Fire Corps Program Survey 2011

Report on Survey Findings, June 2011

Methodology

The 2011 annual Fire Corps survey was sent to 1,017 Fire Corps Program Coordinators. The survey was open for one month and generated 176 completed responses, making the response rate 17 percent. The goal of the survey was to evaluate the program and its existing resources and tools, as well as to ascertain interest in possible new resources and tools.

The purpose of the survey was to gather valuable data and information about Fire Corps that would otherwise go uncollected. Respondents who answered as not having an active program (29%) were sent to a different set of questions than those who indicated they have an active program. The survey questions utilized various formats including multiple choice, open-ended, and rating scales.

Structure of Fire Corps Programs

Over 90 percent of Fire Corps programs report being associated with a fire/EMS department. The categories of fire/EMS departments were distributed almost evenly between volunteer (33%), career (31%), and combination (30%). The remaining respondents indicated their programs were based out of other organizations, such as the fire marshal’s office, a paid-on-call department, and a volunteer organization that promotes wildfire awareness. The number of Fire Corps programs that are associated with career fire departments has risen steadily each year, up from 20 percent in 2008.
A large majority of Fire Corps programs (89%) are utilizing between one and fifty volunteers and are broken down as follows: 45 percent of programs have 1-10 volunteers; 19 percent have 11-20 volunteers; and 24 percent have 21-50 volunteers. Out of the remainder of programs (11%), the majority have between 51 and 100 volunteers, though four programs reported between 101 and 500 volunteers.

In total, 35 percent of departments and organizations began using non-emergency volunteers because of Fire Corps, and just over half of the programs are members of either their state or local Citizen Corps Council, or both. These figures have remained consistent over the last 3 years.

**Volunteers in Action**

The amount of hours that Fire Corps volunteers donate varies greatly from program to program. A small majority (32%) of programs reported that volunteers contributed between 1 and 100 hours total as a group in the last year. However, from 100 hours to 2,000+ hours, the distribution was fairly even, as demonstrated in the chart below:

The number of Fire Corps volunteers fulfilling certain roles has not changed noticeably within the last three years. Over half of all Fire Corps volunteers reportedly assist with administrative duties, public education, and special events. Canteen/rehab (49%), disaster preparedness (41%), and fundraising (44%) are also common activities for the volunteers. Some of the newer roles that Fire Corps members are fulfilling that were not tracked in previous surveys are smoke alarm installations (34%) and victim assistance (23%).

The number of Fire Corps programs targeting specific populations has also remained the same over the last three years, with senior citizens (45%) and youth (39%) still being the most commonly targeted groups. One of the respondents that chose “other” for this question identified another key group, “those within the wildland urban interface.”
Utilization of Resources

When asked to select the five most valuable resources out of a list of 21 existing Fire Corps resources, the results were clear: the Fire Corps web site (67%), Fire Corps Resource Guide (40%), Fire Corps E-update (39%), Fire Corps Department Starter Kit (38%), and sample documents/templates (38%) are considered by programs as the most valuable resources Fire Corps offers.

Respondents were also questioned about specific resources. Only nine percent of programs use 1-800-FIRE-LINE to find and recruit volunteers, whether emergency responders or Fire Corps volunteers. One-third of programs have not utilized the Fire Corps forum, but plan to in the future. However, 43 percent of programs were not aware of the forum. One quarter of programs have participated in at least one of the Fire Corps Academy online courses and found it very helpful. Another quarter have not yet attended a course, but plan to in the future. Of the remainder of respondents, 31 percent were not familiar with the Fire Corps Academy.

In terms of new resources, programs are open to all of the ideas which were presented. Over 60 percent of programs said they may or would definitely use an online store, a volunteer management system, or a media upload feature on the web site. About half of programs said they may or would definitely participate in periodic, live online chats with Fire Corps staff, State Advocates, and other Program Coordinators to ask questions and network.

Benefits and Challenges

Fire Corps programs reported that their organizations have seen more increased support from government officials (40%) because of the Fire Corp program than in years prior. This figure has risen 12 percent in the last three years. Well over half of all respondents report that an increase in community support and recognition and the ability for their organization to provide more programs and services have also been benefits of having a Fire Corps program.

Percent of Respondents Who Have Experienced Increased Benefits Due to Fire Corps
Overall, survey respondents reported fewer challenges in administering their program than in the previous years. Primary program challenges include: gaining financial support for activities (44%), generating awareness (35%), and recruiting citizens (35%). However, as the chart below demonstrates, these numbers have declined across the board from 2008, with the exception of developing project ideas, which is up just slightly by one percent.

### Challenges Encountered by Fire Corps Programs

![Bar chart showing challenges encountered by Fire Corps Programs from 2008 to 2011](chart.png)

#### Introduction to Fire Corps

The methods by which organizations have learned about Fire Corps have shifted slightly over the last several years. For the first time, Citizen Corps Councils (30%) were the main method by which program coordinators initially heard about the program. The Fire Corps web site (28%) was a close second, trailed by conferences/events (18%) and word of mouth (15%).

#### Program Inactivity

Last year, 35 percent of respondents described their programs as “inactive.” In 2011, that figure dropped to 29 percent. The main reasons for inactivity are the same as last year: program awareness is limited or non-existent (36%) and citizens are difficult to recruit (28%). Other reasons included difficulties with gaining financial support (28%) and not knowing who to contact for assistance with getting started (20%). Among those who chose “other,” several respondents claimed that a lack of time was responsible or that they had just registered the program and are still setting it up.
Comments and Feedback

Approximately one-third of respondents provided additional comments at the end of the survey. Below are some examples of the feedback that was received:

- Online courses would be more accessible if given out of normal work hours.
- We are new to the program and still trying to evaluate as a group if it will be of benefit to us, but the web site is very user-friendly and well set up. The FC-100 course was very easy to join.
- Still learning as we grow, but fearful of losing the program due to the “what’s in it for me” attitudes across this state.
- The Fire Corps Academy is great. I wish it would have been available when we first began. I will utilize it in training future members.
- The web site has good information on it and the frequent updates that I receive in email form are very helpful. Staff is always easy to work with and available. Thank you.
- We would love to understand the best way to present this to our board of directors. They see cost and no benefit.
- Make funding a direct award specifically for Fire Corps. In our region, CERT is the most widely understood so CERT projects are awarded a large majority of the grant dollars, leaving Fire Corps with minimal resources.
- Funding. How to raise money to become a 501(c)(3). We need seed money. It would be beneficial for guidance for small (volunteer) departments who are not included in city/government budgets.
- We are having a very difficult time recruiting citizens to help. Right now, we only have one person that has shown interest. We have had three meetings and he is the only one that shows up. I have contacted our churches, all county employees, done stories in all of the local magazines, newspapers, etc. I don’t know what else I can do. Any help would be greatly appreciated!
- Expand to include more info on Rehab Services and the need on the fire ground.

Conclusion

The 2011 survey provided valuable insight into how well Fire Corps is operating at both the local and national levels and provided assurance that possible new resources would be welcomed and utilized by a majority of programs. The challenges and comments revealed areas where our attention could be focused for improvement, and areas of strength have also been pinpointed and will continue to be cultivated.

All in all, the number of programs and the amount of external support is increasing, while the number of inactive programs and challenges in administering a program are decreasing. Fire Corps members nationwide have an ever-expanding impact and make a difference daily – not only in their respective communities, but also across the country.