



# Portland Fire & Rescue

## Focus Groups Summary Report

### Introduction

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AKT LLP worked with Portland Fire and Rescue (PF&R) to conduct 9 focus group meetings from February 25, 2010 to March 29, 2010. The groups were organized around the constituencies listed below. The six internal groups provided an opportunity for all PF&R personnel to participate or be represented. The three external groups allowed PF&R to incorporate the views and opinions of key community partners and constituents from five key areas: Regulation, Public Education, Sustainability, Emergency Response, and Other Area Fire Departments.

The internal focus group sessions were designed to address issues and inspire ideas and suggestions pertaining to the following subject areas: Public Education, Regulation, working relationships with Other Area Fire Departments, Emergency Response, Sustainability, and Changes in Portland's Culture and Diversity. To complement the internal sessions, the external focus groups contained constituents from most of the subject areas addressed by internal focus group participants. This allowed for comparison of internal and external viewpoints.

Each focus group session included time for participants to address other issues and to provide ideas and suggestions of their choosing. A composite of the results from the internal and external groups is summarized below.

### Focus Groups

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#### *Internal*

1. PF&R Chief Officers
2. PF&R Officers
3. PF&R Other Sworn Personnel
4. PF&R Other Sworn Personnel
5. PF&R Non-Sworn & Civilian Personnel
6. Portland Firefighters Association Executive Board

#### *External*

1. Mixed Group with individuals representing Regulation, Public Education, Sustainability, and Emergency Response Constituencies
2. Phone Interviews with individuals representing Public Education, Sustainability, and Emergency Response Constituencies
3. Other Area Fire Departments

## Public Education

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The external and internal perspectives were consistent. Focus group participants indicate that PF&R's Belmont Learning Center, social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter, High-Rise Floor Warden Program, Juvenile Fire Setter Program, Bombero Program and public education announcements are all successful and useful public education tools. The overall effectiveness of PF&R's public education efforts has diminished in recent years; this was attributed to budget cuts.

Visible community interaction is welcomed and encouraged. Suggestions for targeted relationship building ranged from community gatherings at station houses to using local media such as neighborhood newspapers, community and church newsletters. Communications to non-English speaking constituencies should be strengthened.

It is also important for PF&R to be visible and have personal contact with community organizations and other City bureaus. Mutually beneficial collaboration examples include:

- Multnomah County Health Department and the Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) on regional education efforts targeted toward public safety, wellness and emergency preparedness
- Bureau of Planning and Sustainability on correct use of building materials, avoiding toxins and proper weatherization to decrease space heater use
- The City's public safety bureaus working together on joint presentations and programs

Participants acknowledged that PF&R is proficient in providing traditional fire education i.e. Stop, Drop, and Roll and suppression. Many other opportunities were suggested.

Every time PF&R responds, the fire rig provides a public education opportunity. PF&R is revered in parts of the community and has good interaction with children. Other agencies and organizations would like to partner with PF&R as appropriate to leverage PF&R's presence and interactions. PF&R support for accurate maintenance of first responder assistance programs, such as ONI's voluntary registration of people with mobility limitations, would be appreciated and effective.

PF&R has a broad window into community wellness through its emergency medical responses. Collaboration with the Multnomah County Health Department on studies of illness, death, drug use, injury and other emergencies would benefit the community. At a minimum, PF&R should restore the data analyst position so that information can be provided to other agencies and used to target its own education programs. Suggestions for other areas of education supported by data analysis included monitoring trends in local, regional and national fire loss, assessing how well PF&R's programs are targeting the trends, and evaluating public education message effectiveness in reaching targeted audiences.

However, instituting a strong public education program has been difficult for PF&R. Two funded and filled public education positions remain. The Public Information section communicates with the public via the bureau's website and is responsible for social media. The remaining public education workload has shifted to station personnel when possible. Stations have limited time for school and community visits. The busiest stations would benefit from increased public education, but those stations are too busy responding to calls. Firefighters need training and materials to be more effective.

Concerns about lack of clarity for the mission and priority of public education within PF&R were expressed. Employees throughout PF&R are unaware of PF&R's public education role and programs. In general, firefighters will do what is prioritized for them. If public education becomes a priority, firefighters will participate. There is a need to communicate the basis of all PF&R program funding priorities, but especially the public education priority.

A number of education-related issues regarding use of the 9-1-1 emergency call line were discussed. These comments are incorporated in the Emergency Response section.

## **Regulation**

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There are two facets to PF&R's approach to regulation. The Fire Marshal's Office (FMO) exists as PF&R's Prevention Division and is staffed by 40-hr sworn and non-sworn employees who issue permits and conduct inspections. The Company Fire Inspection Program (CFIP) is conducted by PF&R's Emergency Operations Division, by sworn station personnel who conduct inspections when not responding to emergency incidents.

PF&R charges a fee for the issuance of both permits and inspections. The amount of work for both is driven by pre-determined revenue goals.

### ***External Perspective***

No significant issues were noted with issuing permits. Due to budget cuts, customer service staff has eroded and it now takes longer to obtain permits, up from two days to as long as three weeks. Staff are knowledgeable, personable and helpful.

Inspection customers experience a lack of consistency, little organization and communication internally and externally with other bureaus and the State. Participants described inconsistency between FMO and CFIP station inspections and between inspectors over time. There is no apparent knowledge transfer among inspectors. The process for scheduling inspections varies by inspector. Major, costly requirements change with personnel, such as differing preferences for knox box installation.

The Bureau of Development Services (BDS) facility permits program was noted as a good example of a coordinated program. Customers requested similar consistency for both FMO and CFIP inspections. Specifically, customers would value and appreciate the same fire inspector throughout the permitting and inspection processes.

Coordination between BDS and the Fire Marshal could be improved. Fire Marshal agreements do not appear to be kept or recorded at BDS, creating problems over time. When BDS and Fire Marshal requirements conflict, there is no clear precedence hierarchy. FMO was described as weak on processing and reviewing engineering plans, and inspections involving the installation of fire suppression systems. Failure to identify fire suppression installation issues has resulted in costly repairs after construction is completed. A FMO professional engineer at BDS to do analysis of plans and permits was recommended due to required specialized skills. Greater use of stipulated agreements to coordinate citation upgrades with renovations was requested.

Lack of coordination with State regulations was also noted. For example, new State regulations require elevators to have improved/enhanced firefighter recall. Older elevators are not

sophisticated enough to handle the requirement, triggering full modernization. Subsequently, customers heard firefighters do not use elevators during a fire, resulting in questions as to why the firefighter recall was necessary.

Improved communication was recommended, such as an e-mail list serve for FMO updates. Friending the bureau on Facebook provides more information than the website. A method for dialogue is needed for complex questions such as elevator regulations or emerging issues such as allowing mass notification capabilities on new strobe alarm systems or the 2015 fire escape requirements.

PF&R fire investigators were described as professional and knowledgeable but needing more training. There appears to be a high dependence on learning on-the-job. This should be augmented with specific technical training. Investigations' staffing structure of having only one 40-hour/week investigator and remaining staff 24/48 is problematic for agencies working with PF&R. It also appears to result in a disproportionate burden of work placed on the 40-hour staff.

The billing system is a source of frustration. Buildings linked together and owned by the same company are not billed together. Separate addresses are used, often with incorrect contact information. Requested corrections are not done consistently. The bills have an insufficient level of detail; it is not possible to reconcile billings with the specific property. This is especially significant because one building with one address may be billed by sections, resulting in several invoices. The basis for multiple invoicing of one building was not understood.

### ***Internal Perspective***

Many of the external concerns are mirrored internally.

Permit customer service was described positively, with a strong preference for remaining in the current location. Co-location with BDS has been discussed in the past. This was discouraged.

The FMO strives to simultaneously align achieving its revenue goals with delivering professional and comprehensive customer service. However, this is difficult due to FMO's high staff turnover. Personnel on light duty are temporarily assigned to FMO, then return to their stations. Staff prefer the firefighter hero role over the enforcement role. The role of the Fire Marshal is not well understood. The priority of prevention work in relation to emergency response is unclear. A suggestion was made to hire PF&R retirees on contract, though this was noted to be difficult to implement.

The CFIP has been in place for approximately seven years. Training is limited. Stations do not conduct enough inspections to become proficient. Businesses in a Fire Management Area may be outside the station's district, reducing familiarity with the property. Firefighters are uncomfortable conducting inspections with limited training or experience and charging a fee. The quality of service rendered is not commensurate with the fee. This exacerbates the discomfort with the enforcement role.

Concern was expressed on the cost / benefit aspect of the CFIP program. Fee revenue is generated but at the expense of sending four staff and a truck.

Inspection revenue goals have not been reached in several years; this is attributed to reduced staffing. Goals should be aligned with changing resources rather than being left as de facto unachievable.

Staff described frequent FMO priority changes with individual turnover. Staff are aware of customer frustration with inconsistent regulation and code, as well as customer desire for more transparent communication on complex issues. Customers are notified of form changes, fee increases and regulation changes.

## **Other Area Fire Departments**

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There was consensus that cooperation and communication among regional fire agencies has improved. Continuing to strengthen relationships would provide mutual benefit in several areas.

Region-wide operational improvements will require specific prioritization within PF&R and funding to support the efforts. As noted below, the potential benefits are significant but so are the challenges. Significant change will not occur with fragmented, low priority resourcing. A regional management team structure will be needed.

### ***Interoperability***

Interoperability limitations remain. Differences in information technology (radio frequencies and software in particular), staffing models, equipment, training standards, size, and political constraints make mutual-aid and operating on a regional scale difficult. Procedures and equipment are changed without notification to other fire departments. Communication is easier within a department than across the region's fire departments. It takes longer to be cooperative. No fire department is staffed for group effort and coordination. Code regulations are open for interpretation, which varies across the region. Differences in interpretation make interoperability difficult. Improved coordination is needed in areas of overlapping jurisdiction, such as the waterways. In Washington, Vancouver and Seattle cannot participate in large scale events, because it is prohibited by Tort law. Physical landscapes differ. For example, other communities do not have high-rise buildings or large industrial complexes. PF&R's 4-person crew is different than other fire departments' response structures. Some of the region's departments are staffed with a mix of sworn personnel and volunteers, another source of different response approaches.

A highly structured system is needed to coordinate regional operations. This works with specialty teams because the training is highly specialized. In day-to-day routines, there are fluctuations in how firefighters do business. Structured coordination will be difficult. For example, a new regional station numbering system is needed. Renumbering will be a significant project because of the pride and ownership in station identity.

PF&R needs to establish a clear basis and rationale for the benefit of engaging in mutual aid with other fire departments. There are internal perceptions that the smaller departments benefit from PF&R's assistance, but PF&R seldom receives assistance. This is mirrored externally through frustration with PF&R following its own procedures without regard to other partner agencies.

Motivation to overcome these obstacles exists. Homeland Security grant funding is a focal point for all interoperability issues. Successful grant requests allow fire agencies to address interoperability issues. Grants provide real financial incentive to solve interoperability issues.

Suggestions for projects appropriate for regional initiatives included the new 800 MHz regional radio system, incident management with regional teams, apparatus equipment, and equipment storage. Other opportunities are included in the Emergency Response section.

### ***Relationships and Communication***

Networking relationships are helpful and provide exposure to other ways of doing and thinking. Relationships also build confidence in depending on other fire agencies.

Changes in staffing due to retirement, promotion, or other reasons impacts networking relationships. Existing relationships cannot be assumed to continue after a retirement or promotion. Maintaining relationships and communication requires constant reinforcement. However, the Metro Chiefs haven't met in over four years. Quarterly meetings are needed. Chief Officers and Battalion Chiefs are key to regional initiatives. Regional training would take 50 shifts to get through the entire region, making the relationships among Chiefs critical to any widespread implementation. Face-to-face meetings are good, but not required all the time. Airport Chief Officers from the largest airports stay connected via regular conference calls.

Firefighters do not always know each other. Interagency relationships at the crew level are important. Disgruntlement stems from not knowing your partner across the freeway or river. Joint training helps break down crew barriers and gets positive feedback. Because they share a station and usually have a mixed response to fires, Gresham and PF&R work well together. The varying degree of comfort in working with regional fire departments is proportional to the interaction at each level. Working with people whose methods and capabilities are known is preferred.

### ***Training***

PF&R currently trains firefighters from other departments in its programs and facilities. Participating departments reciprocate by sharing equipment and training staff when possible. Increased regional training is seen as a desired and inevitable evolution due to cost efficiencies and benefits of common skills and experience.

There are many areas suitable for joint training. Live fire training using a nationally recognized standard and procedures document allows for multiple agencies to be involved with agreement on the training content. There is a potential for more joint training on specialized responses such as the water dive team. Because of mandatory State and County training and in-service, there could be good joint training for EMS. Joint EMS training would improve relationships and provide education on each other's resources and capabilities.

In general, all the fire departments invest in training new firefighters and little on training officers. There is a common need to expand ongoing training opportunities and programs. The Metro Fire Officer School is an example of where joint training has occurred. This could be expanded to include general leadership and introduction to the officer role. Critical competencies needed for each rank level could be identified, forming the basis for joint internal and external training. However, it was noted that the region has tried to have common expectations for officers in the past with limited success.

### ***Participation at the State Level***

There was a general desire for PF&R to actively participate in committees at the State level. PF&R recently increased its State-level participation and this has been valued and appreciated. Chief Klum was recognized for his ability to think globally and effectively advocate for the needs of both the region and the state's small fire agencies. There is a concern that PF&R's regional role may be limited at times by requirements to represent only the City of Portland. In some areas, such as the State Incident Management Team, participation should be expanded due to PF&R being the largest fire department in the State. When participating at the State level, PF&R needs to maintain a regional perspective reflecting the varied needs of the region's fire agencies.

### ***Employee Health and Wellness***

Employee health, wellness and the aging workforce presents another opportunity for regional cooperation and shared resources. Currently, each department has its own programs. There is a general belief that there are opportunities to benefit from combined efforts and partnerships.

### ***Public Education***

Seasonal public service announcements are expensive. Many messages are common across the region. Interdepartmental public service announcements would be cost effective for all.

### ***Purchasing***

There was a general belief that there are economies of scale to be had through regional purchasing. However, no specifics were suggested. This is an area to be explored.

### ***Emergency Response***

There was extensive discussion on emergency response regional issues. This has been included in the Emergency Response section.

## **Emergency Response**

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The internal and external perspectives on emergency response were consistent across the groups. The issues are systemic across the region. Most are national issues. The projected demographics of a growing and aging population living in an increasingly dense urban environment heightened concerns.

### ***Dispatch Centers***

Dispatch is a challenge with approximately five different dispatch centers in the region. The inability of dispatch centers to know if other area fire agency apparatus are in- or out-of-service results in delayed response. Portland's new CAD dispatch system is an opportunity to improve dispatch interoperability. In a region this size, fire agencies should be able to work together under one regional dispatch center. The CAD software systems of all five dispatch centers have the capability and capacity to handle all regional fire dispatch activity. The CAD software is grossly over-purchased for current use.

All the regional fire departments have the same issues and challenges in managing dispatch centers. Training and retention of dispatch staff is a chronic issue; it is difficult to keep up with attrition. This results in overtime, lower service levels, errors, delays and constant basic training.

Nationally, dispatch centers are organized around three basic models: 1) staffed with professional personnel knowledgeable about the fire service; 2) staffed with individuals following scripts with little or no fire service knowledge; or 3) a fire service knowledgeable supervisor is inserted to oversee the dispatch process and bridge barriers. Model 1 is the most expensive dispatch method but is the most functional and provides the highest level of run-call management. Model 2 is costly and dysfunctional due to high turnover and poor decisions adversely affecting run-call results. Model 3 is the middle ground and the model most dispatch centers use.

The Bureau of Emergency Communications (BOEC) fire dispatch uses models 2 (primary) and 3 due to one PF&R fire liaison located at BOEC. A PF&R fire liaison is not present at all BOEC shifts. BOEC dispatch operates from a script and does not take initiative or gauge appropriate response. BOEC has historically put its weakest dispatchers on fire, resulting in high personnel turnover. Currently it is not considered appropriate to train BOEC dispatchers to gauge proper response.

It may be worthwhile to pay more to have better dispatchers working fire calls. A sense of confidence would build within PF&R by having experienced dispatchers on fire calls. Specialized fire dispatch personnel would cost more. With a regional dispatch center approach, specialized fire dispatch would be more cost effective and the benefits more widespread. Shifting from a scripted dispatch model to an experienced dispatch model would be a compelling regional project.

There was general agreement and willingness among the regional fire departments to contribute toward a cost analysis for a regional dispatch center, including cost to build, staff, define expected service levels, efficiencies gained, etc, as a first step. Analysis may need to be completed in phases. It was noted that accomplishing dispatch change would require attracting the best and brightest personnel from all fire agencies and convincing the governing bodies and communities that the fire departments are working together. If four Fire Chiefs would stand-up together and say this is our regional priority, tie-in a UASI grant, they could change the politics.

As noted below, lack of trust in the dispatch process is eroding morale and affecting response. Actions to improve dispatch would have a strong positive effect throughout the PF&R staff.

### ***Fire Specific***

Fire calls are approximately 20% of the current run call volume. Declining fire calls has been a trend for several years and is continuing. This has a significant impact on the bureau's overall firefighting experience level. Training is increasingly important. For example, firefighters used to go to 50 different fires. Now the model is predicated on the fact that firefighters go to one fire 50 times.

There has not been a death on a fire run for some time. There is a concern that PF&R is innocent, not taking seriously enough the potential for fatality. There is a real need to make sure employees take training seriously.



### ***EMS Specific***

EMS calls are approximately 80% of the run call volume. The number of EMS calls continues to increase, a trend that is expected to continue. PF&R has lost an EMS trainer, data analyst, and Deputy Chief due to budget cuts. These reductions are disproportionate to the EMS call volume. Loss of the data analyst has impacted the ability of other agencies to do their jobs because response data is not available. EMS staff should be increased to even greater size than existed before budget cuts.

Firefighters are no longer participating in EMS annual workshops; one member of a crew attends and has to relay information back to other crew members. All firefighters need this training due to their extensive EMS role.

### ***Non-Emergency Calls***

People call fire departments when they need a solution to any problem. This high level of trust and dependence is good but has negative consequences. The 9-1-1 service is abused by some residents, residential institutions and care facilities that have come to rely on PF&R's consistent response. Fire agencies are essentially subsidizing the facility staff, for example making runs to help people back into bed.

PF&R staff discussed low and dropping morale as a result of the non-emergency calls. There is less motivation to respond to these calls, especially for chronic offenders. PF&R may begin triaging off of dispatch, an admittedly dangerous practice but there is a sense of having no other choice. The non-emergency calls are affecting firefighters physically and mentally.

Solutions can be found by studying heavy run call locations throughout the City and assessing appropriate means to address and educate these constituents and communities; providing better training and education to the individuals at dispatch; creating an alternate non-emergency line to call for advice and do-it-yourself treatment options; and a prioritization of funds to restore sworn personnel to dispatch. Reductions in call volume are simple in some instances. For example, a building with 24-hr security has the ability to check fire alarms that go off unnecessarily. For example, OHSU has its own security dispatch, so if a faulty alarm goes off, OHSU handles it internally. This reduced run-call volume significantly. Paramedics in the field need options for how to dispose patients, such as don't transport by ambulance, take to alternative destinations, contract with cab companies and clinics, use nurse practitioners, etc.

Another growing source of non-essential calls is driven by limiting liability for other City bureaus. Portland Police call PF&R to come to an arrest scene to document that the person in custody received medical treatment. If AMR responds to a police call, they will transport the individual in custody. As a result, Police default to calling PF&R so transport will not be involved.

### ***9-1-1 Public Education***

A run-call volume program is needed that examines high run call areas/locations and determines how and where to target public education efforts. In general, parents are teaching their children bad habits. This is a current and future issue.

In addressing the 9-1-1 abuse issues noted above, education on alternatives to 9-1-1 is needed. Individuals need to know how to take care of themselves. Some cities have adopted a non-emergency call line. One focus group believed that Portland has such an alternative call number but it is not advertised and may not be functioning.

### ***Equipment and Staff Appropriate Response***

In Portland, fire trucks respond in a specific area. Ambulance response areas vary. It may take longer for an ambulance to get to a call. Both vehicles go to all calls so at least one will get there within 5 minutes, which is very important for certain responses such as cardiac calls. This is an example of the region's general philosophy of dispatching as many resources as possible. There is a large gap from this approach to allowing dispatchers to gauge proper response. Some regional fire departments have started on the gauged response path by building response tailored cards at their dispatch centers. Dispatchers are more knowledgeable in what to send out: 2, 4, 6 truck companies or smaller units running non-essential calls. These dispatchers are more comfortable and confident in what they are doing. When these procedures were launched, it caused conversation in Portland for BOEC.

Some risk with non-essential calls was noted. For example, high obesity rates have resulted in more 250, 300+ pound patients. It takes a crew of four, perhaps even two crews, to move a 400 pound person safely. However, there was a strong sense across all the groups that smaller vehicles should be sent for particular needs. The equipment sent needs to be proportionate to the emergency. AMR should have the authority to respond without PF&R.

Station resources need to be rebalanced on an ongoing basis to reflect the shifting response volume as the city grows and changes. Low call volume resources should be consolidated and shifted to high call volume areas on a regular basis.

### ***Low Frequency / High Risk Events***

Low Frequency/High Risk events are another area where formal and organized emergency management training and practice are needed. Improved disaster coordination in terms of possessing basic resources, an ability to sustain resources and coordinate and operate on a logistical level with other local and state fire departments will greatly improve and enhance the City's preparation for disaster.

There are many plans for emergency management but uncertainty was expressed on actual implementation preparedness. PF&R did not participate in a recent evacuation/mass casualty tabletop exercise. Hospitals defend facilities in-place and don't evacuate because of disaster. They plan to do without help from PF&R because they know that help won't be available in a mass casualty event. Firefighters were supposed to be vaccinated first in the recent H1N1 pandemic preparations but they weren't. Regional agencies such as TriMet and Metro would like PF&R to have a stronger presence in disaster planning.

PF&R non-sworn personnel would like to have a defined role in disaster preparedness. They will be needed in a disaster to facilitate the department's response. Non-sworns have neither procedures in-place nor equipment for communicating with each other or sworn personnel during a disaster.

### ***Fees for Response Services***

The high and growing rate of EMS and non-emergency calls is a financial burden for communities across the nation. Some have begun charging fees for some types of responses. In the local region, some fire departments have considered billing assisted living and care facilities for patient lifts. None have implemented response service fees. There is uncertainty that fees would result in appropriate outcomes rather than cost shifts that do not impact call volume. Response services are paid for via taxes, making it difficult to determine the appropriate boundary for fees. There was more support for mitigating actions such as community training in the appropriate use of 9-1-1 and improved dispatch management.

### ***Response Time Goals***

PF&R's goals for response time appear to be static and unattainable. When the goals are not met, feedback is not provided on reasons and what can be done to improve. There is no data feedback to adjust benchmarks and achieve goals. No systemic approach is used to learn why response times are shorter in some instances and longer in others. Setting response time goals to a time that is feasible will give credibility to the goal itself. For example, it may be appropriate to have different response goals for different types of calls.

## **Sustainability**

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### ***Internal Department Initiatives***

PF&R has been proactive in terms of its alignment with the City's sustainability initiatives. PF&R worked with the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BP&S) in redesigning stations to be green buildings. BP&S could also provide technical assistance, identify possible funding sources, and help design operational changes for PF&R on reducing fuel consumption and diesel emissions in fire apparatus.

The fire stations are waiting for feedback on the sustainability measures enacted. For example, the station utility expenses are measured on a per station basis and they have each done several things to be energy efficient. As a result, the stations are supposed to get rebates but the rebates are not coming.

There is a lack of training on emerging sustainability designs. Earlier involvement in the planning process would provide lead time for training development.

### ***External Influence***

PF&R has worked with BP&S on issues involving the solar panel program to ensure correct installation and adequate roof access for fire fighting. BP&S believes this is a good example of effective collaboration. There is potential for the two bureaus to collaborate earlier in the program development process in many other areas. The partnership should be expanded.

PF&R needs a stronger influence and presence in other areas as well. For example, Tri-Met has similar street access issues as PF&R. They did not recall PF&R having representation at expanded bikeway meetings. First responders need to be present at Portland Plan discussions. The public safety bureaus should coordinate their responses to keep public safety criteria visible.

Neighborhood associations need education on the needs of fire trucks (turning ratios, impact on response time, etc.). Use of video and computer animation on the internet were suggested as examples of excellent education tools that would highlight tangible response differences caused by traffic calming devices on neighborhood response time. This would also be useful for professionals, such as architects and engineers, and other City bureaus. First responders need to make the safety tradeoffs more visible for citizens and elevate response issues in proposal development and evaluation.

The PF&R staffing structure is an influence barrier. The Fire Marshal's Office operates on a 40-hr week. It is easy for sustainability groups to coordinate with the FMO. It is more difficult to communicate with station personnel because of their schedules. Reductions in central 40-hr staff positions have exacerbated this issue.

## **Changes in Portland's Culture and Diversity**

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Internal focus group participants recognize that there is much about other cultures that is unknown to PF&R. However, this minimally affects PF&R's ability to respond. PF&R is using the Rosetta Stone language program to provide Spanish language training to its employees. The program has been successful and employees are open and responsive to this training opportunity. To fill the gap with other languages, PF&R accesses a language line interpretive service. Other tools, such as diagrams of bodies for injury location identification, are used at emergency scenes.

Cultural sensitivity is important and PF&R works to bridge the gap between Portland's different cultural groups. The current PF&R cultural competency training courses would be more effective if they were redirected to interactive workshops with specific minority communities. This would encourage dialogue and build relationships, as well as providing education to both groups.

Cultural awareness is a two-way responsibility. Community groups concerned with their cultural representation and understanding can proactively involve themselves with PF&R to understand its operations and practices. Although it is important to celebrate Portland's diversity, it is also important for all of Portland's ethnic groups to come together and become part of Portland's public safety community to facilitate education, sensitivity, and understanding.

## **Additional Topics**

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The following are additional topics that were addressed by internal focus group participants.

### ***Succession Planning, Training, and Personnel Development***

PF&R promotes based on time-in grade and exams. There is no additional performance feedback process, such as performance reviews. Once probation is passed, employees receive limited, reactive and ad hoc feedback. There is no consistent method for performance evaluation, improvement and corrective action. Many participants asked that annual performance reviews with 360 degree feedback be implemented.

After an initial training period as a recruit, there is no continuing education or training to supplement the promotional process. There are no guidelines for leadership or officer training. Further training beyond the recruit level comes from self motivation to find a mentor willing to guide development for promotion. With the current high level of retirement transition, this model

is being strained. Given the lack of guidelines and standards, leadership and management skills are not part of the promotion criteria.

PF&R needs to conduct simulated training experiences. Technology has allowed for laptops and projectors to train for incidents, which has helped. However, simulations need to happen all the time, to allow for run-throughs, adherence to policies and procedures, and near-perfect execution. As the number of fires drop, less on-the-job training occurs. Officers have less experience, diminishing the effectiveness of the ad hoc mentoring training method. This has increased the need for training to supplement on-site experience.

Additional training needs to be accompanied by a shift in attitude/willingness to train after completing the initial recruit training regimen. Negative attitudes toward training and drills were described. There is a perception that expressing an interest in training is a weakness because firefighters are expected to know everything following the initial training. Training expectations are inconsistent. They are shaped by the leadership and culture of each station, and within the station, each shift.

When rotation to a new position occurs, very little knowledge transfer between departing and incoming staff typically occurs. This was a systemic issue underlying discussions on succession planning, training, employee turnover, and the difficulty in maintaining relationships. PF&R does not have position manuals with procedures and expectations, compounding the job transition issues.

A wide range of relationships between sworn and non-sworn staff was discussed, from understanding, respectful and appreciative to uninformed, intolerant and abusive. This range was attributed to limited interaction between the two groups due to lack of sworn rotation through a variety of station and 40-hour positions, lack of performance feedback and clearly defined expectations. Tolerance for individual personalities seems to take precedence over some guidelines. Given the reduced number of sworn positions that interact with non-sworn staff, the opportunity for cultural change through job rotation is limited. This is compounded by the perception that taking a staff position will penalize sworn personnel. Training on the roles and contributions of sworn and non-sworn staff is needed.

### ***Wellness and Fitness***

PF&R does not have mandatory wellness and fitness requirements. It is important for PF&R to take care of its staff. Health and fitness will improve both the physical and mental condition of its employees, which can and will in turn benefit the community. Mandatory wellness and fitness requirements also have the potential to boost morale among employees and reduce susceptibility to injury and poor health. Firefighters are athletes that need to be able to depend on each other.

### ***Internal Logistics and Technology***

There is consistent frustration around the ease of use, availability, accessibility and cost of PF&R's technology products, including radios, hardware, and software products. Problems with technology thwart productivity and many PF&R initiatives. There is a strong desire for alternative sourcing options that would make lower cost options available. Information technology tools are still desk bound to a large degree. A shift should be made to more laptops, air cards, etc.

Apparatus, equipment, and station maintenance and repair are essential to PF&R's daily operations. The internal Logistics section was consistently praised for its high quality work and customer service. However, concern was expressed over aging equipment and apparatus. Service life is being extended, increasing the risk of costly and time consuming repairs.

### **Priority**

Throughout the internal focus group discussions, comments were made about the need to establish clear priorities. For example, if the priorities are 1) fire response 2) EMS response 3) training, then all other tasks need to fall within time remaining, if any. If other areas have higher priority, then stating this clearly is important. For example, do inspections or public education take precedence over training? Is a station out-of-service when conducting an inspection or visiting a school?

The same PF&R priorities should be consistently reflected in station and central staff funding and position decisions. Shifting work from eliminated central staff positions to station personnel without a bureau-wide priority reset creates a mixed message. Goals and expectations should be adjusted to reflect the changes to keep them relevant.

Staff stated repeatedly that they will honor and work within established priorities. The request is for clear priorities to be established and then consistently implemented and defended.

### **Summary**

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Focus groups fulfill the need to reach out and obtain input from people to validate and gain information and supplement issues already identified in the strategic planning process. The nine focus groups successfully completed this step in the PF&R strategic planning development process, bringing their perspectives forward with thoughtful input and discussion.

Analysis of the group discussions highlighted five critical issues that will be important to consider in the upcoming phases of the project:

1. Improve dispatch and triage management.
  - i. Develop new and continue to cultivate existing mutual aid agreements
  - ii. Maintain an appropriate balance of staff, equipment, and training between fire and emergency medical response
  - iii. 9-1-1 and alternative care public education
  - iv. Coordination low frequency/high risk events
  
2. The structural models for providing prevention services are not achieving desired outcomes.
  - i. Training and consistency need to be added to the Fire Marshal's Office and the CFIP
  - ii. Public education: health and wellness, disaster and emergency preparedness
  - iii. Implement customer requested improvements: billing system/invoice improvements; one-stop shopping model; improved communications

3. A comprehensive and structured personnel development structure is needed.
  - i. Leadership and management training
  - ii. Performance measurement and review
  - iii. Training and education to bridge gap between sworn and non-sworn employees
  
4. Consistently implement priorities.
  - i. Allocation of funds per priority across all departments
  - ii. Strategies and goals aligned with funded resources
  - iii. Balancing annual budgets and long term capital needs
  
5. Invest and cultivate relationships with other City Bureaus and Community organizations on a local, regional and national scale.
  - i. Sustainability measures
  - ii. Understanding the City of Portland residents to foster interactive partnerships

The next steps in the PF&R strategic planning process will be the completion of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOC) Analysis. The issues highlighted by the focus groups will be analyzed in preparation for strategic theme development and the Task Force Work Sessions.