

The Gateway Report

Issues Critical to North Carolina's Fire Service Leadership

***A report presenting the conclusions and
recommendations from the participants of***

The Gateway Conference

***Greensboro, NC
September 20-22, 2000***

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Introduction

At the invitation of President Jeffery Cash and the North Carolina State Firemen's Association, many of the elected leadership of fire service organizations in North Carolina met at the Park Lane Hotel in Greensboro, NC on September 20-22, 2000 to participate in The Gateway Conference. Twenty-two members of the fire service attended, representing state level fire service associations, and national organizations. The title for "The Gateway Conference" recognizes the current period in history, moving from one millennium to another, and the opportunity this transition gives us to reflect upon lessons learned from past experience, and plan for our future direction. The following is a report documenting the discussions, conclusions, and recommendations of the participants of the conference. The hope is that the fire service in North Carolina will benefit from the experiences of our leadership in attending the conference, and act upon the issues and recommendations in this report. Action should come at the association level, and at the individual level. Above all, it is hoped that the contents of this report will stimulate additional, continued thought and discussion on these and other issues relevant to our fire service. May these discussions create a passion to seek out improvement in all aspects of our service to the community we protect, and to those dependent upon us for leadership.

Purpose

The purpose of "The Gateway Conference" was to facilitate a meeting among the leaders of North Carolina's fire service to foster consensus on key major issues facing our industry and develop a vision for working towards those issues in a consolidated manner.

Goals

Five goals were established for the conference.

1. Provide an environment for leaders from different arenas to meet and network.
2. Provide individual leadership development.
3. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of our industry in North Carolina.
4. Identify 4-6 issues that all participants can agree upon as being "key" major issues to advancing our industry.
5. Develop a strategic vision and plan for partnering solutions to the key issues.

Participants

The participants of The Gateway Conference represent almost every professional fire service association in North Carolina, along with representatives of national organizations from inside and outside the State.

Dave Anders, President
Professional Firefighters & Paramedics of North Carolina

Alan Cagle, President
NC Fire & Life Safety Educators

Jeffrey Cash, President
NC State Firemen's Association

Kenneth Dilday, Past President
NC State Firemen's Association

Reginald Hassler, President
NC Association of Fire Chiefs

Michael Hill, President
NC Society of Fire Service Instructors

Reed Jarvis, President
NC County Fire Marshal's Association

Charlie Johnson, President
NC Fire Marshal's Association

Daniel Jones, Past President
International Society of Fire Service Instructors
Editor, National Fire & Rescue Magazine

Bart Massey, President
NC Association of Hazardous Materials Responders

Paul Miller, Executive Director
NC State Firemen's Association

Don Oliver, President
The National Society of Executive Fire Officers

Steve Sloan, 1st Vice President
NC State Firemen's Association

Johnny Teeters, Director
NC Association of Fire Chiefs
Gateway Conference Host Fire Chief

Richard Trexler, Chairman
North Carolina Fire Commission

Jerry Webster, Officer
NC Chapter, International Association of Arson Investigators

The following individuals provided support to conference participants during discussions by provided relevant information from State agencies and legislative activities. They were an invaluable resource to the process, but the conclusions and recommendations included in this report may not be their personal opinions or the official positions of the agencies they represent. The Gateway Conference members considered their participation as a “staff resource” and they are not to be considered as parties to the specifics of this report.

Tim Bradley, Senior Deputy Commissioner
Office of State Fire Marshal

Ken Farmer
NC Department of Community Colleges

The following were special guests of the conference. They were invited to attend and participate to provide leadership development for conference participants, share national perspectives on issues, share success stories from similar endeavors, and stimulate global thought and consideration during group activities.

Steve Austin, President
Delaware Volunteer Firemen’s Association

Randy Bruegman, 2nd Vice President
International Association of Fire Chiefs

Joe Judge, Leadership Trainer and Consultant
Staub Leadership Consultants

Paul Brooks, Gateway Conference Facilitator
Treasurer, North Carolina State Firemen’s Association
Faculty Member, Commission on Fire Accreditation International

Vision

The members of The Gateway Conference developed a vision of the fire service in North Carolina from the discussions of issues, priorities, and potential solutions during their 2-½ day experience. It is the desire of the members that the participating agencies adopt the same vision for North Carolina's fire service.

Gateway Vision

A fully inclusive NC fire service that fosters consensus on major issues facing our members and the citizens we serve, and that develops coalitions for working towards solutions.

Issues

The following issues were identified by the group as the most significant issues facing the fire service in North Carolina today. The issues relate to both the citizens of North Carolina, who depend upon our industry for protection, as well as members of our industry and the environment in which we work. The issues are relevant to all of the more than 42,000 members of the North Carolina's fire service, whether from volunteer, paid, or combination departments, and regardless of the size of the community.

The issues fall under eight categories. At this point, the categories are not in any priority order. The issues in bold were considered the highest priorities in each category.

Funding

- ***Should pursue more grant opportunities (emphasis on small cities, 20,000 and less population.)***
- ***Evaluate insurance premium tax on businesses and autos for relief fund.***

Fire and Life Safety

- ***Stronger mandatory sprinkler requirements in State Code.***
- ***More funding for safety programs.***
- Need Funding for fire and safety educators, 1 for every county, 1 for every city over 25,000.
- Enhancements in:
 - Enforcement
 - Education

- Engineering

Training

- ***Lack of mandatory standards (certification) for firefighters.***
- ***Need a State Fire Academy for specialized training, and research & development.***
- Need a joint testing/hiring pool for fire fighter positions.

Legislative

- ***Need to address Public Duty Doctrine to ensure coverage for fire and rescue personnel.***
- ***Fire Marshals must be included in services, planning, benefits, and equal representation.***
- ***Need a unified legislative summit.***
- Need local government representation on Local Government Employees Retirement System (LGERS) Board of Trustees.
- Provide better education/communications on our issues to public officials.
- Incentives for governments (and departments within) to consolidate services.

Planning

- ***State Master Plan should be revisited updated.***
- ***Need more strategic planning involving multiple agencies, community & government.***
- Need a statewide award system for innovative program development.
- Organizations should meet and confer on legislation.
- Need more “Full Scope” integration.
- Should pursue educational incentives for career development for CFO’s.
- Need more “full” commitment to existing institutions.

Retirement Benefits

- ***Need 25 year pension system.***
- ***Fire and Rescue Pension should be paid to all members at age 55.***
- ***The Retirement “Factor” should be raised.***
- There should be a COLA with the Fire and Rescue Pension Fund.
- Should be overall improvements in the retirement system (duplicated).
- Hospitalization should be included in the retirement benefits.

Resources

- ***Need a fast information system linking all of the state fire service.***
- ***Need authorization for cities to do EMS if they choose.***

- Lack of lateral entry, across the board, all positions.
- Staffing levels.
- Staffing commitment to fire/arson investigation.
- Lack of a diverse hiring pool.

Other Benefits

- ***In Line of Duty sudden death by AMI benefit.***
- ***Easier access for municipal workers to affordable workers comp.***
- Heart and Lung benefits.
- Need for tax credits for volunteer firefighters.

Priorities

Although every issue identified in the previous section is extremely important to North Carolina's fire service, the following priorities were selected. The members developed short and long term objectives for these issues and hope that each organization or association in the State will do likewise. The items presented here are in three priority order levels as determined by the participants. As stated earlier, these issues and priorities are those of the conference members, and may not represent the official positions of the State agencies that provided staff support. The Short and Long-Term Issue designation simply indicates an immediacy due to circumstances (like the timing of the upcoming legislative session), or members perception of time to realize action plans. The designations do not indicate variances in priority.

Level 1

- Strengthening sprinkler requirements to reduce life loss due to the effects of fire in North Carolina. (Long Term Issue)
- Require minimum training competencies. (Long Term Issue)

Level 2

- Court opinion that firefighters are excluded from the "Public Duty Doctrine." (Short Term Issue)
- Retirement multiplier should be legislative benefits focus. (Short Term Issue)

Level 3

- Seek authority for cities to provide EMS service. (Short Term Issue)
- Pursue a State Fire Academy. (Long Term Issue)
- Work to insure inclusion of Fire Marshals in benefits, planning, and legislative agendas. (Short Term Issue)

- Seek out or work to create grant opportunities to improve fire service funding resources. (Long Term Issue)

Recommendations

Strategic Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the members of the Gateway Conference, that each participating association include the Gateway Vision, Issues and Priorities presented in The Gateway Report to update their own strategic plan. Each association is asked to disseminate The Gateway Report to association members to provide awareness of major issues, and report key issues in which the association will participate in coalitions or partnerships for solutions.

Objectives

The members developed specific objectives upon which participating associations could partner together in developing action plans. The participants agreed that the NC State Firemen's Association should facilitate initiation of objectives written to involve multiple agencies, but this would not mean that the North Carolina State Firemen's Association could or should lead each objective.

Sprinkler Issue

1. Research other states and other entities to determine the scope of sprinkler efforts and success stories.
2. Document current fire problem in North Carolina with research and hard data.
3. Develop educational programs of success/benefits/methods adopted elsewhere.
4. Begin program to work with stakeholders (Developers, Building Officials, Fire Code Officials, etc.)
5. Identify trade off opportunities.
6. Draft and lobby for legislation and code changes for residential sprinkler alternatives or options.
7. Establish a task force to further study concepts.
8. Develop an economic impact/monetary impact assessment to citizens.
9. Prepare model cost benefit analysis.
10. Analyze current and new residential sprinkler technology and other alarm/early notification technology.

Required Minimum Competencies Issue

1. Establish a task force to educate, and lobby the legislature.

2. Task force should consider the following opinions:
 - Immediate need/ High Risk positions
 - Grandfather Option/May negate desired outcome
 - Phase In/Based upon?
 - 1041
 - Probationary Concept
 - Based upon population/call load
 - Reciprocity of other jurisdictions
3. Task Force should look at all levels of certification beyond FF becoming required minimum competencies
4. Research other states (FL and AL) for similar programs.

Public Duty Doctrine

1. Form task force to meet with legal advisors to determine our actual liability.
2. Based upon outcome of liability research, work with League and Legislature to develop legislation to exempt fire, rescue, and EMS same as Law Enforcement.

Retirement Multiplier

1. All agencies work to develop and promote a legislative plan to raise the retirement formula multiplier to 2.5. *Note: This would provide the retiree approximately 75% of Average Final Compensation.*
2. Identify possible funding sources to help speed approval process.

Cities Authorization for EMS

1. Establish a task force to gather data, develop a position, and outline action steps required to provide cities authority to operate EMS services.

State Fire Academy

1. Establish a task force to develop the concept of a State Fire Academy at a fixed facility for the purpose of program development, research and develop, and delivery of officer and other specialized training.

County Fire Marshal Inclusion

1. Establish a task force to develop a position statement supporting the county fire marshals inclusion in all present and future benefits.

Grant Identification and Development

2. Continue the current NCSFA strategic objective to research and develop grants for North Carolina's fire service.

Follow-up

The participants of The Gateway Conference should meet at the NCAFC's Mid-Winter Conference in Wrightsville Beach, NC in February to follow-up on the recommendations of the Gateway Report and continue efforts to partner strategies for solutions.

Potential Obstacles to Successful Implementation

The members of the Gateway Conference identified the following as opportunities for improvement in our State fire service, which if addressed, could help remove potential obstacles to successful solutions to issues.

Lack of Benchmarking

- Dichotomy (Haves VS Have-Nots), Third World Departments, Class I and Accredited Departments
- No "Bottom Line" in North Carolina
- Limited availability of hard data or research

Need for Greater Unity

- Fragmented (duplicated)
- Lack of unity
- Lot of diverse missions
- Rescue, EMS and EM should be included more in planning, etc.
- Perception of state separation (regionalism; "Down East", "Piedmont", and "Western Part of State".)

Communications

- Lack of communications (duplicated)
- Poor statistical data
- Management and labor relations

Unfocused

- No central clearing house to coordinate efforts/issues
- Tunnel vision
- Lack of a "central" focus...

- No State Academy, No Mandatory Standards for
 - Departments
 - Officers
 - Abilities
- No uniformed training program that is mandated (Police Do!)
- No Vision
- Absence of Uniformity of Purpose

Parochialism

- “You ain’t frum here....are ya?”
- Turfism
- Promotion of self rather than all
- Shared resources (fear, distrust, jealousy are obstacles to sharing resources)
- Security (security is threatened, fear collaboration, cooperation, distrust.)
- Resistance to Change (“Old” School VS “New”)
- We Are Greedy
- Personal Turf

Commitment (weak)

- Apathy
- Don’t believe what we preach