

Running Head: STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE HAGERSTOWN FIRE DEPARTMENT

Strategic Planning for the Hagerstown Fire Department

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Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where

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Abstract

The City of Hagerstown Fire Department does not have a strategic plan to guide the fire department into the future. The purpose of this research was to develop an outline for a strategic plan for the City of Hagerstown Fire Department. The action research method was used to develop a strategic plan outline that provided the foundation for the Hagerstown Fire Department to effectively develop its own strategic plan. Through an extensive literature, a review of strategic plans from other city departments and other fire departments from other jurisdictions, and internal and external questionnaires; the researcher developed a plan for the development of a strategic plan for the City of Hagerstown Fire Department. Strategic issues affecting the department were identified. The identification of the department's core values, a vision for success, strategic goals, and operational objectives, and the development of operational and strategic plans were recommended. An outline and plan for a strategic planning process were developed.

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Introduction

As organizations, we look collectively into the future with the uncertainty of what factors could affect us. However, a plan for the future provides a guide to follow into the uncertainty. To begin planning, organizations must identify issues that could potentially affect their path into the future. By identifying and addressing strategic issues, issues that arise from external factors that affect our internal organizational operation, we can develop a plan to address these issues before they arise. Strategic planning can serve as a guide for organizations to move into the future. The strategic plan can serve as a roadmap for future organizational progress, allowing the organization to be proactive to issues that they may face. Without such a plan, organizations may continue to be reactionary, bouncing from issue to issue as they arise, and missing critical opportunities to grow and progress. The problem is that the City of Hagerstown Fire Department does not have a strategic plan to guide the fire department into the future.

The purpose of this research is to develop an outline for a strategic plan for the City of Hagerstown Fire Department. The action research method will be used to develop a strategic planning outline that will provide the foundation for the Hagerstown Fire Department to effectively develop its own strategic plan. Questions used to guide this applied research are: (a) what are the critical components of a fire department strategic plan?, (b) what are the current and future needs to be met by the plan?, and (c) how is the plan evaluated?

Background and Significance

The City of Hagerstown is Maryland's sixth largest city, with a population of 39,662 and a land area of eleven square miles. Known as the Hub City, it lies on the major intersections of the Norfolk Southern, and CSX railways, and Interstate highways 81 and 70.

The Hagerstown Fire Department is a combination fire department that is predominantly staffed by 75 career personnel, with 15 active volunteers. There are five engine companies staffed with two personnel, two ladder companies staffed with two personnel, and two support vehicles; one staffed by two career personnel and the second staffed by volunteers. All staff operates out of six fire stations. Minimum staffing for each of the three shifts is fifteen firefighters and one shift commander. The city is in the process of relocating one downtown engine company (Engine 2) to the north end of the city. This will be completed in 2012.

The national economic downturn has created several challenges for the City of Hagerstown, and its fire department. In 2007, the city received a SAFER grant that funded nine firefighter positions for a period of five years. This brought the city's total fire department strength to an all time high of 84 career personnel. By 2010, the reduction in property values which are the tax base for the city budget, had fallen to a point where the city could no longer support the services it provided to its residents. Furloughs were implemented city-wide, which resulted in a reduction in minimum staffing in the fire department in FY2010/2011 to fourteen firefighters per day. The city was forced to withdraw from its SAFER grant, and the fire department staffing was reduced by nine positions through attrition, bringing the total staffing to 75 positions. This resulted in a loss of seven administrative/command staff positions (46.1% reduction) and three suppression positions (4.3% reduction). This caused an increased workload for the fire department's administrative and command staff, but minimum staffing was returned to 15 firefighters per day.

From June 2010 to the present, the fire department's Fire Chief of 25 years retired, along with the Deputy Fire Chief, and two Battalion Chiefs. The third Battalion Chief, who has been a career firefighter with the city for 31 years, was promoted to Fire Chief.

The City of Hagerstown Fire Department does not have a strategic plan to address the departments current and future needs. The fire department has experienced dramatic changes in the past three years, and will be forced to address other critical issues in the future. The demand on the fire department to do more with less will continue into the foreseeable future. This research will provide an outline for the development of a strategic plan. Development of such a plan will provide a roadmap for organizational success for the term of the plan and beyond. This research relates to several concepts in the National Fire Academy course, *Executive Leadership*, including thinking politically, decision making, and exercising adaptive leadership. This research also relates to two of the sixteen life safety initiatives: initiative 1, “Define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service relating to safety; incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability and personal responsibility”, and initiative 3, “Focus greater attention on the integration of risk management with incident management at all levels, including strategic, tactical, and planning responsibilities.”

Literature Review

Strategic planning in the fire service has evolved from the first recommendations of the National Commission of Fire Prevention and Control (1973, p. 24) which stated that:

A major section of a community general plan of land use should be a Master Plan for Fire Protection, written chiefly by fire department managers. This plan should, first of all, be consistent with and reinforce the goals of the city’s overall general plan.

Every community should have its own plan for fire protection, as “each community has a set of conditions unique to itself, and a system of fire protection that works well for one community cannot be assumed to work equally as well for other communities. To be adequate, the fire protection system must respond to local conditions, especially to changing conditions and

community needs” (National Commission of Fire Prevention and Control, 1973, p. 27). Kabir (2007) states that “strategic planning is a very popular decision-making framework and process for public management.” “Planning is the key: without local-level planning, the system of fire protection is apt to be ill-suited to local needs and lag behind the changing needs of the community” (National Commission of Fire Prevention and Control, 1973, p. 27). Strategic planning can prompt the kind of imagination and commitment in an organization to deal with life’s challenges, and it can best be used as an educational and learning tool, to help leaders figure out what is important and what should be done about it (Bryson, 2004).

Identifying current and future needs of an organization is critical in the strategic planning process. The strategic issues approach to strategic planning has been successfully used and widely adopted in many municipalities and communities (Kabir, 2007). Strategic issues can be thought of as involving some form of conflict within an organization (Wallace, 2006a, p. 173). “The conflicts may involve ends (what), means (how), philosophy (why), location (where), timing (when), and the groups inside or outside the department (who) that might be affected by the way particular issues are resolved” (Wallace, 2006a, p. 173). Wallace (2006a, p. 173) also states that an internal and external approach should be taken to identify and understand the conflicts of main concerns affecting the organization, and that “understanding this difference is one of the critical success factors of effective fire department strategic planning” (Wallace, 2006).

Kabir (2007) discusses the components of the overall strategic plan for the City of Toronto. The City of Toronto has a "Council's Strategic Plan", approved in October of 1998 which enumerates council's strategic agenda and guides all other planning initiatives and service delivery activities for the city (Kabir, 2007). It contains the council's vision for Toronto, a

mission statement for the city government, and council's goals for the community (Kabir, 2007). A strategic planning cycle is designed to organize participation by building winning coalitions among participants in the process, who create ideas for strategic interventions that implement strategies, and affect change (Bryson, 2004). Wallace (2006a) identifies the following components of a fire department strategic plan: a) understanding and applying the values of the department, b) identifying the department's mandates, which are the statutes and regulations, c) developing the mission of the department, d) understanding and developing the philosophy of operation, e) assessing the challenges and opportunities of the external environment, assessing the weaknesses and strengths of the internal environment, f) identifying strategic issues faced by the department, g) creating strategic goals for the strategic issues, h) creating the ideal future through proactive futuring, i) operational planning from a strategic perspective. Siarnicki (2002) provides a similar work plan that he used to develop the strategic plan for the Prince George's County (Maryland) Fire Department. They included: a) conduct a values scan of the fire/ems department, b) formulate and adopt mission and vision statements, c) select a business modeling plan, d) conduct a performance audit of staff and absent stakeholders, e) conduct a gap audit of resources and ideas, f) conduct detailed planning as a decentralized activity, g) conduct contingency planning, including conflict resolution, and finally, h) identify implementation, feedback, and critical success outcomes (Siarnicki, 2002).

Compton and Grantino (2002, p. 63) identify the fire department's mission statement as the foundation for the organization's strategic plan. "One of the best compass bearings or way of establishing direction in an organization is the mission statement" (Coleman, et al, 2003, p. 3). The mission statement is the basic reason for the organization's activities. For the mission to be

accomplished, the organization must accomplish the objective and reach the goals that take the organization in a specific direction (Coleman, et al, 2003, p. 3).

The mission statement of an organization coupled with the goals and objectives is like a flight plan for an airplane. You might have to deviate for bad weather, but you always end up at the right airport after a period of time (Coleman, et al, 2003, p. 3).

Conducting an evaluation of the organization and its environment is critical in identifying the future needs of the department.

A fundamental concept of any strategic planning process in the past involved conducting a "SWOT Analysis," an evaluation of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of an organization. The traditional SWOT Analysis was developed for the business community and considers these four factors of five different "environments": the macro environment, the industry environment, the competitive environment, the customer environment, and the internal organizational environment (Wallace, 2006).

However, Wallace (2006) contends that a fire department involved in strategic planning, thinking in terms of COWS changes the old concept of a SWOT Analysis. The challenges and opportunities of the external environment and the weaknesses and strengths of the internal environments determine the future of the organization (Wallace, 2006). Bryson (2004) utilizes a similar SWOC analysis; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges.

“Assessing the strategic environment is an important component of strategic planning” (Wallace, 2006). Bryson (2004) indicates that identifying organizational mandates, clarifying the organization’s mission and value, and assessing the external and internal environments can help identify the strategic issues facing the organization.

If you intend to develop a strategic plan, a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities of your external environment and how they drive your internal environment so that you may maximize your strengths and minimize your weaknesses is critical to the success of your department (Wallace, 2006).

“Strategic planning is concerned with finding the most advantageous fit between an organization, and its environment, based on an intimate understanding of both” (Bryson, 2004, p. 125).

Wallace (2006) states that “challenges to the department often will include issues that may reduce the department's ability to maintain the status quo” He includes that they often have a financial influence and may be the result of a community's changing need, such as an increase or a decrease in the need for fire department services (Wallace, 2006). Challenges are different considerations than threats, as threats have a negative connotation, but challenges can be positive and negative (Wallace, 2006). “No one in your community wants to be viewed as a threat to the government they fund with their taxes; they want to challenge government to meet their needs and desires” (Wallace, 2006). Thinking in terms of challenges instead of threats creates a positive mindset when assessing the department's external environment, and makes a significant difference in the outcome of the analysis (Wallace, 2006).

“Opportunities are issues that may allow the department to improve its service level, program offerings, or performance standards, and may be program specific or impact the department as a whole” (Wallace, 2006). Opportunities may be determined by the ability to expand the department or its budget, but may also deal with the department's effectiveness (Wallace, 2006). “The planning team may want to set some parameters for determining if an issue listed is an opportunity or a challenge” (Wallace, 2006).

Although it is difficult to evaluate a strategic plan due to the broad scope of the overreaching strategic issues, it is possible to evaluate its effectiveness.

Evaluation at some level should occur continuously, after each response, but a more formal evaluation may take place as part of the local government's annual goal-setting and budgeting cycle, as part of the a community-wide strategic planning process, or at specified intervals when a more comprehensive review of organizational goals is conducted (Compton & Grantino, 2002, p. 58).

“Goals and objectives of a strategic plan are worthless if they are impossible to attain and equally worthless if they are so easy to reach that it takes no effort whatsoever” (Fire, 1997). “The strategic plan is just entertainment unless it results in action” (Wallace, 2009). These actions result from effective operational planning (Wallace, 2009). Wallace (2009) also indicated that “the best operational plans are developed using the guidance provided in the strategic plan, and these plans can then be broken down into long-range plans, mid-range plans, short-range plans, and action plans.”

Strategic planning does not require a comprehensive integrated set of goals and sub goals; the approach encourages officials to obtain a limited agreement on some strategic issues, thus talking a middle ground approach (Kabir, 2007). “The planning team's objective is to describe each strategic issue in a single paragraph, noting the factors that make the issue a fundamental policy question for the department” (Wallace, 2006a, p. 173). Strategic issues can be phrased in the form of a question in order to provide a better understanding (Bryson, 2004, p. 43). For example, Fire (1997) asks “Over the planning period, what must the fire department offer and deliver to its customers to achieve the goals the planning team wants it to achieve at the end of the period?”

In recent years, planning has become critical in all forms of government, so that they may be proactive, rather than reactive to political and economic situations. According to Poister and Streib (2005) a substantial number of city governments in the United States are using or have considered strategic planning to establish direction, determine priorities, and guide decision making in their organizations. “However, formal strategic planning has yet to become regular and standard practice in municipal jurisdictions in the United States” (Poister & Streib, 2005). “The emergent urbanization and globalization have resulted in municipal governments moving towards strategic planning” (Kabir, 2007). Kabir (2007) also states that “the process of strategic planning is multi-layered and complex, and should be tied to strategic management to achieve strategic goals and objectives.” As a critical part of the fire protection master plan, the strategic plan helps guide the department into the future. The master plan of a fire department is a composite of the strategic plan, which sets goals, and the operational plans, which establish a means to reach those goals (Wallace, 2009).

Operational plans are critical to implement the goals established by the strategic plan. Wallace (2009) identifies operational plans as SMART, or specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented, and time-limited. He states that “for emergency incidents, we usually call them tactical plans, but for management or non-emergency purposes, we refer to them as operational plans” (Wallace, 2009). Schmidt (2011) notes that:

Many fire departments tend to complete their operational planning at the top, excluding the subject matter experts (SME) who are best positioned to present current organizational issues that can synchronize operational requirements to perform safely, effectively, and efficiently. Those SMEs are the field personnel operating every day on

the front lines. Change, or implementing a plan, occurs at the level where the business of the business is actually performed not at the top where the ideas begin.

He contests that successful execution of a plan requires buy-in from all members within the organization (Schmidt, 2011).

Compton & Grantino (2002, p. 59) identify the strategic plan as the organization's roadmap for the future. Wallace (2009a) supports this when he states "strategic planning can assist with justifying and producing effective training and professional development programs and increasing firefighter safety, wellness, and knowledge by advancing the agency's effectiveness."

Understanding the organization's values is a critical component of the strategic planning process. In the Prince George's County Fire Department strategic plan development process, identifying the organizational values, which revealed how the organization felt about itself and how it was perceived by the public (Siarnicki, 2002). This is critical information in strategic planning "because it is intended, in the process of change, that these perceptions be transformed into a positive endowment" (Siarnicki, 2002). Wallace (2009) states that "understanding the core values of an organization and its philosophy of operations is often all you really need to know about an organization to determine its distinctive competencies." He states that the McKinney Fire Department (Texas) "uses three simple philosophies that are the guiding principles of the department and the basis for all actions, including the after-action evaluation of performance" (Wallace, 2006a, p. 129). These three simple philosophies are a) do the right thing, b) do your best, and c) treat people the way you want to be treated (Wallace, 2006a, p. 129).

The philosophy of operations of a fire department is based on its values, beliefs, culture, and mission. This is the foundation for all aspects of the department actions. Any specific strategy, operation, and decision made should be based on this philosophy (Wallace, 2006a, p. 125).

The Prince Georges County Fire Department utilized a similar philosophy of operations, by asking the one key question every time a decision concerning the department was to be made: “is the decision to be made the best possible solution for promoting the good of the citizens whom we have sworn ourselves to serve and protect” (Siarnicki, 2002)?

Linking performance management and measurement process to strategic plans of municipal governments are also very crucial (Kabir, 2007). “The master plan should set goals and priorities for fire services, designed to meet the changing needs of the community” (National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, 1973, p. 29). The plan should seek to allocate resources for maximum payoff in fire protection, and it should provide as system for data collection for continual monitoring of effectiveness (National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, 1973). Strategic planning is more of a cyclic progression, rather than a linear path toward the ultimate goal (Wallace, 2009a). Simply stated: “Set Goals, Plan, Do, Reflect (repeat)” (Wallace, 2009a).

There is a multitude of ways to evaluate the effectiveness of a strategic plan. Fire (1997) states, “we must know what we want our organization to look like at a particular point in the future. To attain that vision, we must set certain mileposts and endpoints to measure against when we reach the desired results.” Wallace (2006a, p. 125) contends that any evaluation of performance should have its roots within the philosophy of operations of the department, which is based on the established mission and vision.

Fire's concept of Key Result Objectives can also be used as a form of evaluations. He states:

One fire department KRO could be attaining a certain number of fire runs. The goal in this case would be to reduce the number each planning period through the delivery of other services, such as fire prevention programs, smoke detector distribution, and increased inspections. Each method to reduce the runs would be goals in themselves – if each is reached, the KRO would be achieved (Fire, 1997).

This key result objective provides a measurable result that can be used to measure one aspect of a strategic plan's effectiveness. Fire (1997) provides additional questions to test the validity of a key result objective. These include: a) is "stretch" built in?, b) what are the rewards for attaining our KROs?, c) what are the ramifications of not attaining the KROs?, d) will our organization's culture change in attaining our KROs?, e) will our success force the department to change?, f) must we change to fit the strategic plan?, g) will our management style change in attaining our KROs?, h) will our success force us to change?, i) must we change to fit our strategic plan? (Fire, 1997).

"Where do we want to go?" is at the heart of strategic planning and the main reason for the strategic planning process (Fire, 1997). "It represents the ultimate goal of the organization for the immediate future, and it is the essence of the vision of the future of the department" (Fire, 1997). Kabir (2007) discusses the vision approach to strategic planning, in which stakeholders get very general and broad guidance from the top managers. Siarnicki (2002) discusses his vision for the PGFD, which:

...Included a business-like approach to operating and managing the fire department and the developing of a strategic planning process that would stabilize the organization. The

objectives were to make the process reflect the department as it is now, make the process value driven, establish clear and obtainable milestones, and make the results inescapable for everyone in the organization.

Wallace (2009) identifies this process as proactive futuring, which involves creating the future rather than simply reacting to it. It is a process of confirming the direction of the department as compared to its vision (Wallace, 2009). “Proactive futuring can help you plan for tomorrow” (Wallace, 2009a). Fire (1997) also notes that the vision must coincide with that of the customers (the citizens and organizations within your protection district) and the government leaders of the jurisdiction within which the fire department operates, which very often, are completely different from each other.

The strategic plan involves looking forward to the future (Coleman, et al, 2003, p. 3). Wallace (2006a) identifies plans as short term, medium term, and long term. “Short term plans are active action plans, and plans in the current timeframe of the operating budget” (Wallace, 2006, p. 48). Wallace (2006a, p. 48) states that medium term plans have timeframes congruent with the current term of the jurisdiction’s city council or board of directors, and typically change with each election cycle. “Theoretically, the election of a new set of elected officials or governing body could bring about a significant change in future operational plans” (Wallace, 2006a, p. 48). Wallace (2006a, p. 48) also states that long term plans extend beyond the terms of the organization’s governing body. “Typically, long-term plans become a chronological plan that includes all three time parameters” (Wallace, 2006a, p. 48). These long-range plans can be considered strategic plans and Coleman, et al, (2003, p. 3) note that “an even longer-range plan is called either a master plan or strategic plan.”

Fire (1997) poses the question: “What are our Key Result Objectives (KROs) for the Future?” He continues by stating “We may have literally hundreds of goals - some big, some small. Key Result Objectives are those objectives and goals that, if not successfully completed, will prevent fulfillment of the plan” (Fire, 1997). This is similar to the planning approach supported in *America Burning* in which the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control (1973, p. 24) stated that “Having established goals, the plan should seek to establish “management by objectives” within the fire department.” This operates on the principle that management is most effective when each person is aware of how his tasks fit into the overall goals and has committed himself to getting specific jobs done in a specific time (National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, 1973). Compton and Grantino (2002, p. 171) make a similar supporting statement that “the plan will serve as a communication tool for the policy makers within the local government and to department members, in an effort to define the organizational vision and to chart the progress.”

Wallace (2006a) states that “at the beginning of the strategic planning process, the leadership must believe that there is a better method to create future excellence.” For the strategic planning process to work, the fire chief and other officers must be committed to excellence (Wallace, 2006a, p. 63). Bryson (2004) indicates that “when leaders are strategically minded and experienced, there may be no need for strategic planning.” However, it is rare for one leader to have all the information to develop an effective strategy, and rare for a strategy developed by one leader to be effectively implemented (Bryson, 2004, p. 14). “Organizations that plan successfully draw on the combined wisdom of their various teams in an atmosphere of collaboration” (Jordan, 2006). Schmidt (2011) notes that every system in a fire department includes three levels of leadership, and it takes all three levels, working in unison, to bring a plan

to life. He contests that these three levels consist of the administrative chiefs working at the organizational level, primarily on creating the future; the operational chiefs or shift commanders, operating at the process level, overseeing the daily operations of the system and communicating and monitoring change; and the company officers, supervisors, firefighters, paramedics, and so forth, working at the performance level, where the operations on the street actually happen (Schmidt, 2011).

Creating the future and change may begin at the top, but real change occurs at the performance level, or the point of delivery, which is on the street. Therefore, input and participation from all members, especially those at the process and performance levels, is needed to execute the department's plans (Schmidt, 2011).

However, initiating and facilitating the planning process is ultimately the responsibility of the fire chief (Compton & Grantino, 2002, p. 63). "In smaller organizations, the chief is often the person responsible for managing the planning process, whereas in larger organizations, facilitating the process is often delegated to a staff member" (Compton & Grantino, 2002, p. 63).

When strategic planning is focused on an organization, it is likely that most of the key decision makers will be insiders, but when it is focused on the community, almost all key decision makers will be outsiders (Bryson, 2004, p. 9). Siarnicki (2002) believes that an open and honest dialogue is needed to develop an accurate list of issues to be addressed by the strategic plan. Kabir (2007) states "stakeholder involvement has become an important issue in strategic planning for municipal governments." Wallace (2006) states "the fire department exists to serve our community, our external environment." The driving force of a for-profit business is its internal environment, and in the case of the fire department, the external environment drives our internal environment (Wallace, 2006). Siarnicki (2002) made stakeholder involvement a

critical component of the PGFD strategic planning process; “Throughout the process, it was stressed that the department did not belong to any one person but that everyone was a stakeholder in the organization.”

Siarnicki (2002) notes that unless the organization’s governing body supports the strategic plan it is doomed to fail. “Government leaders’ rejection of the finished product or, even more devastating, their refusal to fund the plan, will be a sign of failure” (Siarnicki, 2002). However, “the existence of a local political community capable of informed governance is invaluable” (Morehouse & O’Brein, 2008).

Finally, feedback from stakeholders can be used to measure a plan’s effectiveness. Compton and Grantino, (2002, p. 63) stress that soliciting participation from stakeholders, both internal and external, is important. From his experience in the Prince George’s County Fire Department strategic planning process, Siarnicki, (2002) concludes that “the information (from meetings with informal leaders) provided benchmarking criteria to evaluate whether the strategic plan ultimately adopted addressed the organization’s objectives and the customer’s needs.”

In developing a final draft of a strategic plan, Wallace (2006a, p. 51) provides a simple table of contents for a strategic plan, which includes, in order: a) the title page, b) table of contents, c) executive summary, d) core values explanation, e) summary of mandates, f) department mission statement, g) philosophy of operations, h) vision of the department’s ideal future, i) environmental assessment summary, and j) strategic goals.

“Overall, the strategic plan is designed to be reader friendly and guide the department through major issues” (Compton & Grantino, 2002, p. 171). The strategic plan provides general guidance, and may not address every specific issue (Compton & Grantino, 2002, p. 171).

Strategic planning takes time. “It is safe to say that strategic planning will take longer than you

think it *should* take” (Wallace, 2006a, p. 69). Siarnicki (2002) states that the strategic planning process and resulting action plan for the Prince George’s County Fire Department took a little over a year to complete. “At least a year or up to two years may be required to conduct the twelve steps through the entire department. This is especially true if sub-plans are developed for each of the department’s functional divisions.” (Wallace, 2006a, p. 69).

The literature reviewed for this applied research project had significant influence to the design and outcome of the research. As stated in the previous paragraph, strategic planning takes time. Sources indicated that a minimum of one year is needed to complete the entire process. Since this is twice the timeframe allotted for the applied research, the action research focus and goal is to develop an outline for a strategic planning process for the Hagerstown Fire Department, who in turn, will be able to complete the actual process and develop the strategic plan at their desired pace. The literature also influenced who would be considered for input in the internal questionnaire. Although the literature indicated that input should be considered from personnel from across all levels of the organization, input for this research was only solicited from the Hagerstown Fire Department command staff. This was due to the time limitations to the applied research. Input provided from the command staff provided an example of true strategic issues facing the organization, which are included in the strategic planning outline. This was done to provide an example and direction in the planning process. Ultimately, input personnel from across the organization will be solicited in the development of the actual strategic plan, as the recommendations from this research will indicate.

Procedures

The action research method was utilized for this applied research project. The Hagerstown Fire Department does not have a strategic plan to guide the fire department into the

future. The purpose of this research is to develop an outline for the strategic planning process for the Hagerstown Fire Department. Three research questions were developed to support the purpose of this research. These questions were answered with a combination of an extensive literature review, a review of strategic plans from other jurisdictions both in and outside of the fire service, an internal questionnaire distributed to fire department command staff in the city of Hagerstown, and an external questionnaire distributed to fire service leaders from across the country.

The internal questionnaire (Appendix A) was distributed by email to the leadership of the Hagerstown Fire Department. The questionnaire was distributed to five fire department command staff members, the Fire Chief, two Battalion Chiefs, one Captain, and the Chief Fire Marshal. These personnel represented the entire career leadership staff in the fire department at this time, excluding the author.

The external questionnaire (Appendix B) was distributed by email via the National Association of Executive Fire Officers to 754 fire service leaders from across the United States and around the world. The external questionnaire consisted of ten questions, which were a combination of open- and closed-ended questions. The open-ended questions allowed for thoughtful, in-depth responses. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire, which was developed through the commercial website: www.surveymonkey.com. Responses were collected from December 1, 2011 to December 31, 2011. Respondents were also asked to share their organization's strategic plan. Space was provided in the external questionnaire to post a web link if available online. Others chose to mail their strategic plan directly to the researcher. The list of external questionnaire respondents (Appendix C) does represent departments from

across the country, but they were not scientifically selected to provide a specific cross-section of the departments in the United States based on size or location.

Both the internal and external questionnaires have limitations for this research. The questionnaires provided open-ended questions to allow respondents to provide thoughtful, in-depth answers. The desired feedback would provide qualitative results that could be included in the research. However, the depth and format of answers varied between respondents.

An interview was conducted on December 16, 2011 with Mr. Bruce Zimmerman, City Administrator for the City of Hagerstown. These interview questions are located in Appendix D.

Strategic plans were obtained through respondents to the external questionnaire. Eleven strategic plans were reviewed from the following jurisdictions: (a) Bellevue Fire Department – Bellevue, Washington, (b) Castle Rock Fire & Rescue Department – Castle Rock, Colorado, (c) Fire Department of New York – Brooklyn, New York, (d) Graham Fire & Rescue – Graham, Washington, (e) Kansas City Fire Department – Kansas City, Missouri, (f) Navato Fire Protection District – Navato, California, (g) Orange County Fire Authority – Orange County, California, (h) Rapid City Fire Department – Rapid City, South Dakota, (i) South Metro Fire Rescue Authority – Centennial, Colorado, (j) West Manatee Fire Rescue – Bradenton, Florida, and (k) West Metro Fire Rescue – Lakewood, Colorado.

To answer the first research question, “what are the critical components of a fire department strategic plan?” a review of current strategic plans from the City of Hagerstown, other departments within the city of Hagerstown, and other fire departments from across the country were reviewed. Additionally, information gathered from Questions 4 through 7 of the external questionnaire was utilized to provide information to answer this research question.

The second research question, “What are the current and future needs to be met by the plan?” was answered by interviews of key city leaders (the Fire Chief and City Administrator) and by responses provided the Hagerstown Fire Department Command Staff through the internal questionnaire. Information gathered from these interviews and questionnaires provided information on the needs of the department, and helped begin to identify the strategic issues faced by the Hagerstown Fire Department.

To answer the third research question, “How is the plan evaluated?” Information was gathered through Question 8 of the external questionnaire. Information on strategic plan evaluation was also obtained through a review of strategic plans provided by several respondents to the external questionnaire.

Results

The external questionnaire provided information toward the development and evaluation of a strategic plan, providing information to answer applied research question 1: “what are the critical components of a fire department strategic plan?” and applied research question 3: “how is the plan evaluated?” Question 2 of the external questionnaire asked “Does your fire department have any operational plans?” Of the 75 respondents, 61 (81.34%) utilize operational plans in the management of their organization. This is slightly higher than the 58 respondents (77.34%) who provided a positive response to question 1 for the external questionnaire, which asked “Does your fire department currently have a strategic plan?”

Question 5 of the external questionnaire was open-ended, and asked, “Who participated in your strategic plan/development process?” Responses varied, but over half (52%) provided a response that included either the entire internal membership, or a cross-section representing all members of the organization. Question 7 of the external questionnaire asked respondents to

select individuals or groups that had input in the development of the fire departments strategic plan. Table 1 indicates the responses provided for Question 7 of the external questionnaire.

Table 1

Participants in the Strategic Planning Process

Position	Response Percent	Response Count
Fire Chief	97.0%	65
Senior Command Staff	95.5%	64
Company Officers	83.6%	56
Line Uniformed Personnel	70.1%	47
Governing Body	56.7%	38
Community Members/Groups	53.7%	36

A review of internal strategic plans from the City of Hagerstown and strategic plans from fire departments across the country were utilized to answer applied research question one and question three of this applied research project. The internal strategic plans were the overall strategic plan for the City of Hagerstown, and the City of Hagerstown Information Technology Strategic Plan 2005-2009.

The City of Hagerstown Strategic Plan is a simple, one-page plan. There are brief, one-sentence mission and vision statements. There are four focus areas, each with one goal statement. Each of the four goals statements had seven to ten detailed objectives listed, aimed in achieving the goals. Most, but not all of the objectives have completion dates within three years of the plan's publication date of September 2010.

The City of Hagerstown Information Technology Strategic Plan is a five year plan, spanning from 2005-2009. The plan has detailed mission and vision statements. Supporting points are also listed for each statement. The plan states “Information Technology will be guided by the following strategic principles that will provide the channel and philosophy to move the city forward” (Hagerstown, 2005). Five strategic principles are listed. The plan then expands each of these principles. A diagram for implementation which provides a completion timeline is included in the plan.

The Bellevue Fire Department (Washington) strategic plan is a comprehensive, five-year strategic plan. The plan lists a mission and vision statement and core values, as well as guiding principles, similar to a philosophy of operations. The plan lists thirteen areas of focus, each explained in detail. These areas include performance and accountability, organizational design, administration, financial management, information technology, fire prevention, emergency preparedness, operations and emergency response, human resources, safety and training, facilities, apparatus and equipment, and organizational relationships. General strategies, as well as challenges, recommendations, and performance objectives and/or performance measures are listed for each focus area. The plan notes that results monitoring will be conducted to track the department’s success in achieving the goals of the plan (Bellevue Fire Department, 2007).

The Castle Rock (Colorado) 2010-2015 Strategic Plan was facilitated by the Center for Public Safety Excellence. The plan was developed by using a community-driven strategic planning process, which places a strong focus on the external environment and the views and input of external stakeholders throughout the planning process. This helped to establish community priorities, expectations, and concerns for the fire department. The plan includes mission and vision statements, and a list of organizational values. Results from a SWOT

analysis are included in the plan. The plan lists seven strategic goals for the department, and objectives for each. Critical tasks are listed for each objective, along with funding estimates. A process for performance measurement is identified in the plan. “Managing for results” is a concept that considers the identification of strategic goals and objectives, the determination of resources necessary to achieve them, the analysis and evaluation of performance data, and the use of data to drive continuous improvement in the organization as points to consider for the evaluation of the strategic plan (Center for Public Safety Excellence, 2010).

The Fire Department of New York Strategic Plan 2011-2013, is a simple strategic plan. It lists the FDNY mission statement, the core values of the department, and five strategic goals. Each goal is then broken down into one to five objectives. Each goal and subsequent objective is then explained in detail. Some objectives list anticipated completion dates. A list of key performance statistics are presented, but no form of evaluation of the strategic plan is mentioned in the document.

The Graham Fire & Rescue (Washington) strategic plan outlines the strategic planning process which focuses on four primary areas: a) where are we now?, b) where do we want to be?, c) how do we get there?, and d) how do we measure progress (Abel, 2009)? The plan provides a simple mission statement, vision for excellence, and organizational values. The plan utilizes the COWS process to identify challenges, opportunities, weaknesses, and strengths of the organization. The plan cites active community participation by the Fire Commissioners and the Fire Chief as a means of gathering input from customers on the expectations of the fire department by the public (Abel, 2009). The plan lists six strategic goals and a number of objectives for each. Each objective lists critical tasks for completion, as well as a timeline for completion, and performance measures.

The Kansas City (Missouri) Fire Department Strategic Plan is a detailed plan that lists a mission statement, vision statements, and values Valor, Excellence, Selflessness, and Integrity, each with an explanation (Emergency Services Consulting, 2003). The department uses a modified SWOT analysis, identifying Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges to “fully understand the scope and limitations of its environment” (Emergency Services Consulting, 2003). The plan identifies six goals, each with strategic initiatives, objectives, timelines, and critical tasks for completion.

The Navato Fire Protection District (California) Strategic Plan (2009) was developed by using a community-driven strategic planning process, which places a strong focus on the external environment and the views and input of external stakeholders throughout the process. The plan includes mission and vision statements, and also lists guiding principles for the organization. The plan lists eight strategic goals for the department, objectives for each, and critical tasks for each objective. The Navato Fire Protection District Strategic Plan (2009) utilizes “managing for results” as the performance measurement tool in its strategic plan.

The Orange County Fire Authority Strategic Plan 2010-2015 (2010) identifies the department’s mission, vision and guiding principles. The strategic goals of service delivery, performance and accountability, and technology are identified, along with objectives for each. Each objective is broken down into sub-objectives, each with its own timeline, critical tasks, performance indicators, and anticipated outcomes. Evaluation of the plan’s progress is conducted at regular intervals: the Executive Management Bi-Monthly Strategic Planning Meeting, the Bi-Annual Review, the Executive Management Yearly Planning Session, the Three-Year Review, and the Five-Year Review (Emergency Services Consulting, 2010).

The Rapid City Fire Department 2010-2020 Strategic Plan (2010) identifies the mission, vision, and core values of the Rapid City (South Dakota) Fire Department. These values: professionalism, reliability, service, pride, integrity, and loyalty, are listed with explanations. The plan identifies the strategic planning process, which utilized a SWOT analysis to identify the department's needs. The plan identifies ten strategic goals for the organization, and outlines specific objectives, influences, and measures for each (Rapid City Fire Department, 2010).

The South Metro Fire Authority Strategic Plan 2011-2015 (2010) first identifies significant challenges and threats identified in the strategic planning process. Organization philosophies are identified in their mission, vision, and values. The plan also identifies general operating initiatives. The plan lists six master strategic goals. The plan then lists organizational goals in and sub-goals in ten major areas. Many of these sub-goals are measureable and time-limited. Appendices provide information on stakeholder input, critical issues, service gaps, and apparatus replacement.

The West Manatee Fire & Rescue 2011-2016 Strategic Plan (2010) is a stakeholder-driven strategic plan developed over a four day planning session with significant input from external stakeholders. The plan defines strategic planning as "the process of utilizing available and relevant information to establish current orientation, determine goal points, and define directions. In other words: where are we now, where do we want to be, and how do we get there?" (West Manatee Fire & Rescue, 2010). The plan utilizes external stakeholder input to prioritize services, establish expectations, and identify concerns and praise for the organization. The plan identifies the organization's mission, vision, and values. A SWOT analysis was used to identify internal and external factors that affect the organization. The plan also contains thirteen strategic goals with related objectives.

The West Metro Fire Rescue Strategic Plan (2010) was written in conjunction with the fire service accreditation process. It is a five-year plan that identifies a mission, vision, and values, strategic goals, and outcomes. In addition to the general vision statement, there is a separate vision statement for each year covered in the plan, from 2011 to 2016. The values of people, compassion, communications, service, safety, commitment, excellence, strategic management, diversity, prevention, and lifelong learning are explained in detail (West Metro Fire Rescue, 2010). Each of the seven goals has accompanying objectives, critical performance tasks, performance indicators, and outcomes. The principles for strategic goals and outcomes states that the goals and outcomes should be aligned with the mission, vision, and values, should be measureable, wide in scope, built on consensus and common ground, and few in number (West Metro Fire Rescue, 2010).

The second research question for this applied research project asked, “what are the current a future needs to be met by the plan?” An interview was conducted with Mr. Bruce Zimmerman, Administrator for the City of Hagerstown. Mr. Zimmerman has been the City Administrator since June 1994. Mr. Zimmerman was first asked to discuss the strategic planning process used to develop the city’s most recent strategic plan in 2010. Mr. Zimmerman (personal communication, December 16, 2011) stated that a SWOT analysis was conducted with the six elected officials (Mayor and five council members elected at-large) and the city’s department heads. The council was given an outline of the strategic plan, and much of their input came in at the objective level. Mr. Zimmerman (2011) noted several limitations to the city’s strategic plan and planning process. City elected officials placed very little emphasis on the mission and vision of the strategic plan, but were more focused on specific objectives and objective completion (Zimmerman, 2011). He stated that “the plan also made many assumptions” (Zimmerman,

2011). Mr. Zimmerman (2011) also added that he would have liked to have retained an outside facilitator to guide the city through the strategic planning process.

The second interview question asked “How does the comprehensive plan coincide with the strategic plan?” Mr. Zimmerman (2011) stated that the strategic plan guides the city to achieve its overall goals. The comprehensive plan is a function of the planning department, and is a community development plan focused on city expansion and land use (Zimmerman, 2011).

The third interview question to Mr. Zimmerman asked his opinion on the importance of strategic planning in government. He stated that:

A strategic plan provides design and structure to an organization, versus incremental operations. We take a proactive approach (design), instead of a reactive approach to the issues at hand at the moment (incremental) when dealing with issues faced by the city. A healthy, progressive organization has a design that addresses what is needed versus what the organization can afford (Zimmerman, 2011).

The fourth interview question asked “what are some challenges you feel the fire department is facing?” Mr. Zimmerman (2011) stated that our greatest challenge is financial: “Our community wealth is not strong.” “Median family income is \$43,000.00. That tax base may not support the organization. The strategic issue is how do we operate progressively with a median employee salary of \$55,000.00” (Zimmerman, 2011)? Another fire department challenge Mr. Zimmerman (2011) foresees is the the changing fire service world and the need to progress as an organization. “Residential fires are dropping. How does the department adjust to the changing demands” (Zimmerman, 2011)? Service territory issues are also a challenge (Zimmerman, 2011). Mr. Zimmerman (2011) expressed the desire to create an “urban service area” around the city, where the city could provide services to unincorporated county areas

adjacent to the city, regardless of political boundaries. The final challenge was “how do we measure success?” (Zimmerman, 2011). Mr. Zimmerman (2011) stated that measurement of progress should be data driven, and we need to develop a database to make measurements and comparisons.

The fifth interview question posed to Mr. Zimmerman asked “what are some opportunities you see for the fire department to advance?” “Operationally, we need to continue and expand, where possible, our participation in the emergency medical service program” (Zimmerman, 2011). “We need to integrate the fire department into the entire city workforce, showing that they are more than just firemen” (Zimmerman, 2011). Mr. Zimmerman (2011) noted again that our biggest opportunity is to develop an urban service area around the city.

The sixth interview question asked Mr. Zimmerman what some of the weaknesses were that he saw in the fire department. Mr. Zimmerman noted the lack of staffing in the command structure of the fire department. “We have a rich history and ways of doing things in our fire department, and that’s good. But we need to develop and embrace a new and more efficient command and operational structure” (Zimmerman, 2011). Another major weakness is the lack of apparatus replacement due to the deferment of major purchases over the past several years, as a result of the economic status and the city budget (Zimmerman, 2011).

The seventh interview question posed to Mr. Zimmerman was “what do you consider strengths of the Hagerstown Fire Department?” He stated that “we have a career, professional department with a good reputation, led by a strong command staff” (Zimmerman, 2011). “We have a strong focus on public education and fire prevention” (Zimmerman, 2011). Mr. Zimmerman (2011) stated that the city has a well equipped fire department, supported with the

resources it needs. He also cited the flexibility of the organization, and the openness to do new things (Zimmerman, 2011).

The final interview question asked Mr. Zimmerman: “what do you consider overall strategic issues for the fire department?” Mr. Zimmerman (2011) referred back to his responses to question four, as these challenges represent the strategic issues we face. “We definitely have a financial gap to close, but we’re making progress with that” (Zimmerman, 2011). The development of an urban service area is a big issue that I would like to see us accomplish (Zimmerman, 2011). Mr. Zimmerman (2011) finally stated that “we need to identify how we measure our levels of service, not just in the number of incidents and response times.” We need to develop data to make comparisons and show organizational progress (Zimmerman, 2011).

The internal questionnaire consisted of five questions, and is essentially an internal COWS analysis provided to the department’s command staff. Responses were requested from five members of the command staff, but only three provided responses. Responses were kept anonymous. The first question asked: “what are the challenges you see facing the Hagerstown Fire Department?” A common challenge addressed by all three respondents was the issue of growth and annexation and the fire department’s inability of cover fringe areas away from the city center. The situation has an impact on mutual aid both ways. We must rely on volunteer companies from outside the city to protect these areas, and we will also be required to respond further outside the city on our border areas. A third respondent stated that our biggest challenge is working with surrounding county volunteer companies and political powers to develop an urban fire service system.

Personnel challenges were also noted by several respondents: “we need to find ways to deal with our current short staffed situation without reducing services and burning out our

command staff,” and “reinstating vacant career positions in an uncertain economic and political environment.” Also along economic lines, a respondent noted that “we never asked for money, and now the city is asking us to cut from a department with little or no waste.” Another mentioned the uncertainty of future county funding to our volunteer companies. Apparatus replacement was mentioned by one respondent, as “Engine 1, Truck 1 and Truck 4, are either beyond their recommended front line life span or very near to it.”

A few individual challenges mentioned included redoing all of the City's box cards and incorporating Engine 2's new location into that change, and helping the government understand the benefit of good fire protection. “Morale and volunteer recruitment and retention are challenges that never seem to be far away” was added by one respondent.

Respondents were asked to list opportunities they saw for the Hagerstown Fire department to advance. One respondent stated “at some point the City needs to make a move to be the emergency services provider for the Hagerstown Metropolitan area.” Another respondent noted a similar opportunity of contracting with surrounding volunteer companies to provide a metropolitan service. This would provide opportunities to secure additional funding, personnel, and resources, reduce the issue of providing services to annexed areas, remove the mutual aid impact, and eliminate dual dispatching of units to fringe areas.

Respondents were asked to address what they felt were weaknesses of the Hagerstown Fire Department. Two respondents commented on operational weaknesses. “Certainly our staffing level is a weakness. We constantly push the envelope at working situations and jeopardize the safety of our personnel.” Another cited the steady decline in the number and caliber of our volunteer fire fighters as a problem. “The fact that we are a combination

department can be viewed as a strength and a weakness, but it is part of the reason for the decline in the caliber of our volunteers.”

Two respondents addressed management training as a weakness of the organization. One stated that “we aren't grooming personnel for promotion into staff positions. This is partly because the Union hasn't cooperated with us on this, but I think it weakens the department long term.” Another commented that management lacks administrative training and the acceptance of administrative responsibility. “We need to move away from tactics and toward overall incident management.”

A final weakness noted by one respondent was the poor level of service received from our county's communications center; “I think it has weakened the fire service county-wide by increasing response times.”

Respondents were asked to identify the strengths of the Hagerstown Fire Department. All three respondents noted our people as our main strength. “For the most part we have fire fighters that are committed to getting the job done. Our people are better trained than they've ever been and they step up to the plate at any fire ground challenge they face.” One noted that we have many knowledgeable people on all levels, but those abilities need to be harnessed and directed. Other single responses included our City Administrator as a hidden strength due to his support for the fire department, and the fact that department is well equipped.

Finally, respondents were asked to list what they considered to be significant strategic issues facing the Hagerstown Fire Department. They were encouraged to frame the issues in the form of a question, so that strategic goals and objective could be developed to provide answers. The following is a list of strategic issues that were provided by all respondents: a) how do we increase staffing without widening the divide between the volunteer and career factions of our

department?, b) how can we partner with our bordering volunteer companies to expand the Hagerstown Fire Department's coverage responsibility into areas bordering the city but outside of the city's corporate boundary?, c) how can we get the First Hose Company to fit into the Downtown Arts & Entertainment District and remain at their current location?, d) how can we reduce overtime expenses within the confines of the contract with the Union?, e) What can we do to increase the value of the fire department as a work force to the City of Hagerstown, to secure our future in an uncertain economic future; i.e. maintain all current positions?, f) how do we integrate the remaining station volunteers into the Hagerstown Fire Dept (is it time to make one volunteer fire company)?, g) should we consider national accreditation versus improving our ISO rating?, h) how do we develop a metropolitan fire department?, i) how do we address our apparatus purchases based on the changing needs of the city?, and finally, j) how do we direct the focus of our employees towards the positive aspects of our jobs and the goals we can reach as one organization?

The third research question for this applied research project asked, “how is the plan evaluated?” Eleven strategic plans from fire departments across the country were reviewed and evaluated. The evaluation processes used for each were listed previously in this section. Additionally respondents from the external questionnaire (Appendix B) were asked in Question 8, “how does your fire department evaluate its strategic plan?” Of the 75 respondents 22 (29.3%) evaluate their strategic plan by the completion of the goals, objectives, and critical tasks outlined in their plan. Nineteen (25.3%) do not evaluate the effectiveness of the strategic plan at all. Six respondents (8%) stated they review their plan annually, but did not indicate how. Six respondents (8%) stated that their strategic plan is evaluated by staff or department leadership, but evaluation criteria were not indicated. Six respondents (8%) stated that their

strategic plan is evaluated by compiling information obtained through customer surveys. Four respondents (5.3%) utilize CFAI Accreditation criteria as a basis for strategic plan evaluation. Three respondents (4%) stated that they continuously review the progress of their plan, but evaluation criteria were not indicated. Three respondents (4%) stated they conduct a SWOT analysis to evaluate plan effectiveness. Two respondents (2.67%) used established performance measures to evaluate strategic plan effectiveness. Evaluating effective statistics in contrast to plan, meeting ICMA benchmarks, identifying increased efforts on performance, and maintaining healthy relationships with key stakeholders were each listed by respondents as individual performance indicators. Finally, one respondent wrote “the strategic plan is considered a roadmap for the future, plan is how we get there.”

Discussion

The need for formal planning in the fire service was first identified by the National Commission of Fire Prevention and Control in *America Burning* in 1973. Although this document discusses master planning for the fire service, the roots of strategic planning can be found here as well. Strategic planning provides direction for the entire organization and can serve as a roadmap for organizational success. Strategic planning allows an organization to identify challenging, strategic issues, and address these issues with a systematic, proactive approach. An organization’s strategic plan provides guidance; it identifies where the organization is, where the organization wants to go, and how it will get there.

Strategic planning takes time. “It is safe to say that strategic planning will take longer than you think it should take” (Wallace, 2006a, 69). Prior to the beginning of this applied research project, the research anticipated that the entire strategic planning process could be completed within the six-month timeframe established by the Executive Fire Officer Program

ARP Guidelines. However, it was quickly discovered through the literature review that additional time would be required to involve all of the necessary stakeholders to develop a truly effective strategic plan, as noted by Siarnicki (2002), and Wallace (Wallace, 2006a, p. 69) each indicating that effective strategic planning took at least a year, if not two years to complete.

Strategic plans can take many forms, but most have a common set of components or format that provide a foundation for the organization's purpose, and a direction for the organization to follow into the future. Wallace (2006a, p. 51) provides a simple table of contents for a strategic plan. This plan contains the following components: the title page, table of contents, executive summary, core values explanation, summary of mandates, department mission statement, philosophy of operations, vision of the department's ideal future, environmental assessment summary, and strategic goals.

Core values of the organization must be identified. Siarnicki (2002) states that identifying the organizational values helps the organization reveal how it collectively feels about itself and how it is perceived in the public's eyes. It is intended in the process of change, that these perceptions be transformed into a positive endowment (Siarnicki, 2002). Every strategic plan evaluated in this research identified core values of the specific organization. These values varied from organization to organization, but were similar in the theme of service. Values must be identified from all levels of the organization. In his discussion on the development of the Prince George's County Fire Department's strategic plan, Siarnicki (2002) notes that a values scan was conducted in the organization to make a determination of what values the organization collectively held. In the development of a strategic plan, the members of the Hagerstown Fire Department must ask themselves what core values they possess in relation to their mission or job.

The mission of an organization is the foundation of the strategic plan (Compton and Grantino, 2002, p. 63). Each of the strategic plans evaluated through this research have a specific mission statement. The mission of the Hagerstown Fire Department is to “Improve the quality of life through fire prevention, fire safety education, fire suppression, rescue and other special services to all the people who live, visit, work, or even invest here.” These are the basic reasons for the existence of the organization. Once goals are set, the organization’s mission will take it in a direction towards the desired accomplishments.

Each strategic plan evaluated in this research contained a vision statement. Vision is ultimately what the organization wants to look like as a result of the goals and objectives established in the strategic plan. Wallace (2009) refers to confirming the direction of the department based on its vision as proactive futuring. Our vision must also coincide with our customer’s vision for use. Fire (1997) notes that our vision for our future may not be the same as our customer’s (political leaders and citizens) vision for our organization. To begin developing a vision, the Hagerstown Fire Department simply needs to ask itself, “Where do we want to go?” However, through an analysis of our external environment, we must also ask our customers or external stakeholders where they would like to see us go. An example can be found in the community driven strategic planning process used by the Castle Rock (Colorado) Strategic Plan. This process relied strongly on input from external stakeholders to establish community priorities, expectations, and concerns for the fire department.

The philosophy of operations is a simple statement or group of statements that guide an organization in its decision making process. Wallace states that the philosophy of operations is the foundation for all of the department’s actions, and any specific strategy, operation, or decision should be based on this philosophy (Wallace, 2006a, p. 129). In the strategic plans

reviewed for this research, the terms of strategic principles, philosophy of operations, or guiding principles, were used to describe this concept. These simple statements, however they are termed, are based on the values, beliefs, culture, and mission of the organization (Wallace, 2006a, p. 125) and are a collective summation of their meaning. The philosophy of operations, or similar statement, is a critical component of the strategic plan. It can be used as the foundation for absolutely every decision made by the organization and its members, from the most critical strategic initiatives, down to the simplest, daily tasks, and can be as simple as “do the right thing.”

“The fire department exists to serve our community, our external environment” (Wallace, 2006). Kabir (2007) states “stakeholder involvement has become an important issue in strategic planning for municipal governments.” In the strategic plans reviewed for this research, “stakeholder-driven” (West Manatee Fire & Rescue, 2010) and “community-driven” (Center for Public Safety Excellence, 2010, Navato Fire Protection District, 2009) are terms used to describe the basis for the strategic planning process. These plans strongly rely on the input of external stakeholders and community members to identify strategic issues that affect their respective communities.

Both internal and external stakeholder involvements are critical in the strategic planning process. Table 1 (page 24) indicates, from respondents of the external questionnaire, that the majority of fire departments consider internal stakeholders from across the organization in their planning process, including the fire chief, senior command staff, company officers, and line uniformed personnel. Only 56.7% of respondents consider governing body input, and 53.7% consider community member/group input in their strategic planning process. However, this

indicates that governing body and community input are widely considered in the strategic planning process.

Input from all stakeholders is critical in strategic planning. Internal stakeholders include command staff and representation from Hagerstown Professional Firefighters, IAFF Local 1605. External stakeholders include city administration and elected officials and citizen representation. Bryson (2004, p.9) noted that when strategic planning involves the organization, the key decision makers will come from within the organization. However, when the strategic plan is focused on the community, the decision makers will be outsiders (Bryson, 2004). In the development of the PGFD strategic plan, Siarnicki (2002) stressed that “the department did not belong to any one person but that everyone was a stakeholder in the organization.” Although a strategic plan for the Hagerstown Fire Department is focused on the organization, the overall outcomes have a greater impact on the community we serve. Input from all stakeholders, internal and external, should be considered in the development of a strategic plan for the Hagerstown Fire Department.

Wallace (2006) indicates that assessing the strategic environment is an important component of strategic planning. This assessment will help develop an understanding of current and projected needs of the organization, which leads to the second question of this applied research project, “what are the current and future needs to be met by the plan?” Three methods of department needs or strategic issue identification were identified in this research, the SWOT analysis and the SWOC or COWS analysis. SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), COWS (challenges, opportunities, weaknesses, and strengths) or SWOC, all provide the same assessment of the environment, however COWS and SWOC phrases threats as challenges.

In order to understand the current challenges, opportunities, weaknesses, and strengths of the Hagerstown Fire Department, and COWS analysis was incorporated into the interview with

Mr. Bruce Zimmerman, Administrator for the City of Hagerstown, and also into the internal questionnaire posed to the command staff of the Hagerstown Fire Department. Wallace (2006) notes challenges often include issues that may reduce the department's ability to maintain the status quo, and often have a financial influence. Mr. Zimmerman (personal communications, 2011) stated that our greatest challenge is financial as "our community wealth is not strong." Respondents to the internal questionnaire also noted several challenges that ultimately have financial roots. Recent staffing reductions present financial challenges because we need to find ways to deal with our current short staffed situation and reinstate vacant career positions in uncertain political and economic environments. Both the City Administrator and command staff also noted that capital replacement of apparatus is becoming a challenge, as we are deferring capital purchases due to the economy.

Wallace (2006) identifies opportunities as issues that may allow the department to improve its service level, program offerings, or performance standards, and may be program specific or impact the department as a whole. Mr. Zimmerman (personal communication, December 16, 2011) identified the continuance and expansion of the emergency medical services program, and also the need to integrate the fire department into the city workforce. The opportunity most frequently mentioned by Mr. Zimmerman (2011) and the command staff respondents is the opportunity to develop an urban services area and become the emergency services provider to the Hagerstown Metropolitan Area. This area would include areas currently within the city boundaries and immediately adjacent unincorporated and incorporated areas. Although this is an opportunity for the fire department to grow, it will also create a number of challenges in the process.

Weaknesses are areas where the department needs to improve the most, and can also be considered challenges. The most noted weakness affecting the Hagerstown Fire Department is the staffing of command level positions. Down 46 percent from 2010, the staffing at the command level is a critical operations weakness, and “we constantly push the envelope on working situations, jeopardizing the safety of our personnel.” Mr. Zimmerman (2011) agrees, stating that “we need to develop and embrace a new and more efficient command and operational structure.” The cities fiscal situation has also been considered a weakness, as we have had to defer replacement of our aging fleet of apparatus.

Strengths are areas where the organization excels, and can be used as a driving force for tackling challenges. All internal respondents and the city administrator cited our personnel as the greatest strength in our organization. We have great people with tremendous ability at all levels of the organization, and they are our greatest asset. However, these abilities need to be harnessed and directed, as one respondent stated. A strategic plan will provide a general sense of direction for personnel at all levels for the achievement of the common goals of the department.

Strategic issues are the needs, ideas, challenges, and opportunities identified in the COWS analysis. Strategic issues are easier understood when framed as a question (Bryson, 2004, p. 43, and Wallace, 2009). Mr. Zimmerman and respondents to the internal questionnaire were asked what they considered to be strategic issues affecting the Hagerstown Fire Department. They were asked, as Bryson (2004) indicated, to frame their issues in the form of a question, just as Fire (1997) asks “over the planning period, what must the fire department offer and deliver to its customers to achieve the goals the planning team wants it to achieve at the end of the period?” Respondents and interviewees all provided strategic issues framed as questions, which can be found on page 35 and 36 of this applied research paper. These questions can be

used for the Hagerstown Fire Department's strategic plan, keeping in mind that some may be given a lesser priority after information is gathered from external stakeholders. Nonetheless, they provide a practical example of strategic issues that currently affect the Hagerstown Fire Department.

Strategic goals can be established from the strategic issues, the goal being the desired result or answer to the question posed as the strategic issue. "Having established goals, the plan should seek to establish management by objectives for the fire department" (National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, 1973, p 24). Once the Hagerstown Fire Department develops strategic goals from the strategic issues, the planning group will need to develop objectives to meet these goals. The most critical are the key result objectives that, if not completed, will prevent fulfillment of the strategic plan (Fire, 1997).

Each strategic plan reviewed in the research identified specific objectives that required completion in order to meet the strategic goal. These objectives can be broken down further into critical tasks, which were done in several of the plans examined in the research. The terms critical tasks and critical performance tasks could be used interchangeably to identify steps to completing objectives. Fire (1997) states that "goals and objectives are worthless if they are impossible to attain, but equally worthless if they take no effort to reach." Therefore, the Hagerstown Fire department should take serious consideration into establishing goals and objectives for their strategic plan. Goals and objectives should be attainable, but some amount of work must be required at all levels in order to experience productive results.

These critical tasks used to reach the goals and objectives of the strategic plan can also be the basis for a department's operational plans. Wallace (2009) considers strategic planning "just entertainment" if it does not result in some kind of action. Operational plans need to be

SMART, or specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented, and time-limited (Wallace, 2009) and should be developed by the personnel at the level where the action actually takes place (Schmidt, 2011). The Hagerstown Fire Department currently has two established operational plans. The annual operating budget provides operational direction on how funds are utilized throughout the fiscal year. The public education program has an operation plan (Appendix E) that provides a monthly breakdown of the critical operational tasks necessary to meet the goals of the public education program. The Hagerstown Fire Department should develop operational plans for every long or short-term program undertaken by the department. These plans will provide a course of action to complete critical tasks, which will in turn meet key objectives, working to reach the strategic goals outlined in the strategic plan.

Several plans identified specific performance indicators that can be used to measure the plan's effectiveness. Hagerstown City Administrator Bruce Zimmerman (2011) expressed the need to measure the strategic plan by issuing his final challenge to the department to answer the question "how do we measure success?" Several of the plans reviewed in the applied research identified performance indicators, measures, and desired outcomes of their objectives as forms of evaluation of their respective strategic plan. Respondents to the external questionnaire also provided a variety of approaches to evaluating their respective plans, from formal, individually developed measurements, universally accepted CFAI accreditation criteria, and frequent re-evaluation of the SWOT or COWS analysis. Informal evaluations conducted by developing and maintain stakeholder relationships was also identified as a means of strategic plan evaluation by one respondent, which was a method also identified by Compton and Grantino (2002, P. 63), and Sairniki (2002). Mr. Zimmerman (2011) stated in his interview that measurement of progress should be data driven, and we need to develop a database to make measurements and

comparisons. The Hagerstown Fire Department needs to first identify what data can be used to measure plan effectiveness, and then create a means of data collection and evaluation, in order to develop effective comparisons to demonstrate strategic plan progress and effectiveness.

Recommendations

The problem is that the City of Hagerstown Fire Department does not have a strategic plan to guide the fire department into the future. The purpose of this research is to develop an outline for a strategic plan for the City of Hagerstown Fire Department. Based on an extensive literature review, an internal questionnaire of fire department leadership, and an external questionnaire of other fire departments, and a review of strategic plans from other departments with the City and from fire service agencies across the country, it has been determined that a strategic plan, developed using the product of this action research, can be used to provide a roadmap for the future of the Hagerstown Fire Department.

From this research, seven recommendations have been developed to guide the Hagerstown Fire Department through the strategic planning process. First, the City of Hagerstown Fire Department should actively pursue the development of a strategic plan. The strategic plan will provide a roadmap for the future growth and prosperity of the organization. This will allow the organization to identify its current conditions and clarify strategic issues, and develop a proactive plan to address the issues it identifies.

Second, a strategic planning workgroup should be organized to undertake the strategic planning process. This group should be led by a strategic planning champion, and should consist of representatives from all levels of the organization. This will help develop buy-in from all levels of the organization, and consider the input of all internal stakeholders.

Third, input from stakeholders from outside the organization, as well as internal stakeholders, should be considered in the development of the strategic plan. Since the fire department is a public organization, whose overall operations and services have a greater affect on external stakeholders, a community-driven, or stakeholder-driven process should be utilized. This places greater emphasis on the external stakeholder's needs and the community's vision for, and expectations of the fire department.

The fourth recommendation is that the City of Hagerstown Fire Department should establish a vision, core values, and a philosophy of operations. Along with the current mission statement, these concepts build the foundation for the strategic plan. They essentially serve as the guide, or rules the organization will follow for tackling strategic issues and setting objectives that, if completed, will reach the strategic goals.

The fifth recommendation is that the City of Hagerstown Fire Department Strategic Plan should contain the following: core values explanation, summary of mandates, department mission statement, a philosophy of operations, vision of the department's ideal future, an environmental assessment summary, and strategic goals with operational objectives for each. These components will help the organization membership and the public understand why the organization exists, what is expected of the organization and its members, what strategic issues affect the organization, and what the course of action the organization plans to take to address each issue.

The sixth recommendation is that the City of Hagerstown Fire Department should develop operational plans for each of its major programs. These operational plans will help the organization meet the objectives needed to reach their strategic goals. These plans will provide specific steps for completion; be results-oriented, will provide measurable and achievable results,

and be time-limited. Successful completion of the operational plans, and their affects on the organization and the community, will provide a basis to measure the effectiveness of the overall strategic plan.

Finally, the City of Hagerstown Fire Department should use the outline in Appendix F as a foundation for its strategic planning process. This outline provides a format developed from components of other accepted strategic plans. The outline also contains a list of potential strategic issues that could affect the City of Hagerstown Fire Department, based on an internal COWS analysis conducted with several key internal stakeholders over the course of this research. The organization simply needs to continue the process and develop its roadmap for the future.

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Appendix A

Internal Questionnaire Email

All:

I am working on my final Executive Fire Officer Applied Research Paper, which will result in an outline for a strategic planning process for the Hagerstown Fire Department. I would like your input on the following items:

1. What are the challenges you see facing the Hagerstown Fire Department?
2. What are some opportunities you see for the Hagerstown Fire Department to advance?
3. What are some weaknesses you see in the Hagerstown Fire Department?
4. What do you consider strengths of the Hagerstown Fire Department?
5. What do you consider significant strategic issues facing the Hagerstown Fire Department? (strategic issues are better framed as questions; i.e. How do we reduce our ISO rating? or How do we maintain our service levels with fewer resources? etc.)

Please provide short (or detailed) responses to each of these questions and return via e-mail as soon as you can.

Thanks for your help!

Mark

Mark Cleck
Battalion Chief
Hagerstown Fire Department
25 W. Church Street
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740
(301) 791-2544
(717) 729-5136

Appendix B

External Questionnaire

1. Does your fire department currently have a strategic plan?

YES

NO

2. Does your fire department have any operational plans?

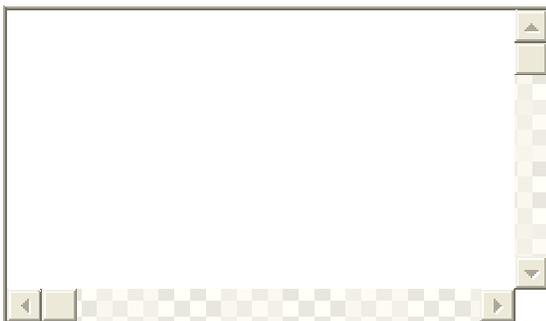
YES

NO

3. How often does your fire department review and/or update its strategic plan?



4. What values does your department consider so important that they are listed in your values statement?



6. Was your fire department's strategic plan accepted by the governing political body or authority having jurisdiction?

- YES
- NO
- Currently under review

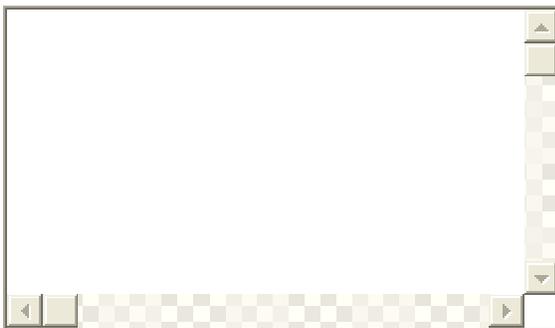
Other (please specify)

7. Select which individuals or groups had input in the development of your fire departments strategic plan.

- Fire Chief
- Senior Command Staff
- Company Officers
- Line Uniformed Personnel
- Governing Body
- Community Members/Groups

Other (please specify)

8. How does your fire department evaluate its strategic plan?



9. Please list the city and state of your department.

10. If your fire department's strategic plan is available online, please list the link below.

Appendix C

External Questionnaire Respondents

Johnstown, Ohio

Centennial, Colorado

Louisville, Kentucky

College Station, Texas

Orange County, California

Gainesville, Florida

Sandy, Oregon

Anne Arundel County, Maryland

Lawrenceville, Georgia

Ashburn, Virginia

Cambria, California

Bellevue, Washington

City of Port Orange, Florida

Garner, North Carolina

Seminole County, Florida

Carlsbad, California

Fairfax, Virginia

Honolulu, Hawaii

Westminster, Colorado

Waterbury, Connecticut

Kansas City, Missouri

Tulsa, Oklahoma

Wilson, North Carolina

Mundelein, Illinois

Payson, Arizona

Ocala, Florida

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Tamarac, Florida

Aberdeen, Washington

Waycross, Georgia

Wildwood, Missouri

Sylvester, Georgia

Ignacio, Colorado

Graham, Washington

Mill Valley, California

Hampshire, Illinois

Lebanon, Oregon

Wilmington, Delaware

Rock Springs, Wyoming

Apex, North Carolina

Castle Rock, Colorado

Onalaska, Wisconsin

Rapid City, South Dakota

Springfield, Missouri

Novato, California

Bradenton, Florida

Yuma, Arizona

Pocatello, Idaho

Casa Grande, Arizona

Fairlawn, Ohio

Goodyear, Arizona

Joplin, Missouri

Hampden Township, Pennsylvania

Pompano Beach, Florida

Tomball, Texas

West Hartford, Connecticut

Miramar, Florida

Nashville, Tennessee

Carrboro, North Carolina

Blue Springs, Missouri

Palm Coast, Florida

John's Island, South Carolina

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Calhoun, Georgia

Midland, Michigan

Ridgefield, Connecticut

Arlington, Virginia

Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Arizona

Baltimore, Maryland

Bluffton, South Carolina

Lakewood, Colorado

New York, New York

Denton, Texas

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Mr. Bruce Zimmerman, City Administrator, Hagerstown Maryland

Interview conducted on December, 16, 2011

City Council Chambers, 1 W. Franklin Street, Hagerstown Maryland

1. Please provide an overview of the process for the development of the city's strategic plan which you helped to develop.
2. How does the comprehensive plan coincide with the strategic plan?
3. What is your opinion on the importance of strategic planning in government?
4. What are some challenges you feel the fire department is facing?
5. What are some opportunities you see for the fire department to advance?
6. What are some weaknesses you see in our fire department?
7. What do you consider strengths of the Hagerstown Fire Department?
8. What do you consider overall strategic issues for the Hagerstown Fire Department?

Appendix E

Hagerstown Fire Department
Public Education Operational Plan

Here's an overview of activities performed by the HFD and the time period when they have normally occurred:

- January: Provide annual fire safety programs at childcare centers. Contact information is in the school file.
- Perform preventive maintenance, lesson plan modifications (if needed), etc, at Children's Village in January and February.
- Work on developing / enhancing fire safety initiatives and campaigns.
- February: Send safety house invitation email to grade three teachers (team leaders). Follow-up with a second email or telephone call in one week if required. All safety house information is in the school file. The safety house is usually taken to all city schools in April.
- Continue childcare center visits.
- Work on fire safety initiatives and campaigns.
- March: Finalize safety house schedule and send to grade three teachers.
- Prepare clock/battery smoke alarm press release. A sample is in the file. Email the release to media. Place follow-up telephone calls to ensure participation.
- Make a decision about what areas will be visited during the spring/summer neighborhood safety campaign. Half of the HOT ZONE and at least two census tracts. A master list of area is in the survey file. Split the aggregate survey area into three equal sections. Consider volunteer firefighter participation. Create survey area maps. Many are already in a folder. Purchase required survey materials. Inventory and stock the smoke alarm installation kits.
- Work on fire safety initiatives and campaigns.
- April: Conduct safety house visits at schools.
- Continue preparation work for the neighborhood safety campaign. Issue a press release on the scope of the neighborhood safety campaign and what areas will be visited.

Prepare to be asked to participate in spring and summer community events.

Work with Children's Village to prepare for the Kids Alive Fest which is held in May.

May: Begin neighborhood campaign.

Participate in the Kids Alive Fest

June: Continue the neighborhood campaign.

July: Collect, inventory and store all survey supplies. Process statistics from the campaign and release a report of activity to the chief, HFD staff, city and media.

Start work on the fall Children's Village schedule. City schools will occupy most of November and December. All instructors are paid overtime for services rendered.

Work with Children's Village to help recruit new instructors.

August: Complete the fall Children's Village schedule. Perform required preventive maintenance at the Village and prepare classrooms for the school year.

Participate in the annual community block parties.

Consider potential initiatives / programs that could be created or supplemented by an Assistance to Firefighters Grant.

September: Begin Children's Village program. Train / mentor all new instructors.

Send an email to all Hagerstown pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and grade one teachers (team leaders) reminding them about use of the Seven Critical Lessons on Fire Safety. Information on the lessons is located in the school file. Make sure the email includes an invitation for HFD staff to visit the school as a follow-up to the lessons. Remind teachers as necessary.

Prepare for fire prevention week. Consider the NFPA theme and act accordingly to plan fire prevention week activities. Issue a press release near the end of the month.

Near the end of the month begin scheduling the career Hagerstown firefighters who will provide instructional services for the city schools at Children's Village in November and December.

Consider making application for a fire prevention grant through the AFG initiative.

- October: Call news media to insure receipt of fire prevention week information. Respond to service requests from community groups.
- Visit all city schools as follow-up to the Seven Critical Lessons on Fire Safety. Lesson plan is in the school file. Be sure to have teachers assign the homework assignment. Ask that all completed assignments be sent by the teacher to YOU at Children's Village via school mail.
- Prepare clock/battery smoke alarm press release. Email the release to media. Place follow-up calls to insure participation.
- Continue working with Children's Village as needed to get new instructors working independently.
- Finalize the schedule for HFD instructors at Children's Village. Be aware that YOU are the emergency back-up instructor if an HFD staff member cannot fulfill their obligation.
- November: Review all completed homework assignments from the Seven Lessons project. Act accordingly on follow-up services.
- Conduct an inventory of HFD fire prevention materials. Begin working on a budget request for next fiscal year needs.
- December: Finalize budget needs for next FY and submit to supervisor. Obtain and complete the required community development HUD budget request for next FY. Larry Bayer is the contact at community development.
- Contact all Hagerstown childcare centers and remind them of the Start Safe program. Offer the annual fire safety program visit that integrates with Start Safe. Contact information, visitation request memo and lesson plan are in the schools file.

General Information:

1. NEVER stop doing regular canvassing of neighborhoods. This has, and long will be, the most effective strategy for reducing the occurrence of residential fires and improving working smoke alarm compliance rates.
2. Maintain the smoke alarm program. Monitor the smoke alarm installations and inventory. Do not let installation requests become lost in shift rotations.
3. PLEASE continue the Home Safety Makeover program. Although it has proven challenging to market, this program is very valuable because it delivers service to

- seniors who really need it. In addition, the HSM program builds valuable community equity.
4. Consider continuing in a leadership position for Safe Communities Hagerstown. Recruit motivated people (doers) to participate.

Continue searching for creative funding mediums (grants, foundations, etc.) to help supplement programs.
 5. Assist with delivery of the department's Youth Fire Setting Intervention program. Seek higher education to obtain a greater understanding of the problem and intervention strategies.
 6. Always be prepared to use a fire-damaged home as an open house window of opportunity. Act promptly on opportunities. Refer to the file for information about this program.
 7. Continue mitigation strategies on the leading causes of fire in Hagerstown. Always remain abreast of current HFD fire experience through use of departmental software.
 8. Assist business and industry with development of emergency action plans. Templates and examples are located in the respective files. Provide workplace safety programs as requested.
 9. Provide all new firefighters with a comprehensive overview of prevention initiatives performed by the department. Work hard to insure all staff understand, value, and cooperate with risk reduction efforts.
 10. Work closely with Children's Village staff to sustain this vital program. This is your number one priority! Assume full leadership responsibility for the fire safety component of the program. Teach your fair share of the classes. You are ultimately responsible for insuring teaching assignments are covered. Provide educational tours of the campus upon request.
 11. Work closely with the childcare centers to strengthen the Start Safe program. Use FEMA grant funding to secure teaching kits for all pre-school classrooms.
 12. Seek and take advantage of continuing education opportunities. Especially - the National Fire Academy's public education curriculum. Advanced education in the field of instructional methodology and curriculum development will also be helpful.
 13. Be flexible! One of the most important attributes of a public education officer is to maintain flexibility and provide quality customer service. You must work odd hours at times to accomplish this task.

14. Do not assume that childcare centers and schools will call you for annual programs. Use our timeline schedule and call them first! Be patient with their scheduling issues. Above all – be flexible!
15. Employ the same strategy with the news media. Maintain contacts with staff from all message mediums. Be respectful of folks with limited experience in their domain. Consider taking a class on public information officer.
16. Continue work on all on-going risk reduction initiatives and campaigns.

Appendix F Strategic Planning Roadmap

The City of Hagerstown Fire Department should actively pursue the development of a strategic plan. The following process should be utilized to formulate a strategic plan.

1. A strategic planning workgroup should be organized to undertake the strategic planning process. This workgroup should include the following individuals: the Fire Chief, Chief Fire Marshal, two additional career officers, four volunteer representatives, IAFF Local 1605 President or designee, three representatives (one from each shift) from IAFF Local 1605. This will provide equal representation of management, volunteer membership, and uniformed labor, which will also have representation from each shift. These individuals represent the internal stakeholders of the organization.
2. The strategic planning workgroup should have a leader. This should be the Fire Chief, or his selected designee. This individual should be the champion of the strategic planning process.
3. A group of external stakeholders should be identified to provide input into the strategic planning process. These should be individuals from the community who can provide objective input into the strategic planning process. Representatives could be drawn from:
 - A. Community Group Leaders
 - Neighborhoods 1st Groups
 - Service Organizations (Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, etc.).
 - B. Members of City and County Government
 - Mayor and/or council member
 - City Administrator
 - County Commissioners

- Members of other city departments.
 - Police Chief
 - Community Rescue Service (EMS) Representative

C. Community business leaders and investors

D. Citizens at-large

It is up to the internal workgroup to determine the role and depth of involvement of the external stakeholders. This may be limited to a single questionnaire, or may include inviting some or all of the external stakeholders to every planning meeting. At a minimum, the external stakeholders should be consulted to identify the community's expectations for the fire department (clarification of the mission and vision).

4. The Hagerstown Fire Department *Mission Statement* should be reviewed by the planning team to ensure that it is contemporary. The current mission is: "Improve the quality of life through fire prevention, fire safety education, fire suppression, rescue and other special services to all the people who live, visit, work, or even invest here."
5. The planning work group should develop a *vision* for the Hagerstown Fire Department. This vision should identify where the department would like to be in the future. The Strategic Planning Workgroup should consult the external stakeholders to help establish direction for the department. This vision should be detailed, with supporting statements for clarification.
6. *Core Values* of the Fire Department should be identified by the Strategic Planning Workgroup. This should be accomplished by conducting a values scan of the entire organization. The external stakeholders should also be consulted at this juncture, as it is

critical for the values of the organization to be congruent with the values expected by the external stakeholders.

7. Based on the Mission, Vision, and Core Values of the organization, a *Philosophy of Operations* should be developed by the Strategic Planning Workgroup. This should be a statement or a group of statements that can serve as the basis for every decision made regarding fire department operations.
8. An environmental assessment study should be conducted, and a summary placed in the strategic plan. This could be accomplished by conducting a COWS (challenges, opportunities, weaknesses, and strengths) analysis, which should include all external stakeholders and all members of the Strategic Planning Workgroup. The Strategic Planning Workgroup may consider conducting the COWS analysis within the entire fire department as well.
9. From the environmental assessment, a list of strategic issues should be developed and prioritized. Strategic issues should be framed in the form of questions which will be answered by the subsequent operational objectives. Strategic issues already identified through this research are:
 - A. How do we increase staffing without widening the divide between the volunteer and career factions of our department?
 - B. How can we partner with our bordering volunteer companies to expand the Hagerstown Fire Department's coverage responsibility into areas bordering the city but outside of the city's corporate boundary?
 - C. How can we get the First Hose Company to fit into the Downtown Arts & Entertainment District and remain at their current location?

- D. How can we reduce overtime expenses within the confines of the contract with the Union?
 - E. What can we do to increase the value of the fire department as a work force to the City of Hagerstown, to secure our future in an uncertain economic future; i.e. maintain all current positions?
 - F. How do we integrate the remaining station volunteers into the Hagerstown Fire Department (is it time to make one volunteer fire company)?
 - G. Should we consider national accreditation versus improving our ISO rating?
 - H. How do we develop a metropolitan fire department?
 - I. How do we address/prioritize our apparatus purchases based on the changing needs of the city?
 - J. How do we direct the focus of our employees towards the positive aspects of our jobs and the goals we can reach as one organization?
10. A list of *Strategic Goals* should be developed from each strategic issue included within the Strategic Plan. The strategic goal is the ultimate point that the department would like to reach, meet or achieve, based on its mission and vision. For each strategic goal, one or more *Operational Objectives* should be developed that will provide the means to reach the strategic goal.
11. Each Operational Objective should contain the following:
- A. *Critical Tasks* that need to be accomplished to meet the objective.
 - B. *Performance Measurements/Timelines* that can be used to benchmark progress.
12. Operational Plans should be developed for each operational program in the Fire Department. These will provide progressive measurements, to ensure that activities are

being completed as scheduled. See Appendix E of this research for an example of an existing operational plan.

13. Develop a database of measurable data should be collected to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan that show organizational progress.

14. The completed strategic plan should have the following format:

- A. Title Page
- B. Table of Contents
- C. Executive Summary
- D. Core Values Explanation
- E. Summary of Mandates
- F. Department Mission Statement
- G. Philosophy of Operations
- H. Vision of the Department's Ideal Future
- I. Environmental Assessment Summary
- J. Strategic Goals
 - Operational Objectives
 - Critical Tasks
 - Performance Measures

15. The Hagerstown Fire Department Strategic Plan should be submitted to the City Administrator for review, and forwarded to the Mayor and Council for acceptance.