

MTFR STRATEGIC PLAN

Goal 1.0 Identify and Address Departmental Personnel Needs

Objective 1.1 Enhance leadership abilities within the department by providing opportunities to acquire relevant skills

Providing our people with skilled leaders and managers is a critical component to our overall success. Traditionally, leadership education has been overlooked in volunteer fire departments, and operations have suffered. As the knowledge base for the EMS and fire service continually expands, having members thoroughly trained to lead impacts not only emergency operations, but all areas of our agency. MTFR is committed to providing our members and supervisors with top-quality leadership training and experiences. To address this objective, the Department will:

- **Implement training for new recruits on leadership skills.** Providing the Department's future leaders with the necessary skills to excel will have a positive impact on our operations well into the future.
- **Develop leadership opportunities for members in the EMS and Special Operations program areas.** Currently, departmental leadership positions are based on fire suppression operations. This structure eliminates non-firefighters from leadership positions. By developing supervisory positions in other areas, we will open these positions to all members.
- **Develop partnerships with large fire departments to facilitate experiential learning.** By partnering with large departments (Columbus, Cincinnati, Toledo, etc.) our personnel will have to opportunity gain valuable tactical and strategic experience through ride along programs.
- **Encourage and fund member participation in outside training opportunities focused on command and leadership.** Members can gain valuable education in these core areas by attending outside training courses and seminars, such as at the Ohio Fire Academy.
- **Require future officers to be cross-trained in all areas of service.** As MTFR has evolved into an all-hazards response agency, having officers who are trained as firefighters, EMTs and in special operations is crucial. No longer can an officer rely solely on their fire suppression experience and training and hope to adequately command the range of incidents to which we respond.

Timeframe and Cost

The vast majority of the action items under objective 1.1 can be accomplished within the first two years of this plan and within the operating budget. Providing members with outside training, both through ride along time and seminars will cost an additional \$7,000 per year. This amount includes funds for registration fees and tuition as well as travel reimbursement.

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Objective 1.2 Increase recruitment of community members and others for the positions of emergency medical technician, firefighter and general member.

Volunteer staffing is the most cost effective option available to provide emergency services coverage. MTFR has a long tradition of volunteer staffing, which is recognized and supported by this plan. However, we realize the challenges inherent in maintaining a quality volunteer force in the face of ever-increasing time and training demands. We endeavor to remain a primarily volunteer force supplemented by paid staff members. To address this, we will:

- **Develop a consistent advertising program to support volunteer recruitment.** Through regular events and media ads, this program will stress the need for volunteers.
- **Improve diversity within the department.** MTFR continues to strive to diversify our force through the successful recruitment, retention and promotion of minorities and women. We strive to have a workforce that reflects the community and feel that this ensures the vitality of the Department. We will continue to target “non-traditional” groups for recruitment.
- **Increase volunteer opportunities by enhancing the general membership category.** We recognize that not everyone wants to be a firefighter or EMT, but that many people wish to serve the community. Through the general membership program, community members who wish to volunteer in non-emergency roles will have the opportunity to do so.
- **Improve benefits for paramedic personnel.** MTFR, like many small departments, faces a shortage of trained paramedics. Through the development of a paid-on-call system and other benefits, we will continue to provide the community with qualified advanced life support providers.

Timeframe and Cost

The action items identified above can be implemented within the first year of the plan, with the exception of the last item, improving benefits. Because this item includes added costs and new programmatic design, its implementation may take two years. The primary costs associated with these items come from increased advertising (\$1,500 per year) and funding a paid-on-call system for paramedics. It is estimated that this will cost \$10,000 per year.

Objective 1.3 Improve current member retention programs

Keeping volunteers once we recruit them is always a challenge. A positive work environment, socially and physically, go a long way towards maintaining future excellence. Creating a positive atmosphere, providing opportunities to serve, facilitating training and reducing the burden on volunteers will help to meet this objective. To do this, we will:

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- **Increase the amount of outside training available.** Exposing our volunteers to nationally recognized experts, trainings on best practices as well as providing networking opportunities with peers allow for professional development and personal growth.
- **Improve internal compliance with policies, procedures and standards.**
- **Increase recognition of accomplishments and positive involvement.** Providing our staff with positive feedback and recognition of their accomplishments and commitment shows our concern for and appreciation of their time and effort.
- **Improve compliance with fitness and wellness requirements.** MTFR was the recipient of a 2002 Federal grant that funded the start of one of the nation's first mandatory fitness program for volunteer firefighters. The very nature of a volunteer force contributes in part to the difficulties in enforcing these standards. Through increased monitoring, peer involvement, incentives and recognition, we can continue this important component of our operations.
- **Investigate and develop "direct impact" benefits for active volunteers.** In some areas of the country, volunteer firefighters and EMTs receive "direct impact" benefits for their service to the community. These include partial property tax abatements, rent discounts, waiver of municipal fees, health and life insurance and pension programs. These programs can go a long way to making a volunteer feel appreciated and strengthening retention efforts.
- **Offer additional opportunities for advancement.** While volunteers fill our line supervisory positions, having non-supervisory positions, such as command aids or public information officers, provides more opportunities for advancement.
- **Investigate and implement a better system of volunteer compensation.** Currently, MTFR volunteers receive seven dollars for every call they go on, regardless of duration. Additionally, volunteers receive no compensation for training time or for their level of qualifications. Many volunteer departments have transitioned to paid on call systems to better compensate the volunteers for their time.

Timeframe and Cost

These action items, with the a few exceptions, can be implemented within the first year of the plan. The majority of these items are low-cost and, in most cases, can be absorbed within the operational budget. Funding outside training will cost an estimated \$4,000 per year starting in FY 2006 (FY 2005 is budgeted at \$3,000). It will take at least two years to fully investigate "direct impact" benefits and work with county and local governments on implementation. However, this should be at little to no cost to the township. Depending upon what type of system is implemented to better compensation, this option could cost up to \$25,000 per year. This could not be started until FY 2006 at the earliest.

Objective 1.4 Increase the number of paid staff members in effort to further supplement available volunteers.

MTFR began utilizing part-time staff to supplement available volunteers in 1997. This was in response to a decrease in the number of available daytime volunteers. This

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mirrors a nationwide trend that has seen a steep decrease in the number of volunteer firefighters and EMTs. While we remain committed to a primarily volunteer workforce, we recognize the need to provide service at all times. To address this, we will:

- **Continue to examine developing and future trends that affect our staffing.** As the township grows and our population ages, we will continue to see an increase in call volume, which may impact staffing. Monitoring these developments will allow us to respond accordingly.
- **Revamp part-time program to cover holes in schedule.** Currently, one part-time staff member works Monday through Friday from 1 pm to 7 pm, and on weekends from 9 am to 5 pm. To better address staffing shortfalls, we propose to increase part-time coverage from the current weekday hours to a 12-hour shift, covering from 7 am to 7 pm.

Timeframe and Cost

While the first action item is virtually cost-free, the second will increase our current part-time program expenditures by approximately \$14,000. Another option that has been considered was to replace a part-time position with a full-time one. It has been suggested that this would increase accountability and reliability; however, this option would not allow us to cover as much time, and, when coupled with part-time staff to pick up schedule slots not covered by the full-time person, would cost us an additional \$10,200. The part-time program as proposed above would allow us to cover more time at less cost.