Greenville Fire Rescue Department
Organizational Stakeholder Assessment Project
Final Report*

*Please note that this is an excerpt of the Final Report which includes
Executive Summary, Introduction, Method, and Final Summary with Recommendations.
Please see the full report for a complete review and discussion of survey data.

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<u>About Developmental Associates, LLC</u>

Developmental Associates (DA) has extensive background in human resources, and management consulting for more than twenty-five years with over fifty local governments and with the leading North Carolina universities including Duke, Wake Forest, UNC-Chapel Hill, East Carolina, UNC Asheville, and North Carolina State. Developmental Associates provides cutting edge services that go beyond typical human resource consulting firms at a reasonable cost. We are a fourteen-member organization that combines strong academic and practitioner experiences into the services we provide to public and not-for-profit organizations.

<u>About the Consulting Team</u>
We have assembled a team of subject matter experts to assist the City of Greenville in conducting an organizational analysis of the Greenville Fire and Rescue Department. Dr. Heather Lee is an Industrial Organizational Psychologist who specializes in leadership selection, training and coaching in addition to leading projects related to organizational or departmental assessment. She is the principal consultant.

Subject matter experts working on this project include:

- Chief Greg Grayson, retired from the City of Greensboro Fire Department with more than 35 years of progressive North Carolina local government fire service experience, has served as Fire Chief in three NC municipalities and served as an Assistant Director in the Office of the State Fire Marshal,
- Director Jim Albright of Guilford County Emergency Services started his career in Guilford as a paramedic in 1989, is the immediate past chair of the NC Association of EMS Administrators and is on the Board of the NC Chapter of the National Association of EMS Physicians,
- Mr. Joe Durham, former Wake County Deputy County Manager and now a Senior Consultant with Developmental Associates, brings valuable public management expertise to the project team; and,
- Dr. Holly Danford, Client Services Manager for Developmental Associates, has a doctorate in Public Administration, assisted with survey development, coordinated all aspects of survey deployment, and conducted all data analyses.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Developmental Associates (DA) was engaged to manage the Organizational Stakeholder Assessment project for the Greenville Fire Rescue Department (GFRD).   The project elements included:

1. Conducted an overall, high level needs analysis through small groups and targeted interviews.
2. Conducted an employee survey based on the issues identified through the needs analysis that assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats at the unit, departmental, organizational and community levels.
3. Reviewed data provided by the City to assess vulnerabilities identified in the survey.
4. Made data-based recommendations to aid the City and department in prioritizing issues and resources.
5. Sharing the results directly with the City Manager's office and GFR staff.

The initial scope of work was to survey active duty employees. The scope was expanded to include former employees and academy participants. Nineteen focus groups were conducted with active duty employees and interviews were conducted with the City Manager, the Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief between March 20 and April 1, 2018. The data from these groups and interviews resulted in the creation and deployment of three surveys: active duty employees, former employees who had voluntarily separated since January 1, 2014 and current GFRD Academy participants. These surveys were deployed on April 19, 2018.   Response rates varied across the three surveys from 84% for active duty employees, 39% for former employees and 64% for Academy participants and. The Academy Survey data is provided in a separate report.

In addition to the surveys, the consultants asked the City for documents and data related to policies and procedures, human resource information such as raw turnover data and training records as well as operations and performance data such as CAD reports, shift staffing, Standards of Cover, etc. The survey and operations data were analyzed along with national benchmarking standards from SHRM on employee job satisfaction, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), the Association of Public-Safety Communication Officials International, International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), and ICMA's Center for Performance Measurement. The consultants also reviewed past studies (e.g. ICMA/CPSM Operational Assessment, Internal Communication Assessment) as well as City of Greenville (COG) data about turnover, policies and procedures, etc., in order to assess what issues and recommendations from those studies had been resolved and which were still ongoing.

Strengths

Comments in the focus groups, survey responses and citizen survey results reflect that the GFRD is delivering essential services to the City of Greenville and that the community perception of those services is quite positive. With an 88% approval rating, the citizens see the staff of GFRD as providing excellent customer service and patient care. Further, employees whether they be current, former or still in the Academy, consistently listed pride in their work, customer service, passion for their career, the cross training of skills for Fire/EMS/USAR, ability to multi-task, and helping others as their calling, as

important strengths of employment at GFRD.   Having an independent Academy does provide a distinct advantage in recruitment and training specific to the organization and the Academy participants feel that the curriculum and program is a strong asset of the GFRD. Another strength of the department is diversity of personnel. The department's goal of striving for its providers to look like the community has resulted in statistics that are higher than the national average for Fire/Rescue departments. Continued attention to expanding diversity is a strategic plan goal that will focus attention on this very important aspect of public safety service delivery.

Since 2013, there have been several opportunities for self-examination and scrutiny about the leadership and operations of GFRD whether they be in the form of internal department surveys, professional operational assessments, citizen surveys, strategic planning, seeking accreditation, or the current study. Ideally, such forms of self-evaluation lead to changes that enhance effectiveness of staff and mission delivery. Indeed, when effectively implemented, the changes from self-evaluation can lead to increased retention, lower turnover and higher citizen satisfaction with services.

It is a strength to undertake self-examination as a department and GFRD should receive credit for the efforts made to assess different aspects of operation. For example, the ICMA/ CPSM Operational Assessment resulted in 25 recommendations, some of which have been fully or partially implemented (e.g. changes in EMS unit staffing from three to two personnel, creating a strategic plan, committing to the accreditation process, enhancements to the Standard of Cover, and attempts at changes intended to reduce committed time and provide more hands at incidents as examples). Of course, changes are only as good as their implementation and evaluation thus, strengths can be double-edged swords if a systematic review is missing and/or if unintended and less desirable consequences result from changes.

The 2017 Strategic Plan and the commitment to the accreditation process yield opportunities for stakeholder involvement and self-assessment against metrics for designated strategic priorities; and in the case of the accreditation study, factors required to be met to earn the accreditation designation. Both the strategic plan and the accreditation self-assessment are vehicles through which many of the results and recommendations in the current study may already be in process and/or can be included and further evaluated.

The current study evaluates perceptions of the department that are wide-ranging and variable in terms of the effectiveness of and satisfaction with working conditions, relationships with colleagues, compensation and benefits, leadership, communications, career development, training, and operations. The recommendations in many cases are very specific and made with the understanding that the Strategic Plan already establishes some of the recommendations as goals or objectives. Where there is overlap between the recommendations in this plan and goals in the Strategic Plan, we hope that the specificity of our recommendations assists in providing additional tactics with which to carry out goals and objectives specified in the action plan.   The study team feels that the strengths of the department can aid in addressing any gaps or deficiencies identified and that any desired changes are feasible to achieve with motivation and commitment to a systematic improvement process from the City Manager, GFRD leadership and employees to ensure that GFRD is consistently seen as an excellent employer for future and current employees and continues its excellence in service delivery.

Overview of Results and Recommendations

Using research on job satisfaction and engagement and a SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis conducted with 95% of employees in GFRD, this study has assessed multiple factors that contribute to job satisfaction within the department. National benchmark data and years of research on employee job satisfaction indicate that when employees are dissatisfied with certain factors of work, they are less likely to be engaged. Lower employee engagement leads to higher voluntary turnover. While data about the single measures of turnover and morale are reported in this study, the details about job satisfiers and dissatisfiers should be the focus for action because people who have good morale can still have dissatisfaction with factors that should be improved for effective employee engagement.

The perceptions reported in the focus group resulted in a survey where the results show a variance of opinion about GFRD leadership behaviors and operational activities. The biggest satisfiers are with specific working conditions, benefits, work with colleagues and relationships with immediate supervisors and Station Officers. While passion for work is often cited as a significant retention factor, the results do confirm that nearly half or more of employees are reporting dissatisfaction in important areas that predict turnover such as overall morale, incentives for acquiring new skills, leadership behaviors such as employee recognition, feedback on performance, communication and consistent application of policies and procedures, clear and transparent promotional processes and training. On the other hand, it is important to note that perceptions were mixed about leadership behaviors regarding fear of retaliation, communication, employee appreciation, transparency and better internal customer service. Not all employees have the same experience with leadership which creates an opportunity to look further into the differences between those employees who are satisfied and those who are not.

The survey findings of higher rates of dissatisfaction than satisfaction in key areas drove the need to review available City and benchmark data in staffing, retention, training and pay/incentives as well as operational areas.   Therefore, addressing these concerns requires an approach, driven by City values and goals, that is a combination of making clear what the City Manager's expectations are for how all City department heads will manage and lead employees, the availability of leadership training, leadership performance measures that evaluate individual performance against expectations, and accountability for both leadership and operational deviations from those expectations

Recommendations are divided into 11 sections, each of which has several suggested strategies or tactics for GFRD to consider in moving forward.   The full detail of the recommendations can be found in Section 4 of this report. The recommendations are based on focus group perceptions, evaluation of the responses from two surveys, thousands of comments, records from GFRD, external data, and a review of best practices from professional associations.

1) **Approach to Tackling Recommendations** – It is strongly recommended that the City Manager authorize the Chief to create a process for responding to each recommendation in this report using multiple levels of stakeholders.
2) **Turnover**–GFRD has experienced a significant increase in voluntary turnover from 2015-2017 with an increase in retirements from 4 in 2015 to 8 in 2017 and from 8 resignations in 2015 to 21

resignations in 2017.   As the economy improves, the employment market is increasingly more favorable to applicants and to organizations with successful retention programs. If core issues for turnover are not addressed systematically, more turnover is likely on the horizon.

3) **Recruitment of New or Former Staff -** The Strategic Plan addresses the need to "Direct the Development of Employment Pool" to increase workplace diversity. The objective of ensuring that the workforce looks like the City of Greenville is laudable and must also include strategies for increasing staff in general.

4) **Retention of Current Staff** – The reasons for an individual staying with an organization are numerous and personal; however, job satisfaction with key factors has been found to be predictive of higher retention among employees.   In addition to addressing staffing challenges as noted above, the strategies identified in Section 4 could enhance several sources of job satisfaction and ensure a systematic response to turnover.

5) **Compensation and Incentives** – The 2017 SHRM survey of job satisfaction and engagement reports that compensation is the number one factor in both turnover and retention.[1]   The current practice of promotion being the only method of increasing pay other than cost of living or merit increases, is a major source of dissatisfaction of many current and former GFR employees.   Evaluation of additional models of compensation that are used with success in other Fire/Rescue departments is strongly recommended.

6) **Leadership** – There is a high level of dissatisfaction with leadership by many but not all in the department. While not uniform across employees, dissatisfaction crosses shifts, age and position. Effective leadership is essential for creating a culture of high morale which influences retention. Training, coaching and accountability are key aspects of improvement that are needed going forward.

7) **Communication** – There is a need to Increase opportunities and channels for two-way internal communication among all levels of leadership, line employees and City departments that adheres to values of transparency and consistency.

8) **Career Development -** The Strategic Plan goal of establishing a progressive career development process is an important step towards improving a key aspect of job satisfaction. The development of this plan should ensure that it rewards employees for acquiring new skills, creates clear succession planning and establishes a promotional process using an objective system.

9) **Training -** The Strategic Plan provides an action of "Create a Comprehensive Training Plan" which indicates it was completed December 2017. Standards for type of training and number of hours are included in this plan.

10) **Deployment Model** – There is a need to undertake a formal analysis of call volume demands and performance to develop a data-based evaluation of the deployment model (i.e. dispatch procedures) that ensures effective allocation of resources, evaluation of workload, and response. This process should involve a committee review from members across stations, ranks and shifts, as well as the 911 Communications system.

11) **Operations Recommendations – There are multiple operations recommendations that fall into the following categories. See Section 4 for strategies within each category.**
    a) Workload
    b) Response Technology and Personnel Accountability

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[1] SHRM (2017) – Research Report: Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement. The Doors of Opportunity are Open.

c) Standard of Cover

INTRODUCTION

Project Scope and Goals

Developmental Associates (DA) was engaged to manage the Organizational Stakeholder Assessment Project for the Greenville Fire Rescue Department (GFRD). GFRD is unique in North Carolina as one of two departments that has merged the delivery of fire and rescue services with ambulance transport. Developmental Associates (DA) serves as an independent, third-party subject matter expert group to provide an assessment of GFRD to identify key issues, opportunities and to propose a plan for action. The project originated from the City Manager's Office following receipt of concerns from current and former employees and evidence of high turnover among tenured Fire/EMS staff. The project elements include:

1. Conducting an overall, high level needs analysis through small groups and targeted interviews.
2. Conducting an employee survey based on the issues identified through the needs analysis that assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats at the unit, departmental, organizational and community levels.
3. Reviewing data provided by the City, County, past studies, and national benchmarking data to assess vulnerabilities identified in the survey.
4. Reporting on the data and making recommendations to aid the City and department in prioritizing issues and resources.
5. Sharing the results directly with the City Manager's office and active duty participants.

The project was expanded to include a survey of former employees and GFRD Academy participants. This report only provides information about the Active Duty and Former Employee surveys. The results of the Academy survey are provided in a separate report. The project also follows an evaluation of the department operations conducted by The ICMA Center for Public Safety Management in 2014 where 20 recommendations were made. While that study focused on operations, the current study will focus on identifying perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats by employees and using operational data to verify and validate concerns.
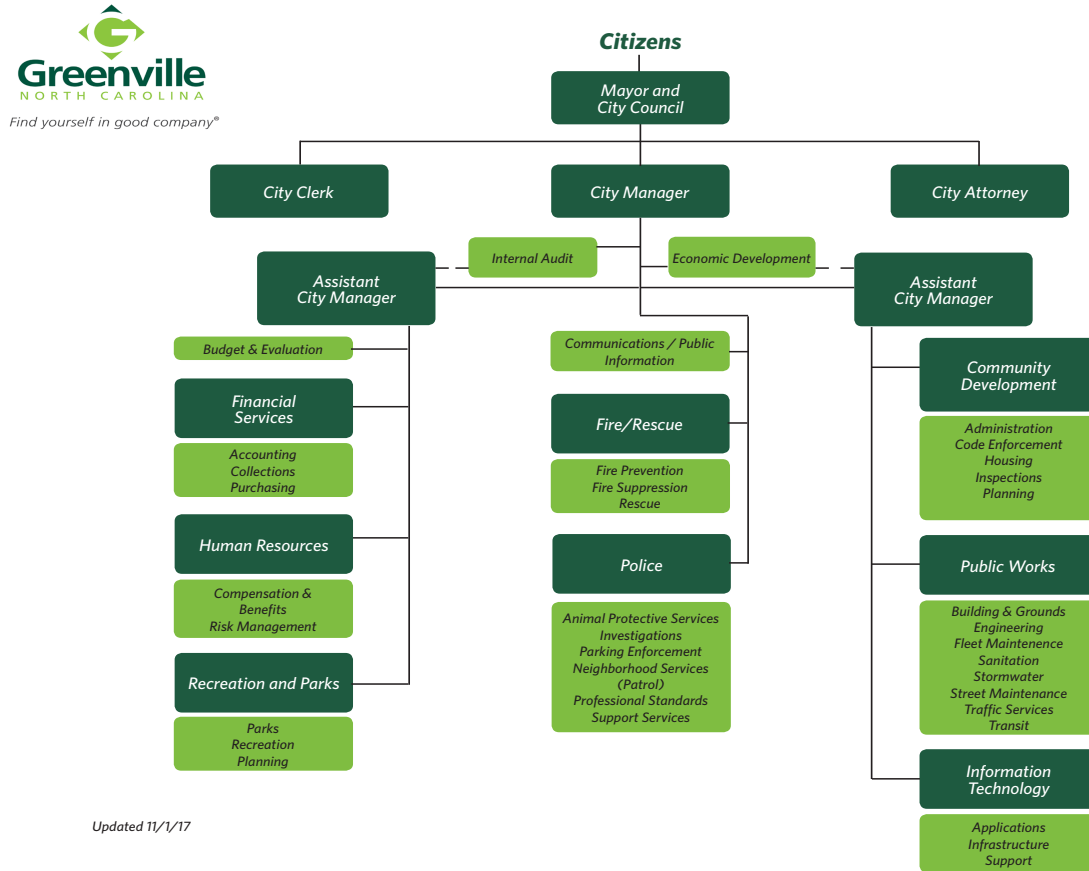
About GFRD

The GFRD is unique in North Carolina as the only urban combined Fire/Rescue department with ambulance transport. The Chief of GFRD reports directly to the City Manager, who in turn, reports to the City Council.   There are 161 roster positions allocated to the department which includes 13 administrative positions and 24 Academy slots. As of April 20, 2018, when the surveys were deployed, the actual census of the department was 133 active duty personnel and 23 Academy[2] participants. GFRD currently operates out of six stations. The GFRD Strategic Plan indicates that call volume in 2016/17 was 13,817 with 83% being EMS related calls[3]. The most recent call volume numbers have

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[2] COG – GFRD Roster as of 4/20/2018
[3] GFRD Strategic Plan - https://www.greenvillenc.gov/Home/ShowDocument?id=16802

GFRD on track for greater than 18,000 responses in 2018. A seventh station has been approved by the City Council and design work is underway with construction slated to begin in the next fiscal year.[4] Figure 1 represents the City organizational chart and Figure 2 represents the GFRD organizational chart.
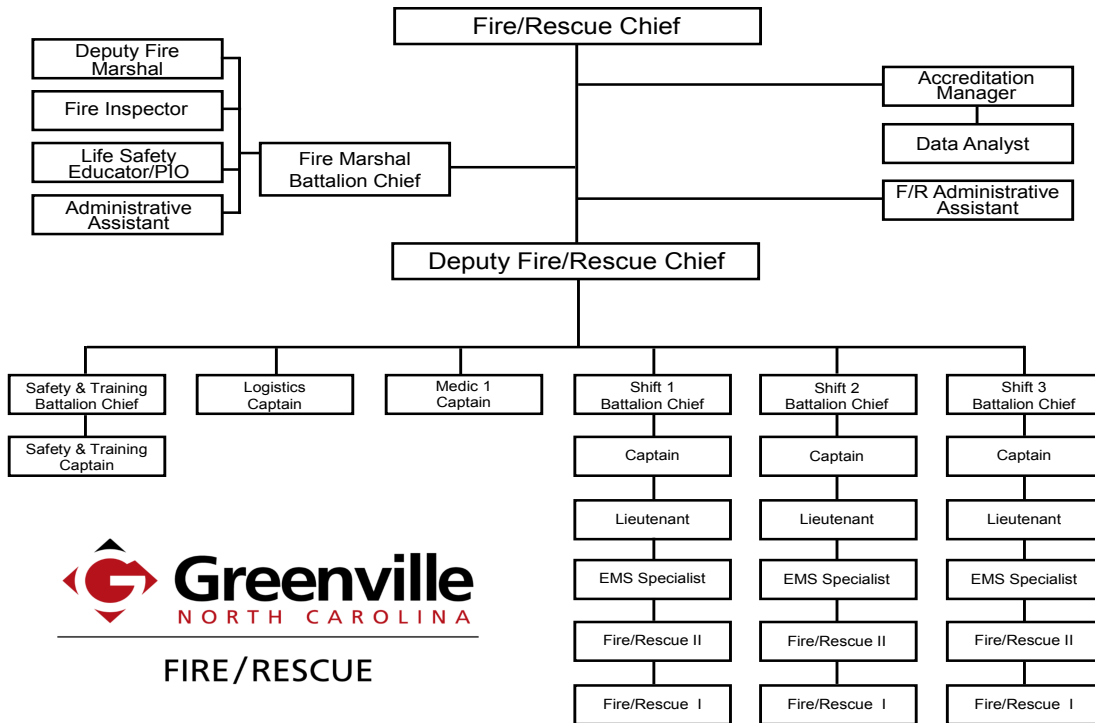
Figure 1: City of Greenville Organization Chart[5]

Figure 2: GFRD Organizational Chart[6]

In the absence of other similarly-sized, combined Fire/EMS departments in North Carolina, GFRD must look to national examples of combined departments as well as separate Fire and EMS best practice strategies for benchmarks. The City of Greenville and/or GFRD have undertaken evaluations over the last five years to gather information about internal and external perceptions and operations. Recent studies about or referencing GFRD include an internal survey of Fire/Rescue Communication by the GFR Communication Committee (2013)[7], an analysis of data and operations by ICMA/CPSM (2014)[8], and the ETC Institute (2016) Community Survey[9] about satisfaction with City of Greenville departments and services.

The most recent citizen survey as of 2016,[10] reflects that the community has confidence in GFRD as demonstrated by an overall satisfaction rate of 88% and growth in satisfaction from 2013 to 2016 in "Provision of EMS services," "City efforts to prevent fires" and "Enforcement of Fire Codes" (7%, 6% and 5% respectively). In identifying the most important City provided services, Citizens identified Fire/EMS second only to Police.
The results of these internal and external studies paint a mixed picture of satisfaction with service and delivery between internal stakeholders (staff) and external stakeholders (citizens).   While the

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[6] GFRD Organization Figure, Page 6. https://www.greenvillenc.gov/Home/ShowDocument?id=16802
[7] 2013 Fire/ Rescue Communication Survey Results
[8] 2014 Fire and Emergency Medical Services Operations and Data Analysis
[9] 2016 City of Greenville Citizen's Survey. https://www.greenvillenc.gov/government/city-manager-s-office/citizens-survey
[10] Ibid

department enjoys high levels of trust and satisfaction from the community, increasing internal stakeholder levels of satisfaction on key contributors to job satisfaction is important to ensure continued delivery of effective and sustainable high-quality services to the community.

The unique combination of skills sets needed to support the combined services of Fire and EMS requires innovative and frequent evaluation of personnel and operational protocols to ensure that GFRD meets its mission to "educate, protect and serve our community." Recent feedback from current and former employees, coupled with a high turnover rate in the last three years, confirm the City Manager's directive for an evaluation of the department in order to 1) determine the facts behind stated concerns, 2) identify causes where possible, 3) make recommendations for next steps in order to maintain the high level of service that Greenville citizens are accustomed to receiving, and 4) provide additional data for continuous improvement efforts. The purpose of this report is to describe the data collected from the Active Duty, Former Employee surveys, and from supplemental sources in order to reach evidence-based conclusions and recommendations.

Overall Needs Analysis Approach

Developmental Associates conducted the departmental and organizational analyses using a systematic approach that included:

- meeting with multiple stakeholder groups to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats,
- development, deployment and analyses of three surveys to assess perceptions of current, former and Academy employees; and,
- a review of operational documents and data from the department and the City, review of relevant statutes, regulations, and industry standards as well as the utilization of subject matter experts to analyze and integrate the data from all sources.

To identify key issue and trends, to formulate recommendations, and to assist the City in establishing priorities, our team conducted group meetings, interviews, surveys of current and a sample of former employees; and reviewed departmental, organizational and professional standards data.

Group Meetings and Interviews with Active Duty Staff

Consultants from Developmental Associates offered group interview sessions to every active duty member of the Greenville Fire and Rescue Department excluding Academy staff. Nineteen sessions were offered shift by shift and station by station. One session was held for the Command Staff, one for the Administrative Staff, and two make-up sessions were held. Consultants also interviewed the City Manager, and separately, the Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief. In addition, a dedicated email was created to enable employees who could not attend the meeting to offer their insights as well as for employees who may have wanted to provide additional information outside of the group format.[11] Through these discussions, we asked four questions of each group:

1. What are GFRD's greatest strengths? At what are we the very best?
2. What does GFRD need to work on the most as an organization? Where are our greatest areas for needed improvement?
3. What external opportunities are out there that we are not currently taking advantage of that could make us a better organization?
4. What dynamics present threats to us as an organization that could hold us back from being all that we could be for the people that we serve and protect?

The questions were sent to staff in advance of the meetings and all responses collected during the meeting were recorded on flip figure pages so that participants could see the responses. Participants were then allowed to each confidentially rank their priorities for improvements (question #2 above).

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[11] Feedback from employees sent by email has been reflected in the report related to data received in the Focus groups and Surveys (Appendices 1-3). Additionally, logistical questions about the timing of the survey and receipt of the survey were also answered via the dedicated email.

These improvement areas were content analyzed for all groups and then reduced to themes. Figure 3 below, identifies these themes and priorities from highest to lowest across the focus groups.

Figure 3: Focus Group Prioritization of GFRD Improvement Areas
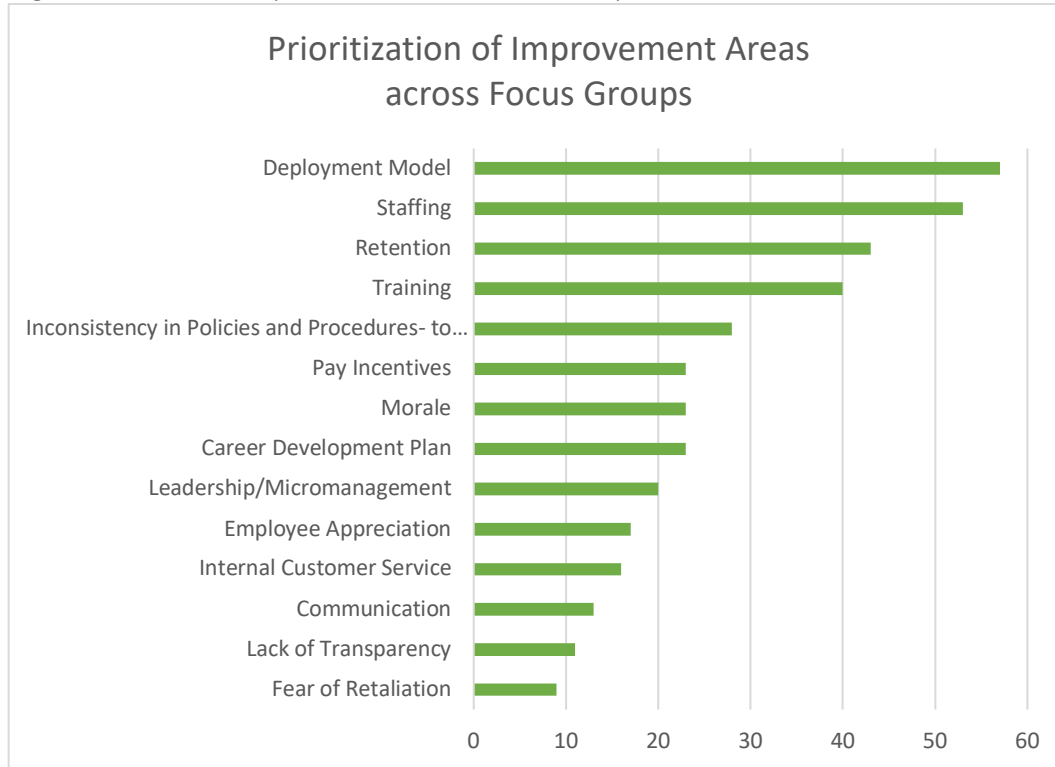
Of the 133 non-academy staff members employed at the time of the group meetings, 126 staff attended a group session or interview[12]. Thus, 95% of active duty employees provided early feedback that would be used to shape the surveys later deployed to over 240 people.

Survey Development

Based on the small group sessions and targeted interviews, we developed and administered three unique stakeholder surveys: 1) an active duty employee survey gauging what issues Fire Department demand priority attention within the department as well as the department's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and perceived threats, 2) a survey developed for former employees who had voluntarily separated since January 2014 to solicit their reasons for leaving and perceptions about key issues identified in the focus groups, and 3) a survey sent to Academy participants to specifically address issues related to training. The Academy survey data is provided in a separate report.

While there were common overlapping questions across surveys, a combination of unique multiple choice and open-ended questions in each survey provided rich and complex information about the

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[12] Focus groups and interviews were conducted between March 20 – April 2, 2018. Participant data was obtained through headcount collected at the time of the meetings and an employee census report from GFRD of employees as of 4/20/2018.

differences across the stakeholder groups. The online and anonymous nature of the surveys allowed for accessibility to all respondents as well as confidentiality for those who may not have been comfortable speaking out in group sessions.

Survey Deployment and Response Rates - The surveys were created using the application Survey Monkey. DA deployed the surveys via email for active duty and Academy employees on April 20, 2018. Due to North Carolina Statutes on employee confidentiality, the City Manager's office mailed letters to former employees who had voluntarily left GFRD since January 2014. The letters to former employees, which were mailed to the employee address on file as of April 20, 2018, each contained a unique survey link for the survey. Reminders were sent to active duty employees via email on three different occasions. No reminders were sent to former employees as these were mailed by the City and Developmental Associates did not have access to names and address of whom were mailed surveys. All responses were anonymous and were returned online using DA's Survey Monkey account. Table 1 indicates the two stakeholder groups discussed in this report, number of invitations sent, and responses received along with the response rate. The response rate is calculated based on the census at the time of the survey.   An average response rate of 30-40% is typical for online surveys. There was a response rate of 84% for the active duty employees and former employees had a response rate of 39%.   Within the surveys, not all respondents answered every question therefore there are varying numbers of responses represented across items.

Table 1: Response Rates by Survey

Stakeholder Group	Responses Received/ Invitations Sent*	Response Rate
Active Duty Employees	112/133	84%
Former Employees (voluntary separations since 01/2014)	31/79	39%

*Invitations sent based on number of active duty employees on roster as of April 20, 2018

Data Analyses: We calculated descriptive statistics including frequencies and mean scores. Where possible and relevant, we also conducted cross-tabulation analyses by age, race, education, tenure and position. Where present, we report statistically significant differences, that is, differences that are more likely than just random chance. Tabular and cross-tabulation data for the survey items can be found in the Appendices.

Content Analyses: Content analysis is a technique for systematically describing written, spoken or visual communication. It provides a quantitative (numerical) description of frequency related to how often comments relevant to a particular theme occur. As in all qualitative analyses, the naming of themes and grouping of comments is subjective and could be debated.

Due to the volume of comments across the two surveys, we conducted content analyses on open-ended questions from each survey and generally summarize them in relevant sections of the report. In our analyses, we have intentionally tried to be more general with the goal of narrowing the focus on critical areas. The content analyses for survey items are not intended to capture the level of detail associated

with each individual comment. More discrete categorization of comments can actually dilute the results and hinder defining clear actions and next steps. The content analysis tables and the individual comments are provided in the Appendices.[13]

REVIEW OF OPERATIONAL DOCUMENTS

The survey results include personal opinions about the working conditions and leadership of the department but also about factors for which there are policies, procedures, and data.   The review of additional documents allows for a means of validating perceptions reported in the surveys as well as comparisons against national benchmarks. The consultants requested documents and reports from the City to understand existing policies and procedures, operational processes and performance data. Additional information was also requested from the County and the Medical Director related to provision of EMS services.

ORGANIZATION OF FULL REPORT

This report summarizes results for the active duty and former employee surveys. Data was requested from GFRD and the City of Greenville related to human resources practices, policies, and employee statistical data as well as operational information to assess strengths and vulnerabilities identified in the survey.   Section 1 contains the results of the Active Duty Survey, Section 2 contains a review of operational data that was undertaken once the Active Duty results were reviewed, Section 3 contains the results of the Former Employee Survey, Section 4 includes the report summary and recommendations, and Section 5 includes multiple appendices.

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[13] Names and identifying information have been redacted from comments to ensure confidentiality of respondents. Errors in spelling and grammar were not corrected in raw comments.

Section 4: Summary and Recommendations

This study was undertaken at the request of the City of Greenville Manager in response to high turnover and concerns raised by current and former employees about the functioning of the Greenville Fire Rescue Department. A 2014 by ICMA/CPSM made a number of operational recommendations for the department, some of which were implemented and some of which have been included in a 2017 Strategic plan. This study makes additional recommendations as noted below.

The current study gathered current and former employee perceptions via online surveys. Once employee perceptions were gathered, the study team determined that vetting the perceptions with available data would be important for the credibility of the recommendations and for the City to respond with evidence-based actionable decisions. Thus, the scope of the original study which was to evaluate the perceptions of active duty employees, was expanded to include former and academy employees as well as an independent review of City and other source data.

Limitations: With any study, there are limitations. First, this study is a snapshot in time about a highly dynamic organization. Data gathered and reported reflects the time period in which it was gathered, and decisions should be made on the basis of updating data to ensure it is the most current available. Second, the survey design itself utilized a "neither strongly agree nor disagree" or neutral option rather than a "don't know or NA option" for many questions. While this is an acceptable survey design option, there are a smaller number of administrative or non-Fire/EMS staff for whom many of the questions were not applicable. Therefore, we focused our discussion of results on the Strongly Agree/Agree or Strongly Disagree/Disagree ends of the scale rather than the middle. Given the high frequency of the responses for these anchored responses, we do not believe that this negatively impacts the data. Third, given the small number of women represented in the department, we did not solicit gender in the demographic section of the active duty or former employee survey. Statistical analyses to look for differences would not have been feasible given the small numbers. However, the fact that we did not specifically gather this information, in no way suggests that the study team believes that gender differences are unimportant. The study team recognizes there may be differences in how female and male staff view issues. We encourage the department to ensure that their diversity effort in employment continues to include recruitment and retention of women as well as race and ethnicity.

Recommendations: Recommendations are divided into 11 sections, each of which has several suggested strategies or tactics for GFRD to consider in moving forward.   The recommendations are based on focus group perceptions, evaluation of the responses from three surveys, thousands of comments, records from GFRD, external data, and a review of best practices from professional associations.

1) **Approach to Tackling Recommendations** – It is strongly recommended that the City Manager authorize the Chief to create a process for responding to each recommendation in this report using multiple levels of stakeholders.
   a) For ownership, credibility, and accountability, we recommend that employee committees (made up of a mix of position, rank, shift, station, tenure, race and gender personnel) are created and tasked with working on specific categories of recommendations or depending on scope, specific recommendations. Specific best practices for these committees follow.

i) A charter for each committee should be created that identifies who is on the committee, ground rules for engagement, goals and objectives, scope of authority, reporting requirements, and deadlines.
ii) We recommend that each committee appoint a chair who has skill in running meetings and working through a group problem solving process. This person should not be appointed on the basis of rank nor appointed by Department Leaders.
iii) Progress should be reported regularly and consistently.
   (1) Committee meetings should be at least monthly, and minutes should be available for review in a transparent fashion to other stakeholder groups, including the City Manager.
   (2) Larger group meetings that include representatives of each committee should meet at least quarterly to report on progress.
   (3) The City Manager should receive a report on an agreed upon schedule. We recommend in-person reporting at least every six months.
b) Create a Project Management Dashboard (there are several software options available on the market). GFRD has undertaken several self-studies. The Strategic Plan begins to address some but not all of the recommendations in this report and the 2014 ICMA operations review. Further, the Strategic Plan, as available on the City website, has a more general implementation plan in terms of actions and timelines (e.g. "ongoing with annual review"). Because staff were unclear about the status of many issues, we recommend the creation of a project management dashboard where results for key performance indicators are reported on consistently and updated regularly by committee members. This dashboard would be a transparent way for staff to keep track of progress and put into practice, the old adage of "You get what you measure."[14] In addition, the Strategic Plan should be revised and updated to incorporate prioritized recommendations.
   i) For each recommendation, there should be an implementation plan that includes the goal, objectives, strategies or tactics along with who will be responsible and the timeline.
   ii) For each recommendation, there should be a data-based evaluation step that is scheduled to review the change in policy, procedure or practice after implementation.
      (1) Evaluations may occur at 90 days, six months or a year depending on the complexity of the change. A schedule of evaluation should be part of the action plan.
      (2) Data must be gathered that examines the baseline before a change implementation and then compares the baseline to post implementation data. Data may be from CAD, Logs, Surveys, etc.
c) A skilled and neutral facilitator will be needed to manage this process effectively even though the department leadership and staff will do the "heavy lifting." If the City does not have a skilled facilitator on staff (this person can come from anywhere in the City) to guide this process, we recommend that a neutral person be contracted to oversee the kickoff of the process.
2) **Turnover**–GFRD has experienced a significant increase in voluntary turnover from 2015-2017 with an increase in retirements from 4 in 2015 to 8 in 2017 and from 8 resignations in 2015 to 21 resignations in 2017. As the economy improves, the employment market is increasingly more

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[14] Ariely, Dan (2010). You Are What You Measure. Harvard Business Review. June 2010. https://hbr.org/2010/06/column-you-are-what-you-measure

favorable to applicants and to organizations with successful retention programs. If core issues for turnover are not addressed systematically, more turnover is likely on the horizon.

a) Revise exit interview[15] process to be comprehensive in seeking reasons of departure, determining what, if anything would have retained employees, and seeking an exiting employee's evaluation of the employment experience about compensation, benefits, policies, leadership, training, etc.

   i) Consider sending an online survey within the window between when an exiting employee is working out their notice to two weeks after their last day. There are multiple tools for establishing an effective exit interview process and this information can be invaluable in identifying trends to allow for quick interventions.

b) Turnover is embedded in the concerns raised in this report. Recommendations to reduce turnover and increase retention are identified among the following nine recommendation areas. Recommendation #1 above suggests the path for systematically tackling the issues raised in the surveys. If employees see that a transparent, action-oriented process is in place and being monitored by the City Manager, they may be more inclined to "stick it out" thus increasing employee retention in the short-run while working towards systematic changes in the long-run.

3) **Recruitment of New or Former Staff -** The Strategic Plan addresses the need to "Direct the Development of Employment Pool" to increase workplace diversity. The objective of ensuring that the workforce looks like the City of Greenville is laudable.

a) Documents that outlined the specific tactics and timeline for attending career fairs and community outreach events were not available (page 18). As noted above, we recommend that a "dashboard" of detailed action plans be created.

b) Addressing staffing needs will be important to address concerns of employees and ensure that there are adequate staff to carry out the mission of the department. Additional recruitment strategies include:

   i) Consider hiring lateral transfer employees from other agencies and incentivizing them with carryover for leave time and selected benefits.

   ii) Consider hiring part-time, PRN (e.g. "when necessary") staff to assist in times of shortages, increased call volumes, vacation, holiday periods, etc.

   iii) Review policies related to hiring military trained personnel and adapt as feasible, including allowing reciprocity for military training.

   iv) Once a systematic approach to addressing recommendations is created, consider targeted outreach and recruitment of former employees who left in good standing.

   v) Evaluate compensation incentives (to be discussed further in the next section) related to attraction and retention of staff.

4) **Retention of Current Staff** – Evaluating the reasons employees stay is as important as evaluating the reasons that employees leave. The reasons for an individual staying with an organization are numerous and personal; however, job satisfaction with key factors has been found to be predictive of higher retention among employees.   In addition to addressing staffing challenges as noted above, the strategies outlined in this report could enhance several sources of job satisfaction and ensure a systematic response to turnover.

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[15] 2018 Glassdoor: 13 Must Ask Exit Interview Questions

a) In alignment with our recommended approach to create a committee driven process to respond to the recommendations in this report, we also recommend developing a permanent City-wide "retention and engagement" committee once the organizational assessment committees have created action plans for the recommendations. An ongoing committee dedicated to retention and engagement can look towards the development of a proactive rather than reactive retention program by regularly surveying current employees, reviewing benchmark data, making recommendations and participating in retention programs as advocates and champions.

i) The City-wide committee include GFR members nominated from a pool of employees from every shift, every position level, and ensuring demographic representation in terms of gender, race, generation and tenure. The committee should also include representatives from HR and the City Manager's Office to help ensure that resources for success are available.

b) Typical employee retention and engagement programs are customized to the organization. Many of the issues discussed in this report are issues related to employee engagement. Once some of the concerns outlined in this report are addressed, a commitment to long term retention and engagement, through a committee tasked with this oversight, ensures that it does not fail to be attended to in the face of other priorities.

5) **Compensation and Incentives** – The 2017 SHRM survey of job satisfaction and engagement reports that compensation is the number one factor in both turnover and retention.[16] The current practice of promotion being the only method of increasing pay other than cost of living or merit increases, is a major source of dissatisfaction of many current and former GFR employees.

a) Conduct an evaluation of compensation strategies nationally for combined EMS and Fire Service to determine best practice models that aid in retention and motivate employees to seek advanced skills.

i) Evaluate models such as parallel advancement and pay differentials for paramedics that are currently in use within North Carolina and nationally as potential strategies.

b) Review the applicability of step and skill-based pay to allow for incentives to individual staff in order to continue to grow their skills so that cost of living increases, merit pay and promotions are not the only ways employees can increase their salary.

c) Evaluate lateral transfer incentives such as adjustments in matching leave benefits, retirement and health insurance, and other options to incent talented staff from other agencies to join GFRD without having to start at the same benefit levels as a first-year career staffer.

6) **Leadership -** There is a high level of dissatisfaction with leadership by many but not all in the department. While not uniform across employees, dissatisfaction crosses shifts, age and position. Effective leadership is essential for creating a culture of high morale which influences retention. Training, coaching and accountability are key aspects of improvement that are needed going forward.

a) Acknowledge high turnover and other concerns in person to all levels across shifts and stations. accept responsibility for finding solutions to issues, and announce credible, visible and accountable steps for improvements.

b) Be visible to and engage at all levels to develop interpersonal connections and relationships across shifts and stations.

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[16] SHRM (2017) – Research Report: Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement. The Doors of Opportunity are Open.

      i) Develop a regular schedule of visitation and rotation across shifts and stations by senior leaders

c) Strengthen accountability of supervisors and line staff by evaluating performance standards against desired competencies.

      i) Add specific GFRD standards in addition to the current City-wide performance system. The current performance standards as developed are too general to be applicable across a job family.

      ii) Consistently hold supervisors accountable for improvement when gaps in leadership behavior and expected outcomes are identified. Using coaching and performance management systems, providing and documenting timely feedback are essential strategies for effective leadership in any organization.

      iii) Ensure that supervisors deviating from standards of expected leadership are coached for success; trained, if skill gaps are identified, and held accountable for changing behaviors when deviations from standards are noted.

      iv) Expect consistent application of discipline procedures such that the same infraction (at the same frequency level for individuals) receives the same application of policy that is demonstrable to any independent reviewer.

      v) Consider expanding who is involved in discipline decision circle to be a more collective decision.

d) Train all employees in foundational communication and emotional intelligence skills as a precursor to supervision and leadership succession planning and promotion.

e) Increase frequency, transparency and clarity about decisions using multiple methods.

      i) Evaluate the 2014 ICMA recommendation "that the GFRD develop a system to document nonemergency activities so that decisions about new efficiencies and the capacity to do work are both accurate and transparent to leadership and the community. "

        (1) If such a system has *not* been established, we recommend that it be done as part of the larger process improvement plan resulting from this study. If the system has been established, an evaluation of the system needs to be completed and adjustments made as needed if gaps are identified.

7) **Communication -** There is a need to Increase opportunities and channels for two-way internal communication among all levels of leadership, line employees and City departments that adheres to values of transparency and consistency.

a) **Intensify communication in general, across supervisory levels, to regain trust using multiple methods such as skip-level meetings, social gatherings, emails, and recorded webinars for off-shift communication so that key information is not filtered differently depending on who delivers it or interprets it but delivered in the same way by leaders and reinforced by supervisors.**

b) Develop an effective inter-generational communication workshop. Consistent statistically significant differences by generation in the survey lead to a need for greater understanding of Millennials through interaction opportunities, training and facilitated activities.

i) An objective in the Strategic Plan[17] is to develop a workshop about millennials in the workplace to "Adjust the existing workplace's habits/communications/expectations" and to "teach the millennials workplace expectations."

ii) Effectively use blended learning strategies to deliver this training including finding a dynamic, interactive facilitator to carry out in-person activities in addition to passive but "just in time" learning approach (e.g. webinar). This should not be a "once and done" workshop but have objectives and activities that are ongoing.

iii) Increase use of cross-functional employee committees to carry out work which enhances communication but also collaborative skills across employees.

c) Reevaluate and communicate specific tactics used to carry out the Strategic Plan goals using multiple methods, multiple times per year with a transparent dashboard that stakeholders can review on an ongoing basis.

d) Review and revise department policies, procedures and protocol and standardize policy and procedure development and communication systems using Fire/Rescue best practices against benchmark organizations.

i) The accreditation self-assessment tool allows for such a review in a systematic fashion and is underway.

ii) The process for review should ensure input from employees at all levels.

iii) The process for communicating changes should use different formats of delivery and have repetition built into the system given turnover rates.

iv) Develop and communicate expectations for how policies and procedures are consistently interpreted and applied. Use of multiple methods of communication as a standard practice, including having a dashboard, regularly scheduled meetings, videos of important topics on an intranet site, newsletters, and training sessions can supplement emails which were cited as the predominant method of communication in the active duty and former employee surveys.

e) Proactively educate elected and appointed officials about GFRD using citizen's academies. The GPD already has a Citizen's Police Academy in place. Many communities also have Fire 101 Academy's. Given the unique nature of this combined department, increasing understanding of the department's services, challenges and barriers, will aid in advocacy efforts and resource allocation decisions.

f) Consider engaging an independent survey contractor to solicit quality of GFR service data on a regular and on-going basis. Many companies will benchmark data against similar and like providers. This will provide important evaluation data for decision making.

8) **Career Development -** The Strategic Plan goal of establishing a progressive career development process is an important step towards improving a key aspect of job satisfaction. The development of this plan should ensure that it rewards employees for acquiring new skills, creates clear succession planning and establishes a promotional process using an objective system

a) Confirm desired rank structure and establish qualifications, eligibility factors and advancement procedures for every position. The Segal Waters job family competency documents provide an excellent starting point for this effort.

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[17] 2017 GFRD Strategic Plan for example on page 15 cites specific strategies related to evaluating turnover and a millennial workshop but these are not specified in the action plan. Omitting objectives from the action plan may lead to incomplete execution and measurement against the goal.

b) Benchmark promotional processes against other similar departments and select consistent and appropriate promotional strategies for each position.

c) Establish a progressive career development processes that rewards employees for acquiring new skills, creates clear succession planning and promotional levels using an objective system. (Note: The Strategic Plan provides an action of "Create a Professional Development Plan" which indicates it was completed in December 2017. This plan was not made available for review; therefore, it is possible that some of the recommendations below are already under consideration.

    i) Train evaluators in using consistent and objective measures to hire and promote staff.

    ii) Consider the use of external assessors at the same or higher position level as that being filled to reduce actual and perceived bias.

    iii) Clearly communicate promotion results using objective data on an individual basis. Evaluate the process of sharing promotional results overall as some Fire and Police departments do to increase transparency.

    iv) Offer coaching sessions to employees who receive promotions and to those who do not in order to ensure understanding of performance strengths and gaps.

    v) Require employees to develop a career action plan that is then reviewed, approved and incorporated into performance plans.

d) Implement enhanced career development for Chief Officers. This is cited as an objective on page 15 of the Strategic Plan but is not specifically outlined in the action plan though it may be included in the "Professional Development Plan" previously referenced.

e) Evaluate training reimbursement policies and procedures for required certifications (e.g. ALS, paramedic) to ensure that there are incentives without unintended consequences.

f) Survey respondents made over 100 comments related to desired employee recognition practices.

    i) Strengthen employee recognition programs with attention to both financial and non-financial options.

    ii) Allow GFR staff to nominate and prioritize forms of recognition that would fit within the overall COG culture and policies.[18]

    iii) Employee recognition strategies should include short, medium and long-term ideas that acknowledge individual differences by employees, position, shift and generation.

    iv) Ensure that metrics for receiving rewards are publicly posted and frequently evaluated to match departmental and City strategic goals.

9) **Training** - The Strategic Plan provides an action of "Create a Comprehensive Training Plan" which indicates it was completed December 2017. Standards for type of training and number of hours are included in this plan.

a) Re-evaluate the continuing education and competency assessment of firefighters to determine if core and essential functions are consistently able to be met by all firefighters. Competency assessment should be conducted at least on an annual basis. While the GFRD Training Plan does outline topics and hours necessary for training, a full evaluation of each staff member's training

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[18] Evaluating and developing employee recognition programs would be an excellent role for a retention and engagement committee.

records as well as competency assessments should be completed. This effort may already be under consideration given the accreditation self-study.

b) Include the involvement of the EMS Medical Director and faculty from Vidant in clinical education, as well as structured training with instructors with extensive prehospital or emergency medicine backgrounds

c) Institute a formalized progression process for new providers within the department in consultation with the Medical Director. This should also include providers going through credential progression.

d) Consider instituting random, independent customer surveys for patients receiving care from GFR. Similar to current healthcare Press-Ganey surveys, but specific to the EMS function. www.emssurveyteam.com. These survey results should be shared with staff and Medical Direction, as well as feeding into the training plan for providers.

10) **Deployment Model -** There is a need to undertake a formal analysis of call volume demands and performance to develop a data-based evaluation of the deployment model (i.e. dispatch procedures) that ensures effective allocation of resources, evaluation of workload, and response. This process should involve a committee review from members across stations, ranks and shifts, as well as the 911 Communications system.

a) Consider modifications to the current deployment system upon formal evaluation.

b) Conduct continual analyses utilizing demand, risk, and unit travel times at times of expansion and/or station replacement to ensure that service enhancements could not be realized with relocating existing stations as a first option.

c) As operational changes are considered, the GFRD needs to formalize a change management process to look at data prior to and after any operational change using a defined set of metrics. A number of management tools are available, such as Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) or Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control (DMAIC).

11) **Operations Recommendations**

a) **Workload**

   i) Evaluate <u>daily-minimum staffing</u> level is a high priority for resources, especially with the Ladder/Tower Truck and Rescue Truck.

   ii) Evaluate <u>peak demand staffing</u> is also an important priority as a potential next step in strengthening the GFRD on-duty firefighter contingent with significant attention focused on current and future workload.

   iii) Re-evaluate sleep time arrangements and benchmark against similar volume and service delivery models.

b) **Response Technology and Personnel Accountability**

   i) Continue to improve the relationship with Pitt County 911. (Note: The GFRD Strategic Plan has a goal to "Maintain/ Enhance relationship with 911 Communications[19].)

   (1) Develop a clear and transparent action plan with milestones is essential for progress to occur on this objective While it may be available, it was not available for review in this study.

   (2) Consider mutually developing a Service Level Agreement (SLA) of the expectations of both parties in the delivery of 911 call intake, dispatch of resources, unit allocation, unit

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[19] 2017 GFRD Strategic Plan, Page 13

benchmarks, and other metrics related to function. A mechanism for monitoring compliance should also be agreed upon that allows independent review of data from the system related to performance of Pitt County 911 and GFRD.

    (3) Work with the Pitt County 911 Communications Center to:

        (a) institute a performance measurement system benchmarked against national standards; and,

        (b) to deliver services at an agreed-upon level of service.

  ii) Invest in advanced technology such as automatic vehicle location (AVL) on all fire department response apparatus in order to improve response times by sending the closest resources to emergencies as well as more accurately capturing data for demonstrated performance.

    (1) The GFRD Strategic Plan cites use of MDV and automatic vehicle locator (AVL) technology. Having a clearly communicated action plan that allows the rank and file to see progress on this step is critical.   The use of (AVL) interface with the computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system will allow the closest appropriate unit if available to be dispatched for a request for service.

  iii) Consider "auto-enroute" and "auto-arrive" technology to eliminate human interface with these priority time benchmarks.

  iv) Develop response configurations based on AMPDS coding (i.e. BLS units to convalescent and properly screened alpha responses; ALS units to higher acuity events).

  v) Review and formally evaluate efficacy of "squads" given high call load. Ensure that unintended negative consequences regarding number of vehicles sent to lower acuity calls is abated.

  vi) Establish a hierarchy and/or clarify the hierarchy on medical responses. Currently a number of providers are assigned to events without clear lines of authority per staff comments (who's in charge? Officer on Engine, Paramedic on ambulance, Paramedic on Squad?).

c) **Standard of Cover**

  i) Determine the expected level of service from GFRD and consistently evaluate the department against that stated level of service or standard of coverage. While significant work has been done to develop Standards of Cover for the GFRD in response to the ICMA recommendation "to utilize a risk-based strategy to reevaluate and refine their decision matrix for outlining what types of requests for service require an emergency response and which types of service requests can be responded to with the normal flow of traffic," continued focus on risk reduction could be implemented, specific to risk associated with unit responses.

    (1) Consider differentiating medical response based on time and confidence interval using the Advanced Medical Priority Dispatch System (AMPDS) from lowest priority (Alpha responses) to highest priority (Echo responses). The same approach can be used on fire and service calls, particularly if Emergency Fire Dispatch (EFD) is integrated into the call intake process by Pitt County 911.

    (2) Consider submitting response data to "FIRECARES"[20] as a benchmarking source.

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[20] https://firecares.org/#about

(3) Provide an annual update of data analysis for departmental personnel and city management staff.

Summary: The Greenville Fire Rescue Department has received a great deal of study over the last five years by ICMA/CPSM, an accreditation self-study, a strategic planning process and now this study. A willingness to self-assess is an important first step to developing effective practices. Significant changes in leadership, policy, procedure, and practice have been undertaken since 2013. Further, operational changes implemented in 2015 coincided with a large increase in turnover that increased again the following year. While causation of increased turnover cannot be determined with certainty, employees in the current study, expressed strong concerns about leadership and operational issues and anecdotally, in large numbers through the focus groups and in the former employee survey, linked turnover to these concerns.

While the department is undertaking an effort to address many of the concerns identified through its 2017 Strategic Plan and the accreditation self-study, a lack of transparent communication, evaluation of decisions, and inconsistent exhibition of effective leadership behaviors across ranks, has created a culture of distrust and low morale. Despite high satisfaction with their chosen career, particular work conditions (e.g. equipment) and co-workers, a majority of current and former GFR employees expressed dissatisfaction with multiple areas (e.g. leadership, communication, training, career development) that require attention by the City Manager's office and GFR leadership to ensure increased job satisfaction and retention of staff. In addition, an independent review of operational data, validates some of the concerns shared by staff and necessitates high priority evaluation to ensure that the department continues to receive the high level of public support it has garnered through citizen surveys, and indeed even grows that support.