



Fire Staffing and Succession Planning

Audit No. 2409

WHY WE DID THIS AUDIT

The audit evaluates the effectiveness of the Scottsdale Fire Department's (SFD) succession planning, including review of staffing, recruitment, and training of key personnel, as well as the potential impact to staffing levels due to the expected increase in firefighter retirements over the next few years.

BACKGROUND

The Scottsdale Fire Department (SFD) was established in 2005, when the contract with a fire service provider ended.

After 20 years of service, the firefighters hired when the department was created are now eligible to retire through the Public Safety Personnel Pension System (PSPRS). A small portion have already retired, having transferred or purchased years of credited service from an eligible organization or reached the age of 62, with 15 or more years of service.

PSPRS members that joined prior to 2012 may also enroll in the Deferred Retirement Option Plan (DROP) upon retirement, which allows participants to defer pension benefits and continue working up to 5 years (or up to 7, if qualified).

WHAT WE FOUND

A succession plan with expanded training and development strategies is needed to prepare SFD for the retirement of many top-ranking firefighters over the next few years.

About 60% of sworn firefighters in supervisory and leadership positions are eligible for retirement. SFD has expanded its promotional academies and increased hiring over the past year. To bridge the gap in experience, a strategic approach to training and development is needed. In addition to developing a formal Succession Plan document, areas for improvement include:

- Providing a career development guide to firefighters
- Assessing and document skills, strengths, and qualifications of its existing workforce, and develop a prioritized/strategic training plan to fill identified skills gaps.
- Identify training-related costs and align the training budget with the training plan.

Using overtime to cover daily shift staffing can be costly and does not allow SFD to hire and train additional firefighters to fill upcoming vacancies.

- By the end of FY 2025/26 staffing need to provide daily minimum coverage of Emergency Operations will exceed the number of authorized positions, increasing reliance on overtime to provide shift relief.
- Rank promotions, job changes, and increasing training needs are not typically addressed in staffing calculations but impacted the ability to staff daily shifts and resulted in higher overtime usage during FY 2024/25.
- Improving tracking of other activities, such as wildland firefighting and special event staffing, would allow for further analysis of staffing needs.
- Documentation of data and assumptions used in its staffing calculations could be improved. As well, further automation of its open shift assignment process would improve efficiency and ensure overtime assignment policies are consistently applied.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We recommend the Fire Chief:

- Develop a formal Succession Plan that includes: a strategic training and development plan and budget, a career development guide, assessment of skills and qualification within the existing workforce, and projections of future talent requirements.
- Evaluate organizational or policy changes that would expand the candidate pool for management roles or availability of specialty-certified firefighters.
- Evaluate whether adjustments to staffing calculations are needed and improve documentation of data and assumptions used.

Management agreed with the recommendations.