

The Gateway III Report

Issues Critical to North Carolina's Fire Service Leadership

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

The Gateway III Conference

***Clemmons, NC
September 18-20, 2002***

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Introduction

At the invitation of President Roy Spell and the North Carolina State Firemen's Association, many of the elected leadership of fire service organizations in North Carolina met at the Village Inn and Conference Center in Clemmons, NC on September 18-20, 2002 to participate in The Gateway III Conference. Twenty-five members of the fire service attended, representing state level fire service associations. Several of these attendees are also involved in leadership positions in national organizations. The title for the conference, "Gateway III," recognizes this period in history, moving into a new millennium, and the opportunity this transition gives us to reflect upon lessons learned from past experience, and to plan for our future direction. The Gateway theme reflects upon the courage and leadership required to pass through the "Gateway of the Future" to explore and chart new territory.

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

Facilitate a meeting among the leaders of North Carolina's fire service to foster consensus on key major issues facing our industry, and commit to our vision of 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.

Dave Anders, President
Professional Firefighters & Paramedics of North Carolina

Jerry Brooks, Fire Chief
Clemmons, NC
Host Fire Department

Wes Greene, Fire Chief
Guest Participant

Robert Griffin, 1st Vice President
NC State Firemen's Association

Jerry Grubbs, Assistant Fire Chief
Winston Salem FD
Host Fire Agency Representative

Rick Hall, Executive Director
NC Society of Fire Rescue Instructors

Michael Hill, Risk Manager
NC Volunteer Safety Workers Compensation Fund

Reed Jarvis, Representative
NC County Fire Marshal's Association
NC Fire Marshal's Association
NC Chapter, International Association of Arson Investigators

Cathy Lohr, Executive Director
NC Association of Fire Chiefs

Paul Miller, Executive Director
NC State Firemen's Association

Richard O'Brien, Secretary/Treasurer
Professional Firefighters & Paramedics of North Carolina

James Peele, President
NC Association of Hazardous Materials Responders

Steve Sloan, Past President
NC State Firemen's Association

Roy Spell, President
NC State Firemen's Association

Richard Trexler, Chairman
North Carolina Fire Commission

Jake Whisnant, President
Western NC Firefighters Association

Bryant Woodall, President
NC Association of Fire Chiefs

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
NC Department of Insurance

Ken Briscoe, Manager
Fire and Rescue Commission

Larry Hughes, Deputy Director
Fire & Rescue Training and Inspections Staff
Office of State Fire Marshal

Charles B. Barham, III, Associate Vice President
NC Community College System

Winfield Abee, Regional Coordinator
NC Community College System

Red McKemey, Regional Coordinator
NC Community College System

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

Jeffrey Cash, NC Director
National Volunteer Fire Council

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

The following resources were used as references to stimulate thought and discussion among participants:

The Gateway Report, North Carolina State Firemen's Association, 2000. This was the report from the first Gateway Conference.

Gateway 2 Conference Top 5 Priorities and Action Plans, North Carolina State Firemen's Association, 2001. This was the outcome document from the second Gateway conference. (Appendix A)

A Time To Lead: A Vision For The Future of The Fire Service, International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2002. A Document prepared for the fire service to solicit input and discussion for IAFC's Strategic Planning Conference, October 2002. Includes a message from Chief Randy R. Bruegman, President.

Protecting Our Nation: The Immediate Needs of America's Fire Service, joint agency document, 2002. A position paper presented to the President and Congress from the Congressional Fire Services Institute, International Association of Arson Investigators, International Association of Fire Chiefs, International Association of Fire Fighters, International Society of Fire Service Instructors, National Fire Protection Association, National Volunteer Fire Council, and the North American Fire Training Directors.

2002 Focus Group Report: Member Input Into Organizational Planning, North Carolina State Firemen's Association, 2002. This report documents the results of three focus groups, one held in each of the three regions of the State, held to solicit member input and areas of concern.

11 ideas For 2002, International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), 2002. IAFC Executive Director Gary Briese, CAE, report to IAFC Board of Directors.

Vision

The members of Gateway III discussed the vision of the fire service in North Carolina that came out of the original Gateway discussions of issues, priorities, and potential solutions. One edit was made to ensure inclusion of the rescue mission and community. It is the desire of the Gateway III members that the participating agencies adopt the same vision for North Carolina's fire service.

Gateway Vision

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

Priorities

Although every issue identified by Gateway participants were extremely important to North Carolina's fire service, the following priorities were selected. The members developed short and long term objectives for these priorities and hope that each organization or association in the State will do likewise. The items presented here are in priority order as determined by the participants. As stated earlier, these 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 immediacy due to circumstances (like the timing of the upcoming legislative session), or member's perception of time to realize action plans. The designations do not indicate variances in priority.

(The entire list of issues that were developed by Gateway participants are included in Appendix A to this report, and should be reviewed by the reader to put the following priorities in proper context, and to ensure that important items that may be addressed in individual association strategic plans are not overlooked.)

Priority 1 - Public Safety Officer Benefits (PSOB) (Long Term)

- Lack of coverage for heart disease as an occupational illness.
- The North Carolina PSOB has not kept up with increases in the Federal benefit.

Priority 2 – NC Fire Caucus (Short Term)

- Lack of legislative awareness among industry members.
- Lack of industry awareness among legislators.

- Lack of an effective system for promoting fire and rescue service legislation.

Priority 3 – Funding Pathways (Short Term)

- Disproportionate share of authorized funding at State and Federal level going to agencies other than the local jurisdictions.
- The path through which funding decisions are currently tracking fails to include significant local input.
- The model system should be the F.I.R.E. Grant process.

Priority 4 – Marketing and Communications (Long Term)

- Systems for communicating industry issues are not effective or non-existent.
- System for grassroots involvement when calls to action are required is ineffective.

Priority 5 – Fire Fighter and Rescue Workers Safety (Short Term)

- Too many fire and rescue workers are killed or injured in our Nation and State.
- There is not a significant emphasis placed on fitness and wellness by our statewide professional organizations and associations.

Recommendations

Strategic Recommendation

It is the strategic recommendation of the members of the Gateway Conference, that each participating association include the Gateway Vision, Issues and Priorities presented in The Gateway III Report to update their own strategic plan. Each association is asked to disseminate The Gateway III 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. It is recommended that each association provide representatives to participate in the task forces that will be charge with specific objectives and action plans. Each member of Gateway III that was present committed to work to achieve the strategic recommendations.

Goals and Objectives

The members developed specific goals and 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 task

forces to involve multiple agencies, but this would not mean that the North Carolina State Firemen’s Association could or should lead each objective.

PSOB (long Term)

Goal – Enhance Federal and State Public Safety Officer Benefits.

Objective 1 – Appoint a task force to achieve action plans.

Objective 2 - Support federal “Hometown Heroes” Bill introduced by Rep. Etheridge.

Objective 3 – Introduce a similar State bill for heart and stroke coverage.

Objective 4 – Increase State Line-of-Duty Death benefit from \$25,000 to \$100,000.

Objective 5 – Explore positions that may not currently be covered.

NC Fire Caucus (Short Term)

Goal – Establish a NC Fire Caucus modeled after the Congressional Fire Caucus.

Objective 1 – Appoint a task force to research and propose a model for organizing a NC Caucus.

Objective 2 – Organize a Caucus according to the model to begin with Long Session convening in January 2003.

Objective 3 – Develop a Caucus legislative agenda for the 2003 session.

Objective 4 – Organize a Watchdog organization to monitor legislative action and committee sessions.

Objective 5 – Task Force shall develop and implement a program to increase member awareness of the legislative process and legislative issues.

Funding Pathways (Short Term)

Goal – Lobby for direct Federal and State funding to the local fire and rescue departments.

Objective 1 – Appoint a task force to develop a position statement for distribution to Federal and State political representatives.

Objective 2 – Advocate for a model similar to the FIRE Act distribution method.

Objective 3 – Appoint a task force to directly pursue grant funding in support of Gateway goals and action plans.

Marketing and Communications (Long Term)

Goal – Increase and improve the marketing and communications efforts of the NC Fire and Rescue Service industry to better inform members and communities of services and issues related to public safety.

Objective 1 – Appoint a task force to research and implement a plan to achieve the overall goal.

Objective 2 - Develop an e-group(s) of industry members, target audiences, and other interested parties.

Objective 3 – Aggressively pursue the creation and maintenance of a grassroots contact and action group.

Objective 4 – Seek funding to produce a Public Service announcement(s) in support of fire and rescue service to be distributed statewide.

Objective 5 – Organize a support group of professional and community leaders from outside the emergency services community.

Firefighter and Rescue Worker Safety (Short Term)

Goal – Decrease the occurrence of all firefighter and rescue worker injury and death in North Carolina.

Objective 1 – Appoint a task force to research and document firefighter and rescue worker injuries and deaths, including near misses, in North Carolina.

Objective 2 - Develop or adopt a fitness and wellness plan based upon the results of the task force research.

The participants reviewed progress on the Gateway 2 Conference Top 5 Priorities and Action Plans, and agreed to continue working towards these objectives, many with activities currently underway, while adopting the new and additional goals and action plans in the preceding section. The Gateway 2 Top 5 Priorities and Action Plans are listed in Appendix B to this report.

Follow-up

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

Potential Obstacles to Successful Implementation

The members of Gateway III reviewed and reaffirmed 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 on legislative issues
- Poor statistical data
- Not effectively communicating labor issues
- Lack of "Watchdog" network or system for following legislative action

Unfocused

- Need to better 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!)
- Absence of Uniformity of Purpose

Parochialism

- 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
- Failure to act, or lack of awareness, on an individual level
- We do not always “Walk the Talk”

Appendix A

Overall Issues

The group identified the following issues as the most significant issues facing the fire and rescue 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 50,000 members of North Carolina's fire and rescue service, whether from volunteer, paid, or combination departments, and regardless of the size of the community.

The issues fall under five categories. At this point, the categories are not in any priority order.

Legislative

- We need to develop county political contacts.
- We need to pursue establishing a Fire Caucus in the North Carolina General Assembly.
- There is a general lack of legislative awareness among industry members.
- There is a general lack of awareness among legislators concerning fire and rescue issues.
- Departments should have access to shared contracts for purchasing.
- Apparatus driver's age appears to be an issue in safe vehicle operation.
- The North Carolina fire and rescue industry needs a consolidated political action committee (in addition to individual organization's special interest PACs) to promote consolidated efforts in the political arena.
- There should be greater legislative efforts towards providing funding for staffing.
- We lack an effective, organized vehicle for communicating legislative action and issues among industry members.
- There is no organized "watchdog" effort to monitor legislative action on industry wide issues.
- There are serious issues concerning funding pathways that result in diluting funding levels that actually reach the local jurisdiction.

Training and Education

- We should continue to expand and upgrade fire and rescue training offered to members of the emergency response community.

- There needs to be improvement in defining basic training needs and curriculums.
- There is inadequate investment in research and development.
- Availability of Instructional props is inconsistent.
- More efforts are needed in forecasting training needs.
- Training and education of members and public are required for the hazards presented in roadway events and overall roadway safety.
- Members are not attending important training activities.
- There should be a more strategic approach to locating local and regional training facilities.
- Our industry should pursue “reciprocity” of training and certifications among member agencies.
- Our industry needs minimum training competencies. This issue continues to surface in any professional gathering.
- We must place greater emphasis on formal education.
- We should establish criteria for training facility design and develop models to make available to local agencies.
- Budget problems at the State and local level are having an impact (current and future) on agencies that provide support and services to North Carolina’s fire and rescue industry.

Standards

- We need to promote more partnerships in developing Standard Operating Guidelines at the local level.
- The “meetings and training” clause found in many fire service statutes requires more specific definition to ensure the needs of the industry and members are being met.
- Fire Fighter and Rescue Worker safety continues to be an issue.
- The volunteer exemptions to safety standards should be eliminated since they are in conflict with industry and safety standards, and communicate the wrong message for safety of personnel.
- Greater emphasis and resources should be targeted towards fire and life safety programs.
- We should promote identification of the fire problem at all levels and develop strategies to address the problem directly.
- We should promote programs and resources for physical fitness of members.
- We should make concerted efforts to encourage risk and hazard assessments in our communities to promote the most appropriate planning and response.

Benefits

- There are inequities in the Fire and Rescue Pension 55 year old eligibility criteria.
- There is a need for more low interest loans to fire departments.
- Instructors coverage for benefits should be addressed, specifically the Public Safety Officer [line of duty death] Benefit (PSOB).
- As an industry, we should pursue greater educational incentives for members.
- The disability earnings cap in the Local Government Employees Retirement Fund should be removed.
- The State PSOB must be increased.
- State and Federal PSOB benefits should be expanded to include a heart benefit, greater coverage for instructors, etc.
- The Local Government Employees Retirement Fund should provide for options that can be adopted at the local level to enhance the basic benefit.
- There should be tax credits for fire fighter training, education, and participation.

Marketing

- Our industry, and specifically at the State level, lacks an adequate and effective public relations effort.
- We should attempt to change the terminology from “police/fire” to “fire/police.”
- We must mount a marketing campaign directed outside of our own agencies to the community at large.
- We should create “New Traditions” that will help us change the culture within our industry and achieve our goals and objectives.
- “Gateway” and the resulting reports and plans must be aggressively marketed to communicate and achieve the overall goals and objectives.
- There is not a wide spread commitment at the local organizational level to the Gateway Vision.
- There is not a single location to which members can inquire of issues and items of importance to our industry. There should be an “issue hopper” where individuals could go to see what is current.
- There is still not adequate information or action on diversity and inclusion issues.
- There must be some method developed to engage our members to become more aware/ knowledgeable of issues, and to act.
- Gateway must be marketed on a very broad scale to be effective.
- We must do a better job of marketing the services and benefits to our communities from the fire and rescue industry.
- There is not enough money to support local needs for Weapons of Mass Destruction equipment.

- Our members need guidance from our leadership organizations on major issues such as 1710/1720, accreditation, ISO (ISO for jurisdictions over 100,000 population, and the NC Response Rating System for jurisdictions under 100,000).
- There must be a major grass roots effort mounted to organize, mobilize, and motivate members and member departments to take action in the political arena, standards setting processes, and any other national, state, or local arena that impacts the members of our industry and the communities they serve.

Previous Gateway Issues

The following issues appear in previous Gateway I or II documents and were considered by the group as worthy of continued attention. Most of these items are included in action plans, which have already been assigned to existing Gateway task forces, or appear in individual organizations strategic plans.

- The Retirement Multiplier
- Time tables and accountability of specific Gateway action plans
- Updating of the State Master Plan
- Pursuing a State Fire Academy
- Pursuing Fire Marshal inclusion in benefits programs (See Appendix B)
- Identifying grants or other potential funding sources
- Pursuing minimum training competencies
- Pursuing Public Duty Doctrine protection
- Stronger mandatory sprinkler protection
- City's authorization to provide EMS services
- Creating central focus and clearing house for dissemination of information

Appendix B

Gateway 2 Conference Top 5 Priorities and Action Plans

1. **Objective:** Enhancement of retirement package should be legislative benefits focus. (Long Term Issue)

Action Plan:

- Immediately contact local representatives and ask them to support 25-year retirement bills.
 - State Firemen's Association to develop a letter and bullet sheet to be mailed to the respective presidents of all fire/rescue agencies by Oct. 15, 2001.
 - Interagency communication to occur between NCSFA and PFFPNC/IAFF concerning retirement and benefit issues throughout the year. (Dave Anders and Paul Miller)
2. **Objective:** 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. (Long Term Issue)

Action Plan:

- Task Force will develop a conceptual plan by November 19, 2001.
 - The Task Force will present to the 8 department Community College Coordinators and OSFM a conceptual plan on November 30, 2001.
 - A meeting with the 58 community colleges' Deans of Continuing Education and the School Coordinators to present the conceptual plan will be done by the Task Force in the first quarter of 2002.
 - Between November and January survey with a cover letter and bulleted conceptual plan will be mailed to all firefighters in North Carolina.
3. **Objective:** To provide County Fire Marshals and their eligible staff with equal benefits to firefighters that is members of a certified fire department in North Carolina and members of the North Carolina State Firemen's Association.

Action Plan:

- Prepare a recognizable definition of a County Fire Marshal and their eligible staff (See Appendix C). Definition should be broad enough to cover training requirements (36 hours) and related responsibilities. The N.C.County Fire Marshal's Association along with NCSFA will develop this definition by December 31, 2001.
- Research and identify all General Statutes that affect benefits for Firefighters and identify how other statutes have been modified to include previously omitted groups. The legal staff of the NCSFA and the legislative liaison from the N.C.County Fire Marshal's Association will work together to complete this by June 30, 2002.
- Draft appropriate legislation to accomplish the following objectives:
 - a. Modify Statutes to allow CFM and staff as defined access to the benefits of the NC State Firemen's Assoc. that are paid for with Relief Fund money.
 - b. Modify Pension Fund Statutes to include CFM staff as defined in the Pension Fund.
 - c. Modify Statutes affecting In-Line of Duty Death Benefits to include CFM and their staff as defined.
 - d. Draft legislation that ensures that CFM and their staff as defined will be included in all future benefit legislation that applies to firefighters in North Carolina.
 - e. Obtain sponsorship to introduce these bills and changes in the long session in 2003.

Reed Jarvis and Roy Spell will Co-Chair the Task Force. This Task Force will work with the Legal Staff of the NCSFA and the legislative liaison (Mike Tapp) of the NC County Fire Marshal's Association to accomplish the objectives in this section by December 31, 2002. Oversight of legislative issues and concerns will occur between the NCSFA and the County Fire Marshal Association. * **Footnote - Access to said benefits will require the CFM and their eligible staff to be members in good standing of the NC State Firemen's Association.**

4. **Objective:** Identify alternate funding and grant opportunities and develop awareness, education, training, and mentoring in the methods of obtaining grants. (Long Term Issue)

Action Plan:

- Identify alternative funding sources for North Carolina Fire/Rescue Services and provides access to the information in various formats.
- The Task Force, within 30 days, will develop a list of Federal, State, Local, and Private Funding Sources including grants.

- By May 1, 2002 have developed the list for publication in newsletters, catalogs, and electronic web sites.

Action Plan:

- The Task Force will provide training, education and mentoring for grant seekers to the North Carolina Fire/Rescue Service.
 - By May 1, 2002 the Task Force will:
 - Identify existing workshops that are available to provide information on grant writing.
 - Identify and provide listing of grant recipient departments willing to participate in a mentoring process.
 - Develop, schedule and publicize workshops throughout North Carolina.
5. **Objective:** Identify a State Fire/Rescue Focus or Central Point to disseminate information and resources (State & Federal funding) to be handed off to the local level. (Short)

Action Plan

- The focus shall be the Office of State Fire Marshal. OSFM will develop a written protocol by mid winter conference of 2002 to report back to Gateway 2 on the dissemination of resources between Local, State and Federal government.

Action Plan

- Identify political focus for issues dealing with benefits. This will be a focus between NCSFA, PFFPNC and the NCAREMS.
- A Task Force of Paul Miller, Gorden Joyner, and Dave Anders will develop a communications network to disseminate information among the proper agencies by January 30, 2002. The task shall develop a list of email addresses and establish an "e-groups" or similar distribution network.

Appendix C

“County Fire Marshal” defined –

Any member of a unit of county government whose assigned duties include firefighting or fire suppression related activities, response to incidents involving hazardous materials/weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or fire/arson investigation. Additional duties may include but are not limited to the organization and coordination of county fire services, enforcement of fire laws, codes and regulations, fire and life safety education and fire service training. Each member shall attend at least 36 hours of drills and meetings in each calendar year, which shall be certified by the Board of County Commissioners.