

JOHNSON
Cornell University

Tompkins County Fire Dept Volunteer Revival Project *Overview*

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Project Overview

The Department of Emergency has contacted the Cornell Johnson MBA program to help with a project around improving TCFD volunteerism.

Project Overview

Work with Tomkins County Fire Departments to identify root causes behind declining volunteerism and define a roadmap of initiatives to revive the ability to attract and retain volunteers.

Desired Outcomes

- Strategic roadmap on how to further increase volunteerism in the future
- Increased TCFD ability to attract new volunteers
- Increased TCFD ability to retain volunteers
- Ability to populate grant applications with information
- Pipeline for future MBA projects

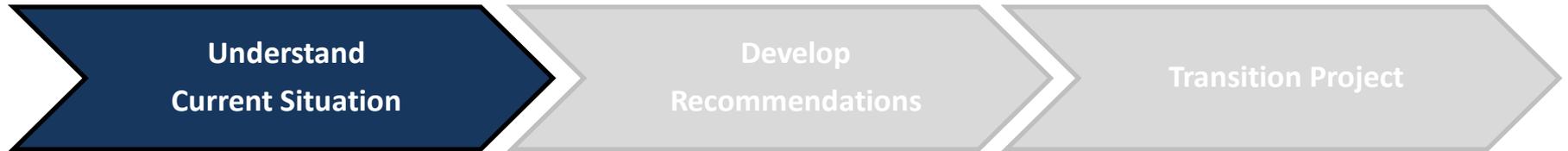
Deliverables

- Current root causes of declining volunteerism
- Raw data and survey results
- Proposed and prioritized solutions
- Description of solutions including
 - Overview
 - Detailed implementation steps
 - High-level cost estimates



Project Approach

Thus far, we have researched the current situation and are now beginning to develop recommendations for the TCFD departments to implement.



Understand Current Situation

- Analyze current TC call data
- Research national FD volunteer trends
- Conduct initial volunteer survey
- Conduct key interviews
- Document underlying issues

Develop Recommendations

- Define volunteer solutions
- Prioritize solutions
- Develop detailed descriptions of solutions including
 - Overview
 - Detailed implementation steps
 - High-Level cost estimates
- Develop solution timeline

Transition Project

- Determine which solutions MBA teams will help implement
- Identify incoming MBA project team
- Prep on project progress
- Introduce new team to client team



Survey Overview: Quotes

There were some general trends that stood out when reviewing the survey open-ended questions.

On biggest challenge to volunteering: ***“Justifying training to family”***

On recruitment: ***“Recruiting more women should be a priority and once they join, actually including them in firefighting activities vs. auxiliary, fundraising activities would help”***

On recruitment: ***“We have found that “junior fire academics” with 8-12, 12-16 year olds have brought new members in when they turned 18”***

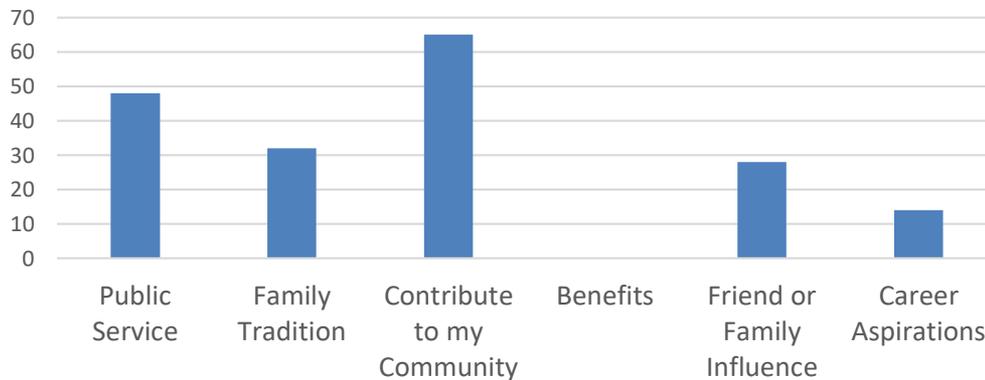
On challenges while joining: ***“getting to know people”; “social integration into group”***



Survey Overview: Summary Data (n=101)

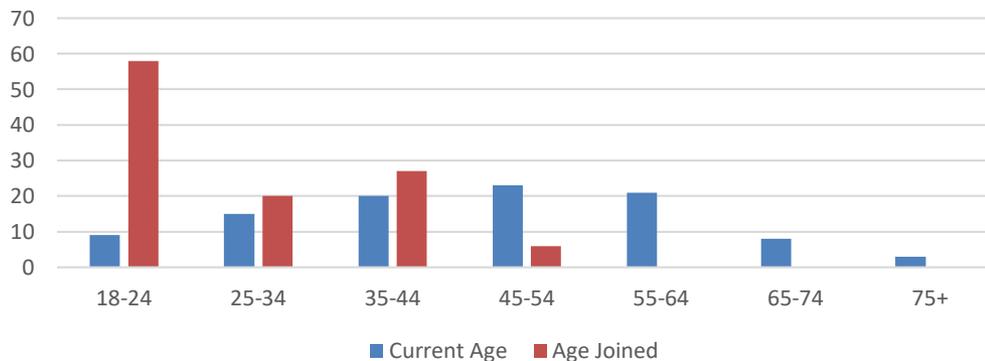
Many volunteers joined to give back to the community and none for benefits, and 18-24 seems to be the best age to target volunteers but retention has been an issue.

Reason for Joining



- Members join to give back to community
- Members with career aspirations skew younger and join before 24

Age Breakdown of Current Members



- Predominantly 34-65 y/o males
- >50% of current members joined before they were 25 y/o

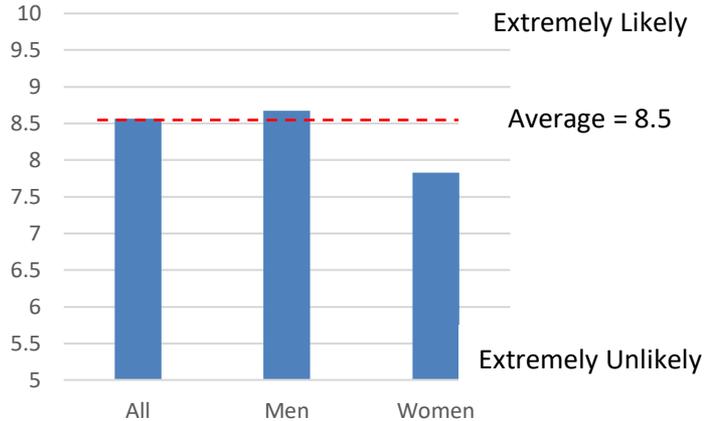
- Leading indicator that recruitment is insufficient to backfill loss of volunteers



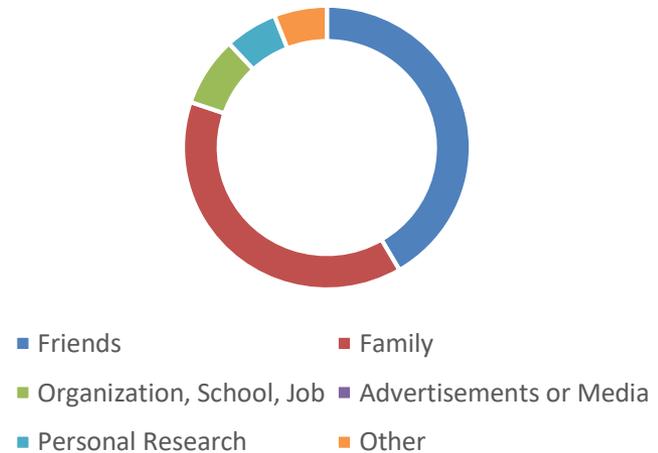
Survey Overview: Summary Data (n=101)

Most volunteers learned about the opportunity through friends or family and would recommend their department, suggesting referrals may be highly valuable for recruiting.

Willingness to Recommend
(out of 10)



How Members Learned About Opportunity



- Majority (79%) of members learned about opportunities through friends or family and are willing to recommend volunteering to a friend or colleague
 - Significant opportunity to use current members to recruit new volunteers
- Women are less likely than men to recommend their department to friends or colleagues. Evidence in comments section that women do not feel included
- Not 1 member learned about the opportunity through advertisements or media efforts



Interview Assessment: Problem Areas

Many of the issues with volunteerism seem to stem from the area of participation and retention rather than initial recruiting.

Recruiting

- Limited to no incentives are provided by the department
- Recruiting initiatives “dying”
- Candidates lose interest because it is difficult to find information or no one follows up
- Measuring success of different initiatives is difficult
- Burden of finding new candidates large for local departments

Participation

- High level of time commitment required
- Preference for certain types of calls
- Limited to no incentives to motivate participation
- Increase in the number of calls, mostly non-incidents
- Changes in the workforce have limited time for volunteering
- Shift requirements not effectively leveraging volunteer time

Retention

- Heavy department-required training
- Disagreements with stagnant management teams
- Heavy labor involved
- New joiners are not adequately welcomed into the team
- Unpredictable hours
- Comradery / community element has declined
- Inclusion issues for minority groups