

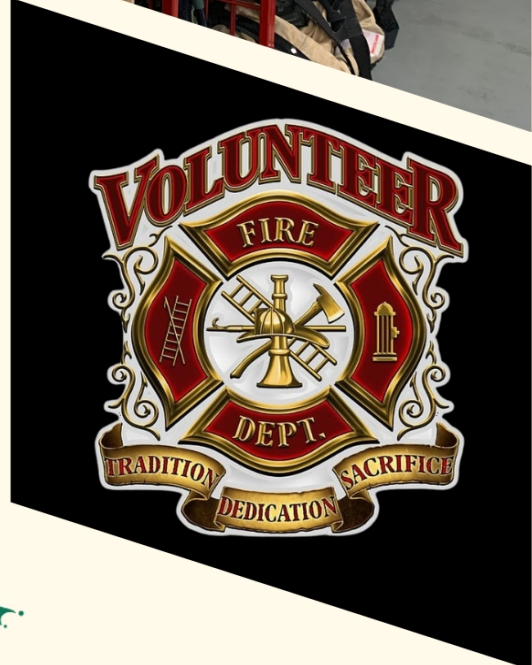


Leveraging Community Assets

Improving Volunteer
Fire Services in
Washington County

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Prepared for
Washington County Community Foundation



O'NEILL
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND
ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

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Leveraging Community Assets: Improving Volunteer Fire Services in Washington County

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Executive Summary

Volunteer participation in fire services is declining in Washington County, Indiana, leaving rural communities vulnerable to fire disasters. Some insurance companies now classify these areas as high risk, refusing to provide home insurance. Washington County, established in 1813, covers over 500 square miles and is Indiana's seventh-largest county, with 11 fire departments. This situation mirrors a nationwide trend of declining firefighter membership due to population shifts, insufficient support for firefighters, and limited financial resources.

During July 2024, the O'Neill School recruited a group of eleven students to study and understand the needs of Washington County's fire service departments. A series of recommendations followed alongside case studies which have been compiled as resources for further strategic development of essential fire service throughout the region. Recommendations are grouped into the following main categories: Coordination/Consolidation, Funding, and People. The three main categories each contain specific recommendations such as fire territory consolidation efforts, grant and funding initiatives, recruitment and retention strategies, and training program and design.

The primary objective is to achieve improved fire services in Washington County. There are five objectives that this report aims to fulfill:

1. Increase efficiency of fire services.
2. Expand community awareness.
3. Increase and maintain recruitment and retention of both volunteer and career firefighters.
4. Secure sustainable funding for fire services.
5. Strengthen relationships amongst stakeholders in the community.

The report has three major categories which recommendations will fall into:

1. Coordination/Consolidation
2. Funding
3. People

Recommendations for Washington County include the following:

1. **Coordination/Consolidation:** This recommendation focuses on consolidation and resource allocation strategies. The creation of a fire territory would facilitate increased opportunities for revenue generation, economies of scale, and resource sharing across participating townships. Additionally, the creation of a fire coordination position would support and facilitate these recommendations. Lastly, the consolidation of training efforts coupled with virtual training options may help train new firefighter recruits faster.

2. **Funding:** Federal grant strategies and a county-wide approach may generate more revenue for fire services. Recommended strategies include hiring professional grant writers, seeking out federal grants, applying for grants as a county versus individual townships, and utilizing standardized language to aid in securing and maintaining grant awards. Other funding strategies include private and state grant opportunities, a redistribution of local income taxes, and low-cost fundraising opportunities.
3. **People:** This recommendation is focused on recruiting and retention efforts through creating a strategic plan to recruit and retain firefighters throughout the local community, developing community awareness and utilizing marketing techniques to engage potential candidates. Initiatives include outreach such as firefighter open-houses, parades, truck ride-alongs, and the junior firefighter program. The use of a qualitative and quantitative survey may be used to collect meaningful data regarding firefighter perspectives and needs across fire departments.

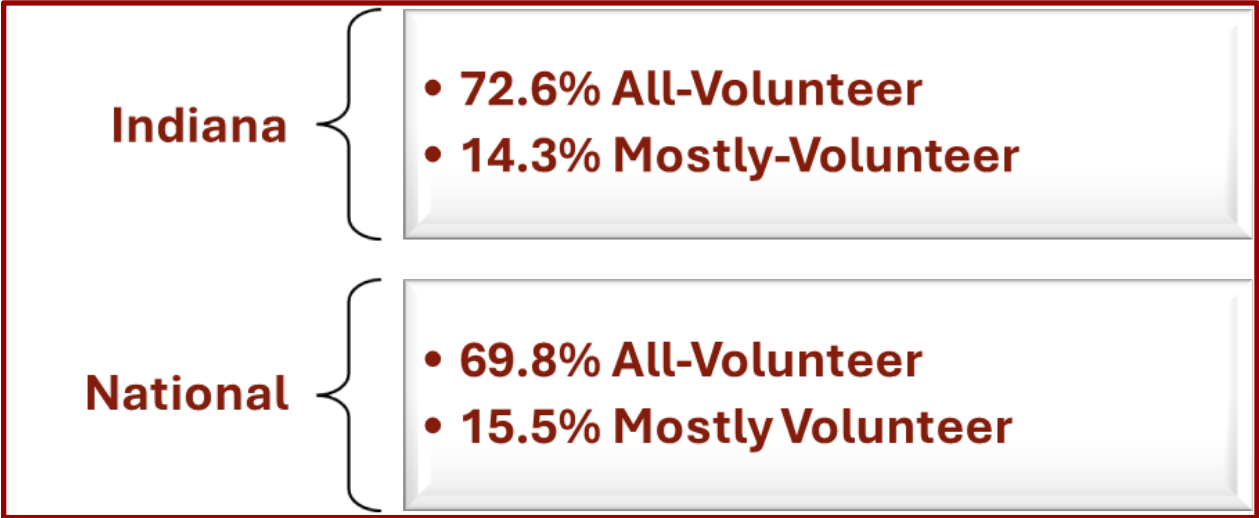
The recommendations above aim to help Washington County develop a stronger fire service while alleviating funding challenges. These initiatives may take the long-term to implement, however, they are intended to provide long-term financial and operational security for the community and fire service departments. Additionally, Washington County will want to consider how to strategically market these initiatives across townships.

Background

Washington County, established in 1813, is located in the southern region of Indiana and spans over 500 miles. It is the seventh largest county in the State (Washington Indiana, 2018). Salem is designated the largest town with a population of approximately 6,400 individuals. The County has a total of 13 townships, and there are 11 active fire departments (IBRC, 2012). The town of Salem has its own fire department, while there are other fire departments for townships and even two fire districts, Blue River and Brown-Vernon.

Across the United States, fire service membership has been decreasing, leaving small, rural communities such as Washington County vulnerable at the onset of fire catastrophes. The National Volunteer Firefighter Council (NVFC) reports reasons for previous volunteers leaving fire service, which include but are not limited, to a lack of social cohesion, social exclusion, poor leadership support, and a missing sense of community belonging. Current volunteer or career firefighters struggle with a lack of clear expectations, the pressure of outside responsibilities beyond volunteering, and struggling to meet time commitments related to training and volunteering (NVFC, 2020).

In Indiana, approximately 72.6 percent of registered fire departments are all-volunteer departments, while 14.3 percent are “mostly volunteer” departments, which can be seen in Figure 1 (FEMA, 2024b). These percentages represent approximate nationwide averages of all-volunteer departments representing 69.8 percent, while “mostly volunteer” departments represent 15.5 percent (FEMA, 2024b). Notably, even though a sizable majority of fire departments in the United States are strictly volunteer-based, only 15 percent of the U.S. population is served by volunteer fire departments. The remaining 85 percent of the U.S. population is served by career fire departments (Becker, 2024). In many cases, volunteer fire departments are located in primarily rural areas with low population density.



(Source: FEMA, 2024b)

Figure 1: Percentage of Volunteer to Mostly Volunteer

In recent decades, the number of volunteer firefighters nationwide has been decreasing. According to the NVFC, the number of volunteer firefighters in the United States totaled approximately 898,000 in 1984 but decreased to approximately 677,000 in 2020 (NVFC, 2022). During the same period, the number of calls tripled, from less than 12 million in 1986 to more than 36.6 million in 2021 (Becker, 2024; NVFC, 2022). Specific to Indiana, the total of Hoosier volunteer firefighters has declined by approximately 4,000 in the past 30 years (Grohowski, 2024). Elsewhere, Pennsylvania totaled approximately 50,000 volunteer firefighters in 2017, declining from 300,000 in the 1970s (PFESI, 2017), even as Pennsylvania’s population increased from 11,793,909 in 1970 (Bureau of the Census, 1970) to 13,002,700 in 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Figure 2, below, shows the number of volunteer firefighters in the United States between 1984 and 2020.

Number of Volunteer Firefighters in U.S. by Year ⁴

YEAR	NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS	YEAR	NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS
1984	897,750	2003	800,050
1985	839,450	2004	795,600
1986	808,200	2005	823,650
1987	816,800	2006	823,950
1988	788,250	2007	825,450
1989	770,100	2008	827,150
1990	772,650	2009	812,150
1991	771,800	2010	768,150
1992	805,300	2011	756,400
1993	795,400	2012	783,300
1994	807,900	2013	786,150
1995	838,000	2014	788,250
1996	815,500	2015	814,850
1997	803,350	2016	729,000
1998	804,200	2017	682,600
1999	785,250	2018	745,000
2000	777,350	2019	722,800
2001	784,700	2020	676,900
2002	816,600		

(Source: Volunteer Fire Service Fact Sheet, n.d.)

Figure 2: Number of Volunteer Firefighters by Year

An In-Depth Look at Washington County Challenges

In July 2024, the O’Neill graduate team held stakeholder panel interviews. Interviews included volunteer or career firefighters, township trustees, and key community leaders. The panel interviews provided relevant insight into the day-to-day challenges faced by the Washington County volunteer fire departments. These discussions also identified areas of opportunity for fire service improvement as well as a better understanding of both the political and marketing challenges to pursuing major policy changes throughout the County. Policy recommendations require community buy-in for successful implementation.

In response to the stakeholder interviews, this report seeks to identify the causes contributing to the decline of firefighter participation while improving operational efficiency, funding, and community support in Washington County. The report provides detailed recommendations and resources to address these issues. Recommendations are represented by three structured categories: Coordination/Consolidation, Funding, and People. There is a pressing need to address these issues to decrease risks to the community and to improve the community’s future health and well-being. Further details on the current challenges across Washington County are detailed below.

Coordination Opportunities

Establishing a fire district in Jackson Township in Washington County recently faced challenges due to public perception, stakeholder resistance, and administrative barriers. Fire territories might be an alternative solution; however, both options require significant community support. Currently, township fire departments rely on informal mutual aid agreements, which could impact response times and affect liability.

- **Fire District Failure:** In 2023, Jackson Township and its Volunteer Fire Department were unsuccessful in persuading the county to create a petition to establish a fire district in the community. Key challenges included public perception, lack of buy-in from key stakeholders, anticipated administrative burdens, and aversion to increasing taxes. Any future efforts to establish a fire district will require County official support as well as strategic communication around potential local tax changes. Additionally, future efforts should emphasize anticipated improvements in the quality of fire services for residents and potential cost savings in homeowners’ insurance with a lower risk classification.
- **Fire Territories:** Washington County does not have an established fire territory at present. However, fire territories may be a plausible solution to alleviate townships from being independently responsible for funding and administering the fire service programs.

Please see the Consolidation Options section and Appendix A for a summary of the differences between fire districts and fire territories.

- **Community Resistance and Perception:** To initiate a fire district or fire territory across some or all townships, it will be essential for the respective townships across Washington County to have mutual buy-in on the agreed upon approach. Additionally, community buy-in will require community support when identifying board members and required personnel.
- **Mutual Aid Agreements:** Mutual aid agreements are currently informal between townships, and the continued use of these agreements may be considered. These agreements state the terms and conditions under which two or more fire departments share resources and coordinate responses to incidents such as fires or medical emergencies (FEMA, 2024a, p. 3). As applicable, key elements of written mutual aid agreements include management and updates of the agreement, insurance coverage responsibilities, communication strategies, legal liability, and workers' compensation coverage (FEMA, 2024a, p. 11). The efficacy of verbal agreements depends on fire departments maintaining collaborative interpersonal relationships and shared understanding of expectations. A key disadvantage of a verbal mutual aid agreement is that the terms of agreement can change when there is departmental turnover, interpersonal conflict, competing priorities, or differences of opinion. Written mutual aid agreements may be maintained despite changes in leadership or relationships between departments. For example, a 2013 mutual aid agreement template shared by the Salem Fire Department explained how departments are responsible for their own legal liability and how the department serving the location of an incident typically assumes command responsibility (Washington County Fire Chiefs Association, 2013. p. 1-3). However, written mutual aid agreements require administrative management and continued renewal between participating fire departments. Our understanding is that existing written mutual aid agreements have not been maintained or renewed across Washington County fire departments; rather, verbal mutual aid agreements have been utilized instead to maintain commitments between fire departments.

Funding Opportunities

Washington County volunteer fire departments face significant financial challenges, relying on limited township funding. These financial constraints affect the departments' ability to maintain up-to-date equipment, which can jeopardize firefighters' safety, while volunteer firefighters often cover training costs out-of-pocket.

- **Insufficient Budgets:** Volunteer fire departments currently lack a sufficient level of public funding needed to support general operating, capital improvement, and personnel

expenses. Volunteer fire departments do not have taxing authority and budget allocations are made at the discretion of township trustees on an annual basis. In many townships, nearly 50 percent of the department's already limited funding covers insurance costs for personnel. The remaining funding is divided between general operating, capital improvement, and other personnel-related expenses.

- **Outdated Equipment:** As a result of insufficient budgets, most volunteer fire departments lack the annual budget needed to ensure equipment and gear for their firefighters is compliant. Non-compliant equipment jeopardizes the health, safety, and well-being of Washington County volunteer firefighters. Inadequate equipment can also directly impact a department's Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification (PPC) grade potentially leading to increased fire insurance premiums in the area. The PPC program evaluates the number and condition of equipment including engines, pumpers, ladders, and other tools (Insurance Services Office, 2023). Outdated equipment can end up becoming more costly and it is important to address outdated equipment concerns.
- **Out-of-Pocket Expenses:** Volunteer firefighters are not eligible to receive salaries or hourly wages for their services; yet they are required to meet the same training and certification requirements as their career firefighter counterparts. In fact, volunteer firefighters are required to obtain as many as 10 specialized certifications (e.g. Firefighter I, Firefighter II, Hazmat Training, Emergency Medical Training (EMT) and many more.) that are required by a combination of federal government, state government, and insurance providers in order to be cleared for work. Given widely cited funding shortages across townships, many volunteer firefighters pay out-of-pocket for required training and certification courses.

People Opportunities

Washington County is facing a shortage of volunteer firefighters. Insufficient public understanding of the financial challenges facing fire departments, including the fact that most fire services are volunteer led, has a direct impact on their ability to maintain services.

- **Volunteer Firefighter Shortage:** Washington County faces a critical shortage of volunteer firefighters. Recruitment of new volunteers and retention of existing volunteers are key concerns for departments. Both recruitment and retention remain challenging due to the volunteer nature of the positions, lack of funding, and the time required in this role. For example, the certification and pre-training requirements often take between six to eight months to complete depending on the availability of certification courses and training opportunities. This time commitment is required before even being cleared to serve as a firefighter and is a limiting factor for recruitment.

- **Lack of Community Awareness/Support:** Limited public awareness of budget and funding challenges can affect the fire departments' operations. According to several township trustees and volunteer firefighters, most Washington County residents are unaware that their fire services are volunteer led. This lack of awareness makes it increasingly difficult to build community support for the implementation of available public funding mechanisms – i.e. property tax or local income tax – to secure additional dedicated funding for fire services in townships. Resistance to the use of such mechanisms has deepened given the impacts of inflation and rising costs of living.

Compounded, the issues above have inhibited Washington County volunteer fire departments from providing optimal fire services. For example, in one township, a community member noted that it took their township volunteer fire department upwards of 5 hours to arrive at their home to respond to a fire call. Due to mutual aid agreements, bordering township departments were able to respond earlier and salvage the home, but their own township department was the last department to arrive at the scene. Fire services are an essential part of public safety for Washington County, yet, the lack of public funding, personnel, community buy-in, and resources for these services prevents Washington County's volunteer fire departments from executing these responsibilities safely and reliably in each township.

Consolidation and Coordination Options

There are several options for Washington County to consider regarding consolidating resources and personnel across townships. Both fire districts and fire territories are options that Washington County should consider increasing fire service efficacy. Additionally, consolidation of training resources will create a more concise training schedule. The following section includes information regarding consolidation options and recommendations for improved fire service.

Fire Protection Districts

Fire protection districts (or fire districts) may be formed to serve an entire county, or alternatively, one or more governmental units within a county (IC 36-8-11-4). Therefore, a county may have one or multiple fire districts. Additionally, fire districts have their own authority to set tax levies, issue bonds, and incur debt (IC 36-8-11-15). However, their levy authority requires approval from the county council (IC 36-8-11-18). Each participating township and municipality have a seat on the fire district board. The fire district is therefore responsible for overseeing and financing fire services for all participating governmental units instead of a township, municipal, or county executive. Fire districts have the option of merging with other fire districts within a county or may operate separately from one another (IC 36-8-11-23). The district's tax levies, and bonding authority are also separate from other local governments even though the district must obtain county and State approval of levy changes (IC 36-8-11-15).

1. **Formation:** Counties may introduce and pass legislation to form fire districts for fire protection, fire prevention, or other similar purposes, or property owners may petition for their creation (IC 36-8-11-4, IC 36-8-11-5). Districts may consist of all townships in the county, or alternatively, one or more townships and parts of one or more townships in the county (IC 36-8-11-4(c)). Municipalities completely or partially located within the county must adopt an ordinance or receive a petition from most property owners to join the district (IC 36-8-11-4 (d), IC 36-8-11-5.1). A fire district may merge with another district if they share at least one-eighth of their boundaries, and a petition is filed with each county that would be part of the merged district (IC 36-8-11-23).
2. **Petitions:** A valid petition to establish, or oppose, a proposed fire protection district must contain either signatures from 20 percent of property owners with a minimum of 500 signatures, or signatures from the majority of property owners within the proposed district (IC 36-8-11-5(b)). Petitions for fire districts must be submitted to the county auditor and include the following information:
 - Name and purpose of and need for the district.

- Description of included territory sufficient to notify affected property owners.
- Statements of the district’s advantages, how its benefits exceed its costs, and how its creation serves “public health, safety, or welfare.”
- Whether the petition is “conditioned” upon one or more grants (IC 36-8-11-7).

Once the county receives the petition and verifies signatures, commissioners may draft an ordinance or resolution or schedule a public hearing regarding whether a district should be established (IC 36-8-11-8). If 51 percent or more of affected property owners, or if owners of more than two-thirds of property in the district, sign a petition in opposition to the district, then commissioners must dismiss the petition in favor of the district. If the petition for the district is dismissed, petitioners cannot submit a new petition for the same district for two years from the date of dismissal (IC 36-8-11-10).

3. **Board:** The county shall appoint either a board of fire trustees with at least three members and all participating townships and municipalities represented, or a nine member county-wide governing board, within thirty days of voting to establish a district (IC 36-8-11-12). Board members and trustees must have “knowledge and experience” in matters pertaining to fire protection (IC 36-8-11-12). Trustees may receive up to a \$100 per diem and expense reimbursement for board service (IC 36-8-11-14). The fire protection district board has the same powers and duties as a township executive regarding fire protection and contracting with volunteer fire departments for services (IC 36-8-11-15). The district shall appoint staff to manage the finances and administration of the district and annually submit an operating budget, a report on financial transactions, and a progress report to the county (IC 36-8-11-15).
4. **Taxes and Spending:** The district has the authority to issue bonds, incur debts and liabilities, and levy taxes at a uniform rate on all property in the district. The district board shall establish a levy sufficient to fund its operating budget, which must be approved by the county and the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance (IC 36-8-11-18). Units participating in the district may not have duplicate levies for fire service (IC 36-8-11-19) and must provide consent to disband any fire departments within their boundaries (IC 36-8-11-21). A fire district must pay the healthcare expenses of firefighters who are ill or injured while on duty (IC 36-8-11).

Fire Protection Territories

Fire protection territories allow partners to pool resources for fire services together while either maintaining control over their own property tax levies or adopting a uniform levy for the territory (36-8-19-7). This approach differs from fire districts which only have the option of assessing a single levy for all taxable property within the district. Fire territories also differ from mutual aid agreements insofar as they can raise tax revenue for fire services. To join or form a

fire territory, local governments must hold at least three public hearings before adopting legislation (IC 36-8-19-5). While fire territories have the option of forming a board consisting of participating units (IC 36-8-19-6.9), a fire district must have a board. Unlike a fire district, a fire territory must designate a local government as a provider responsible for fire service in the territory (IC 36-8-19-5). Like a fire district, a fire territory is responsible for paying healthcare expenses for firefighters, who are ill or injured while on duty (IC 36-8-19-14). Participating local governments in a territory give up control over delivering fire services, which could dissuade a local government from joining a territory or lead to disagreements with the designated provider. A fire territory also provides greater flexibility for participating governmental units than a fire district. Rather than being required to have the same levy for all property within a district, individual units can still have their own tax levies for property within their boundaries. Participating units also have the flexibility to remove themselves from the fire territory. This may weaken a fire territory and its available resources but free up the participating units to pursue their own strategies for fire service delivery.

Additional funding sources in Washington County include a reorganization of local income tax, additional corporate partnerships, grant procurement, and various fundraising opportunities. Washington County would need to evaluate the best options for their residents; it is important to understand available grants and resources when making an informed decision.

1. **Formation:** Legislative bodies of two or more contiguous local governmental units can form a fire territory for fire protection, prevention, and other related purposes (IC 36-8-19-5). Each participating unit must hold public hearings before forming a territory and their legislative body must adopt an identical ordinance or resolution between January 1 and March 31 to form the territory in the following calendar year. Participating local governments are not required to disband any of their fire departments unless they adopt an ordinance or resolution to that effect (IC 36-8-19-10). The ordinance or resolution to form a territory must include the following information about the territory and participating units:
 - the property tax levy, rate, and budget
 - expected spending, fire service levels, and debt service
 - boundaries of the territory
 - effect of the territory on county units' local taxes and property tax credits; and
 - a description of capital improvements in the territory (IC 36-8-19-6).
2. **Designated Provider:** The ordinance or resolution establishing the territory must also designate one unit as the provider of fire protection services. The designated provider will determine the levy necessary to fund the territory's budget after its formation (IC 36-8-

19-6; IC 36-8-19-8). To change the designated provider, each participating unit must adopt an identical ordinance or resolution (IC 36-8-19-6.5).

- Taxes and Spending:** Fire territories must either adopt a uniform levy for all taxable property across the territory or adopt separate tax levies for each of the participating local units. In either case, levies may be implemented over a period of up to five years for territories formed in 2023 or later (IC 36-8-19-7). Participating units in a fire territory may also adopt ordinances or resolutions to levy up to \$0.0333 per \$100 of assessed value for an equipment replacement fund each year and transfer up to 5 percent of surplus from its primary levy into the fund (IC 36-8-19-8.5(e)). Like a fire district, fire territories can purchase firefighting apparatus and equipment under an “installment conditional sale” or a “mortgage contract” (IC 36-8-19-8.7). Territories shall also pay for healthcare expenses of firefighters who sustain an injury or illness while on duty (IC 36-8-19-14).

Comparison of Fire Protection Districts and Fire Territories

Both fire districts and fire territories have pros and cons., although, both strategic approaches are intended to alleviate the burden of townships in providing fire services. Both options are also intended to improve the efficacy of fire services by allocating resources more efficiently, which includes increased sharing of key personnel and responsibilities.

	Pros	Cons
Fire District	Can be formed by one or more townships or municipalities, or be county-wide	County must approve districts of one or more townships or municipalities
	Can be proposed by county or by petition signed by residents of proposed district	County must approve petitions for districts; public hearings are optional
	Same levy throughout the district. District can also issue bonds and incur debt	Levy amount is the same regardless of a community’s ability to pay
	Pools fire department resources across townships and municipalities, or a county	Places taxing authority for fire services with an independent body
	Participating cities, municipalities, and counties all have seats on the board	Residents cannot vote for or against their board representatives
	Districts can merge with other districts if they have some shared boundaries	District must dissolve for governments to withdraw

Fire Territory	<p>Townships & municipalities can join, withdraw, or designate provider yearly</p> <p>Can be formed by one or more townships, municipalities, or fire districts</p> <p>Governments manage their own levy or establish a uniform levy for fire services</p> <p>Residents can have a say in fire services by participating in public meetings required before their community joins a territory. Residents can also vote for or against executives based on fire services</p>	<p>Territory may be unstable if governments join or leave every year</p> <p>Geographically limited as it requires participants to share boundaries</p> <p>May not increase tax fairness whether levies are uniform or vary</p> <p>Residents may have less say if their community is not the designated provider and if there isn't a joint executive board to oversee fire services throughout the territory</p>
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Figure 3: The Pros and Cons of Fire Districts and Fire Territories.

A fire district has advantages related to consolidating fire services under an independent governing body with uniform policies and representation of all participating governments. The disadvantages of a fire district relate to its reduced flexibility and indirect accountability to residents. Needs and resources for fire services vary by community and uniform taxation may not increase equity of fire services across the district. Residents may also prefer to keep tax and fire service decisions with elected officials they can support or oppose in elections.

The advantages of a fire territory consist of its flexibility in local government participation and in allowing participants to either determine their levies or adopt a uniform levy. Residents can make their preferences known by attending public hearings or by voting for or against the local elected officials who manage the territory or designate residents to do so. A fire territory has the disadvantage of being geographically limited, which may also limit its potential for pooling resources. Having a territory with either a uniform levy or various levies may not increase tax fairness or stability of revenues, especially if its membership changes frequently. Designating a local government provider unit can also be a disadvantage if other participating governments disagree with the designated provider's decisions, and the territory does not have a joint executive board to oversee fire service delivery.

Training Consolidation

The time intensive training requirements can be a barrier for recruiting and retaining firefighters across Washington County. Increased training coordination and consolidation may improve how quickly firefighters complete the required training to enter the service. To become a firefighter in Washington County, recruits must complete training as determined by Indiana Department of

Homeland Security (IDHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Once part of the fire service, continuing education is required of firefighters. For example, the Salem Fire Department requires each firefighter to acquire at least 3 hours per quarter or a minimum of 12 hours per calendar year towards training. Some firefighters are deterred from volunteering as the training can be an extensive time commitment. Some recommendations are described below.

1. **Establish Training Coordinators and Training Leaders.** To alleviate training challenges, it is recommended that Washington County establish training leaders across each of the fire departments. Training leaders will be responsible for conducting fire service training on a county-wide basis to all recruits. This would further allow leadership development opportunities for current firefighters as well as establish a designated point person for training coordination at each fire department. Additionally, it would allow for training responsibilities to be shared across a training team; hopefully increasing the number of trainers available and increasing the number of courses available to recruits.

Other training consolidation efforts may include virtual training options hosted across Washington County from any of the designated training leaders. Virtual training can cut down on travel costs in addition to providing a more flexible training environment for the volunteer firefighters. When virtual training is allowed and available, the volunteer may complete training at their own pace, almost anywhere. This can help reduce some of the issues surrounding how long it can take a volunteer to complete training as well as travel cost. Examples of virtual training can be found below in subsequent sections.

Moreover, it is recommended that Washington County establish a training coordinator to help facilitate schedules, classroom facilities, and maintain attendance records. The training coordinator will oversee all training efforts across the County. This person will work closely with training leaders from each fire service department to understand their unique needs and training challenges.

2. **Offer More Training Options Based on Recruit Schedules and Preferences.** It is recommended that training options be scheduled during varied times of the day and week to help alleviate time concerns expressed by potential recruits and current members. It may also increase general interest when potential recruits are offered a wider variety of time options, thereby accommodating many who have non-traditional work schedules. Offered training courses should be a consolidated effort across Washington County, therefore, more efficiently using classroom space, class trainers, and additional training resources more effectively.

Moreover, fire departments and potential recruits may be surveyed for their preferred day and time for training courses. This initiative may be led by the newly created coordinator

role, and the coordinator may work to offer training courses across townships and communities. Moreover, considering schedule preferences may boost recruit interest and accommodate schedules more efficiently.

- 3. Consider the FEMA Program Offerings.** Presently, FEMA Program offerings hosted by the National Fire Academy (NFA) may support consolidation of training efforts for prospective or current firefighters. Distinctive program offerings from FEMA include State Weekend, National Weekend, Executive Fire, and Managing Officer programs. These programs may be another viable option for fire service departments in Washington County to support training progression for acquiring the mandated training hours. Program costs and training content may vary, however, the lodging for attending may commonly be free of charge. Additionally, these FEMA programs may count towards collegiate credit which may be an incentive as firefighters pursue their own career aspirations and personal development.

The Need for Consolidation

Recommendation: Establish Fire Territories to Incrementally Consolidate Fire Services in Washington County

Our recommendation is to incrementally consolidate the resources of fire services in Washington County into fire territories. These resources include but are not limited to volunteers, vehicles, equipment, and administrative resources. Consolidation would enable fire departments in Washington County to pool their collective resources and deepen their coordination of fire services across township and municipal boundaries. Although mutual aid agreements facilitate incident response, the system of fire response in Washington County lacks integration necessary to leverage their resources more efficiently. Washington County has two fire protection districts: the Blue River Fire Protection District which covers Howard Township and the Brown-Vernon Fire District which covers Brown Township, Vernon Township, and the towns of Saltillo and Campbellsburg within Brown Township (Washington County Indiana Published Codes 33.16 and 33.17). Otherwise, townships and municipalities primarily handle their own fire services and lack formal structures to oversee fire service delivery across their boundaries to improve fire service delivery for their residents. Consolidation would allow participating local governments to save money by collectively negotiating for insurance coverage for all of their fire departments and volunteers as well as lower prices on vehicles and equipment. Additionally, consolidation would help local governments identify opportunities to redistribute equipment to fire departments in need within the County or to increase recruitment of volunteers in areas of the County with less fire service coverage.

We recommend establishment of multiple fire territories to increase consolidation in Washington County for the following reasons:

In a fire territory, participating local governments can consolidate resources without having to establish new levies for fire services.

Participating governments can increase their coordination on fire service delivery, pool their revenues, and engage in group purchasing of vehicles and equipment via a fire territory. These governments can coordinate if they decide to adjust their levies; however, establishing a fire territory would not require that residents pay new levies to enjoy the benefits from consolidation (IC 36-8-19-7).

Fire territories allow local governments to maintain control of their levies for fire services.

In a fire territory, elected leaders of each township or municipality still decide the amount of the levy and how much to spend on fire services (IC 36-8-19-7). Voters in those communities can

still directly support or oppose elected leaders based on their decisions regarding fire services and taxation. In a fire district, the district board establishes the budget for fire services and the amount of the levy even though the county council and the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance must approve these decisions (IC 36-8-11-18). Because the county appoints members of a district's board of trustees, township and municipal residents cannot vote on who represents their community on the board (IC 36-8-11-12). With a fire territory, residents can still benefit from increased consolidation without their government losing control over taxes.

Fire territories provide considerable flexibility for participating communities.

In a fire territory, local governments continue to oversee fire services, but this work is done in partnership with other local governments. While the designated provider is primarily responsible for overseeing fire service delivery, the other local governments can and should be actively involved to ensure the quality of fire services for their constituents. If the other local governments in the territory become dissatisfied with the performance of the designated provider, all members of the territory can adopt legislation to change the designated provider unit for the next year (IC 36-8-19-6.5). If a local government becomes dissatisfied with the fire territory, it can withdraw from the territory without being required to change how its residents are taxed unless there is a uniform levy throughout the territory (IC 36-8-19-7). The fire territory also enables other local governments within a county to join without adding new levies for their residents provided the territory does not have a uniform levy (IC 36-8-19-6). Overall, the fire territory model offers flexibility for communities that wish to consolidate resources without forming an independent taxing authority.

Establishing a fire territory would be an incremental and practical approach to consolidation. Unlike a fire district, establishing a fire territory is a decision made solely by participating townships and municipalities. If a township or municipality submits a petition or legislation to establish a fire district for itself, it must also earn the support of the county to move forward with implementation. A fire territory allows townships and municipalities to make their own decisions regarding consolidation. To join a fire territory, residents of the Blue River Fire Protection District and the Brown-Vernon Fire District would have to petition the County to dissolve their existing fire districts first (IC 36-8-11-24). Instead of recommending this step for those districts currently, our recommendation is that other townships and municipalities collaborate to form their own fire territories to begin consolidating resources. As other communities experience the benefits of increased coordination and resource sharing, the existing fire districts should evaluate whether their residents are best served by consolidating their resources with other townships in Washington County or continuing with their existing models.

To consolidate townships into fire territories and ensure contiguous boundaries, the following fire territories are recommended for Washington County in the table below.

Territory	Townships	Fire departments and districts	Phase	Notes
Northeast Washington	Franklin Township Gibson Township	Fire Department of Franklin Township Gibson Township-Little York Volunteer Fire Department	I	Gibson and Franklin share boundaries and there would be two fire departments in this territory
Southeast Washington	Jackson Township Pierce Township Polk Township	Jackson Township Volunteer Fire Department Pierce-Polk Volunteer Fire Department	I	This territory keeps fire services in Pierce and Polk Townships together and allows Jackson Township to join
Central Washington	Monroe Township Washington Township	City of Salem Fire Department Monroe Township Volunteer Fire Department	II	Monroe is one of the smallest townships in terms of population. Combining it with the largest township will enhance services and utilize shared borders
Northwest Washington	Brown Township Jefferson Township Vernon Township	Brown-Vernon Fire District Campbellsburg Volunteer Fire Department Livonia Volunteer Fire Department	III	Combines Jefferson Township fire services with the Brown-Vernon Fire District. Jefferson has shared borders with Brown and Vernon Townships
Southwest Washington	Howard Township Madison Township Posey Township	Blue River Fire Protection District Posey Township Volunteer Fire Department	III	Combines fire services in Madison and Posey Townships with Howard and Blue River Fire District

Figure 4: Proposed Fire Territories in Washington County

Our recommendation for the proposed fire territories is based on consideration of several factors. First, the recommendation forms territories based on two or three townships with shared boundaries to meet contiguity requirements in the Indiana Code. Second, each territory would have at least two fire departments. Although formation of fire territories should increase collaboration of fire departments within the territory, Washington County should continue its use of mutual aid agreements to serve residents as quickly and efficiently as possible. Third, formation of fire territories is broken into three phases to ensure adequate time to plan for each territory and to ideally address practical or political challenges.

Proposed phases for the fire territories are over two-year periods to allow townships to use the first year to plan for financial and operational aspects of the territory. Townships may need an entire second year to conduct the three public hearings required by Indiana Code before they can join a territory. Townships with existing structures that finance or consolidate fire department resources for their communities are in Phases 2 and 3 as they may require additional time for resident buy-in and to adapt those structures to operate within a fire territory. Recommended phasing of territory establishment is as follows:

- Phase I (2025-2027): Northeast Washington, Southeast Washington. Phase I consists of townships without existing structures that can start working together to form a territory.
- Phase II (2027-2029): Central Washington. Additional time is provided because this territory combines the largest and smallest townships in terms of population.
- Phase III (2029-2031). Northwest Washington, Southwest Washington. Phase III consists of territories with fire districts consolidating with townships without districts. Additional time is provided to ensure resident buy-in and integrate townships with and without existing structures.

This proposal is intended to be an incremental approach to consolidating resources. The process of forming each of these territories will include navigating local politics and building public support for consolidation. If township governments decide not to move forward with one or more of these territories, other townships could still move forward with forming their territories. Consolidation in a part of Washington County will encourage consolidation efforts in other parts of the county.

Alternative Option: Establish a County Fire District

Although establishing a county-wide fire district would enable full consolidation, we do not recommend this approach at this time for Washington County. A county-wide district would require most townships in Washington County to give up control over their levies for fire services. Given the loss of local government control over levies and fire services, obtaining the number of required petition signatures or the support of all townships would be difficult in practice. Residents unfamiliar with fire districts will likely have concerns over delegating fire

services to a board that is independent of their local community. Moreover, county commissioners would have the final say on any proposal for a county-wide district. As the county did not approve the petition for a fire district in Jackson Township, it seems unlikely that a petition for a county-wide district so soon after would have a different outcome. In addition, the Blue River District and the Brown-Vernon Fire District would also have to merge with any county-wide district to be included. While a county-wide fire district would achieve a greater consolidation of resources than several fire territories, we instead recommend that townships and municipalities within Washington County take an incremental approach to consolidation of resources for fire services by establishing multiple fire territories.

Conversations about resources for fire services may also include accounting for differences in tax levies between communities in Washington County. Please see Figure 5 for the Fire Levy Rate per Township in Washington County. According to the Washington County 2024 Budget Order, tax rates per \$100 of assessed value for fire services range from:

- \$0.1120 for the Blue River Fire District to \$0.1157 in the Brown-Vernon Fire District; and
- \$0.0178 in Polk Township to \$0.0986 in Washington Township (Indiana Department of Local Government Finance, 2024).

As the highest levy for townships in Washington County is over five times greater than the lowest levy, fire territory boards could discuss how to best address equity concerns in tax rates for fire services across Washington County.

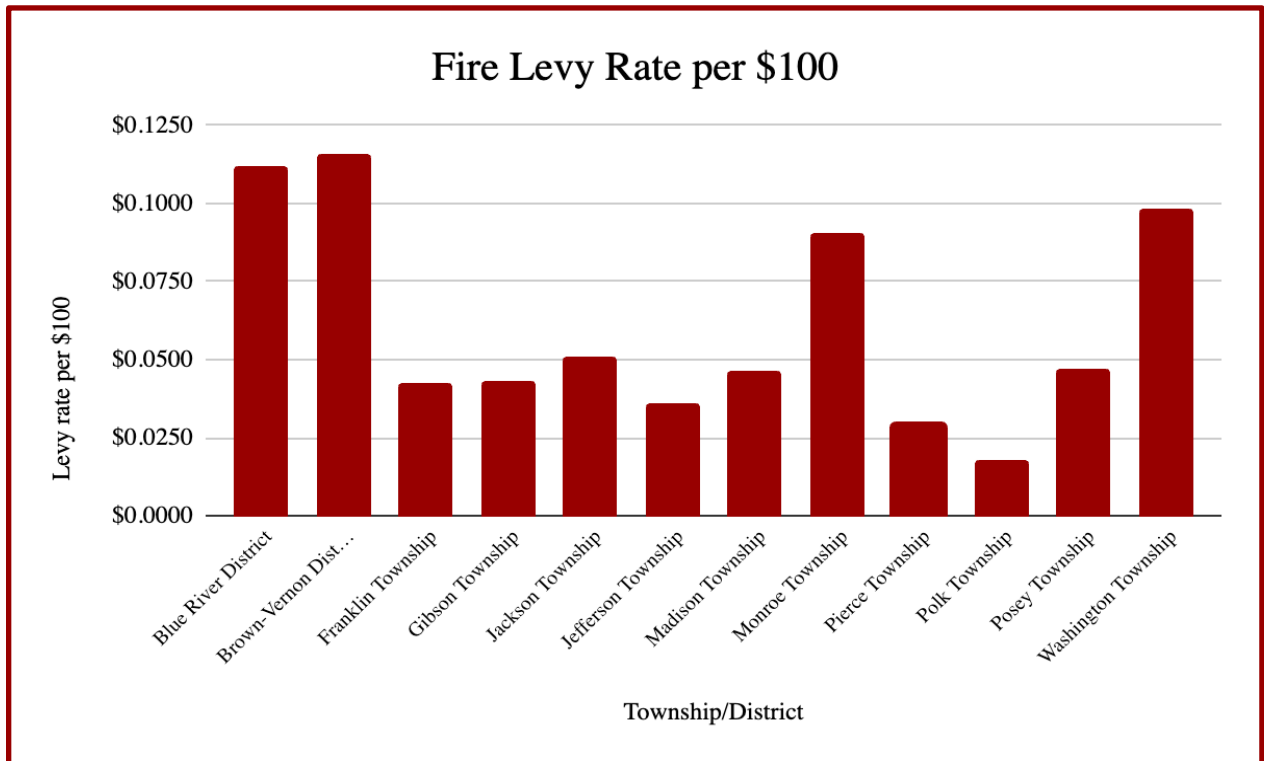


Figure 5: Fire Levy Rate Per Township in Washington County (Indiana Department of Local Government Finance, 2024).

A County Fire Coordinator could also help with the consolidation of resources and personnel in Washington County. Several counties across the United States have County Fire Coordinators that can help fire services in a variety of ways. A County Fire Coordinator could even be helpful if a consolidation does not occur.

County Fire Coordinators

Across the country, County Fire Coordinator roles are increasing. However, the coordinator role's scope of responsibilities varies depending on the county. These positions are seated within the county government and have a core responsibility to coordinate activities across all fire departments within a county. Coordination activities include but are not limited to: recruitment, retention, training, communication, partnerships, funding, and planning. There are many examples of County Fire Coordinators working specifically with volunteer fire departments to increase efficiency amongst departments with limited personnel and resources. Washington County's fire departments would benefit greatly from a centralized, county-wide Coordinator position to increase efficiency and improve fire services across every township and district. Figure 6 offers examples on how various counties have approached the County Fire Coordinator position:

Characteristic	Mariposa County California	Raleigh County West Virginia	Warren County Kentucky	Columbia County New York
Demographics of County & Fire Departments	1500 square miles 50 percent rural	600 square miles 92 percent rural 13 of 14 County fire departments are volunteer	540 square miles Rural areas 9 volunteer fire departments within County	650 square miles Rural areas 32 volunteer fire departments within County
Position Type	Full-time Temporary Hired	Full-time Permanent Appointed	Full-time Permanent Hired	Full-time 2-year term at County discretion, Appointed
Position Responsibilities:	<i>Singular focus:</i> This position was created with the intention to support volunteer recruitment and retention and provide clerical support for County staff. The temporary position will expire once grant funding concludes	<i>Singular focus</i> Raleigh appoints a Fire Levy Coordinator focused on liaising between fire departments and community to ensure fiscal stewardship. Provides intensive support to financial management, as deemed necessary by the County and fire departments	<i>Multi-focus:</i> This position has multiple issues of focus, including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Budgeting● Short- and long-term goal planning● Compliance● Coordinating training, technical assistance and government support● Hosting a central database of information● Grant writing support	<i>Multi-focus:</i> The State mandates each county to have a fire coordinator. The main responsibilities are coordination of mutual aid and training. Columbia County's coordinator provides additional program, and communication support to its departments.
Positioning within County	Hired by the County Fire Department	Appointed by the Raleigh County Commission	Hired by the County Judge Executive	Appointed by the County, as mandated
Funding Stream	Grant-funded through Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant	County-funded	County-funded	County-funded, state grants made available to support fire departments
Level of Intensity to Implement	Low	Low	Medium	High

Figure 6: County Fire Coordinator Examples. All job descriptions can be found in Appendix B.

In these models, County Fire Coordinators work closely with designated fire department staff - often the fire chiefs - to ensure smooth creation and implementation of coordination tasks. These coordinators tend to have experience in fire prevention. For example, the current Raleigh County Fire Coordinator is a retired Fire Captain (Raleigh County, 2024).

Such positions require commitment from the County and/or State to create and implement. Fire departments should work with their respective County and State administrators to advocate for the creation of such a position. Funding is required for compensation and could be sourced from either County, State, Federal or grant funds. Moreover, example job descriptions for the coordinator position can be found in Appendix B.

Coordination Case Study: Warren County, Kentucky

In recent years, Warren County, Kentucky worked with an emergency fire services consultant (Mission CIT) to produce a comprehensive study of the County's nine volunteer fire departments (Mission CIT, 2024). This study produced multiple findings including a five-year strategic plan. The strategic plan begins with the hiring of a County Fire Coordinator, and the position has already been approved by County Fiscal Court. The County is currently hiring for that position (as of July 31, 2024) (Warren County, 2024). There are many similarities in challenges faced across the country by volunteer fire departments, and Warren County is one example of a strategic approach to addressing county-wide coordination that Washington County may consider. Please see the case study in Appendix B for more information.

County Fire Coordination Strategic Planning

Volunteer fire departments can work with their county to create a County Fire Coordination Strategic Plan, or a plan that outlines specific and achievable goals to increase coordination amongst the fire departments. These plans should be driven by the needs of the volunteer fire departments, created in consultation with fire chiefs, but authored and implemented by the County. In some counties, this is a main responsibility for a County Fire Coordinator. Washington County should prioritize the creation of a County Fire Coordinator position, who can then assist with strategic planning as it relates to the County's fire coordination needs.

Coordination Recommendations

This section will outline two topline recommendations to increase coordination:

1. Implement a County Fire Coordinator
2. Engage and coordinate a strategic plan
3. Creation of fire territories

Recommendation One: Hire a County Fire Coordinator

It is our recommendation that Washington County hires a County Fire Coordinator as a permanent, full-time position dedicated strictly to Fire Coordination to best support county-wide collaboration, communication, and fire service efficiency. This Coordinator position should be specific to fire services, focused on addressing the multiple fire coordination challenges stakeholders have raised, and should have familiarity with emergency fire services. We encourage Washington County to adopt many of the job responsibilities found in the sample from the Warren County, Kentucky County Fire Coordinator position (Please see Appendix B for job descriptions). Avenues to fund this position include state, county, federal, or grant funding, and the position should be hosted within the Washington County government. Here are a few options for the creation of such a position:

1. **Federal Grant Funded Position in the Emergency Management Division.** Should the position be housed in the Emergency Management division, opportunity exists to use FEMA funding to support such a fire-specific role (ex. SAFER grant) (FEMA, 2024c). We recommend this option as the most ideal to launch this position quickly, with the hopes of transitioning into a commitment of County funding for the long-term.
2. **County Funded Position in the Emergency Management Division.** Stakeholders communicated that funding exists for a second position within the Emergency Management division, though that funding is being used to support the general operations of that division. We recommend that an advocacy campaign be started to suggest the creation of a new position in the Emergency Management department, solely dedicated to fire services coordination, and funded by a permanent commitment from the County Government. This campaign should be driven in combination with the Fire Chief's Association, all volunteer fire departments, and engaged community members. While commitment of additional funding is a difficult request, the advocacy campaign should focus on the long-term contributions a County Fire Coordinator could bring, which would offset the costs of compensating such a position.
3. **Grant Funded Position within County Government (Division to be Determined by County Government).** If government contributions for this position are not feasible, we recommend the funding of this position as a top priority upon beginning a strategic grant application process (see "Funding" section for more information). Grant funding, particularly that from a foundation or non-governmental contributor, may provide more flexibility for the department in which this position sits. Should Washington County desire to put this position in another division besides Emergency Management - such as under the County Judge as Warren County does - that should be made clear in grant applications.

Recommendation Two: Engage in County Fire Coordination Strategic Planning

It is our recommendation that Washington County create and implement a County Fire Coordination Strategic Plan (see Figure 7). This plan should include specific, achievable, and time-oriented goals that will create impactful outcomes to increase coordination amongst the volunteer fire departments and improve fire services in the County. The County Fire Coordinator should draft the County Fire Coordination Strategic Plan. They should highly prioritize collecting the input of all the County's fire departments, working closely with the fire chiefs, to build the plan's goals. This will ensure the goals reflect the needs of the fire departments, remain feasible to achieve, and have the fire departments' buy-in when it comes to implementation practices. Should the County fail to support the hiring of a coordinator, Washington County's Chief firefighters should form a core committee of interested volunteers to create a draft strategic plan with the support of one or more community organizations such as the Community Foundation.

Similarly, the plan should be implemented by the County Fire Coordinator in partnership with the fire departments. While the departments will be asked to shift some mindsets and practices related to increasing coordination, it should primarily be the role of the County Fire Coordinator to strategically liaise across departments to implement the Plan's recommendations. Two options regarding funding the position are being proposed: a grant-funded county coordinator, or a County-funded County coordinator (see Figures 8 and 9).

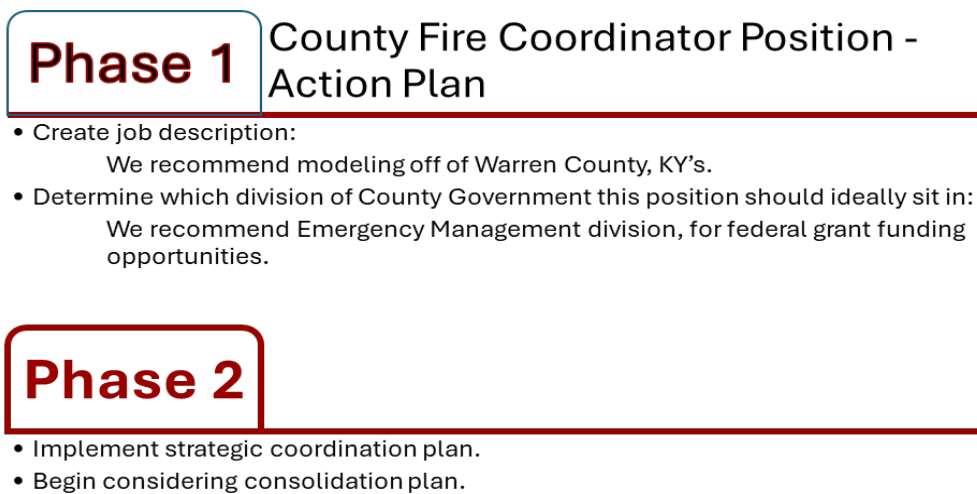


Figure 7: County Fire Coordinator Position Action Plan

Phase 1

Grant Funded County Coordinator

- Submit grant applications to fund this position (SAFER, Foundation, State, etc.)

Phase 2

- Utilize funding to support the onboarding of a Coordinator
- Determine necessity for re-application for grant funding (based on timeline of initial grant award)

Phase 3

- Reapply for grant funding, as necessary
- Create and implement plan to transition to full-time County funding, sharing successes of Coordinator position and impact on fire department efficiency

Figure 8: Grant-Funded County Coordinator

Phase 1

County Funded County Coordinator

- Begin advocacy campaign, gaining community and government official buy-in for County support for this position

Phase 2

- Ensure position is included in County Budget, have influential advocates attend hearings & meetings relevant to such position

Phase 3

- Hire a full-time coordinator

Figure 9: County-Funded County Coordinator

Recommendation Three: Creation of Fire Territories

To recap, proposed phases for the creation of fire territories are over two-year periods to allow the townships in Washington County to use the first year to plan for financial and operational aspects of the territory and to hold required public meetings in participating townships in the second year. More detailed information about the consolidation of fire service resources into fire territories is found above under the *Need for Consolidation* section.

The recommended phasing of territory establishment is as follows:

- Phase I (2025-2027): Northeast Washington, Southeast Washington. Phase I consists of townships without existing structures that can start working together to form a territory.
- Phase II (2027-2029): Central Washington. Additional time is provided because this territory combines the largest and smallest townships in terms of population.
- Phase III (2029-2031). Northwest Washington, Southwest Washington. Phase III consists of territories with fire districts consolidating with townships without districts. Additional time is provided to ensure resident buy-in and integrate townships with and without existing structures.

To establish fire protection territories, proponents must develop strategies to persuade elected officials in participating local governments to pass enacting legislation. Proponents must also encourage fellow residents to express their support for consolidation to their elected officials.

Consolidation Implementation Strategies

The following is a list of recommended steps to advocate for consolidation and persuade community members and elected officials to support the effort.

1. **Form a steering committee.** A steering committee should consist of interested community members, fire department volunteers, and other stakeholders willing to meet periodically and develop strategies for advocating for the establishment of a fire protection territory.
2. **Hold one or more public listening sessions before commencing the effort.** Facilitated public meetings are an important strategy for listening to residents' preferences and concerns regarding fire services. These meetings can also help ensure an advocacy effort for a fire territory aligns with residents' expectations and can help identify potential opposition to the effort. Resources like the Community Toolbox provide helpful guidance on how to conduct public forums and listening sessions effectively (Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, 2024). Although the local government is required to hold public meetings before voting on a proposed fire territory, holding these sessions prior to launching an advocacy effort allows residents to provide input on the proposal early in the process. If legislation to establish a fire territory is already pending, elected officials are more likely to hear from strong proponents and opponents rather than residents with moderate views.
3. **Develop a plan for conducting the fire protection territory campaign from start to finish.** This plan should include articulating the goals of the campaign and determining how to organize the work of the campaign to accomplish these goals. This work may include the following:

- *Raising funds for the campaign's work and setting up one or more bank accounts as needed to manage funds.* A grassroots advocacy campaign may rely heavily on volunteers asking for individual donations of money and in-kind donations. Besides making personal asks of supporters for these donations, a campaign should ask for donations in its online communications and provide ways that supporters can give online, in-person, or by postal mail.
 - *Recruiting volunteers to help with the effort.* Founding members of the campaign should start by reaching out to friends, family, or neighbors willing to help. Ideally, one or more members of the campaign should manage volunteer recruitment and help place volunteers into roles that align with their capacity to help and the campaign's needs.
 - *Building relationships with elected officials who could champion legislation to establish a territory.* Establishing a territory requires that participating local governments adopt legislation. If the proposal for a fire territory originates from community members, support from one or more elected officials will be necessary to place the issue on the agenda with local governments. If these relationships do not already exist with campaign members, then campaign members should schedule an appointment with the official to introduce themselves and explain how a fire territory would help improve fire services for residents.
 - *Ensuring compliance with relevant laws for a campaign to influence local legislation.* Because local laws may have reporting requirements for organized efforts to lobby local elected officials, one or more volunteers should seek legal advice if possible and research how to run the campaign in a way that complies with the law.
 - *Developing a strategy for communicating with elected officials and media.* Running a successful campaign will require earning support from local elected officials. Local or State media could inquire about the campaign, or a campaign may try to use press releases or local relationships to pitch a story to the media. A campaign likely requires one or more individuals willing and ideally experienced in working with elected officials and media. Additionally, having volunteers who can help write press releases or manage the campaign's online presence facilitates communication with elected officials, media, and interested residents.
4. **Develop messaging in favor of the territory.** Members of the steering committee should develop key messages that explain the need for a fire territory, how fire services to the

community will improve due to consolidation of resources, and the benefits that residents will enjoy due to increased efficiencies or resources for fire departments. These messages can also be used in a brochure or one-to-two-page fact sheet explaining the effort for distribution to community members, media outlets, and other key audiences. Effective messaging should also focus on the benefits to the community of increased coordination, efficiency, and leadership. If the campaign includes advocating for more funding for fire departments, messaging should focus more on how this helps improve the quality of fire services for the community rather than how it helps fire departments' funding levels. Messages should also clearly state the intended monetary impact of the territory's establishment (i.e., "total tax levies will not increase" or "total tax levies will increase by no more than __%").

A 2019 FireRescue1 blog post provides additional tips for engaging the community and messaging that are relevant to efforts to influence legislation on establishing a fire territory (Loomis, 2019). Key tips include developing a strategic plan beforehand to show the fire department or district's work in addressing community needs, assessing the strengths and weaknesses in its relationship with the community, and developing a communications plan. The post recommends organizing key messages based on the following questions regarding a ballot measure requesting a bond:

- Who is your agency and what services does it provide?
- Why is it deserving of this tax increase? How is it already financially responsible?
- What challenges is it facing to provide service?
- What is the proposed solution and how will it benefit the community?
- How much will it cost the average property owner or resident? (Loomis, 2019).

5. **Develop a website and/or social media pages to provide information on the campaign and engage community members in actions.** Content of these pages may include contact information for the campaign, key messages, FAQs about the proposal, links to selected media about the effort, and pages where residents can take actions to help such as signing up to volunteer, donating, or sharing information with friends and neighbors. For example, a website in favor of a ballot measure consolidating several fire districts in Conifer, Colorado includes information on how to donate, responses to myths about the campaign, key messages about how the change would benefit the community and pictures of firefighters performing their duties (A Safer Conifer, 2023).
6. **Recruit and train volunteers on key messaging.** Volunteers should be trained on how to communicate the key messages of the campaign to policymakers and the community. Messaging should focus on how the resident will benefit from the improved quality of fire services and any costs they will pay to establish the district or territory. Messaging

focused only on the funding or needs of fire departments without explaining the benefit to residents is less likely to be persuasive. Interested community members and off-duty firefighters can be effective key messengers to the extent they can explain how and why the proposal for a fire district is personally relevant to them.

7. **Communicate with elected officials regarding the proposal for a fire territory.**

Elected officials are likely to be interested in hearing the perspectives of constituents regarding the proposal. Volunteers within the elected official's district should contact the official to explain why they support the effort and why the elected official should also be supportive. Typically, face to face conversations with elected officials are more personal and therefore more effective at persuading elected officials than other forms of communication. However, emails and social media content can also be impactful when they include stories of how the issue is personally relevant to the volunteer. While recruiting volunteers to provide testimony at a public hearing can have an impact, engaging the official before the hearing could make a greater impression. Before communicating with elected officials, a campaign should review local policies in case they are required to report on any lobbying activity. If a fire department is a 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit organization, it should track any expenditures or volunteer time spent on lobbying on behalf of the organization for the IRS and any state or local reporting requirements (Bolder Advocacy, 2023).

8. **Continue engaging residents.** If the local government is voting on an ordinance to create a fire protection territory, then residents may contact their elected officials to express their views and ask for the official's support or opposition. This is an opportunity to continue engaging residents in communicating with elected officials. By providing talking points, residents can deliver a campaign's key messages to the elected official. However, if residents deliver these messages word-for-word without explaining why the issue is personally meaningful, an elected official may assume these communications are coming from a professional campaign rather than grassroots, volunteer effort.

9. **Look for opportunities for residents to experience challenges faced by fire departments.** Asking volunteer firefighters to talk about the issue at community events or arranging for the local fire station to host an open house, could help residents better understand the challenges faced by firefighters and what it means for fire service in the County. For example, a June 2024 Fort Madison Daily Democrat article describes how a fire department open house helped generate support for a bonding measure in Fort Madison, Iowa (Vidmar, 2024). Such events should adhere to any restrictions on lobbying that may apply to a public or nonprofit fire department.

10. **Thank elected officials and residents for their support of the campaign.** Regardless of the outcome of a vote by local officials, the campaign ought to thank the supporters who made this campaign possible. Residents or elected officials who opposed the petition could be persuadable in the future. Present disagreements should not preclude future dialogue on the issue.

Grants and Funding

This section explores diverse funding mechanisms that could be leveraged to create sustainable funding for Washington County fire services. These mechanisms include grants - both governmental and private - and public funding mechanisms like the local income tax. Implemented together, these alternative funding sources provide a diverse funding model that will build Washington County's capacity to advance its fire services and public safety goals.

Grant Procurement

Grants are especially vital for volunteer departments that are dependent on community generosity and volunteer resources. According to National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) data, as seen in Figure 10, 65 percent of U.S. firefighters are volunteers with most departments being volunteer fire departments, making grants vital as volunteer departments depend heavily on donations and grant awards (Volunteer Fire Service Fact Sheet, n.d.).

The majority of fire departments in the United States are volunteer.

Of the total 29,452 fire departments in the country, 18,873 are all volunteer; 5,335 are mostly volunteer; 2,459 are mostly career; and 2,785 are all career. ²

(Source: Volunteer Fire Service Fact Sheet, n.d.)

Figure 10: Volunteer Departments in the United States

Additionally, in fiscal year 2023, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources reported that, across Indiana, 101 grants were successfully procured across 58 counties for an award total of \$454,000, just through the Department of Natural Resources (FireRescue1, 2024). Grant procurement and other fundraising through strategic community partnerships could be a vital strategy for funding the volunteer fire departments in Washington County.

Prior to applying for grants, departments must be able to define the barriers impeding service provision. Grantmakers want to see that grantees have a solid understanding of the impediments to success and a solid game plan for how grant funding can specifically help to eliminate these barriers. By incorporating specific metrics such as number of volunteer firefighters per capita and average age of equipment the problem statements can be quantified to identify priorities. We have developed a list of such metrics (Please see Appendix C) that relevant stakeholders should consider compiling in the short and medium term. This information will provide stakeholders with compelling data that can be used to strengthen grant proposals going forward. It can also be used to support volunteer firefighters in identifying and communicating about the

total costs of operating a volunteer fire department. This information can be used to make points about funding shortfalls and the need for government leaders and community members to support in raising funds.

Grant Database

To support Washington County fire departments secure funding, a grant database of viable grant opportunities has been created (see Appendix D). The website link to the excel spreadsheet includes three sections: Foundation Grants (Tab A), Government Grants (Tab B), and Grant Resources (Tab C). Grant opportunities include Foundation, Local, State, and Federal Grant prospects. The grant database provides specific details of each opportunity with a thorough description, requirements, and includes hyperlinks to both the Grantmaker website and each application, when applicable. Additionally, Grant Resources (Tab C), provides grant related resources. The information is discussed in detail below and in Appendix D. It includes a list of professional and vetted grant writers, a list of organizations providing grant writing classes, contact information for Indiana University Bloomington faculty who teach graduate and undergraduate student grant writers, and online resources for developing proposals and narratives.

- **Foundation Grant Opportunities (Tab A in Excel Document Link)**

Several foundation grant opportunities were identified, with a range of reward amounts. The low reporting requirements for foundation grants is particularly appealing, making them feasible for volunteer firefighters to manage without outside assistance. Additionally, less documentation is typically requested in the application process. The Gary Sinise Foundation's First Responder Grant is particularly noteworthy and is specifically designed to aid first responders (See Appendix D).

- **Government Grant Opportunities (Tab B in Excel Document Link)**

Federal grants can be a significant funding source for fire departments. However, federal grants are complex, and the vetting process may be cumbersome. Applying as a county, through the emergency management office, rather than individual townships, can increase chances of qualifying for and securing larger federal grants. Certain grants offering large award amounts may evaluate eligibility by the population served and budgeting requirements. The frequency of fire runs can also influence eligibility for certain grants.

Combining resources from multiple townships could increase the competitiveness of grant applications. One strategy is for a lead township to submit a joint application on behalf of other townships as sub-grantees. This enables the townships to pool their resources to meet federal matching requirements. Regardless of what form this joint

application takes, a formal agreement should detail the distribution of grant funds across the townships. A county fire coordinator can be beneficial in this process as having a county coordinator is viewed favorably by federal agencies.

Each fiscal year, members of Congress may apply for “Congressionally Directed Spending” in the Senate or “Community Project Funding” in the House (GAO, 2023). Building relationships with your elected U.S. representatives and senators can bring awareness to public safety needs. It would be beneficial to contact their offices, especially their district offices, to understand what funding opportunities are available each year, to build relationships with their staff, and invite them to outreach and recognition events. Members of Congress will often sign a letter of support for a federal grant request from their district to ensure an application receives consideration (U.S. Senator Todd Young, n.d.). (See Appendix D).

- **Grant Resources (Tab C in Excel Document Link)**

Grant Consultants: It is recommended that a grant consulting firm be utilized to pursue federal grant opportunities. This is an untapped funding source that has the potential to be lucrative for the volunteer fire departments. A grant professional experienced in federal grant writing is best equipped to apply for and manage large complex grants. Federal grants entail a significant amount of post-procurement reporting requirements, disbursement, and management requirements that a professional experienced federal grant writer is best equipped to successfully manage. A list of vetted grant writers is available in the Grant Resources (Tab C) tab of the grant database, each with the skills and experience to pursue complex federal opportunities.

Grant Writing Classes: To aid firefighters in developing the necessary skills to successfully apply for and manage grants, virtual and in-person grant writing classes are offered through several organizations. Options include:

- The Indiana Volunteer Firefighter Association (IVFA) offers in-person grant writing courses to fire departments across the state free of charge (District 13B Grant Writing class, n.d.). Classes are posted on the IVFA website and registration is required. IVFA publishes registration and class information.
- Through the RISE UP program, the Washington County Community Foundation (WCCF) provides free assistance to nonprofits in Washington County including grant research and writing, and marketing and communications (Rise Up, n.d.).

- NVFC offers free online grant writing classes to NVFC members and charges a minimal \$20 fee to non-members (NVFC, 2023).

Indiana University Bloomington Graduate & Undergraduate Student Grant Writers:

Indiana University Bloomington offers grant writing courses to both undergraduate and graduate students. These courses provide students an opportunity to draft proposals for various organizations and government entities, as professors oversee the process. See Figure 11 for a grant writing class description. Students can be a resource for Washington County fire departments as they can draft proposals. The course instructors would need to be contacted to discuss prospective projects. Professors Laura Littlepage and Jill Nicholson-Crotty have offered the services of their grant writing classes. Their contact information is included under the Grant Resources (Tab C) in Appendix D.

Scheduled classes for SPCN-N 557					
IU Bloomington Fall 2024 <input type="checkbox"/> Hide closed classes (1) Class Filters					
Class #	Meeting Time	Room	Instructor	Open Seats	
9577 Closed	Eight Week - First 8/26/2024–10/18/2024	WB WEB	Helen Tygret	0/30 Waitlist 1	⌵
<p>Type Lecture</p> <p>Credits 3</p> <p>Mode of Instruction 100% Online All</p> <p>Location Off Campus</p> <p>Building WEB-BASED CLASS</p> <p>Enrollment Requirements ⓘ Prerequisite: Must be a SPEA Graduate student</p> <p>Class Notes Above class reserved for O'Neil Online students until August 5 Above class meets first eight weeks only</p> <p>Course Description This course provides the opportunity for each student to develop a complete proposal--through participation in the entire grant application process. The integration of case studies, visual media, printed materials, and class discussions provide students with practical knowledge for writing successful proposals.</p> <p>View/order textbooks</p>					

Figure 11: IU Bloomington Course Description

Logic Models

Logic models support grant application processes. They are demonstrative tools that illustrate the inputs, activities, outputs, and anticipated outcomes of a program. Consequently, they assist grant applicants in planning what will be done (activities), what will be achieved (outcomes), and how grantees will measure program outcomes. Moreover, logic models are helpful for defining funding priorities, measuring impact, and communicating the value of the services provided to the Washington County community.

Logic models offer several key benefits including:

- **Outline of goals and how to measure impact:** By visually mapping the connection between resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes, a logic model provides a clear road map for achieving outcomes.
- **Inform grant proposals and outreach materials:** Clearly stating the impact of the volunteer fire departments in Washington County is necessary to apply for grants, seek corporate donations, and grow community support.

Federal and large foundation grants often require logic models as part of the application process. Figure 12 illustrates the concept. Detailed guidance on logic model development from the State of Michigan and the University of Kansas is included in excel documentation linked in Appendix D.

Program Area	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
<i>Emergency Response</i>	Personnel Equipment Facilities (fire stations) Technology (communication systems) Training	Emergency response and rescue operations (EMS, fire suppression, rescue) Collaboration with other fire departments and EMS services Equipment maintenance Firefighter training and development	# of emergency calls responded to # of joint operations Average response time to emergency calls # of equipment checks # of hours of training completed # of certifications earned # of lives saved	Reduced emergency response times Increased efficiencies through collaboration and coordination
<i>Fire Prevention & Education</i>	Partnerships with schools	School fire safety and prevention presentations Community educational events	# of outreach activities # of educational materials distributed # of students instructed	Increased knowledge of fire safety among students Increased support for fire prevention efforts Reduced fire related injuries
<i>Community Engagement & Volunteer Support</i>	Volunteer recruitment Volunteer hours Grant funding Donations	Outreach Stakeholder engagement	# of new volunteers recruited AND retained # of active volunteer firefighters # of hours volunteered # of fundraising activities # of donations # of social media posts	Increased volunteer retention Increased volunteer satisfaction Increased public trust Increased sustained funding for volunteer departments

Figure 12: Sample Logic Model

Fundraising Strategies

Washington County can increase its funding by expanding and developing community partnerships and digital fundraising. Notably, previous fundraising efforts, such as fish fries (a common fundraising strategy among departments) were explained as being expensive and unprofitable, netting departments as little as \$1,000 after expenses. The following proposed fundraising methods require minimal upfront investment.

Community Partnerships

- **Adopt-a-Fire-Station Program:** Create a program that allows businesses and residents to donate time, money, or other items to local fire stations. Local businesses can support firefighter training and equipment purchases in exchange for recognition. Many fire departments have created Adopt-a-Fire-Station or Firefighter programs. This could be an opportunity to engage local businesses in fundraising efforts. One example is the Los Angeles Fire Department’s Adopt-a-Fire Station program (Newman, 2018).
- **Door Knocking Campaigns:** Direct outreach to residents is another source of fundraising and community awareness building. In exchange for donations, discounts from local businesses can be provided. Ludlow Volunteer Firefighters Association in Kentucky gives residents that donate \$20 a “supporter card” that can be used for discounts at local businesses (Ludlow Kentucky, 2021).
- **Digital Fundraising:** Fundraising platforms such as Donorbox and BetterWorld can be used at no or low cost to engage community members and raise funds. The platforms could host online raffles, 5k walks, and other fundraisers. Charity gaming is allowed in Indiana (Small and Mason, 2024). Crowdfunding is less labor intensive and more cost effective compared to the labor-intensive fish fries traditionally hosted by the departments. Crowdsourcing platforms eliminate the need for extensive planning as well as setup and cleanup and events can rely on a smaller number of volunteers (Betterworld, 2024).

Public Funding Mechanisms

In our various meetings with stakeholders, we learned from all three of the stakeholder groups, firefighters, community members, and trustees, that there is a general consensus amongst the people of Washington County that the citizens do not want an increase in taxes to help pay for the fire services of Washington County. However, there were recent changes to Indiana Code

that allow for a county to utilize local income tax for fire services. This recent change would allow Washington County to utilize the existing local income tax revenues to fund and support fire services, without needing to increase taxes in Washington County.

Local Income Tax

Title 6, article 3.6 of Indiana Code establishes the parameters by which a county fiscal body or other local authority may adopt a county-wide local income tax. In 2023, Washington County levied a combined local income tax rate of 2.00 percent. This local income tax included 0.29 percent for public safety, 0.32 percent for economic development, and 1.39 percent for certified shares. With some exceptions, local income taxes may not exceed 2.50 percent. At a combined rate of 2.00 percent, Washington County currently has the 36th highest local income tax rate in the state (Indiana Legislative Services Agency, 2023). This relatively high tax rate, combined with sentiments shared by stakeholders, makes clear the need to identify existing resources in lieu of securing additional tax revenues. This section will discuss opportunities for reallocation from existing revenue streams, as well as discussing the ability of townships within Washington County to tap into their considerable cash reserves to support the emergency equipment, facilities, and vehicle maintenance needs of their volunteer fire departments.

According to IC 6-3.6-6-17, “A civil taxing unit may use its certified shares [of local income tax revenues] for any of the purposes of the civil taxing unit.” IC 36-8-13 provides local fire service responsibilities to the township. Therefore, townships may utilize any portion of their local income tax revenues received via certified shares to support fire services in their townships. According to the Department of Local Government and Finance’s (DLGF) *2024 Local Income Tax Distributions* report, certified shares totaled more than \$565,000 for townships within Washington County, nearly matching the \$632,000 in fire services levies assessed by townships county-wide, and far exceeding any other single source of township revenue (DLGF, 2024). Allocating just one-fifth of this revenue source would be more than sufficient to hire and properly support a county-wide fire service coordinator. This provides a collaborative township opportunity to support county-wide coordinated fire services should the support of the County be unobtainable.

According to the 2023 Annual Financial Reports for each township within Washington County found on Indiana Gateway, local income tax comprised more than 31 percent of total township revenues collected in 2023. See Figure 13. When combined with the cumulative fire funds which are used to support capital expenditures and equipment, and the fire and EMS fund which is used to support volunteer fire and emergency medical services, three quarters of all township revenues, from tax sources, could be used to support fire services within the township (Indiana Gateway, 2023). At this time, there are limited details included in township financial reporting; it is unclear what, if any, local income tax funding is being allocated from townships to their local fire departments.

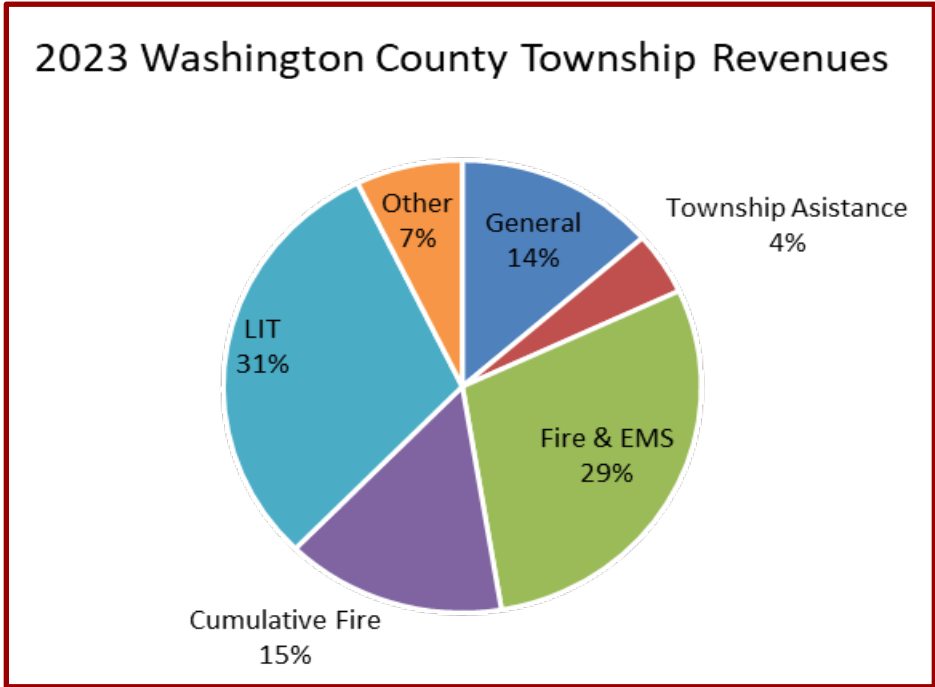


Figure 13: 2023 Breakdown of Washington County Township Revenues

According to the *Indiana Gateway Cash Balance as a Percent of Budget Report*, townships within Washington County carried an average cash balance equivalent to 240 percent of their annual budgets, totaling just over \$2.8 million. See Figure 14. These balances far exceed the State average of 94 percent annual budgets. Reducing these cash reserves to the State average would mean allocating approximately \$1.76 million county-wide (Indiana Gateway, 2024). These funds could be allocated to existing needs or set aside to support larger coordination efforts such as consolidating departments.

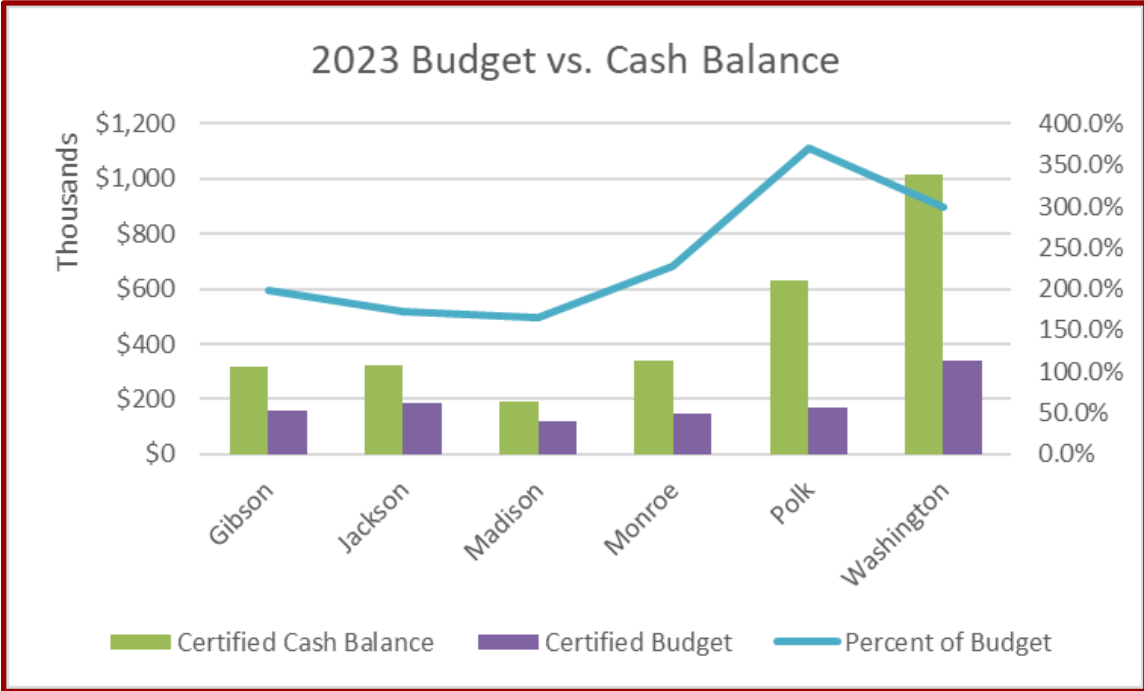


Figure 14: 2023 Budget Compared to 2023 Cash Balance in Washington County

In addition to the township-specific opportunities to increase financial support for fire services outlined above, counties also have a unique opportunity to allocate existing resources to this important purpose. A recent change in 2023, in Indiana Code, allows counties to allocate a percentage of local income tax to fire services. House Enrolled Act 1454 - 2023, modified IC 6-3.6-6-8(d) by allowing county-adopting bodies, or the county council in Washington County, to allocate 0.05 percent of their local income tax established for the purpose of public safety to township fire departments, volunteer fire departments, fire territories, and fire districts. This distribution occurs before the regular distribution to other civil taxing units. The distribution is made proportionate to each fire department’s share of the county’s total tax base. Based on Washington County’s 2023 public safety local income tax revenue of more than \$1.7 million, approximately \$300 thousand could be allocated directly for fire protection services. Because this allocation occurs prior to the normal distribution of local income tax levied for public safety purposes, other local units’ distributions would be reduced. Approximately 67 percent of this allocation would come from the county’s share of the current income tax distribution. Another 30 percent of revenues would come from Salem’s current allocation, with the remaining funds coming from the existing allocations for the remaining towns located within Washington County (DLGF, 2024). This allocation would provide additional funds for Washington County to use to improve fire services across the County.

Government Funding Implementation Strategies

The reallocation of existing government resources will require both strategies to educate and persuade elected officials at both the county and township level as well as building community support. The following is a list of recommended steps to advocate for the repurposing of both county-wide and township local income tax revenues. These efforts build on and compound with those strategies previously mentioned for the purposes of consolidation. While these strategies can occur without consolidation, their effectiveness is improved through the consolidation of resources.

1. **Determine the operating and capital budgets.** Before a specific request can be made to the county council or township board for an allocation of local income tax, each existing department must assess their capital and ongoing operating needs to determine the minimum funds necessary to support the desired service improvement. These budgets would best be supported by official repair estimates from third party vendors, procurement quotes, and inspection results. Capital needs should be split between immediate needs, such as new personal safety gear and long-term, high-cost needs, such as the replacement of a truck or building. This will support the ability of departments to request allocations more than their annual operating budget.
2. **Build support with affected units.** The County allocation of local income tax for fire services will necessarily pull funding away from the municipal taxing units within the County, including the County itself. These funds are required to be spent on limited public safety purposes, including EMS, police, and fire. Therefore, early communication with the Sheriff's office, EMS, and Salem police would strongly support the reallocation. Importantly, the impacted municipalities will have the opportunity to shift other revenues to backfill the reduction in public safety local income tax allocated to other emergency services. Township funding is far more limited in allowed use than County and City funds. Therefore, only the trustee and township board are necessary to convince of the reallocation of local income tax or use of cash reserves.
3. **County council adopts resolution.** For a county to allocate an off-the-top allocation of local income tax for public safety to fire services, the county council must adopt a resolution. An adopted resolution applies only to distributions in the following calendar year. The resolution must:
 - a. Include information on the service area for each township fire department, volunteer fire department, fire protection territory, or fire protection district, as applicable.

- b. The distribution must be based on the assessed value of real property, not including land, which is served by each township fire department, volunteer fire department, fire protection territory, or fire protection district, as applicable.
 - c. The county council must provide a copy of the resolution to the county auditor and the department of local government finance not more than fifteen (15) days after the resolution is adopted.
4. **Township General Fund Allocation.** Unlike the county-allocated local income tax discussed above, townships can appropriate a portion of their cash reserves as well as a share of their ongoing local income tax through the regular budget development process. This includes the publication of the budget meeting, initial meeting, adoption meeting, and Department of Local Government and Finance approval. No additional steps or processes are necessary for the township to allocate its existing resources to supplement existing fire support funding.

Grant and Funding Recommendations

To address funding issues, the following recommendations present a variety of options for Washington County to adopt. In addition to exploring options that leverage public funding mechanisms to support fire services, Washington County stakeholders should also take advantage of private and public grant opportunities, as well as low investment fundraising opportunities.

Implement the following grant specific recommendations:

- Utilize the Grant Database to identify appropriate grants for each fire department.
- Hire a professional grant writer particularly proficient in writing federal grant applications, so as not to limit your funding opportunities and to help in identifying the grant opportunities most appropriate for each department.
- Take grant writing courses offered to become better equipped to apply for smaller foundation grants available to volunteer departments.
- Utilize the logic model styling to help structure project proposals.
- Apply as a county either through the Washington County Emergency Management Agency (EMA), or with one department applying as the main grantee with additional districts listed as sub-grantees, with a contract explicitly detailing disbursement.
- Contact Indiana University Bloomington professors to utilize undergraduate and graduate student grant writers.

Implement the following low-cost fundraising recommendations:

- Adopt a fire station program.
- Engage in a door knock campaign.

- Engage in digital fundraising by creating an account on Donorbox and BetterWorld to begin leveraging crowdsourcing funds.

Implement the following local income tax revenue maximization recommendations:

- Reallocate existing local income tax revenues to utilize to fund and support fire services consistent with recent changes in legislation.

People

Firefighter advocates, associations, and researchers have studied the issues behind declining participation, both with respect to recruitment of new volunteer firefighters and retention of existing firefighters. The statewide and national trends in declining numbers of firefighters may be attributed to numerous reasons, including the following (Bevans, 2024; NVFC, 2020; PFESI, 2017; Lantz and Runefors, 2021):

Recruitment and Retention

- **Shifting population trends:** Rural communities are getting older, and younger people are moving away or commuting to work in other locations.
- **Loss of community feeling/less interest or time to volunteer itself:** As peoples' lives get busier or have other priorities, ideal candidates do not have an interest in volunteering.
- **Lack of support/flexibility in juggling volunteer responsibilities with other commitments.**
- **Mismatched expectations of firefighter responsibilities:** Firefighter volunteers lose excitement for their roles when they find the volunteer role is often focused on meetings, paperwork, and training, as opposed to fire and rescue calls.
- **Increased call volume:** As call volumes increase, stress among stretched firefighter teams also increases.
- **Onerous fundraising commitments:** Many firefighters report fundraising fatigue as a cause for losing interest in volunteering.
- **Family/partner disapproval:** Firefighting is stressful work, and if families are not supportive of the commitment to serve, firefighters are likely to be pulled away from their volunteer roles.

Fortunately, volunteer firefighters as well as interested potential recruits are motivated or influenced by a variety of personality traits or circumstances that may be considered when developing recruiting and retention strategies. Some of these include the following (Lantz and Runefors, 2021):

- **A sense of altruism, self-worth, and satisfaction from serving the community.**
- **Career growth opportunities:** Firefighters may use a volunteer role as a basis to gain experience for a career firefighter role.
- **Pride or sensation seeking (i.e., the “thrill” or “rush” from firefighter work).**
- **Skill-building and self-confidence:** Like other forms of service, such as the military, participants find the role helpful in personal growth.

- **An escape from domestic roles and responsibilities (notable among women).**
- **A family tradition of firefighting.** Many firefighters come from multi-generational firefighting families, which provides a support structure and a basis for realistic expectations of the role.
- **Peer involvement and desire to join the team:** Recruits are more likely to be interested if they have friends with whom they may join a department and volunteer.

Education

There are education programs that are offered online as well as nearby communities that can be utilized to strengthen the education of firefighters within Washington County. Some of these programs include classes from Ivy Tech that an individual may take and online classes that can further fire education at a lower cost.

Ivy Tech has a Firefighter certification program that may be beneficial to individuals who are attending Ivy Tech. Please see Appendix E for Mentorship Program Information and Ivy Tech Firefighter Certificate Program information. It would be beneficial for Washington County to partner with Ivy Tech and work to bring this program to current Washington County Ivy Tech locations. This would help with retention throughout the County, as individuals can pursue their college degree in Washington County and earn that firefighting certificate in Washington County. The individual would then be certified to be a volunteer firefighter in the State of Indiana. Currently, firefighter certificate programs are only offered at Bloomington, Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, Plainfield, South Bend/Elkhart, Valparaiso (Ivy Tech, 2024). If the individual is also already pursuing a college degree, they may be able to add this certification to their degree program at little to no extra cost, depending on how their college is funded. This could be beneficial to retaining volunteer firefighters within Washington County as the individuals would have a personal stake in Washington County.

Online Training Classes

Online classes can be a useful tool for the recruitment and retention issues in Washington County and offer an affordable and flexible option for individuals who are working full-time or have other responsibilities. Two providers currently offer online firefighter classes at a low-cost:

- **The Indiana Fire & Public Safety Academy** can pay for the training on a department or individual basis; it may be beneficial for Washington County to pay for one department membership and split the costs among the townships. “Almost 200 courses are currently available, including over 70 fire protection courses for firefighters, fire inspectors, and officer development; over 100 EMS CE courses to help meet Indiana EMT and paramedic renewal requirements; and 20 workplace safety courses to comply with workplace safety requirements” (Indiana Fire & Public Safety Academy, 2024). These

online courses provide options for continuing education and required workplace safety training. The online courses can also be used for further training that is not required by the State of Indiana that piques the interest of firefighters or can further help them in their line of work.

- **The National Volunteer Fire Council** has free training to individuals who are members of the Council. There are a variety of trainings offered on this website that can be helpful for firefighter skills. “Virtual classroom courses are organized in the catalog by the following categories: Grants and Funding, Health and Wellness, Leadership, Preparedness and Prevention, Recruitment and Retention, Safety and Equipment and Wildland Fire” (NVFC, 2024a). Utilizing pre-recorded and virtual classrooms for beginning education and continuing education would be a useful tool for the fire departments; it would be important for the County to coordinate regarding membership and interest in this program.

These resources could be utilized, if they are not being utilized already across Washington County across the various volunteer and career fire departments. It may be beneficial to pay for one account across the County that multiple fire departments may use to help with training and continuing education.

The U.S. Fire Administration, a Division of FEMA, released a manual on Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services in May 2023 (U.S. Fire Administration, 2023). This comprehensive manual was developed cooperatively by national fire service organizations and provides nationwide data and best practices for recruitment and retention and collaborating with local governments. We recommend utilizing this document as a resource to enhance recruitment and retention strategy and have provided some additional ideas below. Please see Appendix F which includes a Recruitment and Retention Planning Tool that can be adapted based on the needs and available resources of your department.

Youth Engagement and Recruitment

“The Youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow.” - *Nelson Mandela*

Recruitment is a major need of the volunteer departments; however, it is also important to use recruitment measures that are sustainable in the future. Youth participation is vital for sustainable volunteer fire departments and therefore, the current firefighters need to appeal to the youth. Our recommendation is that recruitment and education about fires and firefighting begins at a young age and involves a variety of school-aged children. The recommendations below are tailored to the age of the children:

Elementary

- Firefighters travel to elementary schools and show the fire trucks to the children and talk about fighting fires.
- Firefighters host an activity day such as a field day or coloring contest that involves the firefighters in the schools. This will strengthen the relationship between firefighters and the children.
- Firefighters can teach simple fire safety protocols such as calling 9-1-1 and what to do in case of an emergency.

Middle School

- One of the departments hosts a field trip for that day in which middle school-aged children can learn more about the daily operations of firefighters. They can also learn about the different fire-related apparatus.
- Interactive presentations with the fire apparatus and in-depth explanations of how firefighting tools work.
- Firefighters can teach more in-depth fire safety protocols such as creating an Exit Plan in the event of a fire.

High School

- Interested high school students can volunteer at one of the fire departments to help with tasks such as cleaning, organization, and inventory. Students can earn necessary volunteer hours for college or complete internships as Social Media Interns.
- Field trips can become more in-depth at this age such as the chemistry to how fires are put out and how grease fires are put out. Students can also be taught more advanced fire prevention tools and the severity of wildfires.

While we acknowledge that Washington County previously had a Fire Explorer program, a program such as this could be vital to increasing the youth's interest in fire. Such a program is a straightforward approach to identify and cultivate the community's youth toward volunteer fire service while establishing a system that can serve as a "pipeline" for recruits that can fill volunteer fire staffing positions throughout Washington County. "A well-designed and professionally run junior firefighter program can add significant value to your department. Not only does it bring in new volunteers, an injection of youth and the energy they bring can invigorate your department for years to come" (NVFC, 2023, p.5). A Fire Explorer program can be a multi-year program that can be utilized to begin an individual's firefighting interest. NVFC has a developed Fire Explorer program that could be utilized as a resource to develop and revise a Fire Explorer program in Washington County. The program created by NVFC includes specifics regarding the activities that the youth can legally participate in, a suggested age

requirement, and suggestions on how to start the Fire Explorer program. This program can include a variety of ages and a variety of activities that the youth can partake in.

A model that Washington County can utilize is from the fire territory of Brownsburg in Hendricks County, Indiana. The Town of Brownsburg developed a “Safety Education” that includes programs such as safety talks, school or day care visits and other educational programs (Fire Territory Brownsburg, Indiana, 2024). The Safety Education that is implemented in Brownsburg can be like the program that Washington County uses; it is important to utilize the resources of other towns, cities, counties, and states across the country.

These tools can help to educate school-aged children on the importance of fires, but also pique their interest about firefighting. This can help with long-term recruitment strategies and increasing community fire education, which in turn can help minimize the damage that fires may cause.

Mentorship Program

A major theme throughout our recommendation is centered on increasing coordination between the townships throughout Washington County. A mentorship program could facilitate this coordination concept. One township may have more experienced volunteer firefighters while another township may have less experienced volunteer firefighters; creating a mentorship program between the townships can help train the less experienced volunteer firefighters while the experienced volunteer firefighters advance their leadership and teaching skills. This will strengthen communication skills in the firefighters, in the townships, and across Washington County.

The State of Maryland has a mentorship program for their volunteer firefighters that can be implemented across Washington County. The State of Maryland portrays this mentorship program as a flexible program that allows for a program to be as formal or as informal as the department or county prefers. Please see Appendix E for Mentorship Program Information and Ivy Tech Firefighter Certificate Program information. An informal mentorship program could be illustrated as conversational that focuses on the development of skills between the mentor and mentee while a formal mentorship program would have milestones and requirements that a mentor and mentee should meet while in the mentorship program. The State of Maryland portrays their mentorship program as “Two-way Learning.” This emphasizes that while this is a beneficial program for a mentee, the mentor is also gaining valuable skills such as leadership skills and teaching skills.

A volunteer firefighter mentorship program would be beneficial to implement across the County to increase communication skills, coordination, and increase firefighter skills across Washington County. It is vital that the volunteer firefighters from different townships agree on how the

program is designed and implemented as this is a collaborative effort. Roles of the mentor and roles of the mentee should be properly defined to increase efficiency of this program. Firefighter departments should establish who is interested in becoming a mentee or a mentor and begin to define the overall goals of this program.

Non-Operational Volunteers

The community can be a vital part of the fire program in Washington County. As one piece of the solution to the recruiting and retention issue, members of the community who are not able to be firefighters can also be volunteers for the department in nonoperational roles such as administrative assistants, social media interns, community outreach, inventory or clean-up. Currently, there is administrative work that various fire departments are tasked with such as weekly inventory reports, billing, general administration, and organization within the fire department. Nonoperational volunteers can remove some of the administrative responsibilities from firefighters and spread the work from operational firefighters. This allows for engagement of community members who want to volunteer their time but cannot fully commit to the requirements of being a firefighter. Utilizing individuals who want to volunteer for their community but may be unable to meet the demands of being a volunteer firefighter can also provide an entry point to amplify the peer-to-peer recruitment and may result in recruitment of additional operational firefighters.

An example of an alternative volunteer role is the Social Media Intern. This is a role that can appeal to a younger demographic that involves the younger generation in the community. The goal of the social media intern would be to highlight some of the work that the firefighters are doing in the community, raise awareness in the community, and notify the community of events that involve the fire departments. This can either be done for each township or the social media intern may travel to several fire departments. This can provide a wonderful experience for the social media intern, but also provides a great opportunity for the community to learn more about the fire departments.

Descriptions for these four volunteer positions (Administrative Assistants, Social Media Interns, Community Outreach Volunteers, and Inventory/Organization Volunteers) can be tailored to be specific to what the department or Washington County needs, but utilizing another social media internship description from another department or state would be helpful. For example, the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) created a one-page job description that included information such as requirements and the duty description of the social media intern. These duties included “Creating and writing social media posts across a variety of platforms” (LAFD, 2017). However, LAFD also had specific requirements for education, which would not be needed for Washington County’s social media intern. Please see Appendix G for sample volunteer descriptions for Non-Operational Volunteers. These Non-Operational volunteer positions can be designed to fit the needs of each fire department or fit the needs of Washington County as a whole. The individual

can travel between departments or work with one department, depending on the needs. Coordination is needed to figure out the needs of each fire department. A volunteer may also help with two areas, depending on the time of that individual and that work that needs to be done within that department or the County.

The Recruitment Pool: A Look at the Numbers

With a population of 28,182, Washington County ranks 56th out of Indiana’s 92 counties in population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021b). Of course, an increased population would, in turn, increase the potential recruiting pool for volunteers for Washington County’s volunteer fire departments. However, the population of Washington County has remained static, ranging between approximately 27,200 and 28,200 since 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). As a result, for the near future, it is reasonable to assume that Washington County will have a relatively stable population. Traditionally, recruiting efforts for volunteer fire department staffing have been directed toward frontline firefighting roles, and in the past, recruits and volunteer firefighters have been male. However, for counties with smaller populations like Washington County, a revised recruiting approach may be beneficial, considering the entire community as a potential recruiting pool.

Figure 15 illustrates the necessity of broadening the recruitment for department roles to the greatest extent possible. Obviously, fire departments need to recruit able-bodied individuals who can manage the physical rigors that are characteristic of firefighting, fire prevention, and rescue services. However, if only men are actively sought after and recruited from within the community, the candidate pool is, of course, half of what the pool would be if women were recruited.



Figure 15: Population and Candidate Pool Considerations

To illustrate the urgency to consider new recruitment and retention strategies, as well as a different approach to staffing needs and roles, consider the following math exercise. Also, consider that 10 percent of the County population is interested or could be inspired to pursue volunteer fire department service. Starting with the top row, with the County population of 28,182, the interested 10 percent would then constitute 2,818 individuals. However, if considering those ideal for frontline fire service, this pool needs to be reduced. First, if the population over 65 or under 18 is removed, the remaining County population is 16,768; the interested 10 percent would constitute 1,677 individuals. Next, if County residents with potentially limiting or disqualifying characteristics, such as persons with special cognitive needs, underlying physical/medical conditions, etc., are removed from firefighter consideration, 14,002 individuals would remain in the population count, or considering the interested 10 percent, the candidate pool would be reduced to 1,400. Of the remaining pool, if women were not considered in the available population count, this count would be further reduced to 6,692 men, or again using the interested 10 percent, only 696 individuals of the over 28,000 individuals in the County would be actively recruited for volunteer fire service.

With a relatively small pool for firefighter recruits, it is essential to identify, reach, and recruit the women and men of Washington County who may be interested in firefighter duty. At the same time, there is a larger pool of residents that, while not ideal candidates for frontline firefighter duty, can serve the volunteer fire departments in a variety of administrative and support capacities, relieving the burden of active volunteer firefighters from such duties. Therefore, there is a dual recruiting and retention approach that Washington County should consider: 1) the active recruiting of women and men to be volunteer firefighters, and 2) the creation of other roles for people of all ages and abilities to serve and then a wider recruiting effort to fill these roles. With this dual approach, the volunteer fire departments of Washington County can “flip” the candidate pool pyramid, resulting in the whole community becoming a candidate pool.

People Recommendations

To address the recruitment and retention issue that most of the fire departments are facing, there are a few recommendations we suggest. The list below addresses assorted topics such as the youth, mentorships, and strategies which aim to address this issue.

1. **Implement a consolidated mentorship program that spans the County:** A mentorship program can unite the departments across Washington County. Each fire department may learn something new from another department. A mentor may be in one fire department while the mentee is in another fire department; this allows the individuals to share their own experiences, but also provides a non-biased individual to assist with training and questions for the mentee.

2. **Educate the youth and the community:** The Youth and the members of the community are the next firefighters. Educating the youth and beginning their interest in firefighting early can help address long-term recruitment issues. Educating the youth and the community can also help to minimize fires throughout Washington County.
3. **Utilize already existing educational resources created by outside organizations:** It is important to consolidate resources. If a given class is already available online, consider taking the online class to minimize unnecessary costs. Research what specific classes are offered online and coordinate specific dates that volunteers can watch the training together. Pay for one online membership across the County that all department members can use for continuing education or required education.
4. **Meeting and recruiting candidates where they are in the community:** Creating a website for the fire departments can assist in reaching interested individuals; it also makes the application process more accessible.
5. **Retention is active recruitment of your current team:** It is important to keep the current members of the fire departments. Retention is just as important as recruitment; if you can better retain your firefighters, you may need to recruit less in the future. Make your current members feel appreciated for all the work that they do in their community.

A Multi-Faceted Approach

With the need for recruitment and retention, we have identified a strategy that consists of three approaches:

1. **The whole community is your supporter, benefactor, and recruiting pool:** Create community awareness through education, interaction, and visibility.
2. **Meeting and recruiting candidates where they are in the community:** Reach potential recruits for firefighting and other support roles by communicating via platforms and means with which they are likely to engage – and keeping them engaged.
3. **Retention is active recruitment of your current team:** Continue to “recruit” the existing firefighting team, keeping them engaged and excited to serve the community.

The following sections present specific activities for each of these approaches. Depending on the complexity or potential benefits and efficiencies that may come from partnerships, these activities may be undertaken on an individual department basis, through combinations of departments, or on a County-wide basis.

The whole community is your supporter, benefactor, and recruiting pool

As the math exercise demonstrated, given Washington County's population, the prospective volunteer firefighter recruiting pool is small. Further, many in the community are unaware of how a volunteer fire department works with respect to funding or resources, including staff, equipment, or firehouses. It is essential that the fire departments engage with the community to create this awareness. Of course, volunteer firefighters in Washington County and across the United States are weary of ongoing fundraising activities. However, the goal with this initiative is not to fundraise, but instead to "market" the departments – creating visibility, building awareness, and generating pride and excitement toward the departments and their service to the community.

The goal is to make the volunteer fire service a treasured asset of the fabric of Washington County. This goal may be accomplished by aiming to create a life-long relationship between the residents of the County and the fire departments. Suggested tasks include the following:

- **Open houses:** Invite people of all ages into the firehouse to learn about the equipment and the duties of a volunteer firefighter.
- **Parades/County festivals:** Participate in activities across the County frequently; chat and answer questions to build connections with residents.
- **Ride-alongs:** Invite members of the community to participate in ride-alongs (as appropriate) to witness the actions that occur during calls. This can be offered on a sign-up basis, as a reward to students for straight A's or perfect attendance, etc.
- **Citizens fire academy:** Offer a multi-session class to community members to learn about fire prevention and the basics of firefighting and was advertised to the public. This can enhance public safety and may also identify citizens who may be interested in pursuing a firefighting role.
- **Junior firefighter program:** Like the citizen's fire academy, this would be directed to high school-age girls and boys. Partnerships could be extended with local schools to drive interest with the goal of identifying potential volunteer candidates.

Meeting and Recruiting Candidates Where They are in the Community

When it comes to reaching out to the community, few things, if any, can be as successful as storytelling. Firefighters have compelling stories to share – what motivated them to serve, how they play a role within the fire department, recounting actions in the field during fire and rescue calls, how they may come from a long line of firefighters in their family. When telling these

stories, the community listens, and if they are told in an inspirational voice, citizens who may be interested in volunteer firefighting (or potentially as a career) will take notice. If the message is aspirational – the community will step up with support and participation.

Of course, a primary goal is to identify recruits for frontline firefighting. However, the community has far more individuals who may not be able to actively participate in fire and rescue calls but can play a role in supporting the fire department. To encourage this, we recommend the following:

Identify and create roles for all ages and abilities

Numerous tasks can be given to members of the community who look to volunteer and participate – paperwork, administrative tasks, firehouse and equipment support (cleaning, inventory, etc.). Citizens can be recruited on an individual basis or through existing groups (community support groups/organizations, such as Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, YMCA), support services for seniors or people with special needs, church groups, etc.). Groups can also provide individuals who can “chaperone” or look after volunteers who may need some assistance.

Create a “membership” model

When roles have been identified and developed, encourage people to sign up for a “membership” based on their interests, abilities, and any age restrictions. By having several options presented side-by-side, applicants review and consider their current and aspirational interests. For all potential volunteers, communication is essential to nurture interest and convert someone with an interest in the fire department into a full-fledged department volunteer. To add to the ranks of the fire department volunteers, we recommend the following:

Reach the candidates and tell the story

Both time honored and technology-based communication approaches are useful:

- **Word of mouth:** Nothing is better than face-to-face discussions between family, peers, etc. Use existing relationships to spread the word about the benefits of service.
- **Website:** An informative website serves as a front door to the community, sharing the department’s history, mission, and values, as well as a portal for timely information and to foster communication, including the application process.
- **Social media:** A common complaint about younger generations is that they are always engaged with their smartphones. Use this to your advantage – you have a captive

audience that you can reach through a range of popular social media platforms, including X/Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other similar applications. Use these to share your story and generate interest.

Simplify the application process

Provide a web-based form where interested candidates can apply. Keep it relatively short (1 page or so), which can allow the background check process to begin.

Follow up and be persistent AND consistent

Once a candidate has filed an online application, follow up as fast as possible with a call or an email to thank them and see if they have any specific questions. Next, schedule a follow-up interview to continue the process. Be consistent in the frequency of calls and emails and be persistent toward the candidate to establish contact and develop a rapport. Recruiting is a “courting” process – when the organization shows interest, the candidate will often reciprocate.

Figure 16 below depicts a website landing page for the Vincennes Township Fire Department in Knox County, Indiana. The website prominently features several of these key features, including a simple application, an embedded social media feed, prominent service recognition, membership levels, and an easy-to-use application. Figure 17 depicts recent social media posts from the Madison, Wisconsin Fire Department, sharing an information spotlight on a firefighter as well as advertising a community CPR training event.

CONTACT US | LISTEN LIVE | LINKS

VINCENNES TOWNSHIP FIRE DEPARTMENT

ABOUT | JOIN | NEWS | STATIONS | MEDIA | FIRE SAFETY

Join the Vincennes Township Fire Department

YOUR COMMITMENT & PASSION IS NEEDED

SHARE

SEARCH VTFIRE.ORG

Search...

We are always looking for new members of all skill levels to join our team of highly trained and qualified firefighters. We are looking for passionate individuals who are willing to commit to serving their community and providing compassion and care to those individuals who are in need.

Types of Membership

Regular Member

For Those 18 Years of Age or Older

For those interested in joining as a regular member, we ask that you be passionate, committed and willing to sacrifice your time to assist those community members who are in need of our help. You will form great friendships and bonds as a VTFD volunteer that will last a lifetime all while assisting your community. Along with camaraderie and confidence, here are a few other important perks of being a VTFD volunteer:

- Free Training

Recent News

Congratulations to Retired VTFD Captain Thomas Daugherty on His 50 Year Gold Card

- Uniform provided/ per run response funds
- Community Events
- State of Indiana Certification
- Opportunity to attend training at special schools through the state and Country (once requirements met)
- Opportunity to obtain federal certifications

Junior Member

Become A Member Today by Filling Out The Application Below

About You
Please complete the form below and a member of our recruitment team will get in touch with you.

PLEASE PROVIDE ANY PREVIOUS FIRE DEPARTMENTS OR EMS SERVICES YOU HAVE BEEN A MEMBER OF ...

NAME *

FIRST LAST

SEX *

MALE
 FEMALE

DATE OF BIRTH *

mm/dd/yyyy

If none, please enter NONE.

PLEASE LIST ANY FIRE FIGHTING, EMERGENCY MEDICAL, OR LAW ENFORCEMENT CERTIFICATIONS THAT ARE CURRENT ...

If none, please enter NONE

Chief Smith appointed by Governor to Board of Firefighting Personnel Standards & Education

Have a Safe and Happy Thanksgiving

Officer Training

Fire Prevention

Find Us on Facebook

Vincennes Township Fire Department

Vincennes Cub League

Exciting news for VCL in 2025!
The Cal Ripken World Series is coming back to Vincennes!
Press Release Attached:
... See more

(Source: Vincennes Township Fire Department, 2024)

Figure 16: Vincennes Township Fire Department Website



Madison Fire Dept. @MadisonWIFire · 20h

Bryce Anderson grew up around the fire service. He began volunteering in high school, recognizing early that this was the career he wanted to pursue. Anderson is now a firefighter/EMT serving you from Fire Station 7 on the west side!

Meet FF/EMT Anderson: cityofmadison.com/fire/blog/2024...



1 6 629



Madison Fire Dept. @MadisonWIFire · Jul 27

Cardiac arrest can happen anywhere, anytime. That's why all of our personnel, including Fire Prevention and Leadership staff, are certified in CPR.

We want to put the lifesaving power of CPR in your hands-- for free! Next class is Wednesday. Register at MadisonFire.org!



2 327

Figure 17: Social Media Posts – Madison, Wisconsin Fire Department (Source: Madison Fire Department, 2024)

Retention is Active Recruitment of Your Current Team

Recruitment is used to identify, solicit, and enlist new volunteers to the fire department. While we use the word “retention” to describe keeping members actively participating with the fire department, it really is nothing more than ongoing, active recruiting. Volunteers are driven by an altruistic desire to serve their community – they want to be involved. However, they do require care in the form of recognition, investment (i.e., training), a good firehouse culture, and a rewarding experience. Fire departments need to actively reinforce “two-way value” – by providing value to volunteers, the volunteers, in turn, will provide value to the fire department. Toward this goal, we recommend the following:

- **Culture is everything:** A leading cause of volunteer firefighter attrition is poor culture (PFESI, 2017; Greene and Hendershot, 2017). Fire department leadership need to make sure all volunteers feel part of the team – discourage cliques, avoid special/preferential treatment. Make sure everyone is empowered to share input. Use surveys to gauge satisfaction and perceptions, then work with leadership on a culture “audit,” identifying what about the department’s culture is working and what can improve.
- **The interview process reconsidered:** When a volunteer is leaving, take the time to complete an exit interview. Also, consider a “stay” interview – check in with and interview volunteers who have gone absent for a while about what concerns they may have or if/what the department can improve. Not only can the fire department gain valuable insight, but the mere process of the interviews will also let other volunteers know the department cares about retention and culture, boosting morale.
- **Recognize service:** Inside the firehouse, consider an incentive program where points are awarded for attendance or participation on calls. After each scoring period is over (i.e., 6 months or 1 year), award top point earners with prizes, such as gift cards. Outside of the firehouse, use social media posts to celebrate milestone service anniversaries or multi-generational service.
- **It is about family:** Another leading cause of volunteer attrition is pushback from or commitments to family. Make volunteer fire service a “family affair” by hosting potluck dinners, bowling nights, picnics, movie nights, and similar events where spouses/partners and children are invited. While building awareness of the volunteer role in the community is important, building familial support and awareness is also essential.

Case Studies: Proven Recruitment and Retention Actions

The strategy and approaches described in the preceding sections have been used by volunteer fire departments nationwide. The following is a summary of strategies used and outcomes realized by several volunteer fire departments across the United States, several of which have similar profiles and demographics as Washington County (Firehouse, 2020; NVFC, 2024b).

Case Study Example: Alvin, Texas

The Alvin Volunteer Fire Department in Alvin, Texas has successfully used several outreach initiatives to increase community awareness and advance recruiting. The Department uses social media platforms to inform the community about the application process. The Department also partners and advertises at local businesses. During recruiting periods, the department sends a fire truck with 4-6 firefighters to businesses and visits with citizens about volunteering with the fire department. A mannequin dressed in full bunker gear/SCBA is placed at businesses around town along with informational brochures. Full-page and poster sized advertisements on volunteering with the fire department are placed at local businesses. Additionally, yard banners are placed at each fire station.

The Department also highlights service and includes the families of firefighters in events. Recognition awards for every five years of service are given at an annual awards banquet, and the Department hosts an annual children's Christmas party.

Case Study Example: Kiowa, Colorado

The Kiowa Fire Protection District in Kiowa, Colorado uses a variety of recruiting approaches, including social media (Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram), college career days, networking, high schools, news channels, area newspapers, and websites. The District also rewards staff and invests in their professional development. Leadership awards "spot bonuses" and other incentives, including fuel cards and gift cards. The District also makes in-house training programs a priority, helping their staff to achieve state certifications.

Case Study Example: Gilt Edge, Tennessee

The Gilt Edge Volunteer Fire Department in Gilt Edge, Tennessee uses a variety of communications approaches to recruit and create positive awareness in the community regarding volunteer fire services. Social media, specifically Facebook, is integral for recruiting efforts.

Social media is also used to tell the department's story and to show the public what their volunteers are doing every day and at all hours. The department also uses social media and other positive reputation management tools, such as local news media, to foster a positive image of their department through word of mouth in the community. Finally, the Department also uses traditional mail, focusing on a recruiting message but also to support annual fundraising activities. By sending these letters to every address in the fire district, the Department has realized success for both recruiting and fundraising.

Case Study Example: Lewisville, North Carolina

In Lewisville, North Carolina, the Lewisville Fire Department focuses on development and improving the experience of its firefighters. The department has become more flexible with training/certification – volunteers can serve as firefighters, EMS, technical rescuers, support team members, or a combination. The Department has also formed partnerships with local schools and the state to create a vocational fire academy in the local high school, which certifies students to be firefighters and EMTs as a part of their curriculum. Finally, a greater focus has been placed on making volunteer time more meaningful – with the goal of shifting volunteers' motivations from one of obligation to one of enthusiasm to serve. As an example, the Department has shortened pre-training business meetings to only focus on noteworthy events/topics.

Case Study Example: Tennessee City, Tennessee

The Tennessee City Volunteer Fire Department in Dickson, Tennessee pursues a variety of issues to create community awareness. Facebook is used to provide information about calls and events. Information is also presented about the capabilities of the Department, including their swift water rescue and dive teams. The Department hosts an annual photo fundraiser that allows the public to visit and see the fire station. The Department regularly participates in community events, setting up a booth to help recruit volunteers. With respect to retention, the Department emphasizes events for the families of firefighters. The Department hosts numerous family events, including a Christmas dinner, a summer barbecue, and weekly dinners where volunteers and their families have a chance to visit and share a meal.

Resources for Technology

Many of the recruiting and retention tasks can and should be performed by fire department leadership and volunteers. However, it is understandable that some tasks, especially technology-based initiatives, such as website development/maintenance and social media outreach, can be daunting to many people. Fortunately, there will be willing participants among students in the community who can provide technical support, including those high schools and colleges. These

students may volunteer their time or may be able to satisfy academic requirements through paid or unpaid internships through which they provide social media content or website assistance. Further, the Indiana Office of Technology (IOT) provides free website design, support, and hosting services to Indiana local government agencies, with numerous features available that would be useful to the fire department recruiting options (IN.gov, 2024). Additional information and an application are available on the IOT website: <https://www.in.gov/inwp/local-government/local-government-website-design-and-hosting/>.

Survey Implementation and Design

The retention and recruitment strategy for Washington County fire departments will require robust, tangible data and insight into individual viewpoints to support next steps. Therefore, a short Qualtrics survey has been created to learn about the perspectives of volunteer or career firefighters at each of the fire departments within Washington County. The ad-hoc survey will consist of both structured and unstructured questions administered in an online format.

Survey Methodology

A qualitative and quantitative survey will be used to better understand the characteristics, interests, and perspectives around improving retention and recruitment initiatives among volunteer or career firefighters in Washington County. The survey will be conducted through the web-based Qualtrics analytics software. It contains a total of nine distinct questions with a blend of both multiple choice and open text responses. The survey will be used to collect timely responses across Washington County firefighter departments in an efficient manner, while remaining low-cost and accessible across a variety of electronic devices. The total time to complete the survey is approximately 8 to 10 minutes.

Most of the questions in the Qualtrics survey are qualitative in nature and may be used for both qualitative and quantitative analysis later. The selected survey questions were adapted from the National Volunteer Fire Council Retention Survey. Utilizing comparable questions from this national survey may allow for comparison to national data when available.

Moreover, a project partnership between Washington County and the Center for Rural Engagement (CRE) at Indiana University Bloomington may aid in administering the Qualtrics survey as well as analyzing the survey results for stakeholder presentations. CRE may aid in project planning and has extensive experience working with rural communities across Indiana. Additionally, CRE may help in identifying current community strengths and developing innovative ideas which best fit Washington County's needs.

Survey Implementation Schedule

Figure 18 depicts a sample survey implementation schedule. This schedule may be adapted to fit Washington County needs as the project progresses.

Survey Activity	Tasks	Owner	Notes
Initiate Project Partnership with Center for Rural Engagement (CRE)	Visit CRE website and select for project details Contact CRE via phone/email	TBD	
Pre-Survey Marketing	Identify date to administer survey	Washington County Leadership and Fire Department Chiefs	
Launch Survey	Confirm firefighters are available and in attendance	Washington County Firefighter Chiefs	
Survey Close after 7 Days	Close survey after 7 days	TBD	
Meet with CRE to Plan for Data Analysis and Review	Review results with CRE and discuss potential next steps	TBD	
Data Results Presented to Leadership Teams and Identified Stakeholders	Present results to interested leadership and stakeholders		

Figure 18: Washington County Firefighter Survey Implementation Schedule

Sample Survey Questions for Use

The official survey questions are documented in the appendix at the end of this report. Please see Appendix H.

Survey Next Steps

1. **Contact the Community for Rural Capacity Development.**
 1. Propose a project here: <https://rural.indiana.edu/resources/project-map.html>
 2. Email at: iucree@indiana.edu
 3. Call at: 812-855-0586
2. **Identify appropriate stakeholders for the survey portion of this project including:**

1. Confirm there is a complete list of all volunteer or career firefighters in Washington County
2. Confirm there is a complete list of fire chiefs who will aid in distribution, marketing, and administering of the survey
3. Identify community leaders and stakeholders who will be interested in the resulting survey data

Marketing Recommendations

Marketing is an important part in the implementation of these recommendations in Washington County. It is important that the community and the respective stakeholders are aware of these recommendations and how they will impact the community. Some recommendations to market these recommendations to the community include:

- Contact the Indiana Office of Technology (IOT) to create the website for firefighters for the purpose of recruitment and retainment.
- Utilize the website to update the community regarding fire events.
- Communicate with schools to build relationships and set up times for the firefighters to travel to the schools.
- Set up board meetings with Township Trustees to communicate funding changes such as the recent local tax change. See if the Trustees were aware of this recent change.
- Hold meetings within the community within a month of the creation of the website to discuss the new volunteer opportunities within the community.

The U.S. Fire Administration's *Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services* manual includes a section on making the case for support. This manual share that the NVFC Foundation and VFIS (Volunteer Fireman's Insurance Service Inc.) developed Fire and EMS Cost Savings Calculators. These tools allow departments to figure out how much money the department saves the community and provides resources for presenting data to the municipalities who fund the department [Cost Saving Calculators - National Volunteer Fire Council \(nvfc.org\)](http://www.nvfc.org). This manual also shares a number of examples from departments that have had success in marketing to their community and governmental bodies, three are copied below:

- The West Whiteland Fire Company (Exton, Pennsylvania) stresses that communications and transparency are key in building a strong relationship between the department and local government. "Being transparent has reaped the rewards over the years. We are in almost daily contact with the township management and meet monthly with the Board of Supervisors. Their tip for fire departments working with local governments: "Communicate, communicate!" The governing bodies will have to address the level of service. There should be no surprises.
- Mulvane (Kansas) Fire Rescue realizes that to maintain government support, they need to show the value of the department. "I use every chance I get to remind my city council and fire board that the money they save utilizing volunteers should be invested in having the best equipment possible, so our firefighters go home safe at the end of the call!"
- The Carlisle (Massachusetts) Fire Department emphasizes to local officials the better service that a dynamic staffing model allows. They also have become the go-to department for solving the town's logistical problems. They provide workforce and

services for things like building temporary buildings or doing COVID-19 testing for all the town's residents during the pandemic.

Marketing is a crucial tool to increase community involvement and increase stakeholder involvement in fire department issues. The recommendations above are necessary to make gainful strides in addressing some of the issues that the fire department is facing with coordination/ consolidation, funding, and volunteer-related issues.

Problem and Solution

Washington County representatives shared several objectives, which this report aims to address. The primary objective of this report is to improve fire services across Washington County. To reiterate, these objectives are:

- Increase efficiency of fire services.
- Expand community awareness.
- Increase and maintain recruitment and retention of both volunteer and career firefighters.
- Secure sustainable funding for fire services.
- Strengthen relationships amongst stakeholders in the community.

For each of these objectives, there are recommendations that can improve these problems in Washington County. There are three categories that have been identified in the report that have specific recommendations. Below are the three categories with each of their respective recommendations:

Coordination/Consolidation

The recommendations below are proposed solutions to addressing coordination and consolidation problems:

- Establish fire territories to incrementally consolidate fire services in Washington County
- An alternative solution is to create a fire district across Washington County
- Hire a County Fire Coordinator
- Engage in County Fire Coordination Strategic Planning

Funding

The recommendations below are proposed solutions to addressing funding issues. The recommendations are broken down by grant specific recommendations, low-cost fundraising recommendations, and local income tax related recommendations.

Implement the following grant specific recommendations:

- Utilize the Grant Database to identify appropriate grants for each fire department.
- Hire a professional grant writer particularly proficient in writing federal grant applications, so as not to limit your funding opportunities and to help in identifying the grant opportunities most appropriate for each department.
- Take grant writing courses offered to become better equipped to apply for smaller foundation grants available to volunteer departments.
- Utilize the logic model styling to help structure project proposals.

- Apply as a County either through the Washington County EMA, or with one department applying as the main grantee with additional districts listed as sub-grantees, with a contract explicitly detailing disbursement.
- Contact Indiana University Bloomington professors to utilize undergraduate and graduate student grant writers.

Implement the following low-cost fundraising recommendations:

- Adopt a fire station program.
- Engage in a door knock campaign.
- Engage in digital fundraising by creating an account on Donorbox and BetterWorld to begin leveraging crowdsourcing funds.

Implement the following local income tax revenue maximization recommendations:

- Reallocate existing local income tax revenues to utilize to fund and support fire services consistent with recent changes in legislation.

People

The recommendations below are proposed solutions to addressing the issue with volunteer related issues such as recruitment and retention:

- Implement a consolidated mentorship program across Washington County.
- Educate the Youth and the Community.
- Utilize already existing educational resources created by outside organizations.
- Meeting and recruiting candidates where they are in the community.
- Focus on the retention of the current team.

Each of these categories of problems: Consolidation/Coordination, Funding, and People have correlating solutions. The recommendations suggested also will contribute to reaching the primary and other objectives mentioned. These recommendations will improve fire services in Washington County.

Conclusion

After working closely with committed members of the Washington County government and community foundation to understand the needs and opportunities in fire services, O’Neill has provided a variety of recommendations to address the issues that the fire departments are facing. These recommendations can be sorted into three categories: Consolidation/Coordination, Funding, and People. All three of these categories are areas of improvement, which considered together will advance fire service efficacy. It is crucial to find additional funding sources for Washington County and coordinate between the townships regarding grants and strategic funding partners. A county-wide coordinator will help increase coordination and minimize missed opportunities within the county. Recruitment and retention methods can help better support the volunteer and career firefighters within Washington County. While these recommendations are supported by case studies and educational knowledge, the members of Washington County know their strengths and weaknesses best and can navigate the unique political landscape across townships. Washington County should utilize these recommendations and tailor them as needed to best suit county needs.

Appendices

Appendix A: Differences between Fire Territory and Fire District

	Fire Territory	Fire District
Purpose	Fire protection, fire prevention, or other similar purposes	Fire protection, fire prevention, or other similar purpose
Participation and formation	2 or more contiguous local governments	All townships in county or, one or more townships and parts of townships District is a separate unit of government from townships.
Expansion and mergers	Other local government units and fire protection districts can adopt legislation to join	Can merge with another district if they share at least 1/8 of boundaries and with county approval
Legislation required	Yes, by each local government participant Legislation must designate a provider and include boundaries, budget, participants, tax rates, and impacts on county taxes	County must approve legislation to form a district or a petition from residents of the proposed district. Municipalities must adopt legislation, or their property owners must petition to join a district
Public hearings required before formation	Yes, at least three public hearings must be held by each local government before a vote on legislation.	County may hold a hearing or introduce legislation
Petition to establish	No, local government participants must pass legislation	Residents may petition the county to establish a district, but county must approve
Service delivery	One government serves as designated provider that oversee services and determines the levy	District appoints staff to manage finances, administration, and reporting to county and state.
Funding authority	Uniform levy across territory or each unit determines its levy May also levy up to \$0.0333 per \$100 of assessed value and transfer up to 5 percent of surplus from general levy to equipment replacement fund	Bonds, debt, and uniform levy of all property in the district. Participants may not have their own levies.
Equipment replacement special levy	May levy up to \$0.0333 per \$100 of assessed value and transfer up to 5 percent of surplus from general levy	
Petitions	Not applicable	Submitted to the county and signed by 20 percent of property owners (500 signatures)

		<p>min.) or signed by majority of property owners in the district.</p> <p>Must include boundaries, district name and purposes, benefits and costs, and petition funding information.</p>
Dismissal of petitions	Not applicable	<p>Proponents' petition is dismissed if 51 percent of property owners in the district or owners of 2/3s of property owners sign a petition in opposition.</p> <p>Petitioners cannot submit a new petition for the same district for 2 years from the date of dismissal</p>
Governing board	Optional. Board represents participating units	<p>Required. Must have either a board or trustees with at least three members that represents all participating units or a 9-member county-wide governing board.</p> <p>Board members must have knowledge and experience in fire protection</p>
Disband departments upon formation	Only if participating unit adopts legislation	Only if participating unit adopts legislation and with district consent
Pays on-duty healthcare expenses of injured or ill firefighters	Yes	Yes

Appendix B: County Fire Coordinator Job Descriptions

Fire Coordinator jobs vary across the country. Some roles focus more on supporting volunteers while others focus more on training coordination and budget management.

Job Title	Job Description
<p>County Fire Coordinator</p> <p>Warren County, KY https://www.warrencountyky.gov/jobs/fire-coordinator/</p>	<p>Plan, organize, and assist the volunteer fire chiefs of Warren County including implementing systemwide programs within the fire services</p>
<p>Volunteer Fire Membership Coordinator</p> <p>Mariposa County, CA https://www.mariposacounty.org/DocumentCenter/View/2012/Vol-Fire-Membership-Coordinator?bidId=</p>	<p>Coordinate the recruitment and retention of volunteer membership and act as a liaison to volunteers in the Mariposa County fire department</p>
<p>Fire Coordinator</p> <p>Raleigh County, WV https://geebo.com/jobs-online</p>	<p>A Bachelor of Science in accounting is preferred along with knowledge of accounting and budget control practices</p>
<p>Fire Coordinator</p> <p>Broome County, NY https://www.gobroomecounty.com/sites/default/files/dept/R1039-FireCoord-rev102521.pdf</p>	<p>Responsible for planning and supervising county-wide program for fire training and mutual aid</p>
<p>Fire Coordinator</p> <p>Dutchess County, NY https://www.dutchessny.gov/DutchessCountyPublicAccess/ClassSpecifications/PDFProvider.aspx?action=PDF</p>	<p>Responsible for planning and supervising county-wide program for training and mutual aid including supervision of training instructors</p>

Appendix C: Key Data Points

Collecting the right data is crucial for successful grant applications. The chart below contains a list of key data points that are helpful for writing grants and fundraising activities. These data points should be used with storytelling to show the need.

Service Area Population and Geographic Information	
Geographic size	Size of the service area (in square miles)
Land use	Distribution of residential, commercial, and agricultural land in the service area
Terrain	Landscape of the area and its impact on response times and communications
Population	Total population of the service area (population density)
Population demographics	Breakdown of the service area population by age, income, race/ethnicity, etc. including vulnerable populations (elderly, children, low income)
Housing types	Distribution of single-family homes, apartment buildings, etc. in the service area
Volunteer Management	
Active volunteers	Total number of active volunteer firefighters
Volunteer recruitment	Number of new volunteers recruited
Volunteer retention	Number of volunteers retained
Volunteer hours	Total number of hours volunteered by firefighters
Volunteer demographics	Key statistics on volunteers including age, gender, occupation, etc.
Operational Effectiveness	
Emergency call volume	Total number of emergency calls to respond to
Average response time	Average time to respond to emergency calls
Joint operations	Number of joint operations with other public safety agencies and neighboring volunteer fire departments
Equipment requirements	Condition assessments and status of to-code and any shortage data
Equipment costs	Develop capital improvement plans that capture the long-term costs of equipment maintenance to capture total costs of services over relevant time periods
Certification & training requirements	Number of unique certifications/trainings per volunteer per year including average time and cost per volunteer for associated requirements
Community Impact	
Lives saved	Number of lives saved by the department
Property saved	Monetary value of property saved from fires
Community educational activities	Number of outreach activities including fire prevention training, carbon monoxide testing, and smoke detector testing conducted within the community
Financial Information	
Annual budget	Department's annual budget including revenue and expenditures and general operations, capital improvements, and personnel expenses funding gaps
Fundraising events	Number of fundraisers held, and total amount of funds raised
Donations	Number of and total amounts of donations received

Appendix D: Grants Database - Washington County Fire Departments

A comprehensive database has been created to assist Washington County Fire Departments in applying for funding. The database contains additional information than what is summarized in the tables below.

The resource may be reached at the following link:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1h-7-A_r7n6tyIR579vZJEFuEk5KIRyrxU4dfiSS6I0/edit?usp=sharing).

Grant Name and Detail	Grant URL
<p>First Responder Grant Application Grant Type: Foundation Grant Agency Name: Gary Sinise Foundation Amount: Unspecified</p>	<p>Gary Sinise Foundation Website: https://www.garysinisefoundation.org/first-responders-outreach</p>
<p>Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation Grant Type: Foundation Grant Agency Name: Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation Amount: \$15,000 - \$50,000</p>	<p>Firehouse Subs Website: https://grants.firehousesubs.com/</p>
<p>Walmart Spark Good Local Grants Program Grant Type: Foundation Grant Agency Name: Walmart Foundation Amount: \$5,000</p>	<p>Walmart Foundation Website: https://walmart.org/how-we-give/program-guidelines/spark-good-local-grants-guidelines</p>
<p>Lt. Joseph P. DiBernardo Memorial Foundation Grant Grant Type: Foundation Grant Agency Name: Lt. Joseph P. DiBernardo Memorial Foundation Amount: Max \$25,000 per year</p>	<p>Lt. Joseph P. DiBernardo Memorial Website: https://www.joeydfoundation.org/grants</p>
<p>The Kimball International - Habig Foundation Inc Grant Type: Foundation Grant Agency Name: The Kimball International - Habig Foundation Inc Amount: Unspecified</p>	<p>The Kimball International Website: www.kimballinternational.com/giving-spirit</p>
<p>Boren Foundation Inc. Grant Grant Type: Foundation Grant Agency Name: Boren Foundation Inc Amount: Unspecified, Up to \$50,000</p>	<p>The Boren Foundation Inc. Website: https://borenfoundation.org/</p>
<p>Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant Type: Government Grant Agency Name: FEMA Amount: Unspecified</p>	<p>SAFER Grant Website: https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/firefighthers/safer/documents</p>

<p>Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) Grant Type: Government Grant Agency Name: FEMA Amount: Unspecified</p>	<p>Assistance to Firefighters Grants Website: https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/firefighthers/assistance-grants</p>
<p>Fire Prevention and Safety Grants (FP&S) Grant Type: Government Grant Agency Name: FEMA Amount: Unspecified</p>	<p>FP & S Grant Website: https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/firefighthers/safety-awards</p>

Grant Consultants)	Resource URL
<p>Ohio First Responders Grants LLC Grant Consultant Contact Name: Mickey Smith, CEO Cell: (419) 566-1505 Email: Ohiofirstrespondergrants@gmail.com</p>	<p>Ohio First Responders Website: https://www.ohiofirstrespondergrants.com/</p>
<p>River Hills Economic Development Authority Grant Consultant Contact Name: Melissa Woods Phone: (812) 595-9071 Email: mwoods@riverhillscc</p>	<p>River Hills Website: https://riverhills.cc/</p>
<p>City Consultants and Research LLC Grant Consultant Contact Name: Alicia Vaughn Phone: (317) 744-5600 Cell: (317) 871-4626</p>	<p>City Consultants and Research Website: https://www.cityconsultantsllc.com/</p>

Grant Writing Training Courses	Resource URL
<p>District 13B Grant Writing Class - FREE Grant Writing Training Course Indiana Volunteer Firefighter Association and Everton Volunteer Fire Dept Email: info@ivfa.org</p>	<p>Course Website: https://ivfa.org/calendar/district-13b-grant-writing-class/</p>
<p>Rise Up Grant Writing Training Course Washington County Community Foundation Email: info@wccf.biz</p>	<p>Course Website: https://wccf.biz/rise-up</p>
<p>Grant Writing for the Fire and Emergency Services Grant Writing Training Course National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) Email: N/A</p>	<p>Course Website: https://www.nvfc.org/enhance-your-grant-writing-skills-with-free-training-and-resources/</p>

Grant Resource (I.U. Bloomington Student Grant Writers)	Resource URL
<p>Laura Littlepage, Clinical Professor at IU O’Neill School of Public Affairs Phone: (812) 855-5263 Email: llittlep@iu.edu</p>	<p>Background: Professor Laura Littlepage teaches grant writing courses to undergraduate students.</p>
<p>Jill Nicholson-Crotty, Associate Dean of Graduate Public Affairs and Policy Programs Phone: (812) 855-8406 Email: jillnich@iu.edu</p>	<p>Background: Professor Nicholson-Crotty teaches grant writing courses to graduate students.</p>

Grant Tools	Resource URL
<p>Community Tool Box</p> <p>This toolkit from the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas provides a comprehensive overview of logic models.</p>	<p>Website: https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/overview/models-for-community-health-and-development/logic-model-development/main</p>
<p>Logic Models: A Beginner’s Guide</p> <p>This guide provides an overview of logic models, explaining their purpose and includes step-by-step instructions for creating them.</p>	<p>Website: https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/leo/Folder20/Developing_a_Logic_Model_Guidex.pdf?rev=d4c120d3afc248e98404450806b4db30</p>
<p>National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) Cost Savings Calculators</p> <p>The NVFC Foundation and VFIS developed this cost savings calculator to help departments determine how much money their fire department saves their community.</p>	<p>Website: https://www.nvfc.org/cost-saving-calculators/</p>
<p>Grant Website with Databases of Federal Government Grant Opportunities</p> <p>Grants.gov provides a comprehensive database of federal grant opportunities across multiple agencies.</p>	<p>Website: https://grants.gov/</p>

Appendix E: Mentorship Program Information and Ivy Tech Firefighter Certificate Program

Education Resources	
Maryland Mentorship Program 26-page program that discusses how to create and implement a Mentorship Program	Website: https://marylandvolunteer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/MSFA-Mentorship-Program.pdf
Ivy Tech Fire Fighter Certificate Program Course lists of the Fire Fighter Certificate Program at Ivy Tech locations across Indiana	Website: https://catalog.ivytech.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=1&poid=185&returnto=11

Appendix F: Recruitment and Retention Management Plan

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PLAN FOR _____ FIRE/EMS COMPANY

Date: xx/xx/xxxx

The U.S. Fire Administration reports that “recruitment and retention are the cornerstone of any volunteer fire or emergency medical services (EMS) department. Without proper staffing, fire and EMS departments cannot provide the services and protection their communities need. It is critical that volunteer departments have the necessary tools, information and support to assist in their efforts to recruit and retain volunteers.”

This chart provides options to assist in retention and recruitment is adaptable based on the needs and available resources of the department.

Activity	Timing Month/ Year	Resources Needed	Owner(s)	Status
Implement recruitment/retention survey with Center for Rural Engagement (CRE)				
Conduct SWOT analysis/identify strengths and challenges/set goals				
Revise recruitment plan				
Create or update volunteer recognition and benefit plan				
Develop budget for recruitment and retention plan				
Youth recruitment				

Contact school administrators and plan for outreach events: career fair				
Contact school administrators and plan for outreach events: fire education and safety program				
Start or manage Explorer, junior firefighter and cadet program				
Contact vocational or technical schools to partner or start fire and EMS certification programs				
Explore student resident program for college students in exchange for volunteering				
Plan for outreach at PTO/PTA meetings				
Community outreach				
Plan for outreach to new community members through Chamber of Commerce, local realtors, etc.				
Plan for door-to-door events for home fire safety inspections, fundraising or other outreach to also include volunteer recruitment				

Provide an incentive for current members to recruit new members from personal contacts				
Plan for presentations at civic organizations (Knights of Columbus, Rotary Club, etc.)				
Contact local churches and plan outreach or fire prevention activities				
Contact Parks and Recreation Department to reach people who are physically active and might be good recruits				
Attend fitness events or challenges such as 5K runs				
Attend key events such as county fairs or festivals				
Contact local business and partner to recruit employees (it would benefit the company to have trained personnel on site and they may allow for flexible work time)				
Specialized volunteers				
Outreach to military bases and veterans groups				

Outreach to utility companies and local government employees who can provide special assistance in areas of expertise				
Volunteers trained in disaster (Medical Reserve Corps, Red Cross, Community Emergency Response Teams)				
Other				

Appendix G: Sample Volunteer Descriptions for Non-Operational Volunteers

A sample volunteer description for the social media intern would be:

Washington County is seeking a volunteer (unpaid) Social Media Intern that can help with the following duties:

- Create a variety of posts via social media and post to the utilized platforms of the department
- Coordinate with the State IT Department to send updated photographs for the Washington County website
- Coordinate with Community Outreach volunteers to communicate fire department events to the public via social media

The individual could be a high school or college student. This internship could be completed for needed voluntary hours for school or could be used for a required internship for school.

A similar description could be created for the Volunteer (unpaid) Administrative Assistant, Firehouse Organization and Inventory Volunteer (unpaid), and the Volunteer (unpaid) Community Outreach Assistant.

A sample volunteer description for the Administrative Assistant would be:

Washington County is seeking a volunteer (unpaid) Administrative Assistant that can help with the following duties:

- Assist with billing for each fire department such as electric bill, water bill and other necessary bills.
- Assist with necessary accounting paperwork such as budgeting.
- Works closely with Fire Chief to complete necessary paperwork for the department.

Appendix H: Survey to Distribute to Firefighters for Recruitment and Retention

Retention & Recruitment Survey for Washington County Volunteer Firefighters - 2024

Introduction: The purpose of this survey is to collect feedback on retention and satisfaction for both volunteer or career firefighters in Washington County. Your feedback will be used to help us improve firefighter experiences in Washington county. We value your input as a firefighter in Washington County. Your responses will remain anonymous. It will take only 8 to 10 minutes.

Multiple Choice #1 Which of the following best describes the fire department you are associated with?

- Career-only department
- Volunteer-only department
- Combination department

Multiple Choice #2 Are you currently an active firefighter?

- Yes, I am active
- No, I am not active
- No, but I am in training
- Other _____

What made you want to join the fire department?

What might recruit more volunteers or career firefighters to the department?

Multiple Choice #3 Which of the options below best describes your primary role with your current department, or most recent department if you are no longer in the fire service? Check all options that best apply.

- Chief/Deputy Chief
- Assistant Chief
- Line Officer (Captain, Lt., Sgt.)
- Safety Officer
- Training Officer
- Volunteer Firefighter
- Volunteer Firefighter/EMS Provider

Multiple Choice #4 How did you learn about the opportunity to become a volunteer or career firefighter?

- I searched for volunteer opportunities in my community.
- I saw an advertisement somewhere in person.
- I saw an advertisement online.
- I had a family member who was a fire service volunteer.
- I had a friend who was a fire service volunteer.
- Someone invited me to join the department.
- Other _____

Multiple Choice #5 How long have you been at your current department?

- Less than a year
- 1 to 2 years
- 3 to 4 years
- 5 to 6 years
- 7 to 10 years
- 11 to 19 years
- 20 years or more

Multiple Choice #6 How much would you say these factors contribute to volunteer or career firefighters leaving or considering leaving the fire department?

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal	Not Sure
Unclear expectations about time, effort, or duties						
Lack of scheduling flexibility						
Training responsibilities are too much of a commitment						
Few opportunities for professional development or advancement						
Lack of camaraderie or social inclusion						
Life changes outside of the department						
Poor health and well-being						
Other						

Multiple Choice #7 How much would the activities below improve retention for volunteer or career firefighters in your department?

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal	Not Sure
Support new volunteers with mentorship and guidance						
Break up social cliques by assigning members of various backgrounds and ages to work together in groups and other projects						
Give more awards and recognition to mark achievement or service milestones						
Set up an anonymous feedback comment box						
Create opportunities for families to be involved with the						

firefighter
experience

Building a
training
calendar with
more
flexibility

Improving
management
skills of
department
leadership

Offer
leadership
development
courses for
rising
volunteers
and career
firefighters

Conducting
interviews to
understand
those who
may be
leaving or
will leave

Offer virtual
training when
possible in
place of
training in a
classroom

Offer "micro-volunteering" for those who are unable to commit to traditional volunteer time schedules
(Example: 1 day or 1 week a month)

Initiatives which focus on improving health and well-being

Other

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