

# YOU'RE THE FIRE CHIEF NOW WHAT?

*Guidance for  
New & Interim Chiefs*





August 2019

Members of the Fire and Emergency Service,

The first 100 days of a new or interim fire chief's tenure are critical. This guidance is a terrific resource to help new leaders succeed. It will raise the level of professionalism across the fire and emergency service and underscores the importance of working together and sharing our knowledge and experiences.

I commend the Volunteer and Combination Officers Section (VCOS) and the Executive Fire Officers (EFO) Section for their joint efforts developing this important resource.

I encourage you to take the time to read this guidance and keep it handy for future reference. It is also a great resource to share with your department's future leaders to help them prepare for the day when they become a fire chief.

Fire Chief Dan Eggleston, EFO, CFO, CMO  
*President and Chairman of the Board*

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August 2019

Members of the Fire and Emergency Service,

The transition into becoming a new chief or serving as an interim chief of the department has its challenges. Whether you spent many years serving the same department or move to a new department, some guidance through the turbulence of transition is always helpful. When entering a new fire department, you probably know little about the people, the jurisdiction, the partners, or key stakeholders; and you won't learn any more about all those things unless you do your research and then you may only scratch the surface.

The goal of this report is to guide the new and interim fire chief through the transitional phase into taking the reins of an entire organization. This report approached the transition in a format of incident command and the first 100-days method. As a first-time fire chief, it is likely that you are transitioning from an officer position, whether battalion chief, assistant chief or possibly even a company officer. Having served in an officer position, you know the importance of proper incident management. The authors of this report approach this transition using the recognized FEMA Planning P. Size-up, planning and operations relate to your transition into the head of the organization. Approach your transition, whether permanent or interim, just as you would address an incident. Assess the situation, get all of the stakeholders involved, conduct regular briefings, perform reconnaissance and deploy the plan; then start your way around the Planning P again and again until you bring the situation under control and you feel comfortable that you are approaching the event effectively. As the FEMA Planning P indicates, "Execute, evaluate, and revise the plan."

I want to thank the committee members for their work on this report. Their experience brought so much to it. Our committee consisted of people from those with many years of experience in their same position to those who transitioned through the ranks of their own organization to chief or transitioned into totally new departments. The VCOS welcomed the partnership of the EFO Section; the section brought executive-officer contributions to the report and access to various leadership resources and involvement. As an EFO Section member, I appreciated the partnership on this important leadership document. Thank you to everyone for their contributions to a project that will make the transition of new leadership smoother for future leaders. I also want to thank the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association for providing their resource, Creating a Positive Foundation – The New Fire Chief's Guide to the First 100 Days, as a reference document. This document provided us with resources and ideas for incorporation into a nationally used document.

If you are transitioning into the fire chief position, keep this guide nearby to access the various steps that lead to a smooth transition. You may not need it today, but the time may come. Make sure it is in your toolkit of resources when the call comes to step up to the fire chief job or to serve as chief of another fire department. If that time is now, have a plan, stick to the plan, be prepared to adjust and seek wise counsel. Best wishes in your new chapter.

Respectfully,

Chief Al Yancey, Jr.

**VCOS Board of Directors, New/Interim Chief  
Guidance Document Project Leader**



August 2019



Members of the Fire and Emergency Service,

The IAFC's VCOS and EFO Sections are proud to have partnered to create this guidance for your first 100 days as a new or interim chief. "You don't know what you don't know" is a saying that many who have taken on the position of chief for the first time can relate to. It is our hope that this guidance will provide you with the key things you need to know and do during your first 100 days to help yield a smooth transition.

We believe this guide is useful for not only those advancing into the position of fire chief for the first time, but also for those chiefs transitioning to a new department.

By starting your tenure as chief on a strong foot, you will be setting the tone for the future of the department. We encourage you to add this to not only your toolkit, but to the toolkits of your future leaders as they hopefully will one day be making the transition to chief themselves.

The VCOS and EFO leadership would like to thank the committee members from both the VCOS and the EFO sections for their efforts. Their tireless work and openness about their experiences during their own transitions to the position of chief allowed us to create this amazing guidance. Many hours and much hard work was put into this project.

We would also like to extend a special thank you to the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association for providing crucial guidance to the committee. This guidance helped us provide the best possible guidance for the first 100 days as a new or interim chief.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guidance document. We ask that you help us distribute it to help others have a smooth transition in their first 100 days as fire chief. Stay safe out there.

For more information about VCOS, visit [VCOS.org](http://VCOS.org). For more information about the EFO Section, visit [IAFC.org/EFO](http://IAFC.org/EFO). Both websites also contain additional resources for new and current chiefs.

Sincerely,

Chief Charles (Chuck) Flynn  
*Chair, Volunteer and Combination Officers Section,  
International Association of Fire Chiefs*

Assistant Chief Jo-Ann Lorber  
*Chair, Executive Fire Officers Section,  
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## FOREWORD

The job of fire chief is a tough one that continually challenges anyone sitting in that seat to exhibit skills in multiple areas. Aspiring fire chiefs sometimes take years to attend and teach classes, participate in multiple meetings, respond to a wide array of incidents, and deal with all members of the fire department and local residents and businesses. Those who prepare themselves effectively often achieve their ultimate goal of becoming the chief of the department.

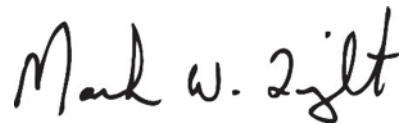
Unfortunately, there are times when the fire chief position is suddenly vacated, and the membership or government officials are forced to appoint an interim fire chief. In many of these cases, the promotion is sudden and unexpected. Often, a person has not had a desire to be the fire chief, or there was no adopted plan on who is selected to be the interim chief. It can be a lonely time for the newly selected interim chief. Suddenly, the entire department is in your hands and the firefighters and officers look to you for leadership during this time of transition. Some departments want a caretaker to keep the lights on and to assure that calls for service are handled without any problems. Some departments want the interim chief to step in and fully function as the fire chief and to move the department forward, or to “fix” the issues that have been ongoing for years.

This report is written as a guide for those that may be or have been appointed to fill an interim chief position and for those taking on a permanent chief position for the first time. There are multiple demands placed on any chief, but the first 100 days for a new or interim chief can be the most difficult. No modern fire department wants to be placed on “hold” while a new or interim chief finds his or her way, and this may be the time that the department needs the leadership of a solid fire chief.

This report gives a road map to follow, and gives new and interim fire chiefs ideas, tasks, and issues that should be considered and often implemented. The report is written by seasoned fire chiefs that know what the job entails and understand the challenges that a new or interim chief will deal with. You may not use everything in the report, so use it as appropriate given your department and community culture.

Look at being a new or interim fire chief as the opportunity of a lifetime. This is your chance to be a change agent and experience leading an organization through a transition that can set the tone for a successful organization moving forward.

Enjoy your new opportunity; make the most of it.



Mark W. Light, CAE  
IAFC Chief Executive Officer and  
Executive Director



## YOUR FIRST DAY AS CHIEF

**“The Future Belongs To Those Who Believe In The Beauty Of Their Dreams.”**

*–Franklin D. Roosevelt*

Congratulations! It's your first day on the job as the newly appointed fire chief. You've found your office, the coffee pot and the washroom, but now what do you do? There are several paths that may have brought you to this day when you are occupying the highest office of the department, but generally speaking, it happens in one of two ways. Preferably there was a predetermined opening (such as the previous chief retiring or moving on with notice) and the powers that be selected you over other candidates after an interview process and offered you the position and both sides came to an agreement as to when you would take command.

The next scenario is a rapid appointment, where the previous fire chief was in the office the day before but was fired, suspended, passed away or for whatever reason is no longer available for the job. Whatever the circumstances that brought you to this day, you are here and you must now begin to navigate the office and the responsibilities that come with it.

For those who are rapidly appointed, not only do you have to deal with the surprise factor that is being felt throughout the entire organization, but you may also be dealing with the interim tag, which means you are in charge until a permanent chief is named. Whether or not you are a candidate for the permanent position may influence your actions, and this document will spend extra time on such challenging scenarios.

This document is intended to guide you as a new department chief—even if you have previously served as a chief elsewhere—through the entry stages of your appointment. Whether you have been a member of the organization for 10 years or have been hired from the outside to take the reins of the organization, there are commonalities and things you will need to get up to speed on immediately, as 911 calls will not stop to allow you a honeymoon.

Your community demands prompt professional service regardless of the chief's familiarity with the job, and the department's external financial obligations certainly aren't going away because you're new. You do not have the luxury in leadership to have the organization slow down or stop while you figure everything out. You will face decisions on your first day; sometimes those decisions will be critical to the operations of today and the coming days. You will need to make the best-informed decision you can with the tools, resources and personnel you have. The first day on the job as fire chief will undoubtedly test you, as most problems that existed yesterday still exist today and now everyone has to adjust to your leadership and management style, which may be vastly different than that of the past occupant of your new high-back leather chair.

Accept now that there are going to be pitfalls and you won't be able to avoid them all, but the key will be how you navigate the troubled waters, learn, recover and move forward. This guidance document was assembled by an accomplished committee and is intended to point you in the proper direction and guide you toward sound decision-making. The members of the committee were all once new to their positions as you are now. Some were recently appointed while others have been serving for many years; in either case, they were interested in sharing their experiences and lessons learned to help guide you through this challenge.

You are no doubt going to feel stress through this time. Although it is hard to see at the moment, there is strength in stress. However, we must learn how to surround ourselves with confidants and resources to help us manage the situation and relieve the stress.

It is imperative that you take care of your mental health and physical wellbeing. Stress does a lot of strange things to the body; we know it can disrupt your sleep patterns, eating and temperament and can affect the way you treat your own family. Allow the significant people in your life to be there for you. Be sure to take some deep breaths, both literally and somewhat figuratively—and by this we mean build in some true time off to focus on your family, your rest and your own personal wellbeing.

It is our nature to push hard through difficult transitions and not take time for ourselves, which has the potential to lead to unexpected time off through sick leave or struggles at home with your spouse or children. Many of the items you are tackling can wait a day or so as long as you are properly prioritizing, which is what this guide is intended to help with.

In order to help guide you through your department personnel mental wellbeing, consult VCOS's *Yellow Ribbon Report: Under the Helmet and Internal Size-up*.<sup>1</sup> It says, "As a chief or chief officer, it is incumbent on you to accept personal responsibility for facilitating and maintaining the emotional and physical health of your responders. We need you to recognize and accept emotional wellness as a legitimate obligation for every responder and department—yes, even yours."

In order to successfully lead the women and men of your organization, you must keep yourself in good health and lead by example. The Yellow Ribbon Report and many other important resources are available online at VCOS.org.

We also want to encourage you to keep up (or get started) with your physical wellbeing. If you are not a regular at the gym or in a physical fitness program, consult with your physician and get started. Get a pedometer and set a step goal, join a pickup basketball league, swim some laps—whatever is necessary to get some exercise. The life of a fire chief is often spent parked in a chair for meetings, paperwork and traveling to meetings and events. A lot of those meetings include food and refreshments, which unfortunately are often not particularly healthful. You will need to step up your physical wellness game to maintain a healthy lifestyle that will keep you in your position for many years to come.

## EXTERNAL HIRE SCENARIO - ADVANCE RECONNAISSANCE

If you're an external hire, a number of things will happen in advance of being appointed chief. Wages, hours and benefits will be discussed and negotiated. Moving expenses may be considered or at least offset. And time will likely be provided to allow appropriate notice and transition from both the agencies that you are leaving and joining. Regardless of the length of transition, do not wait to get started!

It is highly recommended that as the new chief you call and schedule some time in the fire station and at the city or town hall. Recommend a lunch meeting with the interim or acting chief; get an idea of the operational priorities and the work plan for the year. Ask about the existing command structure and where the department is heading under its leadership. If the interim chief is going to remain on staff, ask how they see themselves being most useful to the organization. Have a copy of the organizational structure and annual report available to aid in the conversation.

When stopping at city hall, request a meeting with the highest-level municipal (city, town, or village) administrator. Get an idea of their impression of the fire department. You will want to have this meeting independent of current department staff. Municipal leadership may have concerns over the operation of the fire department and in the presence of fire department staff municipal support staff may not be as open in their comments.

<sup>1</sup> VCOS Yellow Ribbon Report - Under the Helmet: Performing an Internal Size-Up. IAFC-VCOS (2017, August). Retrieved from <https://www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/resources/resource/vcos-yellow-ribbon-report-under-the-helmet-performing-an-internal-size-up>

You will want to know the relationship that exists between the department and city hall with the intention of continuing good relationships and creating (or repairing) those that are not. If you report to an elected official, advise them that you are going to be in the area and see if they would like to meet with you. Maximize the trip and bring your notebook.

Request a current copy of the municipal budget from the finance director or equivalent. A brief meeting with the finance director can provide information about the financial status of the department. The director will most likely be happy to share their methods of controlling expenses and any past issues finance had with the fire department's budget management and purchasing trends. Get on the good side of finance early; their influence on planning and purchasing is significant.

One last stop should include a visit with the city clerk and human resources. You can ask for any information that is releasable via open-records request. Because you are not yet the department head, you will not be authorized to receive sensitive or confidential information. But the clerk can provide information about any citizen concerns and complaints that have been submitted about fire-department activities. HR can give an indication whether there are ongoing concerns or if a meeting is needed to discuss personnel issues soon after your appointment; there may be a reason an external candidate was preferred.

These are just some of the things that can be done in advance of your appointment. It allows you to report on your first day with an idea of what your priorities will be. It will also provide you the ability to structure a 100-day plan that addresses the variables of your new organization. Why wait? Hit the ground running.



## BUMPY TRANSITION SITUATIONS

**“I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.”**

*–Thomas Jefferson*

As discussed above, it is possible that you inherited the office of the fire chief because the authorities of the fire department believed the previous fire chief was not doing a good job or perhaps the operations of the fire department in the community demanded a new leader. These transitions often mean you need to make some significant decisions now and that there is not a lot of time to learn the job.

Critical decision-making is important. Hopefully you arrived at your appointment as chief through years of experience and rose through previous ranks, and you know how to think critically because you've done it with emergency incidents, using the incident-management system. Often, fire chiefs do not think about applying the same principles to administrative issues as they do on the emergency scene; however, there are similarities. Sometimes a decision must be made now.

If you are a fire chief who has been elected to the position in a volunteer organization and previously were a firefighter or line officer, the learning curve will be quite steep, and this document will only highlight your needs. Surround yourself with good people who have experience in facing the challenges you are going to face.

When making critical decisions, you need to assess the situation rapidly yet thoroughly before acting. Unsafe practices cannot continue in the fire department, and these need to be corrected rapidly in order to protect personnel and the community. An example may be a high injury rate within the department that you must identify and get a handle on. Another example may be lack of trust in the fire department by the community or lack of trust in the leadership and administration by the members. Likewise, these must be addressed rapidly; you are the new leader and you need to restore trust in your organization.

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, in their book *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, introduce us to the concepts of technical problems and adaptive problems. “Every day, people have problems for which they do, in fact, have the necessary know-how and procedure,” they write. “We call these technical problems. But there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures.”

Using the Heifetz and Linsky process will help you identify whether you can fix items with an operating guide or if you need to address internal culture. Adaptive problems are the cultural issues you will need to address rapidly to restore the trust of the personnel or the community. “You know you are dealing with something more than a technical issue when people’s hearts and minds need to change and not just their preferences or routine behaviors,” they continued.

Any stakeholder meetings you conduct prior to making any changes will be tremendously useful in this process. Heifetz and Linsky refer to these as getting off of the dance floor and onto the balcony. Essentially, you must observe the situation from all angles, and you cannot do that effectively if you are in the middle of it. It will mean a lot to your personnel and the community to see that you are jumping in through stakeholder meetings and listening, while at the same time making some minor changes.

## FIRST DAY – PRIORITY ONE

**“A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.”**

*–Gandhi*

What do you do on that first day? Hopefully you have thought about that before you walk through the door. Hopefully you were able to research the situation and gain some degree of knowledge before you accepted this role. This is one of the most significant acceptances you have taken in your life. It does not matter if you are the chief of a small department leading 25 volunteers or the chief of a major metropolitan department leading 500 career firefighters. Taking on this leadership opportunity is a big responsibility.

Prior to your arrival, the people who are now expecting you to lead them have already sized you up. They have been on the internet, made phone calls or, because yesterday you were one of them, are making assumptions about your character traits. As soon you arrive at the fire station, they have an initial assessment of you and have already conjured up what they believe your leadership style will be. This is not necessarily bad, but it will happen.

### CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS

At this point in your career, you should have a pretty good if not thorough understanding of the concept of continuity of operations. FEMA defines it this way:

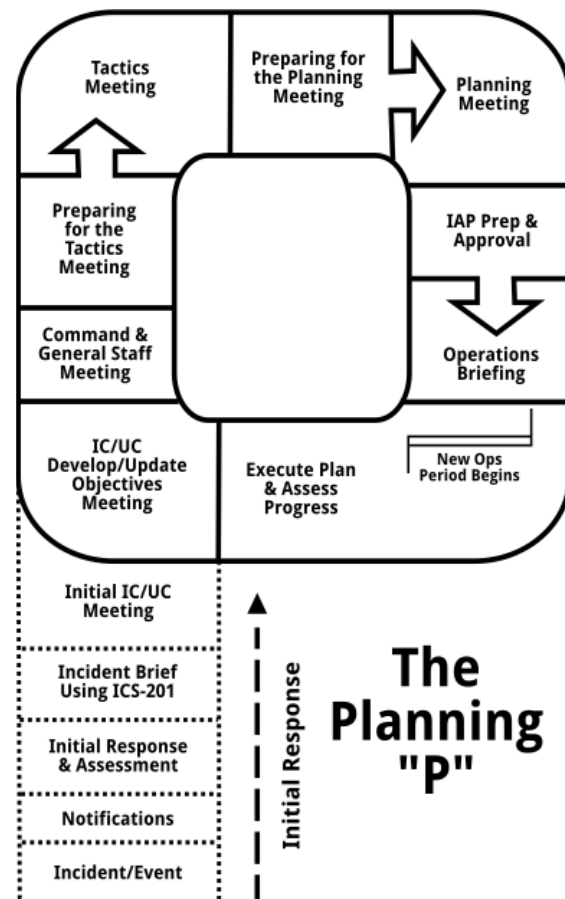
Continuity of Operations (COOP), as defined in the National Continuity Policy Implementation Plan (NCP/IP)... is an effort within individual executive departments and agencies to ensure that Primary Mission Essential Functions (PMEFs) continue to be performed during a wide range of emergencies, including localized acts of nature, accidents and technological or attack-related emergencies. The ultimate goal of continuity in the executive branch is the continuation of National Essential Functions (NEFs). In order to achieve that goal, the objective for organizations is to identify their Essential Functions (EFs) and ensure that those functions can be continued throughout, or resumed rapidly after, a disruption of normal activities.<sup>2</sup>

When the United States votes in a new president, there is a tremendous shift of power on Inauguration Day when there is a complete personnel change. However, the government continues to move along, in most cases without a blip. Now, the stress of the world certainly does not rest on your shoulders with this transition, but the person having chest pains or whose home is burning down is not going to accept a blip. Presidents, governors and other leaders are often evaluated on how well they make it through the transition of power, policy development, crisis resolution and overall condition of their operation over the first 100 days.

Priority one for you, Chief, is to identify that there is Continuity of Operations occurring in your organization. How is that done? Let's relate this to a subject that is familiar to all of us: the Incident Command “Planning P”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>FEMA. (n.d.). Continuity of Operations. Retrieved April 11, 2019, from [https://www.fema.gov/pdf/about/org/ncp/coop\\_brochure.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/pdf/about/org/ncp/coop_brochure.pdf)





FEMA. (2012, January). FEMA Incident Action Planning Guide. Retrieved April 12, 2019, from [https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/assets/incident action planning process.pdf](https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/assets/incident%20action%20planning%20process.pdf)

Some aspects of the Planning P are not precisely applicable in this situation; however, many of the principles still apply. You are commanding an event, and that event is you—a new fire chief, a different organizational leader with potentially different leadership styles and a changing environment. But what didn't change is that we have personnel working under a command structure toward a common goal—success! The decisions we make on our first days as chief will set the direction and prevent the event from getting around and behind us; we need to guide it instead of letting it drive us.

## THE FIRST WEEK

**"The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done and self-restraint to keep from meddling with them while they do it."**

*- Theodore Roosevelt*

### INTERNAL SIZE-UP

Before you begin any formal conversations with your staff about the operation, and certainly before you begin to contemplate any changes, you must first have at least an idea of the way things are supposed to be operating. Seek out and become well versed in any mission or vision statements that already exist; if they don't exist, creating them should be an early item to add to your task list. These statements should serve as a blueprint for how things are currently running, a map for the future and a resource in case there are ever any questions or problems that arise.

If the direction of your department does not match its mission and vision statements, you need to either realign the culture and conduct of your members or adjust the statements to match the current reality. If you receive pushback from any level on potential changes, your department's mission and value statements should support you.

### BRIEFING—COMMAND STAFF MEETING

If you have not already done so, schedule a command staff meeting; this is the command and general staff portion of the Planning P.

Schedule a meeting to happen within the next 24 to 48 hours. If you are a volunteer chief, see how many of your command staff can show up at a specific time during the week for coffee and cake (you bring the cake). If you are a career chief and have battalion chiefs on the road or an operations person, get this meeting underway soon.

### ESTABLISH COMMAND

Invite all your key staff, including any administrative assistants you may have as well as human resource leadership and legal staff. It will certainly be necessary to break out command staff and general staff at some point; however, holding an all-staff meeting at first establishes a communication link.

During this meeting, you want to establish your command presence by outlining your perceived responsibility, authority and expertise. You will also want to establish your command structure by identifying your second in command, operations chief, administration chief, prevention chief and any other critical roles.



If you are the chief of a volunteer department, you have the same responsibilities and need to determine who the players are on your team and their availability to help you work through the transition. It can be extra challenging in an all-volunteer fire department because of the availability of critical support staff during the day when you may be in the office. As a volunteer chief, it may be that you are there every day but the assistant chief is working at the utility company three towns over and cannot be in the station until after 5 p.m. Work with it. In these environments, you will need to be patient and willing to adjust your schedule to fit the needs of the volunteers.

Regardless of your organizational makeup, you must identify the command structure, and that includes formal and informal leaders. Your command meeting will clearly identify the formal leaders who wear the bugles on their collars, but it is critical for you to intentionally begin to identify the informal leaders and those who are influencing your operations.

You are encouraged to not make any abrupt changes. The only exception is if it is very clear that:

- your command structure is the reason you were brought in
- you have personal knowledge that your command structure is the root cause of your organizational inefficiencies

A rapid change may be necessary, but move cautiously and with planning and intent. You cannot lead your department by yourself.

## COMMAND MEETING AGENDA

Again, be intentional and get to the root of the operations. Realize that at this first meeting your personnel, if they are meeting you for the first time, may be cautious with their comments and some will already be jockeying for what they may perceive as advancement potential.

Be real with your staff. If you are new to the department, begin the meeting by introducing yourself: who you are, where you came from, what you are about. Be prepared to open up. Share information about your family, your hobbies, your likes and dislikes and what brought you to this day. It is ok to be guarded to some degree; we all have weaknesses and we are not quick to share those. However, some of these weaknesses are important for others to understand so they can help you and stand in the gap of those areas.

As stated above, establish command presence. Your command staff needs to know that you are the one responsible for the overall operations of the organization and that you are there to support their needs and to guide their decisions.

Here is a sample agenda:

1. Roundtable to introduce each person
  - a. Name, rank, family, hobbies, interests, etc.
  - b. Responsibility/assignment
  - c. Current priority projects they are working on
2. What is the status of personnel available to respond?
3. What is the status of operational facilities?
  - a. Out-of-service status
4. What is the status of apparatus?
  - a. In-service status
  - b. Out-of-service status
  - c. Any pending purchases of apparatus
5. What is the status of critical equipment?

6. Are we getting out the door in an effective, professional manner?
  - a. Average response times
  - b. Incident staffing levels
7. What is currently working in the organization?
8. What is not currently working in the organization?
9. Local mutual-aid partnerships:
  - a. Are they effective?
  - b. Are there any problems?
10. What lingering problems are affecting our operational efficiency?

## STATION AND OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT

During this first week, you want to get the 30,000-foot view of the organization. If the department operates out of multiple stations, you need to visit each one in order to meet the people, introduce yourself and see how things are going. Look at the cleanliness and the maintenance of the grounds and landscape, station, and apparatus and equipment. This may give you an indication of the company leadership at the station.



# THE FIRST MONTH

**“Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”**  
–Confucius

Hopefully you had a successful first week, and that has set the stage for a solid first month. However, there is still much work to be done, people to meet and things to learn. Continue to build your network of people and resources. Using the incident command training you have and keeping with the concept of the Planning P, start putting your plan down on paper and preparing it for action.

## SWOT ANALYSIS

From your first day on the job, you are going to be making observations about everyone and everything. Track all this information and analyze it. Engage with your senior staff, members, peers and stakeholders to ask and get answers to meaningful questions that will help you better understand your organization, improve its problems and develop a strategy that seeks its healthiest future.

As a new chief, it's imperative to understand your organization and where they would like it to be. You will, no doubt, implement important changes under your leadership, but make sure any immediate changes are carefully calculated. Change for the sake of change will only create organizational resistance. New chiefs—especially those hired from outside the organization—should listen and learn about history and tradition before implementing organizational change. That's not to say that you will not make unpopular decisions or changes; however, the information gathered during your listening sessions may impact your approach and timing.

One way to determine priority is to conduct a SWOT analysis:

- **S**trengths are things you should keep doing.
- **W**eaknesses are things you should regulate or stop doing.
- **O**pportunities are things that you should start doing.
- **T**hreats are the obstacles that are getting in the way of your goals and your vision.

See appendix B for a sample SWOT analysis.

## STAKEHOLDERS MEETING

You met with the command and general staff of the organization previously; now you need to begin branching out to the stakeholders of the organization and community. We might refer to this as the tactics meeting of the Planning P. You need to plan interview sessions with personnel, from recruits to the most senior staff. You also need to meet with external stakeholders, including the police chief, sheriff, school administrators, community group leaders and community leadership.

These meetings will help you get a handle on the internal and external views of the fire department. You may be in your new role because internal or external (possibly both) forces believed the previous chief was ineffective in

providing leadership to the organization or addressing a recurring or major issue. Lack of professionalism, internal investigations, lawsuits, breakdowns and failure to properly respond to community emergencies can all lead to a distrust by the community in an organization. If this is the case, you need to triage the situation, and the best way to do so is to understand the expectations of the stakeholders who have a vested interest in the success of the fire department.

## INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

The larger the organization, the more difficult it may be for you to gather all the stakeholders at once, especially if you are now the chief of a large metropolitan department with hundreds of firefighters. What is possible, though, is for you to meet with the formal leaders of the local union or the firefighters' organization.

If your department has multiple firefighter organizations, try to schedule a meeting with each, including the firefighters' union, volunteer firefighter association and auxiliary groups. Depending on the size of the organization and your ability to reasonably meet with everyone, it may be appropriate to meet just with the organization's leadership or executive board. Another option is to ask to attend one of their meetings introduce yourself to the organization.

If you are leading a smaller organization, it is reasonable to believe that you can meet one-on-one with each of your personnel. The key will be to schedule meetings appropriately so you can get your daily work done while still seeing your personnel within the first couple of weeks.

Don't forget about the civilian side of the organization either and its interest in your department. You will want to meet with the leadership of human resources, administrative assistance, the legal department, etc. The questions may not be the same for each, however, so you will want to know about the relations within the organization and these internal departments. If they are outside of the fire department, how are they incorporated and how does the partnership work?

## EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

You will need to do some research on this topic to identify the key external stakeholders. Here is a list of some of the common community leaders and organization that you will want to consider:

- Mutual aid Fire chiefs
- Police chief
- Sheriff
- Communications center director (if outside the fire department)
- Emergency medical director
- School superintendents
- Public-works director
- Community organizations (Rotary Club, Lions Club, Kiwanis, local religious groups, and more)
- Homeowners' associations

Your appointment may be within a special district, such as a fire protection district or a volunteer fire company, where your appointment is not made by a mayor or council but your fire department protects these areas.

In this case, you will also want to include the mayor, town manager, council and first selectmen (whoever is included in the structure in your part of the country) and discuss fire department operations. Calling these external stakeholders may not be the best description because you are going to work very closely with the authority having jurisdiction, so you will want to be on the inner workings of activities as much as allowed.

Your goal in these meetings is to establish what the fire department is doing well and what needs to be improved. Questions during these meetings include:

- What should we keep doing?
- What should we stop doing?
- What should we begin doing?

We must understand that each stakeholder will have differing priorities and observations. You are looking for the common thread in their statements. To do this:

1. Take good notes
2. Establish a spreadsheet of common words and actions
3. Using the spreadsheet, build a theme within the various areas to identify what the community likes and dislikes about your operations.

We must understand that some of the things we do are necessary, but they may not be popular within the community (such as taxes and ambulance bills).

The purpose of the external stakeholder meeting is to gather information. At this point, you may not have a lot of answers; however, you may be pressed for them anyway: "Chief, what are you going to do about ...?"

Be kind, be professional and help these stakeholders understand that their concern is important to you and that you will research the issue and get back to them.

Begin building your support network at these meetings. We can't stress enough that you need to be real and, above all, be honest. If you don't know the answer to some of their questions, simply tell them. You will get some grace considering you are new. However, that will wear off quickly and they will soon look to you for answers and resolutions.

Never forget that the residents you serve are the biggest stakeholders in all of this and can impact you greatly as individuals or groups. If you are a new chief, and especially if you are new to the community, find out quickly where people gather and join them. Prove that you are proactive, concerned and dedicated to making the emergency responders of your community the best they can possibly be.

## EMERGENCY-SERVICE STAKEHOLDERS

The meeting with your emergency-service external stakeholders, such as the police chief, sheriff, EMS (if separate from the fire department) and the communications center will of course be slightly different than the non-emergency-service stakeholder meetings. Some of the same questions, pertaining to what we should keep doing, stop doing, etc., may apply; however, you will want to dive deeper into the partnership aspects of working with your emergency-service stakeholders. How well does the fire department work with local police, the sheriff and the communications center?

We also bring the schools into this partnership because of the consideration of emergency responses to large population facilities in a world where violence and critical emergencies are a real possibility.

You want to determine gaps in the tactical, daily operations of response alongside your emergency-service partners. We recommend that you place any issues or concerns at the top of your priority list and begin to rapidly address those in your transition plan. Problems with our brothers and sisters in blue can be difficult for the line firefighter to navigate, so we need strong partnerships with the police, beginning at the top.

Identify any projects that the previous administration partnered on and the status of those projects. A change in organization leadership may slow the progress of a partnership project, but you need to get up to speed soon and continue to contribute to projects that benefit your organization, the partnership and the community.

## IDENTIFY AND USE RESOURCES

Depending on how you arrived at your new position, you may need to learn an entirely new system of resources and organizations. Arriving as the fire chief in a community that you have never even visited prior to starting the selection process will present the challenge of learning the system of mutual aid, communications, jurisdictions, authorities, etc. While the fire service operates similarly across the United States, it can be very different from the Northeast into the Southwest, across the Midwest and into the Pacific Northwest. Beyond the geographical differences, it can also be much different with concern to available technology and access to resources that may have previously been readily available to you.

You need to efficiently begin to identify the resources and network of people that can begin to help you navigate this new environment. You might relate this to the planning meeting of the Planning P. This is the stage where you gather the people who are in the know based on the plans they prepared and the information they have.

Here is a list of resources that you will want to establish a connection with within the first few months of your transition.

### Local Organizations

- **Mutual-aid association** – Your priority within the first few days will be to identify your mutual-aid resources. You will want to determine who your assistance comes from and how effectively it is working. You will also want to evaluate how you are assisting neighboring fire departments and if that is effective, considering the priority of protecting your own community.
- **Fire chiefs' association** – It is also important to identify the influential and get-it-done fire chiefs in your area. These are the people you want to meet with so they can identify all that is going on within your region. Find out when the meetings are as well as the relational dynamics within the region. Unfortunately, there are those situations where kingdoms are built and silos remain, so you will want to rapidly determine who is going to be an ally and who is going to present challenges.
- **Mayors' and managers' associations** – Depending on your fire department governance, you may be a municipality or a special district. Regardless, you will want to identify any mayors' and managers' associations that may have valuable resources with regard to the government operations, tax authority, etc.
- **Local emergency planning committee (LEPC)** – These may not exist in every state or jurisdiction; however, often there is a group of police, fire, EMS and other emergency-management officials who meet on a regular basis to address the local community emergency planning surrounding industrial facilities, government facilities, etc. You will want to introduce yourself to this group and determine who its influencers are and when their meetings occur so you can begin to learn the local risk levels and become familiar with the plans to address those risks—some of which your organization may be the key player in.

## State Associations

States are different and may have many different fire-related organizations. It will be important to begin to identify these within the first few weeks of your position and find out who the local representatives are and the contact information for the associations. These associations are often influential in state legislation, policy and procedures that affect your state fire service and community risk reduction.

- State fire chiefs associations
- State fire protection districts associations
- State firefighters' union associations
- State volunteer firefighters associations
- County and municipal associations

## National Organizations:

- International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) – The IAFC represents the leadership of firefighters and emergency responders worldwide; their members are the world's leading experts in firefighting, emergency medical services, terrorism response, hazardous materials (hazmat) incidents, wildland fire suppression, natural disasters, search and rescue, and public-safety policy.
- IAFC Sections – The IAFC provides some great sections within its organization with great resources for chiefs and fire department leadership. Each section offers a unique array of benefits specifically tailored to meet the needs of its members. Sections disseminate their expertise throughout the fire and emergency service through publications, workshops, conferences, websites and online discussions.

Below is a list of IAFC sections with a description of some of the features that may benefit a new fire chief:

- Volunteer & Combination Officer Section – Providing chief officers who manage volunteer and combination departments within the fire and emergency service with information, education, services and representation to enhance their professionalism and capabilities.
- Executive Fire Officers Section – Sustain a professionally recognized leadership environment in which all Executive Fire Officers pursue an appropriate combination of formal education, professional experience and nationally, regionally and locally recognized credentials necessary to lead the modern fire service.
- Company Officers Section – Integrating and growing company officer engagement within the IAFC while helping company officers develop leadership skills and prepare to be chief officers.
- EMS Section – Promoting fire-based EMS by providing a focus for addressing fire service EMS issues.
- Emergency Vehicle Management Section – Sharing a common interest and concern with fire and emergency service equipment and apparatus.
- Federal & Military Fire Services Section – Striving to meet current and future challenges and acting as a strong voice for federal fire and emergency personnel worldwide.
- Fire & Life Safety Section – Providing leadership and vision for chief fire officers and managers in an effort to reduce the risk of injury, loss of life and property loss in their communities through effective fire prevention efforts.
- Industrial Fire and Safety Section – Bringing together those responsible for protecting industrial facilities and plants against fire and other hazards.

- Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association – Bringing together fire chiefs from large metropolitan fire departments in order to share information and experiences and to discuss issues that pertain to their departments.
- Safety, Health and Survival Section – Providing leadership, guidance and resources toward a clear mission—to reduce the number of preventable line-of-duty deaths and injuries in the fire and emergency service.
- National Fire Protection Association – The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is a global self-funded nonprofit organization, established in 1896, devoted to eliminating death, injury, property and economic loss due to fire, electrical and related hazards. NFPA delivers information and knowledge through more than 300 consensus codes and standards, research, training, education, outreach and advocacy; and by partnering with others who share an interest in furthering our mission. Its mission is to help save lives and reduce loss with information, knowledge and passion.
- United States Fire Administration – As an entity of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency, the mission of the U.S. Fire Administration is to provide national leadership to foster a solid foundation for our fire and emergency services stakeholders in prevention, preparedness and response.
- National Volunteer Fire Council – The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) provides some great resources on operating a volunteer fire department, including assistance with recruitment and retention programs, marketing, and development. NVFC also offers a library of web-based educational programs to assist with leadership in a volunteer department.



Use this page to write down quick reference contact names and numbers.

	Contact	Name	Number
1.	Homeland Security Regional Office		
2.	County Emergency Management Operations Center		
3.	County Emergency Management Director		
4.	State Emergency Management Operations Center		
5.	Mutual Aid Division/ Association		
6.	Mutual Aid Division/ Association President		
7.	Police Chief		
8.	County Sheriff		
9.	EMS System Medical Director		
10.	State Police		
11.	State Fire Marshal Office		
12.	State Fire Marshal		
13.	City Manager/Mayor		
14.	County Board Chair		
15.	Dispatch Center		
16.	Dispatch Center Director, American Red Cross		
17.	Salvation Army		

# MONTHS 2 TO 6

**“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember,  
but involve me and I will learn.”**

*-Benjamin Franklin*

Once you have been on the job for a month, you should know who the key players are. You should have worked your way through the organization conducting interviews of personnel, meeting with both internal and external stakeholders, and by now are beginning to learn how those people around you operate.

Remaining with the concept of the Planning P, and moving into your 30 to 90 days, you will want to begin formulating a plan and initiate its implementation. Until this point, most of your work should have been observation. You probably resolved a few conflicts and challenges but if your first month’s transition was smooth, you hopefully did not have major decisions to make.

If you are an interim chief with no guarantee (whether you want the position or not) of continuation in the position, we would advise moving cautiously in this area. As an interim chief, you do not want to make any changes that may not remain by virtue of you not keeping the position. Change is difficult for people, and too much of it in a short time can certainly weigh on the performance efficiency of the organization. In interim, it may be necessary to make some changes because of operational inefficiencies; therefore, tread carefully for your interim period.

As the new chief in the position, using the Planning P concept, you are in the preparation phase and will want to assemble your closest advisors, the ones you formed relationships with in the early days of your positions, and begin formalizing your vision and operational plans. It may look something like this:

**Draft the plan**

- Involves your closest advisors as well as those who are leading areas where the change will have the greatest impact (gather resources).
- Establish a vision.
- Describe where we have been, where we are going and why this is necessary.

**Review the plan with advisors**

- Once the final plan is drafted, go through it again.

**Identify SMART goals to monitor progress**

Here is an example of a SMART GOALS worksheet:

<b>GOAL</b>	
<b>S</b>	<p><b>Specific</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do I want to accomplish?</li> <li>• Why do I want to accomplish this?</li> <li>• What are the requirements?</li> <li>• What are the constraints?</li> </ul>
<b>M</b>	<p><b>Measurable</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will I measure my progress?</li> <li>• How will I know when the goal is accomplished?</li> </ul>
<b>A</b>	<p><b>Achievable</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can the goal be accomplished?</li> <li>• What are the logical steps I should take?</li> </ul>
<b>R</b>	<p><b>Relevant</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this a worthwhile goal?</li> <li>• Is this the right time?</li> <li>• Do I have what I need to accomplish this goal?</li> <li>• Is this goal in line with my long-term objectives?</li> </ul>
<b>T</b>	<p><b>Time-Bound</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How long will it take to accomplish this goal?</li> <li>• When is the completion of this goal due?</li> <li>• When am I going to work on this goal?</li> </ul>

At this point, you should have a plan and should have received feedback from your closest advisors. Now it is time to implement the plan. Meet with your senior staff, many of whom should have been involved in the planning and guidance document for the plan and outline your blueprint. Offer an opportunity for questions and discussion, and then roll the plan out.

Keep in mind that with any change, there is probably going to be some resistance, questioning and complaining. Personnel are likely used to the old way, set in that old way and comfortable with it because they know it. Change is taking people from the known to the unknown, and it makes them nervous. If you have not read *Who Moved my Cheese* by Spenser Johnson or *Our Iceberg is Melting* by John Kotter, now would be a good time. Both of these resources are short reads with powerful messages.

Be prepared to make adjustments as may be necessary. However, if you have involved those who need to be involved, drafted a plan that is based on what is best for the organization, and sought fairness and professionalism, then go forward and move through the change model quickly and efficiently, and you should enjoy success. Realize that you cannot and will not make everyone happy, and some may grumble as they conform. However, they will conform (or be gone).



## WHEN YOUR TERM ENDS

**“Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”**

*-Helen Keller*

From the first day you take control of an organization, a good leader will be on the lookout for his or her replacement and will be training those qualified to eventually accept the ultimate responsibilities. Whether you have led the organization for months, years or decades, hopefully you have improved and progressed it, leaving it better than you found it, and are now turning it over to a person you have groomed (in a perfect world), who will build on your work.

For those who were named interim chief to fill a void or handle a crisis, you may not have had enough time to make a tangible impact in terms of change but rest assured that your actions were valued and critical (even if they aren't fully recognized). For those who were named interim chief with the upfront knowledge that you would only be serving a short period of time until a permanent replacement was brought in, and you know that permanent person for whatever reason was not going to be you, stepping down may not only be easier but it may be welcome. If you were given the interim title and told you would be considered for the permanent position but did not receive it, that may be a more difficult situation to handle.

Regardless of the situation, once you step down from your interim chief position and return to the departmental ranks, it is imperative that you handle the situation with professionalism and class. Put your ego aside and remember that it wasn't your department to begin with but instead that you were a servant to the department. Remember that the greater good of your department and community is the most important part of this process. If for some reason you decide that you can no longer serve your department after the new chief is in place, turn in your notice and do what you can to assist the transition. Whether you stay with the department or leave, be professional and don't burn any bridges.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

**“The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.”**

*-Thomas Edison*

You are off and running in your new position. Your first 100 days are critical, as people assess and learn who you are and develop stronger relationships with you. These first 100 days provide tremendous insight as to where you will be going.

There are numerous types of leadership styles out there, and if one works for you, no one can say it's wrong, but we have to recognize that the fire service's traditional style of an infallible person barking orders to be followed or else is quickly moving toward being obsolete. The top leaders, from big business to the U.S. military, have all recognized that today's workforce, especially the younger members, respond significantly better when they understand the reasons behind decisions and believe they are valued. Thus, servant leadership is more important than ever. Servant leadership is the belief that the leader is there to serve the employees, not the other way around. Servant leaders lead without ego, share power and develop those around them.

If you are employing a servant-leadership style, keeping the best interest of the organization's service to the community out front and learn from your mistakes, you will be fine.

You are going to make mistakes. If you don't, you are not leading. You will likely be called to the manager's office or the board room a time or two in your career, with someone asking you to explain a particular decision or program (especially if it didn't go well). So long as you acted with the best interests of the department and the community based on the information available at the time, you should be in good shape.

Keep in mind that politics can sometimes get in the way of progress. Sometimes you are a victim of changing leadership (to no fault of your own), only to find that the appointing authorities believe someone else better aligns with their views or may be better at the job than you. As hard as it is, don't take it personally. As long as you have done things the right way and kept your community out front, you should have no problem landing on your feet.

Best of luck, and keep safety at the heart of all you do!



# APPENDIX A: SAMPLE 100 DAY PLANS

## Fitchburg Fire Chief- 100 Day Plan<sup>4</sup>

	Actions	Details
Prior to Start	Meet with City Administrator, Finance Director, and HR Director.	Acquire and discuss open records information that may assist with a smooth transition.  Budget Status?
First Week	Meet with Fire Department Command Staff- Introductions and Status Report.	Status on current projects. Goals (What do we need to achieve?) Objectives (How do we get there?) Strategic Plan? (Planning through accountability). Leadership Plan
	Meet with Police Chief	Discuss public safety initiatives and Emergency Management functions.
	Meet with EMS Director	Discuss fire and EMS cooperation during medical emergencies. Learn more about existing partnership.
	Meet with Department Heads	Discuss inter-departmental relationships. Identify how city departments support emergency operations and crisis situations.
	Meet with Elected Officials	Work to understand their expectations of the Fire Chief and learn more about their experiences with the fire department.
	Meet with Members of the Fire Department	Address those who directly serve the public. Provide information about the immediate transition. Establish a dialogue and provide an opportunity for questions.
	Work with Interim Chief, Finance Director, and Department Business Manager.	Establish budget status and spending priorities.  CIP Status and Long-term planning
	Meet with Mutual Aid Fire Chiefs	Identify Mutual Aid participation and reinforce collaborative relationships.

First Month	Administrative Review- Involve Command and Company Officers	SOP's and SOG's Rules and Regulations Union Contract- Impacts on Operations
	Departmental Identity	Mission Statement (Review/Revisit) Core Values/ Values Statement
	Training	Meet with Training Chief to discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training Schedule</li> <li>• Mandates</li> <li>• Compliance</li> </ul>
	Equipment Status and Testing	Meet with project leads to discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hose Tests</li> <li>• Ladder Tests</li> <li>• SCBA Fit and Flow Tests</li> <li>• Vehicle Maintenance</li> </ul>
	Fire Inspections/ Fire Prevention	Meet with project lead to discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Status</li> <li>• Compliance</li> <li>• New Construction</li> <li>• Target Hazards</li> </ul>
	Public Education	Meet with project lead to discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active Programs</li> <li>• Active Participants</li> </ul>
	Communication	Discuss existing communication plan. Visit dispatch center
	Community Outreach	Learn more about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local attractions and events</li> <li>• Community Risks</li> <li>• Response vulnerabilities</li> </ul>
	Department Outreach	Fire Department Family Open House. Meet and Greet with firefighter spouses/families.

<sup>4</sup> Resource provided as sample for readers with permission from Fitchburg (Wisconsin) Fire and Rescue.

Second Month	Organizational Structure. Command and Company Officer Promotions/Hiring.	Work with Command Staff to evaluate the department's organization structure.  Work to develop and identify Command and Company officer candidates.  Get approval for promotional process.
	Establish the Groundwork for a Standard of Cover Document.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluating and defining baseline of operations.</li> <li>Identifying benchmarks for achieving goals and objectives.</li> <li>Determining levels of service for all, or portions of the community.</li> <li>Measuring performance over different budget or operational years.</li> </ul>
	Establish the Groundwork for a Community/Department Risk Analysis	<p>Can we match resource to risk?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Probability</li> <li>Frequency</li> <li>Consequence</li> </ul>
	Evaluate Incident Command Capacity	Determine the most appropriate step for initiating incident command standardization/training- system consistent with mutual aid partners.
Third Month	Evaluate Operational Efficiencies	<p>Work with mutual aid partners to determine if shared services opportunities exist in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training/ Officer Development</li> <li>Maintenance</li> <li>Purchasing</li> </ul>
	Evaluate Need for Consultative Services	<p>Baseline for FFD operational status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide direction for operational improvement</li> <li>Third party assessment minimizes bias</li> </ul>
	Strengths-Based Leadership	<p>Command Staff activity to determine strengths.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are their leadership strengths?</li> <li>Are they aware of their strengths?</li> <li>Are they using their strengths to improve the organization?</li> </ul>

	Progress Report	Provide administrative and planning partners with an update of departmental status after the appointment of a new Fire Chief.
	Strategic Plan	<p>Given the information learned during the first 100 days, where is the department going?</p> <p>How is it getting there?</p> <p>Establish the framework of a Strategic Plan.</p>
	Communicate Results	<p>Share departmental status with all "stakeholders."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City administration/ finance</li> <li>Elected Officials</li> <li>Police and Fire Commission</li> <li>Fire Department Members</li> </ul>
	Set Expectation	<p>What will active and contributing members of the department be required to do?</p> <p>How can they support the mission?</p> <p>To ensure the safest and most capable response, members must make an effort to participate regularly.</p>
	Request Input from Administrative and Elected Officials	<p>To ensure that the fire department is meeting its mark, we must continuously communicate with those who expect a high level of service.</p> <p>Insure questions are answered and that observations/ impressions/ perception remain positive.</p>



## TRISHA L. WOLFORD, FIRE CHIEF ~ 100 DAY PLAN<sup>5</sup>



### Considerations starting the job:

- Assess the department – existing leadership, culture, etc.
  - Talk to as many people as you can...Look, listen, ask questions, open doors and look inside (keep asking why)
  - Learn where the informal power appears to be inside the department
- Determine/develop the vision you see for the agency and sketch out the plan
  - Do things really need to be changed or just nudged? Be careful not to fix something that is not broken
  - What leadership style(s) do you think will be successful?
  - How do you see the organization in 3-5 years?
  - What steps will you take to get there?
- Prepare yourself
  - Be honest about your ability and energy to deal with the upcoming challenges
  - Are you able to take bold action? Will you be afraid of a decision or taking a position that would get you fired or censured?
  - Is your family supportive?
  - Are you fit emotionally or physically?
  - Clarity of authority:
    - The Fire Chief should have full authority and responsibility to perform all functions necessary to completely and fully administer the department in accordance with the directives and policies of the department. The Fire Chief shall have exclusive authority to hire, organize, discipline and fire any personnel necessary to carry out the business of the department.
    - The County Executive, L1563 President and the Fire Chief will be considered critical stakeholders in major decisions.
- Be cognizant of the following realities:
  - You will be accountable for the sins of your predecessor, accept it
  - Understand that the Fire Chief role is vastly different than any other position in the organization. Don't think you understand it until you do it
  - No matter who you are or what your gifts are, sooner or later those strengths will be exploited and your limits pushed. It's the nature of the beast
  - You will face a period where your desire to do the job is low when compared to all the stressors (The "is it worth it" phase). If you don't feel this eventually, you're probably not listening enough to the organization (and yes, it's worth it)

### The First 20 Days:

- Be visible. Connect with people
- Communicate my message to key teams (Executive, Management, Labor, Leadership, Sworn, Civilian, Community)
  - Values – What is important to me and why is it important?
  - Expectations – Myself, County Executive, CAO, Council Members, L1563 President, COS, AC, DC's, staff, field personnel
  - Vision – Where is the organization and community headed?
  - Share the big picture plan:
    - Move at a speed the organization can handle
    - Keep the view at a 30,000-foot level
    - Let the specifics become my team's ownership
    - Communicate and be transparent
  - Identify my challenges – what will be difficult for me? (be human and realistic)
  - Identify the current "NOW" issues. What will I tackle immediately?
    - Minimum staffing?
    - Pay?
    - 911 communications combine?
    - Driver only response?
    - Morale?
    - OCS?
  - Communicate personally to all levels, don't immediately expect your message to be delivered effectively
  - DO NOT DO YOUR STAFF'S JOB! If people want change, they need to see the right person
  - Protect the early adopters of your vision – make it OK to get on board
- Introduce yourself to everyone
  - Make it personal. Let them know who you are and what you stand for
  - Have enough time and have extra time
    - Build a matrix to reach every shift at every station, civilian employees, shop, communications, training, IT, HR, payroll, EMS, logistics, FMO
- Internal Review
  - Review Organizational Chart and position descriptions
    - AC, COS, DFC's, DC's, etc.
  - Internal & External work flows
  - SOP's / R&R's
  - Contracts / MOU's
  - Budget
    - Dig deep into the details... are we sustainable?
    - Do we have sufficient financial controls, checks, and balances?

<sup>5</sup> Resource provided as sample for readers with permission from Chief Trisha L. Wolford Anne Arundel County (Maryland) Fire Department.

## The Next 80 Days:

- Schedules meetings:
  - Directors of other County departments
  - Annapolis, BWI, Fort Meade, Naval Academy - Fire Chief's
  - Police Chief
  - Medical Director
  - Council Members
  - Labor Leaders & Volunteer Chiefs
    - Give them a chance to learn things and weigh in before the general population – Don't surprise them
    - Treat them with respect and give them a chance to be a partner
    - Listen to them carefully, thoughtfully, and establish a routine meeting time – keep the meetings even if you think you have nothing to talk about
    - Realize that past relationships may cause your efforts to take longer than you anticipate or want – be patient
  - Legal
    - Interview and select (if possible) your union legal representation
  - Regional Fire Chiefs
  - Educational facilities: AACC, MFRI
  - Hospitals: AAMC, BWMC, St. Agnus, SOMD
  - Community open forum
  - Media
  - Neighborhood leaders
  - Safe Communities Committee
  - Sheriff
  - Mayor of Annapolis
  - Governor
- Work closely with the County Executive, Council and other department heads
  - Build a relationship of trust with the County Executive; learn his style and his plan for the community and the citizens
  - Be a team player
  - Learn how he perceives the Fire Department, what he knows, what he doesn't know and what he needs to know
  - Learn how other Departments view your department: What is the history?
  - Meet with Council. Respect the relationship the CE has with Council – Do not compromise the CE's situation
- Listen, Listen, Listen. Take notes. (likes and dislikes)
- Focus on the future, not the past
- Celebrate the wins – be mindful of the culture that currently exists
- Broadcast your failures – be honest about what isn't working well in your plan and tell them how you are adjusting
- Make it OK to fail but NOT OK not to try
- Keep the membership informed on a regular basis - consider pushing out a message by video, newsletter, closed social media, etc.
- Build Fire Chief Stakeholder Board

## APPENDIX B: SWOT ANALYSIS

S

Strengths

- Things Done Well
- KEEP Doing

W

Weaknesses

- Problems, Risks, Operational Liabilities
- STOP Doing

O

Opportunities

- Operational Potential, Achievable Goals, Needed Response Objectives
- START Doing

T

Threats

- Things getting in the way of implementation/service
- Identify, Address, Educate, Revise Approach and Redirect

# RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

## Volunteer and Combination Officers Section of the IAFC: VCOS.org

- Beyond Hoses and Helmets
- Fire Rescue Organizational Guidance
- Member and Leadership Collaboration
- Federal Compliance Toolkit
- An Insurance Planning Guide for Emergency Service Organizations: Preparing for When Bad Things Happen to Us
- VCOS Yellow Ribbon Report: Under the Helmet: Performing an Internal Size-Up
- VCOS White Ribbon Report: Managing the Business of the Fire Department
- Symposium in the Sun
- Symposium in the Spring
- Various Webinars
- Various SOPs/SOGs

## Executive Fire Officers Section of the IAFC: IAFC.org/EFO

- Firefighter Code of Ethics

## International Association of Fire Chiefs: IAFC.org

- Bullying and Workplace Violence Prevention Toolkit
- The IAFC Chief Officers Desk Reference, printed by Jones and Bartlett, ISBN: 0763729353, 9780763729356
- A Leadership Guide for Combination Fire Departments, printed by Jones and Bartlett, ISBN: 0763733814, 9780763733810
- A Leadership Guide for Volunteer Fire Departments, printed by Jones and Bartlett, ISBN: 0763742074, 9780763742072
- IAFC KnowledgeNet
- Fire-Rescue International
- IAFC Bugle Brief
- Webinars

## Volunteer Workforce Solutions: IAFC.org/Volunteer

- Chief 101
- Chief's A-RIT
- The State of the Volunteer Fire Service Report
- Social Media Toolkit
- Recruitment and Retention Materials and Guidance
- How-To Guides
- Case Studies
- Webinars

## Recommended Books

*Who Moved my Cheese?* – Spencer Johnson, MD

*Leadership on the Line* – Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky

*It's Your Ship* – Captain D. Michael Abrashoff

*You Win in the Locker Room First: The 7 C's to Build a Winning Team in Business, Sports, and Life* – Jon Gordon & Mike Smith

*How Successful People Lead* – John C. Maxwell

*Your First 90 Days* – Michael Watkins

*What Do They See When They See You Coming* – the Power of Perception over Reality – Stephen Gower

*Our Iceberg is Melting* – John Kotter

*The 7 habits of Highly Effective People* – Stephen R. Covey

*The Tipping Point* – Malcolm Gladwell

## References

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- FEMA. (January 2012). FEMA Incident Action Planning Guide. Retrieved April 12, 2019, from [https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/assets/incident action planning process.pdf](https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/assets/incident%20action%20planning%20process.pdf).
- IAFC-VCOS (August 2017). VCOS Yellow Ribbon Report - Under the Helmet: Performing an Internal Size-Up. Retrieved from <https://www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/resources/resource/vcos-yellow-ribbon-report-under-the-helmet-performing-an-internal-size-up>.



### VCOS Vision Statement

To provide chiefs and chief officers who manage volunteers within a volunteer or combination fire, rescue or EMS delivery system with information, education, services and representation to enhance their professionalism.

### VCOS Mission Statement

To represent the interests of all volunteer and combination fire/rescue/EMS agencies. We will be a dynamic organization, characterized by our integrity, customer focus and membership development, with value placed on people and the superior utilization of technology. We will excel by creating educational programs through unrivaled networking and by helping VCOS members further their success and reach their potential.



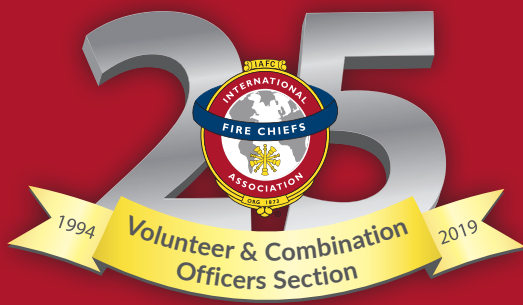
### EFO Vision Statement

The vision of the Executive Fire Officers Section is to create a professionally recognized leadership environment in which all executive fire officers possess the appropriate combination of formal higher education, on-the-job experience and nationally, regionally and locally recognized credentials needed to lead the fire service through an ever-changing response environment.

### EFO Mission Statement

The mission of the Executive Fire Officers Section of the IAFC is to identify, produce, adopt by reference and encourage industry-wide and governmental acceptance of Executive Fire Officer Development programs, certifications and standards for all executive fire officers. This mission will be accomplished by working through and with various existing and future committees and professional organizations within and external to the fire service.

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