



# Virginia Volunteer Workforce Solutions Phase 2 Final Report

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# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Building on the success of Phase 1 of the Volunteer Workforce Solutions (VWS) program, the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association (VFCA), in partnership with the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), implemented Phase 2 of the VWS program throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia from October 6, 2012 through April 5, 2015. This was funded by a FY 2011 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grant through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency. The VFCA and the IAFC also worked with George Mason University (GMU), and the Environmental Systems Research Institute (Esri) to execute this program.

The goal of the VWS program was to provide recruitment, retention, and leadership support statewide in order to increase the number of volunteer firefighters and improve community preparedness. A multi-faceted approach was taken to achieve this goal:

- Recruitment and retention resources were made available on the [www.everydayherova.org](http://www.everydayherova.org) website. This website included a toolkit of templates and guidance created by the VWS program for the on-boarding process of new volunteers. Sample recruitment campaign marketing materials and videos were also posted. Helpful links to other websites and their resources were also on the VWS website. The website has had over 3,000 visits.
- The VWS program conducted 17 training workshops/conferences totaling nearly 30,000 training hours with over 4,000 attendees throughout Virginia. Topics focused on leadership, recruitment, and retention. See section 4.3 for more information.
- An online statewide survey was distributed to capture more data on the issues surrounding recruitment, retention, training, and leadership. The survey had 1,404 respondents representing 90% of all jurisdictions in Virginia. See section 4.2 for a summary of the survey results.
- While much of the VWS program benefited the entire state, there were also fourteen departments selected to receive additional and more specific assistance. These departments were given Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Tapestry Reports full of community lifestyle and marketing data to help better tailor and target their volunteer recruitment campaigns (a sample Tapestry Report is included in Appendix A). In addition, these departments received customized recruitment materials such as banners, posters, and brochures to advertise the need for volunteer firefighters in their communities. Scholarships were given to the VWS departments to attend the excellent educational classes at the VFCA's Fire and Rescue Conference each year.

Key results and findings from Phase 2 of the VWS program are listed below.

- The participating 14 departments reported the following results through the online Volunteer Management System reporting tool.
  - 1,117 membership applications were received
  - 1,163 volunteer interest forms were received
  - 656 new members joined the participating departments

- 1,833 recruitment and retention events were conducted including public safety days, fundraising events, school visits, open houses, fire station events, classes, etc.
- Approximately 300 media contacts throughout the state
- Over 78,000 campaign marketing materials were distributed
- 6,427 social media updates were completed by departments
- A net gain of 365 new volunteers

(Note: These numbers differ slightly than the ones in GMU’s final analytical report because some departments submitted additional data after the close of the data collection period.)

- Core and development population segments were identified for each department to target and focus their recruitment efforts. By the end of the data collection period, 202 new “core” segment adults were recruited as volunteer firefighters in the 14 participating departments. In addition, 145 new “developmental” segment adults were recruited. Penetration rates in the core and development areas increased over the campaign as well. (See section 2.3 for more information on the GIS terms. Appendix B contains Esri’s Post Analysis Report.)
- Summer had the highest recruitment activities during Phase 2.
- Fall had the second highest recruitment activities during Phase 2.
- According to the interest forms received, the top three motivations to join were service to the community, EMS response, and fire response.
- The top three primary occupations listed on the interest forms were student, health care, and unemployed.
- The interest forms collected showed an almost equal split between “active” versus “passive” methods that informed the public about volunteer opportunities. Passive methods include word of mouth, referrals, reputation, proximity to station, etc. while active methods include events, media, website and social media activity, etc.
- According to the Phase 2 online survey, the top five perceived reasons why people left the fire service were: life change, time commitment, station/department politics, lack of leadership, and retirement.
- Leadership training was identified as the highest training need according to the online survey.
- Communication was the leading area in need of improvement according to the online survey.
- Based on VWS Phase 1 and 2, findings show that GIS is a helpful tool for volunteer firefighter recruitment because it helps departments customize and better target their recruitment efforts. However, the key to successful recruitment is to “make the ask” and talk to people about becoming volunteers. GIS Tapestry data can help identify the types of people departments should target and the best places to meet the target audience.
- Current volunteer members can be a department’s biggest asset for recruiting. Departments should ensure that all members know how to communicate and sell the benefits of volunteering and be sure that they properly represent the department at all times.
- Recruitment is an ongoing process and steady recruitment efforts will lead to the best results. Departments don’t need to execute big events each month, but doing a little each month makes a difference. There are several other ways to recruit volunteers including speaking at schools or other civic organization meetings, partnering with local businesses to hand out recruitment

brochures, talking to the media about recruitment needs, offering ride-alongs, and inviting people to open houses, etc.

- Creating a recruitment plan and referencing it on a continuing basis is important. Having a person or committee that takes the lead and is responsible for the department's recruitment activities is imperative.

In summary, the VWS program provided customized tools, resources, templates, marketing materials, press releases, and training programs to help recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. Overall, by utilizing this multi-faceted approach, the VWS Phase 2 was successful in recruiting, retaining, and training volunteer firefighters throughout Virginia.

## 2 BACKGROUND

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### 2.1 STATEWIDE NEED

In Virginia, about 62% of firefighters are volunteers. Each year the Virginia Department of Fire Programs compiles a "Virginia Fire Service Needs Assessment" that documents the critical needs of fire departments statewide. For the past few years the top needs identified by departments have been additional personnel and training. Over 70% of fire departments indicated they need more volunteer firefighters. Most departments also stated that they have no formal type of recruitment or retention programs. Hence, the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association decided to help solve these issues by implementing the Volunteer Workforce Solutions program with the goal of improving volunteer recruitment and retention while also providing much needed and beneficial training.

### 2.2 PHASE 1 OF VOLUNTEER WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

Initially, the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association was awarded a 2009 SAFER recruitment and retention grant to study traditional recruiting methodologies as compared to Geographic Information systems (GIS) based methodologies. Twenty departments participated in Phase 1 of the VWS program which lasted from December 2010 through December 2012. During this period, several leadership workshops were delivered throughout Virginia and received very positive feedback. Overall, Phase 1 saw great results and the final Phase 1 report is available at [www.everydayherova.org](http://www.everydayherova.org) and on the VFCA's website. During Phase 1 of the VWS Program, GIS was found to be a useful tool for volunteer recruitment, therefore, the VFCA applied for and was awarded a SAFER grant in 2011 which became known as the VWS Program, Phase 2. The goal of the VWS Phase 2 program was to identify and assist additional Virginia communities in their recruitment efforts by using GIS data and also by conducting leadership, recruitment, and retention training workshops statewide. Phase 2 of the VWS program ran from October 6, 2012 until April 5, 2015.

### 2.3 WHAT IS GIS AND HOW IS IT USED IN THE PROGRAM?

As the number of prospective volunteer firefighters decreases, the fire service is forced to identify and implement new recruitment and retention tools. The VFCA and the IAFC identified that new methods were needed to better recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. The VFCA and the IAFC hypothesized that using GIS technology and applications could be one avenue to more effectively locate and recruit

future firefighters. The basic theory was to use intelligent demographic and geographic data to recruit firefighters by:

- Holding recruitment functions in locations where desired candidates congregate
- Highlighting the aspects of service that appeal directly to potential firefighters in a specific area
- Directing advertising with the right message to the right audience at the right location
- Targeting direct mail or door-to-door canvassing in the areas where the most responsive recipients live
- Understanding the characteristics of a community's target (ideal) firefighters
- Analyzing the lifestyle characteristics of firefighters
- Determining where ideal and desired firefighters live
- Discovering the untapped potential recruits in specific areas
- Developing strategies to encourage firefighter candidates to join

To determine if GIS would enhance recruitment, an experiment needed to be conducted to compare GIS recruitment activities against more traditional recruitment activities. GIS is defined as a system of hardware, software, and procedures designed to support the capture, management, manipulation, analysis, modeling and display of spatially-referenced data for solving complex planning and management problems. Traditionally, most GIS systems have processed geographic and demographic data. In addition to geographic and demographic information, Esri's systems utilize business data, consumer expenditure surveys, retail market place data, and consumer survey data.

As part of the VWS Program, Esri geocoded the addresses of all active firefighters for each participating department into their software programs in order to identify the specific Tapestry Segments in which the firefighters reside. Esri's Tapestry Segmentation model provides its users a tool to understand the lifestyles and life stages of consumers within a market or region. Tapestry Segmentation classifies U.S. residential neighborhoods into 65 unique market segments based on socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. Tapestry Segmentation uses the notion that most volunteer firefighters have similar backgrounds and that people are attracted by similar tastes, need for security, peer identify, and a sense of place. After researching a volunteer's demographic and personal composition, they are placed within one of the 65 Tapestry Segments. Once the target audience and Tapestry Segmentation are understood, recruitment activities can be performed within the identified segments.

A "core segment" consists of a segment that makes up a large percentage of a community's current firefighter pool. In a core segment, firefighters make up a larger percentage of the workforce than the percentage of firefighters making up the community as a whole. Core segments represent a good opportunity to recruit more of the same types of firefighters that currently make up the workforce. A "developmental segment" not only represents a significant portion of the current workforce, but also represents areas with households that have not yet been reached to volunteer. The "developmental segment" represents new potential for recruiting additional volunteer firefighters.

Esri Tapestry Segmentation also provides its users with information related to market trends or market potential characteristics. Market potential characteristics help departments create a unique recruitment strategy and gives them the knowledge needed to craft successful marketing messages. In addition, media preferences are included in the Tapestry Reports which provides information on the best way for departments to reach their target segments.

### 3 PROCESS

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After being notified of its VWS Phase 2 award, the VFCA advertised the availability of additional recruitment and retention assistance to all Virginia fire departments. This outreach was done through e-blasts, press releases, social media, and presentations at meetings/conferences. Expectations and benefits of the program were clearly outlined and communicated from the start. The VFCA received many applications for program participation and after reviewing those applications and conducting phone interviews, fourteen departments were selected to participate. The selected departments were:

- Albemarle County Fire Rescue
- Botetourt County Emergency Services
- Clarke County Fire and Rescue Association
- County of Orange Fire and EMS
- Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department
- Fairfax Volunteer Fire Department (City of Fairfax)
- Franklin Fire and Rescue/Hunterdale Volunteer Fire Department (City of Franklin)
- Hampton Fire and Rescue
- Henry County Department of Public Safety/Martinsville Fire and EMS
- Leesburg Volunteer Fire Company
- Manassas Volunteer Fire Company
- New Kent Fire-Rescue
- Purcellville Volunteer Fire Company
- Shenandoah County Department of Fire and Rescue

The departments were then required to sign memorandums of understanding agreeing to fully participate in the program. An orientation webinar was conducted with the VWS departments to review the program timeline, goals, tasks, and deliverables. Departments provided their contact information and logos for the recruitment campaign marketing materials. They also compiled the addresses of their current firefighters for the GIS analysis and Tapestry Reports.

A live data kick-off meeting was held on June 8, 2013 in Henrico County. All fourteen departments sent representatives and approximately 80 people attended the meeting. ESRI and GMU representatives also attended and presented to the group. Departments learned how to read and interpret their GIS Tapestry Reports and had time to create 12-month recruitment plans based on the Tapestry Report data. They also learned how to use the online data collection system to track their recruitment and retention results. At the meeting, departments were also presented with their customized campaign marketing materials which included:

- Tri-fold brochures and holders
- Postcards with magnets
- Banners
- Banner stands
- Buckslips
- Posters
- Table top sign with easel back

- Full and half page ads
- Website banners
- Pens

After the kick-off meeting, departments had several weeks to finalize and submit their 12-month customized recruitment plans to the VWS program staff.

From July 2013 through June 2014, departments were required to implement their plans and regularly submit recruitment and retention data into the online Volunteer Management System. Appendix C contains the “How-To Guide” outlining how the system works and type of data collected. On a monthly basis, departments reported how many recruitment/retention events they conducted, how many marketing materials they distributed, the number of media interactions, social media updates and website visits, new applications and interest forms, new members, etc. They also submitted details on special events and media activities as they occurred throughout the program. This data was then compiled and analyzed by program staff and GMU to measure the program’s effectiveness. Section 4.1 contains additional information on this topic.

Departments were given a model press release to customize and announce the official start of their new volunteer recruitment campaigns. Most departments distributed these press releases to their local media outlets. Sample articles resulting from these press releases are included in Appendix D.

As departments implemented their customized recruitment campaigns, the VWS staff provided assistance and guidance to support them. Through conversations with departments and validation from the online survey reports, the VWS staff decided to conduct several recruitment, retention, and leadership workshops to address identified needs and deficiencies. Additional information can be found in section 4.3 of this report.

## 4 RESULTS

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This section discusses the programmatic results related to the online recruitment data captured through the Volunteer Management System, the online survey, and the various training sessions conducted throughout Virginia.

### 4.1 RECRUITMENT RESULTS

The participating 14 departments reported the following results through the online Volunteer Management System reporting tool. (Note: These numbers differ slightly than the numbers contained in the GMU report because several departments submitted additional data after the close of the data collection period.)

- 1,117 membership applications were received
- 1,163 volunteer interest forms were received
- 656 new members joined the departments
- 1,833 recruitment and retention events were conducted including public safety days, fundraising events, school visits, open houses, fire station events, classes, etc.
- Approximately 300 media contacts were made throughout the state during the program

- Over 78,000 campaign marketing materials were distributed
- Nearly 6,427 social media updates were completed by the departments

GMU was contracted to perform a thorough analysis of all collected recruitment data. Appendix E contains a very detailed analytical report compiled and prepared by GMU staff. Below are several important and relevant findings as identified by GMU staff and as reported in the executive summary of the standalone GMU report, entitled *VFCA Recruitment Activity Analysis Report - Phase II*. Again, it is important to note that several departments submitted additional data after the close of the data collection period so the numbers may vary slightly. The findings show:

- The study included 570,879 recruitment/retention activities, 1,037 applications, and 634 new members.
- Even with 269 resignations during the study period, the VWS Phase 2 net gain was 365 new volunteers. All of the departments, with the exception of one, had positive net gains of members.
- The activity breakdown included 1,790 events, 256 media contacts, 78,423 promotional materials, and 490,410 social media contacts.
- With a higher response rate on a monthly basis, the relationship between the reported online interest activity and the seven variables (recruitment events, safety events, media BY the department, banners, brochures/buckslips, magnets/pens, and posters) tested to be significant. On a departmental basis, three different variables (courses/classes, fundraising and leadership/retention), along with safety events, had statistically significant relationships.
- Within the VWS Phase 2 study, website visits was the greatest level of activity. Comparatively, in VWS Phase 1, promotional materials had the greatest level of activity.
- On a departmental basis, 57% of the departments favored fire station and fundraising events. Within the promotional materials group, almost 80% of the departments concentrated their efforts on the distribution of brochures/buckslips and direct mail. Two other departments favored magnets/pens, and one preferred store/business displays. With social media TO the departments, the departments were split between Facebook – fans/likes and websites – and new visits.
- On a monthly basis, the leading activities included fundraising, media BY the department, direct mail, brochures/buckslips, websites – new visits, and Twitter – tweets.
- Seasonally, summer had the highest recruitment total (28%) with fall (27%) running a close second - which is comparable to the 59% combined total for VWS Phase 1. In VWS Phase 2, September had the lowest recruitment monthly total (compared with December in VWS Phase 1). The initial start of the data collection period for both phases, which was immediately after the data kickoff meeting, experienced the highest level of recruitment activity. This theme was prevalent during both VWS Phase 1 and 2 and can be attributed to the higher energy levels and initial commitment to the VWS program and recruitment efforts of the 14 jurisdictions. The VWS Phase 1 started in the fall and Phase 2 started in the summer, and subsequently, these periods demonstrated the highest level of recruitment activity by the jurisdictions.
- Service to the Community (25%), EMS Response (18%), and Fire Response (10%) were the top-three motivators on the Interest Forms, which were also the same in VWS Phase 1. Overall, the

top-five responses accounted for 65% of the listed motivating factors (Career Experience (6%) and Personal Fulfillment (6%)), which is slightly higher than the top-five motivators from VWS Phase 1 (60%).

- The top-three primary occupations on the Interest Forms, which accounted for 31% of the responses, include Student, Health Care, and Unemployed (which compare to Student, Health Care, and the Military with over 50% of the VWS Phase 1 responses).
- Similar to VWS Phase 1, related to social media usage, the findings in Phase 2 indicated that 18% of respondents use Twitter and 39% thought it was a good idea to use Twitter as a recruiting tool.
- Overall, with nearly equal percentages of responses on the Interest Forms, “passive” reasons such as referrals, proximity, reputation, memberships, and word of mouth (WOM) accounted for 40% of the responses for Learning about the Fire Service. “Active” reasons such as events, displays, banners, media, and website (social media) activities accounted for a slightly smaller percentage of responses (39%). With the addition of a combination of “active” and “passive” choices for this phase, the results were similar to the VWS Phase 1 study.
- Overall, due to the increase in reporting between Phase 1 and Phase 2, it appears that departments prefer to report activity through the online Volunteer Management System instead of the manual tabulation forms used in Phase 1.

In addition to the data analysis performed by GMU staff, the Esri staff also identified several noteworthy findings. To collect data, Esri used paper based interest forms to gather the addresses of new recruits to determine changes in penetration rates in the core and developmental areas as identified in each department’s Tapestry Reports. The data showed that 202 new “core” segment adults were recruited as volunteer firefighters in the 14 participating departments. In addition, 145 new “developmental” segment adults were recruited. Penetration rates in the core and development areas increased over the campaign as well. Appendix B contains additional information related to Esri’s Post Analysis.

## 4.2 ONLINE SURVEY

An online firefighter survey was conducted in Phase 1 of the VWS program, and one goal of the VWS program Phase 2 was to modify the survey and gather more specific information related to findings of the initial Phase 1 survey. GMU assisted with the survey development to assure proper survey methodologies were used. After the survey was implemented and the data was gathered, GMU staff analyzed the survey data and produced a detailed statistical report. It should be noted that the term “firefighter” in this instance relates to all ranks within the fire service. A summary of the VWS Phase 2 survey results is shown below and the full survey analysis can be found in Appendix F. The words in quotes below represent the answer choices/categories as listed on the survey.

- 1,404 firefighters responded to the survey. Of the 1404 respondents, 687 were volunteers, 514 were career, and 203 indicated they were both volunteer and career.
- Referrals accounted for 66% of the “Reasons for Joining” the fire service.
- 38% of the “Initial Motivations” continued to motivate firefighters later in their careers.
- The two highest choices for effective recruitment tools by all respondent groups were “Firefighter Referral” and “Word of Mouth.”

- Firefighter opinions regarding effective retention strategies varied significantly by firefighter type. Career firefighters considered “Retirement/Pension,” “Training,” “Healthcare,” and “Continuing Education” to be of primary importance. Volunteer firefighters were more concerned with “Training,” “Annual Banquet,” “Awards,” “Uniforms,” and similar shorter-term perks.
- The five highest perceived reasons why firefighters left the service were “Life Change,” “Time Commitment,” “Station/Department Politics,” “Retired,” and “Lack of Leadership.”
- All firefighter groups listed “Communication” as the leading area in need of improvement. Additionally, volunteer firefighters noted that “Recruitment” and “Retention” are other areas in need of improvement, whereas career firefighters identified “Leadership” and “Motivating Personnel” as other concerns.
- “Leadership” was the subject matter identified as being the most needed type of training.
- Firefighters with fewer years of service learned about the fire service more frequently than expected via Websites/Email/Internet/Brochures/Flyers and less frequently via Family/Friends/Word of Mouth/Community Events, especially when compared to other firefighters having longer tenures.
- Although the survey results indicated a wide variety of associations between “Years in Service” and “Areas in Need of Improvement,” a few significant trends emerged.
  - Firefighters with fewer years of service were more likely to state that no areas need improvement.
  - As firefighter tenure increased, “Succession Planning,” “Motivating Personnel,” “Leadership,” and “Retention” became important areas identified as needing improvement.
  - Firefighters with the most tenure did not identify a need to improve “Communication,” while all others with fewer years of service identified “Communication” as a need for improvement.
- There weren’t as many firefighters with less than 10 years experience overall. Within the group that had less than 10 years experience, there was a significant number whose primary occupation was student, healthcare, EMS, or unemployed (higher than other experience levels). Initially, firefighters in the 0-9-year experience group identified “Personal Fulfillment,” “Career Experience,” “EMS Response,” and “Service to my Community,” as motivational factors or reasons why they joined the fire service. However, these motivational factors changed as the years of experience increased in value, especially for those with career experience. The most tenured firefighters had higher than expected values for “Service to my Community,” and “Fire Response,” but as their service levels increased, motivational factors switched to “Personal Fulfillment” and “Administrative Duties”— which corroborated the findings from VWS Phase 1 results.
- Overall, the “Reasons for Others Leaving the Fire Service” had the most disparity between the “Years in Service” cohort groups.
- Firefighters with fewer years of service considered “Station Politics” and “Fitting In” as reasons why personnel leave the fire service. Firefighters with more years of service believed that

personnel left due to the “Time Commitment” necessary to volunteer and because they “Couldn’t Meet Training” requirements.

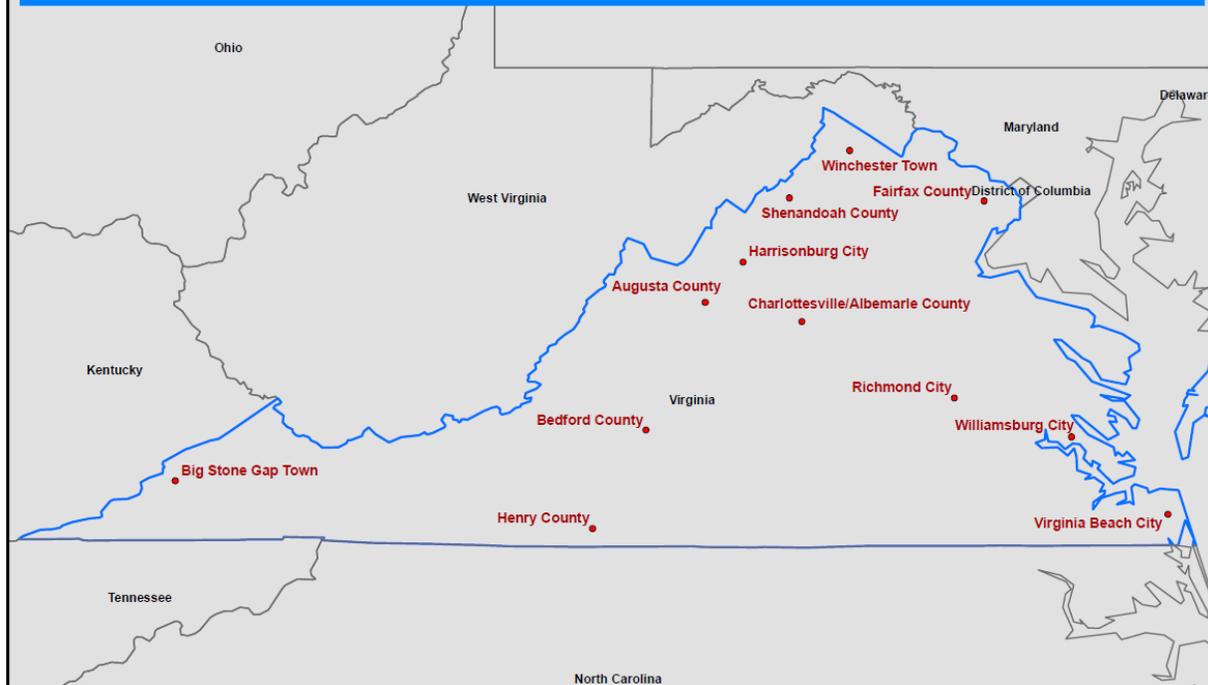
- In the correlation analysis, the groups with the least and most seniority had polar opposite results for eight of the twelve leading reasons related to why personnel leave the fire service.
- Among the ranks of firefighters, “Chiefs” and “Other” did not have concerns with leadership, but “Chief Officer,” “Company Officer,” and “Firefighters” had higher than expected levels of concern related to “Leadership Issues.”

### 4.3 RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND LEADERSHIP TRAININGS

Based on the results from the online statewide firefighter survey and feedback from the 14 VWS departments, the VFCA found expert instructors to deliver training focused on recruitment, retention, leadership, and other subject matter. The VFCA sponsored and delivered the trainings sessions in various regions of Virginia in order to have maximum statewide impact. Most training sessions took place on weekends or weekday nights to better accommodate the schedules of volunteers. A detailed list of the training sessions and a map depicting the geographic diversity of the training locations can be found below. Over 4,000 people attended the training opportunities and nearly 30,000 training hours were delivered cumulatively.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Class</b>
2/21/2013 - 2/24/2013	City of Virginia Beach	VFCA Fire and Rescue Conference (several classes for volunteers)
June 2013	City of Richmond	Virginia Fire Officers Academy
9/15/2013	Augusta County	Team Building for Greatness
9/28/2013	Shenandoah County	Beyond Hoses and Helmets
12/7/2013	City of Charlottesville/Albemarle County	The First Five Minutes of a Recruitment Interaction
2/20/2014 - 2/23/2014	City of Virginia Beach	VFCA Fire and Rescue Conference (several classes for volunteers)
4/13/2014	Dallas, Texas	Fire-Rescue International Recruitment and Retention Panel
4/26/2014	Dunn Loring/Fairfax County	The First Five Minutes of a Recruitment Interaction
5/19/2014 - 5/20/2014	City of Williamsburg	Performance Maximizing Leadership
5/31/2014	Henry County	Beyond Hoses and Helmets
June 2014	City of Richmond	Virginia Fire Officers Academy
7/17/2014	City of Harrisonburg	Bringing Fire Dynamics Research to the Fire Ground
10/24/2014	City of Williamsburg	Leading Change
2/19/2015 - 2/22/2015	City of Virginia Beach	VFCA Fire and Rescue Conference (several classes for volunteers)
3/14/15	Town of Winchester	Five Alarm Leadership
3/27/2015 - 3/28/2015	Town of Big Stone Gap	Advanced Incident Command: Command Overload!
4/4/15	Bedford County	The Fire Service Emerging Leaders Program

## Volunteer Workforce Solutions - Virginia Phase II Classes



For the past 8 years, the VFCA has delivered its very effective and successful five-day, residential Virginia Fire Officers Academy (VFOA), entitled “Safety through Leadership” which is based on the 16 Life Safety Initiatives. Since inception, 519 students have graduated from this award winning program and have completed nearly 26,000 hours of classroom and practical training. This program wouldn’t have been achievable without the support of the VWS grant over the last several years.

One of the largest fire service conferences in Virginia is the annual Virginia Fire and Rescue Conference. The conference offers nationally recognized speakers and tremendous educational opportunities. During the past three conferences, the VFCA, with the assistance of the VWS program, delivered approximately 16,000 hours of classroom and practical training to 3,406 students. In addition to these training classes, the VFCA provided scholarships each year to the participating VWS departments to attend the Virginia Fire and Rescue Conference. Several departments took advantage of the scholarship opportunities and attended the educational sessions and networking opportunities. These scholarships served as retention tools for the departments that could not afford these retention incentives.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND MOVING FORWARD

Overall, Phase 2 of the Virginia Volunteer Workforce Solutions program was successful and recruited 656 new members to the 14 participating departments. In addition, the program delivered nearly 30,000 training hours statewide, and collected useful data through the online survey and the online Volunteer Management System.

Using GIS Tapestry data allowed departments to better tailor their recruitment plans to people that would be more likely to become volunteer firefighters. The departments that used the data, stuck to their recruitment plans, and conducted some form of recruitment activity each month saw positive results. While GIS Tapestry data isn't the answer to solve all recruitment issues, it is definitely a helpful tool. In the end, new volunteers are successfully recruited when current firefighters have the knowledge and ability to have open, honest and informative conversations with interested recruits. Departments should focus on training their current volunteers in effective recruitment methods and developing their ability to persuade potential applicants to join their organization. With a new generation of volunteers entering the fire service, it is important to show and sell perspective applicants and members on the personal benefits and value of joining the department. While volunteer recruitment is important, retention is equally (if not more) important. The VWS program recognized this and identified that effective leadership within an organization is imperative for retaining volunteers. Throughout the VWS program, leadership classes were delivered throughout Virginia with the goal of improving volunteer retention rates.

VWS staff interviewed and surveyed the 14 participating departments at the end of the grant to gather feedback on the program. All responding departments stated that the program expectations were clearly outlined at the beginning of the program. The majority found the information in the GIS Tapestry Reports to be "very beneficial." When asked what elements of the program led to improvement in recruitment efforts, participants stated the following: "media and print materials, leadership training and networking, and having a better understanding of the motivators allowed for more focused marketing efforts thus saving time and effort." The majority of respondents stated that the program helped to improve operational capabilities and indicated that the online data collection system was very user-friendly. Respondents commented that the VWS staff was outstanding and great to work with. One department commented that even though they are a small department, they "picked up five strong new members that are making a difference. Although the program is coming to a close, we intend to use all of the excellent campaign marketing materials until they are gone. We appreciate all of the help from the VWS program."

Now that the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association has successfully recruited new volunteers, the next step is to ensure they are trained properly, receive NFPA 1582 compliant physicals, develop leadership skills, and become productive members of their departments in order to improve service delivery and enhance community safety. In addition, it will be important to keep the momentum going and continue to push volunteer firefighter recruitment efforts throughout the state. The VFCA recently submitted a SAFER grant to execute Phase 3 of the Volunteer Workforce Solutions program with a clear focus on all of those areas.

The Virginia Volunteer Workforce Solutions website located at [www.everydayhero.org](http://www.everydayhero.org) will be kept up-to-date with program information. This report and the other reports cited throughout this document will be available on the everyday hero and the VFCA website as well.

The VFCA and the IAFC appreciate the support of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The VWS program had a very positive impact on volunteer and combination departments throughout Virginia that will provide enhanced service delivery and ultimately keep our communities safer during emergencies and disasters. Both the VFCA and the IAFC look forward to working with FEMA should you decide to award the Phase 3 component of the Virginia Volunteer Workforce Solutions program.