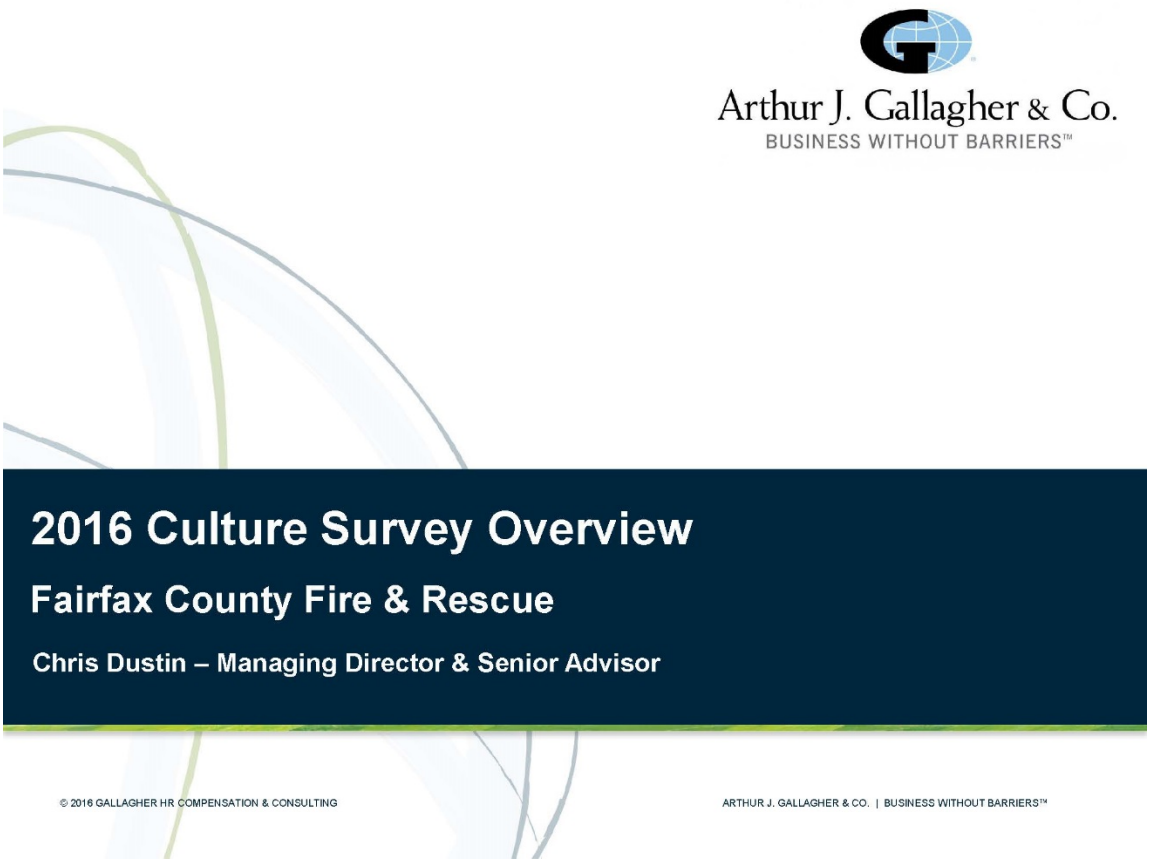
## B. List of Policies & Procedures Reviewed

Below is the list of the 21 Policies & Procedures that Gallagher reviewed during the cultural assessment.

- County of Fairfax Grievance Procedures (Chapter 17 of the Personnel Regulations)
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) information from Fairfax County website
- Fairfax County Government Employee Handbook
- Fairfax County Government Workplace Violence Incident Report
- Fairfax County Memorandum No. 28: Initial Action in Dealing with Impaired Employees Suspected of Alcohol/Drug Use and related documents
- Fairfax County Memorandum No. 32: Employee Assistance Program and related attachments
- Fire & Rescue Department EEO Program Office Intake Form
- Fire & Rescue Department Investigative Warning Form
- Fire & Rescue Department SOP 02.00.04: Sexual Harassment
- Fire & Rescue Department SOP 02.00.05: Discrimination
- Fire & Rescue Department SOP 02.00.13: Employee Relations
- Fire & Rescue Department SOP 02.00.14: Workplace Violence
- Firefighters' and Emergency Medical Technicians' Procedural Guarantees (Administrative Investigation)
- OHREP (Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs) Employment Policies Relating to Pregnancy and Childbirth
- OHREP Equal Employment Opportunity Reporting Requirements
- OHREP Policy and Procedure on Harassment
- OHREP Policy and Procedure for the Reasonable Accommodation Process in Employment
- OHREP Policy and Procedure for Reasonable Accommodation Services and Devices
- OHREP Policy and Procedure for Religious Accommodation in the Workplace
- OHREP Policy and Procedure on Sexual Harassment
- OHREP Policies and Procedures

## C. Cultural Assessment Survey Overview



## Culture Survey Structure

**Closed-Ended Items**

47 closed-ended items: measured using a 6-point agreement scale where *6=Strongly Agree, 5=Agree, 4=Somewhat Agree, 3=Somewhat Disagree, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree*

**Open-Ended Items**

2 open-ended comment question:

(i) *What makes you most proud to be part of FRD?*

(ii) *If you could only change two things at FRD, what would they be and how would you change them?*

**Coding Items**

Seven demographic coding items including:
*Age Range, Gender, Generation, Length of Service, Position, Race, Work Status*

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## Survey Performance Summary

**2016 Culture Survey**

Respondents: *1,495*

Possible Respondents: *2,403*

Response Rate: *62%*

**National Response Rate is 77%**

Administration Period: *September 13, 2016 - October 4, 2016*

Administration Mode: *Online*

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**4.33** Overall Score of all 47 survey items combined; 29th Percentile, which mean you are outperforming 29 percent of organizations

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## Culture Survey Categories

| Survey Category *(in order of performance vs. national norm; statistical significance +/- 0.09)* | FRD 2016 | Normative Differential |
|---|---|---|
| ENGAGEMENT | 4.94 | -0.09 |
| CAREER GROWTH | 4.53 | -0.12 |
| TEAMWORK | 4.58 | -0.17 |
| STATION/CIVILIAN SUPERVISOR | 4.72 | -0.17 |
| WORK ENVIRONMENT | 4.15 | -0.73 |
| SENIOR/COMMAND STAFF | 3.78 | -0.99 |
| GRIEVANCE | 3.96 | -1.04 |
| HIRING | 3.06 | --- |

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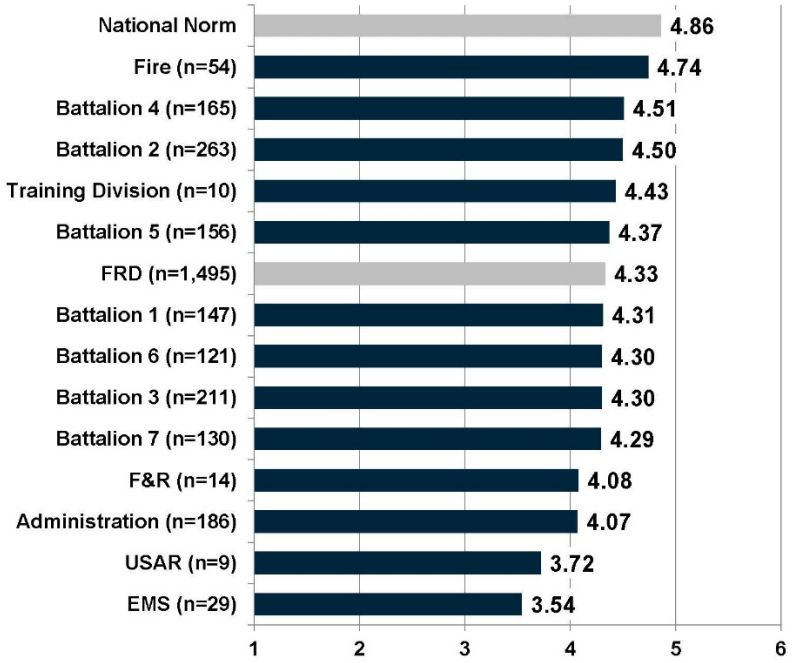
## Overall Culture Score by Facility

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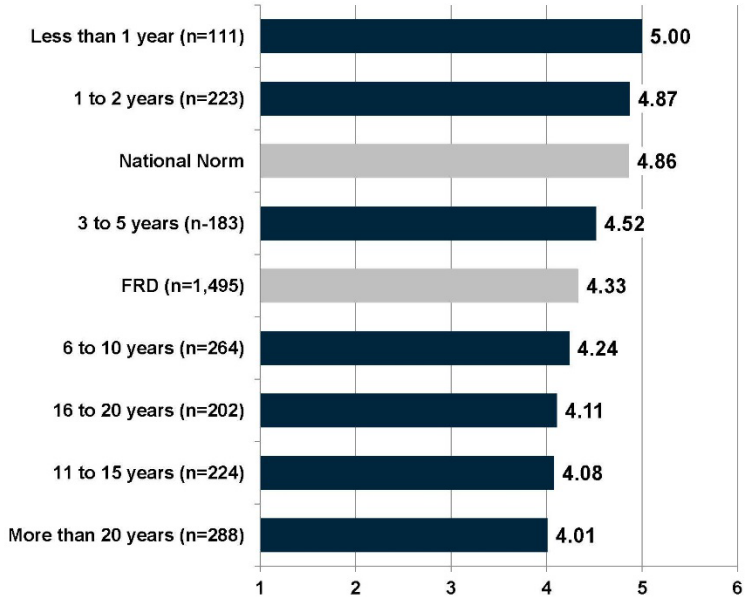
## Overall Culture Score by Tenure

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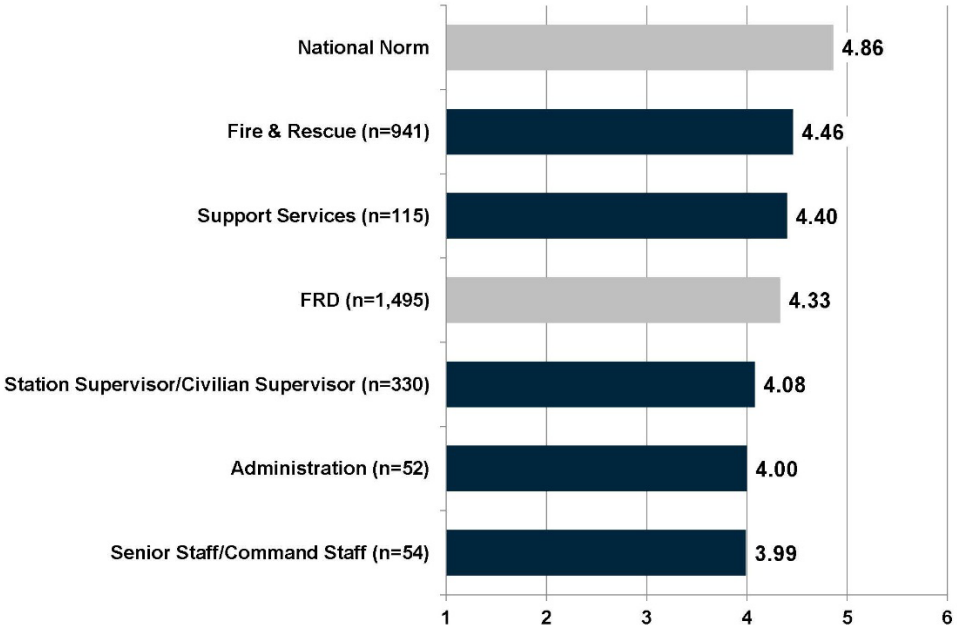
## Overall Culture Score by Position

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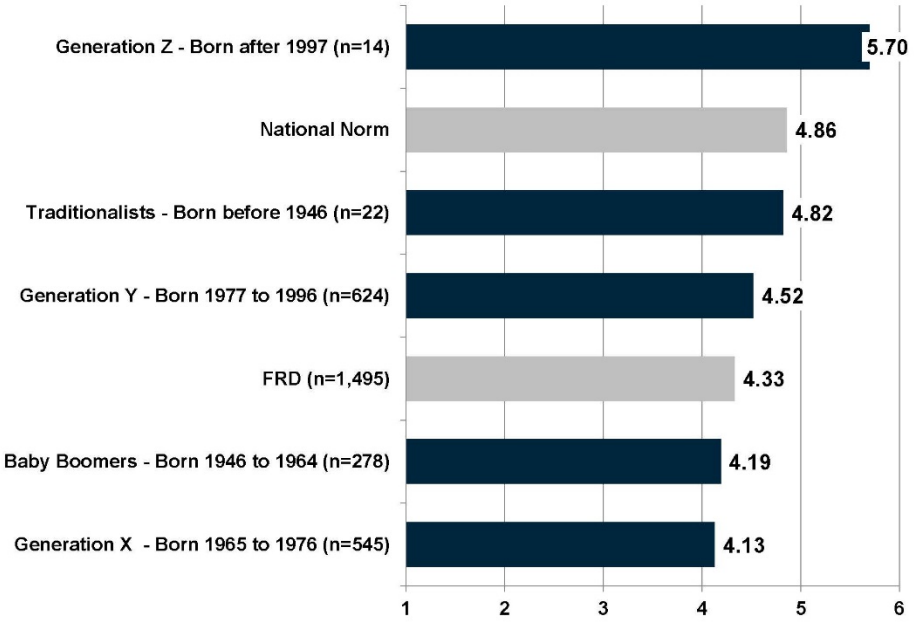
## Overall Culture Score by Generation

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## Key Findings

### HIRING

- Overall hiring process should be reviewed to ensure new hires are vetted to possess the skills to do the job, and are a good culture fit within FRD.
- Communicate to the employees the hiring process and the importance of hiring the right person for the job.

### SENIOR LEADERSHIP

- Roughly 30% of the respondents to the survey had an unfavorable response regarding FRD's Senior/Command Staff on how they are leading the organization.
- Senior Leadership is the top driver to improving the overall culture of the organization – improve transparency, focus on communicating the strategy, mission, and values, increase visibility, and be consistent on how to handle misconduct.

### SUPERVISORS

- Key cultural impact is driven by the Station/Civilian Supervisor – continue to treat employees with respect, listen to their ideas and suggestions, refrain from retaliation, and openly accept and welcome all types of employees.

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