

Governance Model and Implementation Roadmap

Fire Services Governance Study

Fire Services Association of Nova Scotia



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ACRONYMS

AHJ	Authority Having Jurisdiction
CBRM	Cape Breton Regional Municipality
DNR	Department of Natural Resources
EHS	Emergency Health Services
FSANS	Fire Services Association of Nova Scotia
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NFPA	National Fire Protection Association
NG-911	Next Generation 9-1-1
NSFM	Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety (Nova Scotia)
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PSAP	Public Safety Answering Point
PTSI	Post-Traumatic Stress Injury
WUI	Wildland-Urban Interface

GOVERNANCE AND LEGISLATION

CONTEXT

At present, confusion exists as a result of numerous pieces of legislation that govern and/or impact the operation of municipal fire departments in Nova Scotia. In each engagement session, including both fire service and municipal administrators alike, concerns were expressed about the confusion created by the current disparate regulatory framework.

The creation and implementation of a consolidated piece of legislation governing all aspects of fire service operations in Nova Scotia would provide clarity and address several concerns being expressed across the sector.

Several foundational improvements can be addressed through the creation of new and/or consolidated Nova Scotia Fire Services legislation.

A complete analysis of current fire services legislation in Nova Scotia and comparative Canadian jurisdictions is available in Appendix A, "Key Insights Report".



ANALYSIS

Numerous Legislation

In order to understand and reference the current regulatory and legislative frameworks and provisions governing fire services operations in Nova Scotia at present, numerous pieces of legislation must be accessed and understood. This is creating confusion across the sector.

Several opportunities for improvement would be best addressed through the creation and implementation of consolidated legislation, including:

- At present, there is no requirement for the Council of a municipality to authorize the creation and/or operation of a fire department. As such, private fire departments are able to be formed and operated, absent any consideration, approvals, or oversight by elected officials in a municipality.
- At present, there is no requirement for the Council of a municipality to approve or appoint the Fire Chief. This results in a lack of effective authority, responsibility, and accountability on the part of the local Fire Chief to the Council of the municipality they serve.
- Currently, there is a lack of clarity regarding the services that fire departments are responsible for providing. Commonly referred to as "fire protection services",

establishing a clear definition would reduce confusion and develop a common framework across Nova Scotia.

- Currently, significant issues and concerns arise due to the lack of clarity regarding the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) for various fire service matters within a municipality. While these concerns exist in several jurisdictions in Nova Scotia, they are most significant within the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM), where issues with the AHJ commonly arise between the CBRM Fire Chief and local Fire Chiefs.
- At present, there is no requirement for the local Fire Department to advise the Council of a municipality as to the fire protection service levels that are being provided in the municipality. This results in misconceptions and confusion among both elected officials and residents alike. This is also a continuing point of concern for Councillors, who are unable to accurately inform their constituents on matters pertaining to fire protection service levels, and who are expected to provide funding for fire service operations without fully understanding the levels of service being provided.

Definitions

Many expressed concerns regarding the lack of clear legislative definitions for the positions, functions, and responsibilities associated with various fire service roles. Most notably, this emerges in the absence of clear definitions for "Firefighter" and "Fire Chief". Likewise, the current lack of a common definition of "Firefighter" results in feelings of inequity between career and volunteer firefighters and is the basis for concern regarding the equitable application of programs and benefits, including WCB and presumptive cancer-related coverages for Firefighters in Nova Scotia.

Indemnity

The current legislative framework in Nova Scotia does not provide for precise and consistent professional indemnity for Firefighters and Fire Chiefs in the performance of their duties. Many identify this as a significant issue impacting the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters across Nova Scotia, resulting in increased costs as Fire Departments are left to obtain and fund private insurance coverage to satisfy these concerns.



Collaboration Across Jurisdictions

The importance of cooperation, collaboration, and the effective coordination of resources and responses in wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas is crucial in Nova Scotia, given the high prevalence of WUI areas across the province. Enhancements in collaboration between wildland fire service operations, provided through the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and community fire protection services being provided by fire departments would produce numerous fire safety and efficiency enhancements.

Most described the working relationship between the DNR and fire departments during emergency operations as good. It was also noted that improvements could be made from a pre-incident planning perspective, and many suggested that there could be meaningful opportunities for expanded collaboration in training and potential efficiencies to be gained through expanded cross-training.

Organizational Synergy

Several recent and successful organizational changes have been implemented within the Nova Scotia Department of Emergency Management, resulting in increased synergies and efficiencies. Leveraging these changes by realigning the responsibilities of the Office of the Fire Marshal to oversee and coordinate fire department operations under the Ministry of Emergency Management would create opportunities for expanded coordination and more efficient governance. The commonality of purpose between emergency management, the Office of the Fire Marshal, and municipal fire department services and operations makes the alignment of these services viable and valuable.

Many strongly believe that each of these essential services would benefit from this realignment and would be well served by the implementation of a new, single executive staff position reporting to the Deputy Minister of Emergency Management. Some individuals expressed interest in a Commissioner position, to whom emergency management and the Office of the Fire Marshal would report to, and serve as the direct point of contact and oversight for municipal fire departments.

Fire Governance Acumen

A considerable number of municipal administrators and elected officials, whom we met with during this process, do not adequately understand the governance, service levels, authorities, responsibilities, and accountabilities associated with fire department operations.

The opportunity to provide standardized and consistent training for all senior municipal administrators and all incoming elected officials represents a chance to establish province-wide clarity and eliminate the confusion and misunderstandings that are commonplace today.



Fire Prevention and Public Education

Fire prevention and public fire safety education represent the two most important, proactive aspects of the modern fire safety model. Effective fire prevention and fire code enforcement are key elements of both public and firefighter safety. These services must be provided effectively and efficiently, with inspections completed promptly, whether upon request or in response to a complaint.

Currently, the Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Marshal is directly responsible for delivering all fire prevention inspections, Fire Code enforcement, and associated fire safety and compliance work throughout the entire Province of Nova Scotia. The only exception to this work falling directly and solely to the Office of the Fire Marshal is in municipalities that employ career fire prevention personnel. The Office of the Fire Marshal is responsible for performing these duties directly in areas served by volunteer fire departments.

Currently, the Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Marshal lacks access to accurate and comprehensive data and information from fire departments throughout Nova Scotia. This lack of accurate and timely information prevents the creation and implementation of province-wide hazard risk identification assessments. It prevents public fire safety education efforts from being informed by actual Nova Scotia experience.



Information Databases

Numerous fire departments reported that they have no visibility into the availability of specialized services, equipment, and resources on a provincial level. Outside of their normal mutual aid partners, Fire Chiefs generally do not have access to these types of information databases at present.

The implementation of standardized annual reporting by fire departments to the Office of the Fire Marshal would significantly improve this situation, enabling better decision-making and resource coordination.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Province of Nova Scotia should develop and implement a single, purpose-specific Act that consolidates all existing pieces of legislation governing the delivery of fire protection services in Nova Scotia. This legislation should include the provisions necessary to establish the following:
 - a. Only the Council of a municipality may authorize the establishment and operation of a fire department in the municipality.
 - b. The Council of the municipality shall be responsible for approving the appointment of a fire chief for the fire department.
 - c. The fire chief is the person who is responsible for and accountable to the Council of the municipality that approved their appointment, for the delivery of fire protection services.
 - d. The definition of “fire protection services” should include:
 - i. Fire suppression, fire prevention, fire investigations, and fire safety education.
 - ii. The mitigation and prevention of risks created by unsafe levels of carbon monoxide, as well as safety education related to these levels.
 - iii. Rescue services.
 - e. The fire chief has the authority and responsibility for the management of the fire department, including but not limited to the establishment of rules, regulations, and operating procedures, and is directly accountable to the Council of the municipality for all aspects of fire department operation.
 - f. The fire chief, by way of delegation through the municipality, is the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) for all matters pertaining to the delivery of fire protection services in the municipality. In the case of the Halifax Regional Municipality, the AHJ for fire protection services is the fire chief of Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency Services. In the case of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, the AHJ for fire protection services is the fire chief of Cape Breton Regional Fire and Emergency Services.
 - g. The fire chief is responsible for making recommendations to the Council of the municipality with respect to fire protection service levels and is accountable to the Council of the municipality for the delivery of the approved levels of service.
 - h. At a minimum, on an annual basis, the fire chief shall submit a written report to the Council of the municipality that contains at least the following:
 - i. The fire protection service levels being provided by the fire department.
 - ii. An analysis of the calls for service in the previous year.
 - iii. Any challenges requiring the Council's attention regarding the fire department's ability to continue delivering the current level of service.
 - iv. The Council of the municipality shall be responsible for approving the fire protection service levels provided by the fire department on an annual basis

and for ensuring that the fire department has the necessary resources to deliver the approved levels of service.

2. This legislation should define the term "firefighter" in such a manner that includes a fire chief, and any other person employed in, or appointed to, a fire department and assigned to undertake fire protection services, including paid, paid-on-call, and volunteer personnel.
3. This legislation should include provisions for fire chiefs and firefighters, indemnifying them from all liabilities arising from the performance of their fire department duties, while acting in good faith.
4. In collaboration with the Fire Services Association of Nova Scotia (FSANS), the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities for enhanced collaboration between fire departments and the Department of Natural Resources' wildland firefighting services, particularly in wildland-urban interface areas.
5. The Province of Nova Scotia should consider aligning the governance of fire departments, emergency management, and the Nova Scotia Office of Fire Marshal under one Provincial ministry to maximize opportunities for alignment, synergies, and efficiencies.
 - a. The Province of Nova Scotia should consider the implementation of a Nova Scotia Fire Commissioner position, reporting directly to the Deputy Minister – Emergency Management, who has executive accountability for the Nova Scotia Office of Emergency Management, the Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Marshal, and for providing oversight and coordination support to fire departments across Nova Scotia.
6. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should develop, implement, and deliver a comprehensive training program for all municipal council members, municipal administrators, fire chiefs, and senior municipal officials, to be delivered following each municipal election, that covers all aspects of municipal fire service governance, authority, accountability, and responsibility.
7. The Province of Nova Scotia should establish the requirement for each municipality to produce and maintain a community risk assessment to inform the establishment of fire protection service levels.
8. The Province of Nova Scotia should consider incorporating mandatory fire safety and fire prevention content into its provincial elementary and high school curricula.

9. The Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Commissioner should conduct complaint-based, request-based, and proactive fire prevention inspections and related enforcement activities in each municipality served by a volunteer fire department in a timely and effective manner.
 - a. In municipalities with career fire prevention staff, the Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Commissioner personnel should be available for consultation and assistance as required by the fire department.
10. The Fire Commissioner create key performance indicators and other effective service delivery performance management tools to assess the effectiveness of its services Province-wide
11. The Province of Nova Scotia, via the Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Commissioner, should develop and implement mandatory annual reporting requirements for all fire departments, such that the following information is compiled and readily available for all areas of Nova Scotia:
 - a. Fire department resources, PPE, equipment, and apparatus.
 - b. Fire department staffing.
 - c. Fire department service levels.
 - d. Fire department technical qualifications and capabilities, including all aspects of fire suppression, rescue, technical rescue, and emergency medical response.
 - e. Up-to-date contact information for each Fire Chief.
12. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should develop a comprehensive change management and communications plan to support the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report.
13. FSANS should develop a comprehensive report that quantifies the economic value of services being provided by Nova Scotia fire departments, including the economic value of services being provided by volunteer fire departments in Nova Scotia.



FIRE DISPATCH AND COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS

CONTEXT

A myriad of fire dispatch models are currently being used in the Province of Nova Scotia. In some instances, fire dispatch services are provided through contracts with Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs). In others, the services are provided by a secondary PSAP at a local level. During the engagement process, the TSI team was advised that in one department's calls for service are forwarded to the Fire Chief's house. Further engagement revealed another troubling story of dispatching taking place on personal devices while waiting in line at the grocery store. It was also revealed that many dispatchers work alone; others dispatch using Microsoft Excel to manage the call data. The quality and sophistication of these services were described as varying from adequate to mediocre. Emergency dispatch is a critical component of public safety that requires a high-availability design, inclusive of reliability engineering.



ANALYSIS

Information received across the various groups identified inconsistency of dispatch delivery models as a significant problem. The examples provided suggested that:

- Some dispatch centers did not have the capacity to handle multiple concurrent calls for service, resulting in longer wait times.
- In centres that are co-located with police, fire calls are given a lower priority,
- Some centres are unaware of the services provided by the fire departments they serve. This can lead to sending calls to departments that do not have the required capabilities or bypassing departments that are located closer to the emergency.
- Staff working in these centres do not receive standardized training and, in many instances, lack professional qualifications/certifications.
- Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) with interfaced Records Management Systems (RMS) software and recording technologies may not exist, resulting in manual tracking of resources, the inability to record incidents, and the absence of efficient data sharing and management.
- Over and above the dispatch centre gaps, the province has many areas where cellular service is not available, making it challenging to report emergencies or request assistance.

Furthermore, many of these centres are not compliant with [Next Generation 911 \(NG-911\) requirements](#). NG-911 will modernize the 9-1-1 system, enabling faster, more accessible, and more informative emergency responses through the use of digital technology. In simple terms, this involves updating 911 networks to provide faster and more accurate caller location information, enabling real-time texting, and facilitating the transfer of calls to different emergency services. On a national level, many centres have found that meeting compliance with the NG-911 standards is onerous and cost-prohibitive. This has resulted in fire departments evaluating the ability to amalgamate centres or contract to external service providers.

The recommendations that follow have been informed by noted analysis and consideration of the current provincial legislation governing 911 in the Province of Nova Scotia. Bill 455, *An Act to Establish a Department of Emergency Management and Authorize the Establishment of a Nova Scotia Guard*, grants the authority to supervise, direct, and control the emergency 911 system to the Nova Scotia Department of Emergency Management. The department of Emergency Management has partnered with public and privately owned emergency dispatch centres, also referred to as Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), to provide this service.

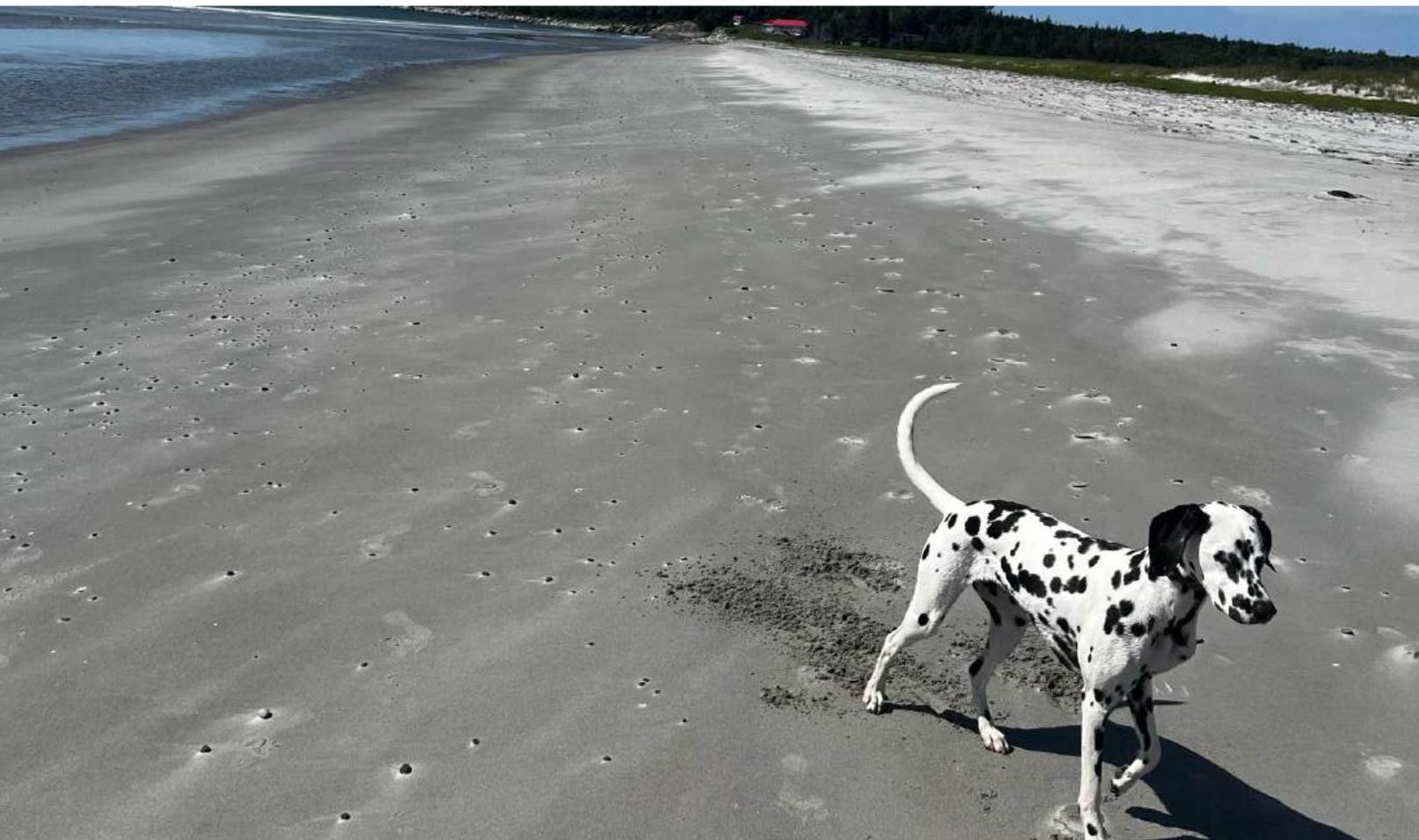
It is worth noting that paramedic services in Nova Scotia are provided by Emergency Health Services (EHS), a division of Nova Scotia Health. Dispatch services for paramedics are centralized at the secondary PSAP located in Burnside.



RECOMMENDATIONS

14. The Province of Nova Scotia should implement a consolidated, province-wide fire dispatch and communications system that meets the needs of all fire departments across the province. This should include the following objectives:
 - a. Facilitate and enable the implementation of Next-Generation 9-1-1 (NG-911) systems and functionality across Nova Scotia.
 - b. Ensure that the fire dispatch facilities, infrastructure, equipment, and operational performance comply with the requirements outlined in *NFPA 1225 - Standard for Emergency Services Communications*.
 - c. Ensure that comprehensive records management systems, processes, and performance analytics functionality are in place to inform and enable effective community risk assessment planning by each fire department, as well as to inform risk-based fire safety education and fire prevention planning by both the Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Commissioner and the fire departments in Nova Scotia.
 - d. Ensure that adequate redundancies are in place to ensure the seamless and uninterrupted operation of the fire dispatch and communications system in the event of planned and unplanned system outages.

15. The Province of Nova Scotia should ensure that adequate cellular and mobile data coverage is available to fire departments to support emergency response operations across Nova Scotia.



PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND TRAINING

CONTEXT

Currently, there are no common and standardized professional fire service competency and training standards established within the Province of Nova Scotia.

During engagement meetings with fire service personnel across the province, the need for common standards arose as a theme at each session. Specifically, members of the fire service, as well as several municipal administrators and elected officials, identified the current confusion between being qualified and being certified. Generally speaking, many attendees of the engagement sessions expressed that establishing both standardized and minimum professional competency and training standards would enhance firefighter safety and improve mutual aid operations.

One example provided by engagement session attendees is that of medical first response, and the fact that common training standards exist for these services, yet do not exist for other aspects of fire service response.

There was consensus that these standards should be established by the Province of Nova Scotia, rather than requiring each municipality to establish its own fire service standards. However, it is important to note that many feel strongly that these standards need to reflect the realities of the fire protection model in Nova Scotia, and must reflect and consider the realities of the hazards faced by and responded to by Nova Scotia firefighters, which include fires, floods, hurricanes, and other weather-related storms and events.

Numerous concerns were expressed regarding the lack of an effective and accessible provincial fire school that meets the needs of fire departments in Nova Scotia. Specific concerns were raised with respect to the lack of geographically-accessible training centres that meet the needs of numerous fire departments, lack of availability resulting in excessive wait times for Nova Scotia firefighters to receive training and training records, and a general lack of confidence with the current provincial fire training structure and its ability to meet the growing and evolving needs of today's fire departments.



When implementing province-wide training, qualification, and certification standards, it is essential to establish and implement an effective transition process, including a "grandparenting" process for incumbent, experienced firefighters in Nova Scotia.

This type of "grandparenting" process has been commonplace in other jurisdictions and industries alike, and is crucial to avoid unintended interruptions of services within fire departments. Over time, formal qualification and certification processes can be achieved on a common basis across the province.

ANALYSIS

The establishment of common fire service training standards in Nova Scotia would provide a professional competence baseline and clarity across fire services in the province regarding the minimum standards required in each fire department.

Professional Qualification Standards

Referencing the applicable National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards would achieve commonality with other provinces. It would enable fire departments to access numerous, readily available training resources that already exist, including online and distance education resources.

The Province of Nova Scotia, via the Nova Scotia Fire Commissioner's Office, is best positioned to establish and implement common professional qualification and training standards. Using the NFPA standards as the base model represents best practice across the Canadian fire service, as does enabling the creation of "made in Nova Scotia" solutions for situations where implementing the relevant NFPA standards does not meet the local needs and circumstances that exist across the province.



One example of this model being implemented successfully can be found in Ontario, via the Ontario Office of the Fire Marshal, where both requirements for formal NFPA Firefighter 1 and 2 qualifications have been established, along with the creation of "Ontario standards" for use in areas where the fire protection service levels being provided at a community level do not align fully with the requirements of the NFPA standards, such as areas where only exterior, defensive firefighting operations are provided.

Other Canadian provinces and territories also employ similar methodologies, with British Columbia (BC Playbook), Alberta (Alberta Fire Chiefs Core Competency Framework), and the Yukon Territory serving as examples.

Provincial Fire Training School

The establishment of a Nova Scotia fire training school by the Province of Nova Scotia, through the Nova Scotia Fire Commissioner's Office, lays the foundation for modernizing, harmonizing, and streamlining the achievement of fire service training across the province.

Establishing a model that consists of a central fire training school, supported and supplemented by several geographically distributed training facilities, would permit the Nova Scotia Fire Commissioner's office to provide consistent, high-quality training for Nova Scotia firefighters in a manner that meets the needs of the fire departments across the province.

The central fire training school should establish robust processes for all aspects of training records, certification, and documentation management, as opposed to the current decentralized model that exists across the province of Nova Scotia.

Mobile and Regional Training

The implementation of mobile training solutions, to the greatest extent possible, would maximize the achievement of training without requiring fire departments to absorb the logistics, impacts, and costs associated with extensive travel required to send personnel to fixed location sites. Mobile training solutions have evolved significantly in recent years, enabling the possibility of delivering high-quality, realistic, and compliant training in locations across the province.

Likewise, the implementation of robust distance-education models and resources, where appropriate, would reduce the time Nova Scotia firefighters need to travel to fire training school locations, thereby reducing the costs and logistical impacts associated with physically attending fixed locations to complete background and prerequisite training modules.

Once province-wide training standards have been established by the Nova Scotia Fire Commissioner's Office, this provincial fire training school should manage all aspects of both professional qualification and certification training for all Nova Scotia firefighters and Fire Chiefs, thereby addressing the current challenges associated with these functions being managed independently by each fire department.

Grandparenting

When implementing province-wide training, qualification, and certification standards, it is vital that the Nova Scotia Fire Commissioner's office create and implement an effective "grandparenting" process for incumbent, experienced firefighters in Nova Scotia.



Best practices in several Canadian provinces include the appointment of the Provincial Office of the Fire Marshal or Commissioner as the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) with respect to NFPA certifications and the associated processes. The establishment of these AHJ provisions would enable the Nova Scotia Fire Commissioner's office to develop and implement the required transitional processes, such as "grandparenting" of existing trained and experienced personnel.

This type of "grandparenting" process has been commonplace in other jurisdictions and industries alike, and is crucial to avoid unintended interruptions of services within fire departments. Over time, formal qualification and certification processes can be achieved on a common basis across the province.

Recently, the Province of Ontario implemented mandatory certification under numerous NFPA professional qualification standards, via the Ontario Office of the Fire Marshal as AHJ. The requirement for formal professional qualifications and certification extends to multiple disciplines, roles, and functions within the fire service; a practical transition framework was implemented as part of the overall process. This framework meets the needs of the fire service, which includes career, composite, and volunteer fire services alike.



RECOMMENDATIONS

16. The Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Commissioner should establish and implement comprehensive and standardized fire service professional qualification and training standards across Nova Scotia.
- Where possible, the applicable National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Professional Qualification Standards should be adopted.

17. The Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Commissioner should establish, implement, and operate a centralized Provincial Fire Training School that meets the needs of the fire departments in Nova Scotia.

- The Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Commissioner should maximize opportunities to establish, implement, and operate an effective network of regional fire training schools, operating under the centralized Provincial Fire Training School, that are geographically located to meet the needs of Nova Scotia's fire departments.
- The Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Commissioner should maximize opportunities to make mobile training systems and instructors available to fire departments across the province, thereby minimizing travel time and the associated costs and service delivery impacts of sending firefighters out of jurisdiction for training.
- The Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Commissioner should maximize the availability of online and other distance-based education and training opportunities, where applicable, for firefighters.
- The Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Commissioner should establish and centrally manage all aspects of fire department professional standards evaluation and certification across Nova Scotia.



18. When implementing standardized fire service professional qualification and training standards in Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Commissioner should establish and implement effective "grandparenting" processes for experienced and current firefighters that form part of the implementation process. The establishment of a fire services advisory committee, in collaboration with FSANS, will help to inform these processes and to support the change management process.

FIREFIGHTER HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLNESS

CONTEXT

The firefighting industry is placing greater emphasis on the health/safety, and wellness of its personnel. A significant amount of research has been conducted on the wellness of firefighters, focusing particularly on cancer prevention and mental health. Both areas are incredibly complex and require a significant amount of effort to ensure that all staff are properly trained and equipped. Firefighters will need to adapt to changes in protocols created to maintain safe environments for all to operate in. The firefighting industry is currently undergoing a significant transformation, with an increased focus on the health, safety, and overall wellbeing of its personnel. This shift is driven by a growing body of research dedicated to firefighter wellness, particularly in the critical areas of cancer prevention and mental health.

Both cancer prevention and mental health present intricate challenges that demand comprehensive and sustained effort. Regarding cancer prevention, firefighters face unique occupational exposures to carcinogens through smoke, chemicals, and various hazardous materials encountered during incidents. This necessitates the development and rigorous implementation of updated protocols for personal protective equipment (PPE), decontamination procedures, and station cleanliness. Educational initiatives are crucial to ensure that all staff understand the risks and are proficient in applying preventative measures. This includes proper doffing and cleaning of gear, maintaining a clean cab environment in apparatus, and regular health monitoring.

Mental health, another highly complex area, is equally critical. Firefighters are routinely exposed to traumatic incidents, high-stress situations, and the cumulative impact of various occupational stress injuries. This can lead to a range of mental health challenges, including Post Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI), anxiety, depression, and burnout. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach that encompasses readily accessible mental health and resilience services, peer support programs, critical incident stress management, and ongoing education to destigmatize mental health discussions within the service. Training all personnel to recognize the signs of occupational stress injury in themselves and their colleagues, along with strategies for coping and seeking help, is paramount.

Ultimately, firefighters must be prepared to adapt to continuously evolving changes in protocols and best practices designed to foster and maintain safe operating



environments. This includes embracing new technologies, participating in ongoing training and education, and consistently adhering to updated safety guidelines to mitigate risks and promote a culture of wellbeing for all who serve.

ANALYSIS

OHS Application to Volunteer Fire Services

During the consultation process, numerous comments were made regarding the confusion within the fire service about whether Occupational Health and Safety legislation applies explicitly to volunteer fire services. Clarification should be provided by the province, through policy or changes to legislation wording, that makes it clear that provincial occupational health and safety rules apply to the entire fire service, including volunteer fire departments. This would be a beneficial first step in the process to ensure everyone is on the same page regarding health and safety.

Bunker Gear

It was consistently communicated that the condition and age of structural firefighting personal protective equipment (bunker gear) vary across the province. Some departments reported having newer gear and have it replaced every ten years regularly. Other departments are wearing gear that is much older than 10 years, and some have not had their bunker gear inspected, tested, and maintained by a qualified provider to ensure it is safe and functional.



The industry standard is to use NFPA 1851 related to the care and maintenance of bunker gear. The standard requires that bunker gear be replaced every ten years. It also outlines the requirement to have the gear cleaned, inspected, tested, and maintained at regular intervals, as parts of the gear have been proven to deteriorate over time, regardless of use or exposure to combustion products. The province should make funding available to assist departments in maintaining their bunker gear in accordance with NFPA 1851, as noted above.

Personal Protective Equipment

There is also an opportunity for departments in the same region to work together on an overarching PPE management program. A program could include a combination of appropriate bunker gear washing machines or procuring a service to clean the gear for departments. The ideal situation is to have two sets of gear for each firefighter; however, this is not possible for many departments. Regions can work together to have a cadre of spare gear for departments to access

when gear is soiled or being sent out for regular testing. This will help departments keep their firefighters in service and able to respond, while controlling costs.

Fire Apparatus

Many apparatus within fire departments require a specialized license to drive. It makes it difficult for departments to have enough qualified drivers to move the apparatus to and from emergency scenes. Some departments leverage the legislation that allows drivers without the proper license to drive the trucks to “emergency” scenes. The province needs to clarify what it deems “emergencies” and work with FSANS to ensure enough properly licensed drivers are operating the vehicles. This is a misapplication of these provisions that, across North America, has resulted in firefighter and civilian injuries as a result of improper training and qualification to drive and operate large commercial vehicles.



Worker's Compensation

Volunteer firefighters depend on their full-time employment to provide for their families. Even though they regularly leave work to attend emergency incidents, they can still return to continue to earn their salary. However, if they are injured on the job as a volunteer firefighter, they need to have appropriate income protection, via Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) coverage, until they are fully recovered and able to return to their normal duties.

The moral dilemma for firefighters who must choose between potentially risking their family's financial security and not being a volunteer firefighter is impacting volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention.

The province should ensure that WCB coverage for volunteer firefighters who are injured in the scope of their work as firefighters is sufficient to replace their full-time wages while they are unable

to work. This issue has arisen numerous times in our workshops and is considered a high-priority issue from a consistency and fairness perspective on a province-wide basis.

Cancer Prevention

Cancer in the fire service is a significant issue, one which the province has recognized through its recent cancer legislation for firefighters. Focus should also be placed on proper proactive occupational cancer screening, imaging, and diagnostic services for all firefighters in the province. Proactive screening has proven to help find and treat various forms of cancer early, reducing the amount of time spent away from employment. Working together with FSANS, a robust system can be implemented to assist firefighters with this increased benefit.

Mental Health

The area of mental health and overall wellness of fire department staff is quickly becoming one of the most critical issues for municipalities and the province to tackle. The field of mental health prevention and treatment for first responders is an ever-evolving one, but staying current is crucial for the wellbeing of staff. The province can demonstrate great leadership by providing resources and ensuring that all firefighters in the province have access to help, support, and resources when needed.



During discussions, it became evident that many firefighters lack access to post-illness / injury treatment, as well as effective and accessible training, resources, and support for preventing occupational stress injuries. There is an abundance of resources available, specifically for training firefighters and their families on preventing severe occupational stress injuries and how to build in mechanisms to deal with the traumatic situations faced in the line of duty.

The province should establish and organize these resources and ensure availability for all areas of the province. All new firefighters should have resiliency training integrated into their recruit and ongoing training programs to ensure they have the tools to navigate any situation they encounter.

There are numerous low-cost and no-cost partnerships available to agencies within the province that could be leveraged. An example is Wounded Warriors Canada, a national mental health charitable organization offering no-cost partnership opportunities.

Working within the provincial training school's new framework presents an opportunity to provide resiliency training to all firefighters across the province. This initiative would enable trainers to travel to various fire departments, offering valuable and consistent training within their local areas

or regions, ensuring all firefighters receive this essential instruction. Much of this could also be made available through asynchronous online learning and/or online group training, rather than in-person and travel-based solutions.

Further to the discussion on WCB coverage above, it is also essential to ensure the WCB coverage for firefighters is sufficient for any firefighters unable to work because of an occupational stress illness or injury, such that a firefighter who can't work their regular employment can focus on recovery and return to work, rather than on how they will continue to provide for their family.

The process should be simplified and easy to access for families trying to apply for coverage to alleviate the stress of the situation. FSANS should establish a network of subject matter experts who can assist Nova Scotia firefighters and their families with the WCB application process.



RECOMMENDATIONS

19. The Nova Scotia Office of the Fire Commissioner should establish and implement standardized fire service PPE and equipment standards across Nova Scotia.
 - a. Where possible, the applicable NFPA standards should be adopted.
20. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to make the appropriate PPE cleaning and decontamination resources available, in support of Firefighter cancer prevention efforts, in a manner that meets the needs of Nova Scotia fire departments.
21. The Province of Nova Scotia should ensure and clarify that all fire departments and all firefighters in Nova Scotia, including volunteer firefighters, are subject to the provisions of the Nova Scotia Occupational Health and Safety Act and the associated Regulations.
 - a. The Province of Nova Scotia, in collaboration with FSANS, should create a drivers certification process making it easier for firefighters to obtain a license to properly operate a fire apparatus.
22. The Province of Nova Scotia should ensure that standardized and equitable WCB coverage is provided to all Nova Scotia firefighters requiring coverage, including volunteer firefighters, and should ensure that the coverage rates and amounts being provided are appropriate.
23. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to ensure that all firefighters, including volunteer firefighters, have appropriate access to proactive occupational cancer screening, imaging, and diagnostic services.
 - a. Consideration should be given to exploring the application of *NFPA 1582 – Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments* with respect to the provision of occupational medical evaluation services for firefighters.
24. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to ensure that all firefighters, including volunteer firefighters, have appropriate access to effective and proactive mental health and resilience education, training, resources, and support.
25. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to ensure that all firefighters, including volunteer firefighters, have appropriate access to effective and proactive post-traumatic stress exposure/illness/injury treatment, support, and assistance.
26. FSANS should explore opportunities to aid Nova Scotia firefighters and their families in completing WCB claims and managing the associated processes.

27. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to encourage local employers to permit their employees, who also serve as volunteer firefighters, to leave work to respond to fire department emergency calls, and to ensure that those employees do not suffer a loss of wages while doing so.

SUSTAINABLE FIRE SERVICE FUNDING

CONTEXT

The province's fire departments face mounting challenges: aging equipment, increasing call volumes, recruitment and retention difficulties, and rising costs. To ensure the continued resilience and effectiveness of Nova Scotia's fire service, a well-designed, sustainable funding model is essential.

Consultation revealed that the existing funding landscape for fire services in Nova Scotia is diverse, often fragmented, and primarily reliant on municipal budgets, property taxes, fundraising efforts, and sometimes provincial grants. Many described the high costs of equipment, apparatus replacement, and training as significant burdens. Many fire departments, especially in rural communities, rely heavily on volunteer fundraising initiatives—such as bake sales, bingos, raffles, 50/50 draws, and community events—to supplement their operational budgets. While these efforts foster community spirit, they consume valuable volunteer hours and are insufficient for long-term capital planning or addressing emergent needs. The information that follows aims to establish a funding formula that balances municipal and provincial contributions, taking into account the principles of equity, predictability, and accountability.



ANALYSIS

Provincial Grants and Programs

The Nova Scotia government provides grants through the Emergency Services Provider fund for equipment that can be used directly in response to fires or emergencies. These grants are well-received by the fire service. However, many fire departments have expressed frustration that essential operating costs —such as fuel, utilities, and routine maintenance — are categorized as ineligible, making it difficult to sustain daily operations. One example shared involved the use of the grant to purchase and install a backup generator; however, the challenges associated with funding replacement fuel and ongoing preventive maintenance for the generator are prohibitive.

Provincial Procurement Strategy

Fire departments need to plan for equipment replacements, facility upgrades, and training initiatives years in advance. Multi-year funding commitments, facilitated through lifecycle planning, enable departments to invest strategically rather than reactively. From an operational budget perspective, many Fire Chiefs explained that they engage in negotiating insurance rates independently of their municipality or emergency service partners. The opportunity that arose from this conversation was the implementation of planning practices supported by centralized procurement efforts, intending to deliver cost savings through economies of scale (bulk buying) and increased negotiating power with suppliers.

Provincial-Municipal Fee for Services Agreements

Municipal parties have expressed the view that cost recovery payments should be implemented for fire department response services provided in areas classified as provincial responsibilities. This includes the establishment of reimbursement fees for emergency response activities undertaken on behalf of the province, such as:

- Motor vehicle collisions occurring on provincial highways,
- Tiered medical responses in support of Emergency Health Services paramedics,
- Wildland firefighting operations in collaboration with the Department of Natural Resources.

The fee schedules would need a regular review cycle to ensure they reflect evolving needs, costs, and risk profiles.

Tax Levies

Volunteer fire chiefs in many areas of the province are tasked with setting their own levy rates annually and having them approved by the residents in their fire area. The process of completing this is very time-consuming and puts a person in a volunteer position in an unenviable position. It would be more efficient for the fire department levy to be included in the tax levy with all other departments in the municipality and passed by Council. Relieving the tax levy burden to the municipality allows the fire chief more time to advance their department and not focus as much of a spotlight on them personally.

Risk Assessment and Feasibility Studies

Many of the discussions with the fire services considered the following questions:

- How was the decision made to provide a particular service?
- What factors influenced the selected level of service?

In some instances, responses lacked specificity or were linked to established practices: "We have always done it that way" or "They asked for our assistance, so we responded." These were prevalent themes heard throughout engagement across the province.

It is generally recommended that municipalities carry out a risk assessment to determine fire and emergency protection requirements. Risk assessments are a best practice that is used to identify and prioritize public safety risks, facilitating evidence-based analyses and decisions about fire protection service delivery, including:

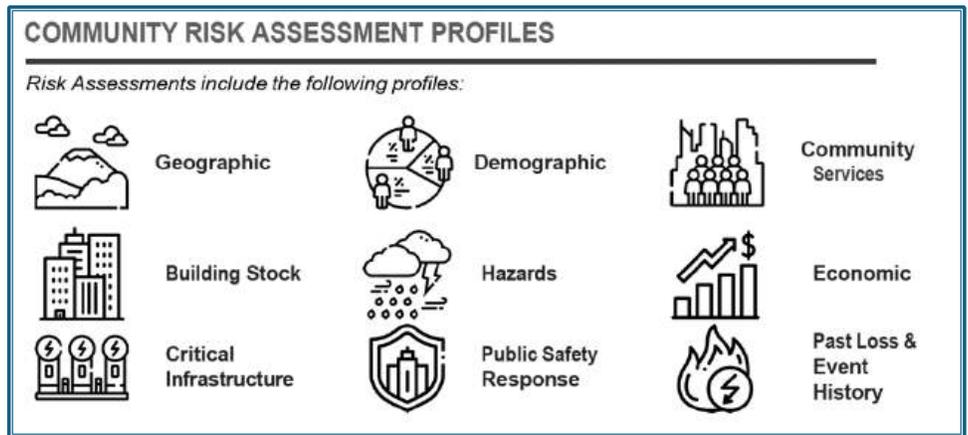
- Locations of fire stations,
- apparatus deployment, and
- staffing considerations.

RISK ASSESSMENT MATRIX

	ONCE IN 100 YEARS	ONCE IN 50 YEARS	ONCE IN 10 YEARS	ONCE IN 5 YEARS	OCCURS EVERY YEAR
MINOR	LOW	LOW	LOW	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
DANGEROUS	LOW	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	HIGH
SERIOUS	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
CRITICAL	MEDIUM	HIGH	HIGH	EXTREME	EXTREME
CATASTROPHIC	HIGH	HIGH	EXTREME	EXTREME	EXTREME

When conducting a risk assessment or feasibility study, municipalities accept responsibilities related to fire protection levels and must consider the associated costs.

Conducting a risk assessment and developing a strategic fire services plan (alternatively called Fire Master Plans) are foundational steps toward enhancing public safety. Together, they enable communities to anticipate hazards, allocate resources wisely, and build resilience against fire emergencies. As Nova Scotia's urban and rural environments continue to evolve with a new governance model, these proactive, integrative approaches will be essential for safeguarding the lives, property, and future wellbeing of all residents.



RECOMMENDATIONS

28. The Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to ensure that all provincial capital asset grant processes, made available to Nova Scotia fire departments, include the provision of the necessary operating funds to maintain the capital asset in a state of good repair.
29. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should work with municipalities to help municipalities in the development of adequate and sustainable funding models for fire departments, with the goal of reducing their reliance on supplementary public fundraising efforts.
30. The Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to implement a cost recovery process for fire departments that respond to emergency incidents on Provincial highways and Crown lands.
31. The Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to implement a cost-recovery process for fire departments that are required to provide medical first-response services, in support of Nova Scotia Emergency Health Services. This should include cost recovery for the necessary equipment, training, and the response to emergency medical incidents by a fire department.
32. The Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to ensure that fire department levy rates, for both resource lands and Crown lands, are updated to reflect the modern costs of providing fire protection services and the associated needs of fire departments.
33. In collaboration with FSANS and municipalities, the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities for providing standardized and cost-effective fire department vehicle, equipment, and liability insurance coverage and rates, rather than requiring each fire department to manage these issues individually.
34. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to make grant funding available to municipalities, to produce community risk assessments, hazard and risk identification assessments, and feasibility studies relating to the potential for the regionalization and/or consolidation of fire departments, including the potential for shared service delivery models in Nova Scotia.
35. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to make grant funding available to local departments and regions to assist with producing reports for long-term equipment, facility, and apparatus lifecycle management plans, as well as fire service reviews, to support departments as they move forward with the forthcoming changes.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

CONTEXT

One of the main issues consistently brought forward was the growing difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers. Many departments have an average age of their firefighters in excess of fifty, with many volunteers serving into their seventies. Time and time again, they stated that they were hesitant to retire because if they didn't, there would be no one else to take their place. The dedication of volunteers was pure and commendable. It was refreshing to see how the passion to serve their communities was prevalent in so many areas. This is an area definitely worth exploring and building on.



The issue of volunteer recruitment and retention is a problem across Canada. Every province is struggling with the decreasing number of volunteer firefighters and the inability to recruit new members. Unfortunately, there is no obvious solution to the problem, but trying new methods of recruitment can be worthwhile.

Another issue many municipalities battle is the lack of growth in their areas. As well as for some who are growing, the affordability of housing makes it challenging to recruit new firefighters. Areas that are not growing are not attracting new residents who would be willing to consider serving as a volunteer firefighter. The existing residents have been recruited in the past and are not interested in joining. The pool of candidates is static. Conversely, growing areas are being priced out for young people who wish to be firefighters but can't afford to live in the communities they want to serve. Either issue is a problem that is not easily solved and is not helpful to struggling fire departments.



ANALYSIS

Recruitment

There is an opportunity for the province to work with local municipalities to create and promote volunteer firefighting in Nova Scotia. A larger-scale recruitment campaign geared towards enticing citizens to volunteer for their local departments could be very impactful and have much more potential than separate local campaigns. As well, any incentives the province may implement for the volunteers can be championed through the campaign. All will help to recruit new firefighters into the departments throughout the province.

This campaign should utilize multiple communication channels, including various social media platforms. Many smaller departments lack the time or resources to manage their own social media presence. Therefore, utilizing popular provincial platforms and collaborating with larger fire departments that have broader media reach would greatly benefit these smaller areas. A unified recruitment message, delivered collaboratively, will be a powerful tool to drive recruitment efforts.

Retention

A theme that emerged from the workshops conducted was that, in addition to a large recruitment problem, there was also a significant retention issue. Many firefighters reportedly complete their introductory training and then volunteer for only a few years before moving on. Training and properly outfitting firefighters is an expensive endeavour, costing in excess of \$10,000 per firefighter. Departments are always looking for methods to deploy to retain their firefighters.

Firefighters expressed the desire for more standards and structure in the fire service. They want to know precisely what they need to strive for to become a firefighter, as well as progress through the ranks to become an officer. Experience also teaches fire service leaders that the younger generation of firefighters is looking for structure and guidance. They do not succeed as well when they have to be self-driven and find their own path to qualifying. Firefighters want clear pathways for becoming a firefighter and progressing through the ranks to officer positions. Fire service leaders have also observed that younger generations of firefighters thrive with structure and guidance, struggling when expected to be self-driven in their qualification journey.



Transparency

This feedback underscores the importance of implementing new, diverse training standards and programs. Firefighters are asking for guidance, and it is the responsibility of the province, through the Office of the Fire Commissioner, to establish these new standards. This will aid departments in both retaining and recruiting firefighters by providing a more transparent process and setting clear expectations from the outset. Furthermore, it will create a level playing field across departments. Currently, significant disparities in skills and training between departments can lead to uncomfortable and challenging emergency scenes.

Recognition

Many firefighters expressed a desire for appreciation from all levels of government for their service and dedication. Frustration regarding a lack of respect was evident, with some stating it was equally as important as monetary compensation. While firefighters would certainly appreciate financial recognition, the perceived lack of respect and recognition from the government was clearly impacting the ability to retain good firefighters. A show of respect, combined with new financial incentives, would be a step forward in retaining firefighters in the province.

Fundraising Time Commitments

This point has been made before, but is worth mentioning again: a key to retaining firefighters is to limit the hours they spend fundraising for their department. Time and time again, it was noted that when they signed up to be a firefighter, they were not signing up to continuously fundraise for their department. Volunteer firefighters have only a limited number of hours to give to their communities. When many of these hours are spent fundraising, it takes time away from their ability to train and respond to emergencies. Eventually, the demand for time becomes too much, and they leave the service. Helping the departments limit the fundraising efforts required will go a long way toward retaining firefighters.

Employer Partnerships

Another aspect of volunteer firefighting is the ability to leave one's full-time profession to attend emergency incidents. Partnerships with employers in each community are key to making this a reality. However, it can be quite difficult for employers to lose their employees during the workday for unknown amounts of time. It can result in lost production, which can affect their business. Implementing incentives for employers to allow their employees to leave during work hours would be incredibly beneficial to volunteer fire departments. It would help boost the number of deployable firefighters during weekday business hours. FSANS, working in collaboration with the province, can develop a standard incentive program that will be implemented across all fire departments.



RECOMMENDATIONS

36. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should consider developing Province-wide recruitment marketing strategies, including print, radio, television, and social media campaigns, to encourage Nova Scotia residents to become and continue to serve as volunteer firefighters.
37. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to enhance collaboration between fire departments and the Nova Scotia Guard to enhance public safety during times of emergency.
38. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to standardize volunteer firefighter compensation structures across the province, ensuring equity and that volunteer firefighters feel appropriately valued and respected. Based on the feedback obtained from numerous volunteer firefighters from across Nova Scotia, the following are examples of suggestions that should be explored:
 - a. Consider implementing enhanced provincial tax credits for volunteer firefighters.
 - b. Consider implementing municipal property tax credits for volunteer firefighters.
 - c. Consider implementing a standardized paid-on-call compensation / honourarium model for volunteer firefighters across Nova Scotia.
39. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to enhance and incentivize the retention of volunteer firefighters.
 - a. Based on the feedback obtained from numerous volunteer firefighters from across Nova Scotia, this could include the establishment of "retirement" tax credits, allowances, or other honourariums that are made available to long-service volunteer firefighters upon their retirement from the fire service, with the value of these honourariums increasing with completed years of service as a volunteer firefighter.
40. In collaboration with FSANS, the Province of Nova Scotia should explore opportunities to implement cost-subsidized access to fitness facilities for volunteer firefighters, in support of their ongoing health and wellness, and in consideration of the demands associated with their service within their respective communities.



Change management strategies are included to support the transition. Consideration should be given to the varying needs of the stakeholders across the province.



1

Fire Dispatch and Communications Systems

Objective: Implement a consolidated, province-wide fire dispatch and communications system.

1. Facilitate the implementation of Next-Generation 9-1-1 (NG-911) systems.
2. Ensure compliance with NFPA 1225 standards for emergency services communications.
3. Implement comprehensive records management systems and effective redundancies.

2



Professional Standards and Training

Objective: Establish common and standardized professional fire service competency and training standards with various levels of standards to train towards, or develop customized Nova Scotia-specific standards for rural departments that don't align with NFPA standards.

1. Adopt applicable National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards.
2. Establish a centralized Provincial Fire Training School with regional training facilities.
3. Implement mobile training solutions and distance-based education opportunities.

3



Firefighting Health and Safety

Objective: Enhance firefighter health, safety, and wellness through standardized protocols and support systems.

1. Establish standardized fire service PPE and equipment standards.
2. Ensure equitable WCB coverage for all firefighters, including volunteers.
3. Provide access to mental health and resilience education, training, and support.

4



Sustainable Fire Service Funding

Objective: Develop a sustainable funding model for fire departments.

1. Ensure provincial capital asset grant processes include necessary operating funds.
2. Develop adequate and sustainable funding models for fire departments in collaboration with municipalities.
3. Implement cost recovery processes for emergency incidents on provincial highways and Crown lands.

5



Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention

Objective: Enhance recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

1. Develop province-wide recruitment marketing strategies.
2. Standardize volunteer firefighter compensation structures and implement incentives for the employers of volunteer firefighters who allow them to respond to emergencies during work hours.
3. Provide cost-subsidized access to fitness facilities and incentivize local employers.

6



Stakeholder Engagement

Objective: Ensure all stakeholders are informed and involved in the change process.

- Conduct regular stakeholder meetings and consultations.
- Provide clear and consistent communication about changes and their impacts.
- Address concerns and feedback promptly.



7

Training and Education

Objective: Equip all personnel with the necessary knowledge and skills to adapt to the changes.

1. Develop comprehensive training programs for all municipal council members, administrators, fire chiefs, and senior officials.
2. Implement ongoing training and education initiatives to keep personnel updated on new protocols and standards.



8

Communications

Objective: Ensure transparent and effective communication throughout the implementation process.

1. Develop a detailed communication plan outlining key messages, channels, and timelines.
2. Utilize multiple communication channels (e.g., email, newsletters, meetings) to reach all stakeholders effectively.
3. Provide regular updates on progress and milestones.



9

Monitoring and Evaluation

Objective: Track progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation plan.

1. Establish key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure success.
2. Conduct regular reviews and assessments to identify areas for improvement.
3. Adjust the implementation plan as needed based on feedback and evaluation results.

Change Management Strategies:

- Build awareness and understanding of why governance changes are necessary.
- Engage and involve key stakeholders in shaping the transition.
- Reduce resistance through transparent communication and consultation.
- Provide training and resources to adapt to new structures and standards.
- Monitor and evaluate the implementation to ensure continuous improvement.

Communications Plan



Audience - Specific Messaging

Firefighters: Focus on safety, training and standardized resources.

Municipalities: Emphasize predictable funding and clear governance

Public: Assurance of equitable and effective fire protection.



Channels

Town Halls
Newsletters
Webinars
Dedicated website portal
Associations
Social Media
Traditional Media



Cadence

Monthly updates during transition.

Quarterly updates during sustainment.

Nova Scotia Fire Service Transition Plan

PHASE 1: PREPARATION (0-6 MONTHS)

Establish Leadership Team



Establish the Change Leadership Team with Provincial, FSANS, Fire Service, and Municipal representatives

Conduct Impact Analysis



Analyze funding models, training requirements, and equipment needs.

Develop Communication Strategy



Create a clear communication plan for all stakeholders involved in the transition.

Launch Consultations



Begin initial stakeholder consultations through town halls, surveys, and union engagement.

PHASE 2: TRANSITION (6-18 MONTHS)

Roll Out Governance



Roll out new governance structures for the fire service.

Provide Orientation & Training



Provide orientation and training for municipal leaders and fire chiefs on the new structures.

Implement Funding Model



Begin the phased implementation of the new funding model.

Pilot Programs & Champions



Pilot standardized training/equipment programs and provide change champions in each municipality.

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION (18-36 MONTHS)

Full Governance Rollout



Complete the full rollout of the new governance model across all of Nova Scotia.

Implement Standards



Implement the standardized provincial training curriculum and make the funding system fully operational.

PHASE 4: SUSTAINMENT (36+ MONTHS)

Monitor & Adjust



Monitor adoption, address gaps, and establish ongoing performance monitoring with KPIs.

Sustain & Celebrate



Use feedback loops to adjust as needed. Celebrate milestones and recognize contributions.

Key Insights Report



Nova Scotia Governance Review of Fire and Associated Services

Transitional Solutions Inc.

July 2025

Key Insights: Governance of Fire Services in Nova Scotia

Purpose and Context

This Key Insights Report summarizes initial themes, observations, and anecdotes gathered to date. It offers a preliminary look at potential opportunities, challenges, and areas of focus emerging from early conversations and data gathered through an environmental scan of the fire services landscape in Nova Scotia

It is important to note that the insights presented here are not final conclusions. Rather, they reflect working theories and perceptions that will be further tested, validated, or refined through the upcoming engagement process (refer to Appendix 1 on page 8). This next phase will be critical to ensure accuracy, capture diverse perspectives, and build a solid foundation for informed recommendations.

Insights

Nova Scotia's approach to fire service governance is characterized by a **decentralized model** and a **less standardized framework** compared to several other Canadian provinces. While the province has foundational legislation, there are significant opportunities for modernization and enhanced coordination.

1. Legislative Framework and Governance

- **Core Legislation:** Nova Scotia's primary legislation for fire safety is the **Fire Safety Act of 2002**. This Act is **modern legislation** that outlines fire prevention, inspections, investigations, responsibilities of local authorities, safety regulations and the powers of the Fire Marshal.
- **Office of the Fire Marshal (OFM):** The OFM oversees fire prevention and investigation within the province. Many municipalities conduct their own inspections and investigations.
- **Decentralized Service Delivery:** Fire and associated services delivery is a **shared responsibility**, primarily between municipal fire departments and the Department of Natural Resources (for wildland fires). Nova Scotia uniquely houses structural fire prevention, structural fire suppression, wildland fire suppression, and emergency management responsibilities in **different government departments**, contrasting with most other provinces where these are often consolidated.
- **Municipal Responsibility:** The **Nova Scotia Municipal Government Act** states that a municipality *"may maintain and provide fire and emergency services,"* rather than *"shall"*. This means **municipalities are not compelled to provide these services**, placing the authority for the level and type of services at the municipal level. Despite this, municipalities are **required to establish fire services** and appoint local assistants to the Fire Marshal under the Fire Safety Act. Local assistants are given legal authority to conduct inspections and investigations, acting as extensions of the Fire Marshal.
- **Legislative Maturity:** Nova Scotia's Fire Safety Act (2002) appears to be **more structured** compared to many provinces and is **ahead of provinces like New Brunswick and British**

Columbia in fire legislation maturity. However, it **trails Quebec and Ontario** in terms of integrated planning, mandatory service standards, and legislative depth.

Comparison of Legislative Frameworks and Municipal Responsibility:

Feature	Nova Scotia	Other Jurisdictions (Examples)
Core Legislation	Fire Safety Act (2002)	Alberta (Safety Codes Act + Fire Services Regulation); British Columbia (Fire Safety Act - updated 2024); Manitoba (Fire Prevention and Emergency Response Act); New Brunswick (Fire Prevention Act - 1985); Newfoundland (Fire Protection Services Act); Ontario (Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997); PEI (Fire Prevention Act); Quebec (Fire Safety Act); Saskatchewan (Fire Safety Act)
Fire Marshal/Commissioner	Oversees fire prevention and investigation; wide but operationally balanced scope.	Defined powers and duties in most provinces (e.g., New Brunswick enforces laws related to fire suppression, prevention, rescue). Comparable to Ontario and Alberta.
Mandatory Municipal Services	Municipalities "may maintain and provide" fire services, not "shall", but are <i>required</i> to establish fire services under the Act.	Mandated: Quebec (Minister sets policies, regional authorities establish "fire safety cover plans"); Ontario (allows Fire Marshal to review and recommend if public safety threatened due to municipal failure to meet responsibilities); Not mandated: New Brunswick and British Columbia.
Government Department Consolidation	Structural fire prevention, suppression, wildland, and emergency management are in different government departments.	Most other provinces often consolidate these responsibilities within the same department.

2. Standards (Training, Operations, and Equipment)

- **Lack of Legislated Standards:** A critical insight for Nova Scotia is that there are **no legislated standards for the organization, deployment, and safety of fire and emergency services**. This lack of uniformity can lead to varied protocols, inefficiencies, and potential safety risks.
- **Training:** Nova Scotia **does not have established training standards or subsidized training** for municipal firefighters. The Fire Service Association of Nova Scotia (FSANS) has requested support for adopting training standards, using NFPA standards as a potential template. While the Act doesn't mandate national standards, they are referenced in practice through training programs. The Fire Marshal and delegated training institutions have training authority. Local departments set hiring criteria, but the province provides baseline training expectations.
- **Equipment:** There are **no established standards for equipment in Nova Scotia**.

Comparison of Standards (Training, Operations, and Equipment):

Feature	Nova Scotia	Other Jurisdictions (Examples)
Legislated Standards	None for organization, deployment, and safety of fire and emergency services.	Have provisions: Most other Canadian jurisdictions. Newfoundland and Labrador can require compliance with national/international codes (e.g., National Fire Code of Canada, NFPA Codes). Saskatchewan's regulations govern standards for fire protection training and certification, and allow for adoption of national codes.
Training Standards/Certification	None established or subsidized. Fire Marshal has authority, but local departments set hiring criteria. NFPA referenced in practice.	Have provisions: Ontario (Fire Marshal develops training programs and evaluation systems, mandatory certification to NFPA standards for all positions except Fire Chief); Quebec (École Nationale des Pompiers du Québec validates training, develops courses, advises); Saskatchewan (regulations govern training standards and certification); PEI (central training school); BC (Structure Firefighting Minimum Training Standards linking service to training).
Equipment Standards	None established.	Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Quebec provide some amount of equipment to municipal fire departments, which "facilitates standardization".

3. Accountability and Reporting

- **Challenges:** Nova Scotia **lacks a quality assurance process** for municipal fire prevention and suppression. Although reporting requirements exist, these mechanisms are **not coordinated or comprehensive** across the system.
- **Inspections and Compliance:** Inspection authority is **clearly defined** for the Fire Marshal and local assistants, with powers to enter and inspect properties. This authority is described as **stronger and more explicit than in New Brunswick or British Columbia**. Fire code enforcement is adopted and enforced under the Act, consistent with practices in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Alberta. Penalties and prosecutions are available for non-compliance, matching national trends.

Comparison of Accountability and Reporting:

Feature	Nova Scotia	Other Jurisdictions (Examples)
Quality Assurance	Lacks a quality assurance process for municipal fire prevention and suppression.	(No direct comparison provided for other provinces having a formal QA process).
Formal Reporting	Reporting requirements exist but are not coordinated or comprehensive .	Most provinces/territories require formal reporting from municipal fire departments regularly. Saskatchewan mandates "fire service information" from local authorities. Quebec requires local municipalities to report fire incidents and regional authorities to report activities annually.
Insurance Company Reporting	Insurance companies and adjusters are required to provide detailed reports on fires and losses to the Fire Marshal/Commissioner.	Consistently required across Canada (e.g., Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan). This data is crucial for assessing fire safety and trends.
Inspection Authority	Clearly defined and strong for Fire Marshal and local assistants.	Stronger than New Brunswick and British Columbia. Designated to local authorities through Acts in Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan.

4. Dispatch and Communications

- **Localized Approach:** Fire dispatch in Nova Scotia is **managed solely at the local level**.
- **Interoperability:** The province provides Trunked Mobile Radio (TMR) communications radios to each fire department, which "provides interoperability possibilities between fire and other emergency response agencies". Nova Scotia possesses a **more interoperable radio and**

telecommunications system for emergency responders than many other provinces/territories, though this varies locally.

Comparison of Dispatch and Communications:

Feature	Nova Scotia	Other Jurisdictions (Examples)
Dispatch Management	Managed solely at the local level .	Most provinces/territories have local/municipal dispatch, some have a split between provincial/territorial and local.
Communication Systems	Provides TMR radios for interoperability. More interoperable radio system than many others.	Saskatchewan's regulations include developing and adopting standards for fire safety services radio communications.

5. Financial Aspects

- **Funding Concerns:** There is a recognized issue of **underfunded departments that cannot meet minimum service standards or ensure firefighter safety**. The need for **dedicated funding from provincial and/or municipal governments** to meet basic minimum standards is highlighted.
- **Legislative Funding Clauses:** There are **not many provinces that have funding clauses in their legislation**, making long-term financial commitments challenging.

Comparison of Financial Aspects:

Feature	Nova Scotia	Other Jurisdictions (Examples)
Funding Challenges	Underfunded departments unable to meet standards or ensure safety. Need for dedicated provincial/municipal funding .	(No direct comparison to other provinces' specific funding challenges beyond the general note that few have funding clauses in legislation).
Funding Mechanisms	(No specific funding mechanism noted in legislation, though provincial/municipal funding is highlighted as needed).	Alberta levies insurance companies to maintain the Fire Commissioner's office. Manitoba's Office of the Fire Commissioner operates as a Special Operating Agency. Ontario allows Fire Marshal's costs to become a municipal lien. PEI has provisions for "Rural Fire Services". Saskatchewan levies fire insurance corporations.

6. Interoperability and Mutual Aid

- **Mutual Aid Agreements:** Many fire departments in Nova Scotia have mutual aid agreements, but there is "**minimal consistency**" in their content and scope, and the OFM is **not involved in their formulation**.

Comparison of Interoperability and Mutual Aid:

Feature	Nova Scotia	Other Jurisdictions (Examples)
Mutual Aid Agreements	Most departments have them, but with minimal consistency in content/scope . OFM is not involved .	Ontario explicitly requires municipalities to establish and maintain mutual aid plans . Saskatchewan allows for inter-municipal areas for prevention/suppression and agreements between various entities.
Radio/Telecom System	Possesses a more interoperable radio and telecommunications system for emergency responders than many other provinces/territories, though this varies locally. (See also Dispatch and Communications above)	(No specific comparison points for other provinces having a less interoperable system, but Manitoba's local authorities are responsible for enforcing the Manitoba Fire Code within their boundaries, and Saskatchewan has radio communication standards).

7. Immunity from Liability

- **Good Faith Protection:** Under Nova Scotia's Fire Safety Act, **officials, departments, and government entities are protected from liability for actions taken in good faith** during the execution of their duties. Similar provisions are also found within the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter.

Comparison of Immunity from Liability:

Feature	Nova Scotia	Other Jurisdictions (Examples)
Immunity Clauses	Includes clauses protecting officials, departments, and government entities from liability for actions done in good faith .	This is a consistent feature across Canadian fire safety legislation . Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Saskatchewan all include similar clauses. This indicates a universal recognition of inherent risks and responsibilities.

Key Insights and Opportunities for Nova Scotia

- **Strengths:** Nova Scotia's Act is:
 - **more structured** than many provinces,
 - **clearly defines roles** for the Fire Marshal and municipalities,
 - **empowers local assistants** for inspections, and
 - provides **strong legal tools for fire prevention and compliance**.
 - It also outlines some provisions for coordination amongst fire departments.
- **Areas for Development:** TSI's preliminary review suggests Nova Scotia has a **decentralized and less standardized approach** compared to many other Canadian jurisdictions. Key areas for potential development include:
 - Establishment of **province-wide legislated standards** for service delivery, training, and equipment.
 - Enhanced coordination in **data collection** and mutual aid agreements.
 - Addressing the **issue of funding**, which remains a significant challenge for fire services.
 - Considering **requiring regional or municipal fire safety plans** (similar to Quebec's Cover Plans).
 - Expanding **integration with emergency management and wildfire resilience planning**.
 - Reviewing **training and certification oversight** to align more directly with NFPA or other more attainable standards.
 - Exploring the inclusion of **equity, mental health, and climate-related provisions**.
 - Discussing the role of **cancer prevention regulations** beyond presumptive legislation.

In summary, while Nova Scotia's Fire Safety Act provides a solid foundation and is ahead of some provinces in maturity, there are significant opportunities to enhance standardization, coordination, and funding to further align with leading practices in Canadian fire service governance.

Comprehensive Engagement Plan for Nova Scotia Fire Services

Fire Services Survey

A specific fire and associated services survey was sent out with over a month for stakeholders to respond. (currently over 200 surveys collected)

Municipal Admin and Governance Survey

A specific survey aimed at Municipal Administrators and Councils was sent. (currently over 25 surveys collected)

Atlantic Fire Leadership Workshop

A workshop was held for Nova Scotia fire services at the Atlantic Fire Leadership Conference. Over 65 participants.

Province Wide Workshops

TSI will host 14 workshops in various locations around Nova Scotia with fire services personnel and municipal administration and governance officials.

One on One Interviews

TSI will be conducting one on one interviews with key government officials later in July.

Final Virtual Workshops

TSI will host two virtual workshops to accommodate those stakeholders who could not attend in person sessions.



Engagement Insights on Fire Services Governance Study

What We Heard Report

Fire Services Association of Nova Scotia



Overview

The Fire Services Association of Nova Scotia (FSANS) initiated this comprehensive governance review of the Nova Scotia Fire Services. Nova Scotia's current fire service governance framework faces several core issues, which necessitated this comprehensive review. These challenges include:

- Increasing impacts of severe weather events such as hurricanes, wildfires, and floods, highlighting the need for resilient, coordinated, and adaptable emergency service governance structures.
- Decades of fragmented and inconsistent systems and legislation, indicating a need to build a more unified model for present and future demands.
- Complexity within the fire service landscape, which encompasses a mix of volunteer and paid services, multiple levels of government, and strong interdependencies with other emergency services like police and ambulance.
- Rising demands on both career and volunteer fire services, contributing to an urgent need for a modern governance framework that is collaborative, community-grounded, and adaptable to future risks.
- Increasing complexity of fire services operations, including issues related to climate change, volunteer recruitment, legislative clarity, and interagency coordination.
- Challenges in how fire and emergency services are organized, funded, trained, and supported across the province.
- The current governance model's effectiveness is influenced by both formal structures (legislation, oversight, funding mechanisms) and informal processes (decision-making, resource allocation, role definition).
- The importance of relationships and trust that underpin effective interagency collaboration, especially in rural and remote areas, is a critical informal process that needs to be addressed.
- Issues related to training and dispatch standards, and key priorities such as mental health, interoperability, and sustainable funding.

The engagement process underpinning this report was designed to be inclusive and representative, gathering diverse perspectives from career and volunteer firefighters, municipal leaders, and intersecting emergency services across both urban and rural regions of the province. This report synthesizes the collective feedback, highlighting major themes, shared priorities, regional differences, service-specific challenges, and stakeholder-identified opportunities to inform the development of a modern, collaborative, and adaptable “made in Nova Scotia” governance framework that addresses current demands and future challenges facing the complex service structures of fire services.

Engagement

To supplement the legislative research conducted, targeted interviews were held with fire service leadership and firefighters, provincial government officials, and public administrators in a cross-section of jurisdictions. These discussions aimed to validate insights, explored challenges, and assessed the transferability of governance innovations to Nova Scotia. Interviews were extended to the Office of the Fire Marshal, the Deputy Minister of Emergency Management, the Associate Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs and Nova Scotia 9-1-1 Dispatch.

Surveys were utilized to reach a broad cross-section of fire service members and municipal leaders. One survey was designed for the Fire Services and a second survey was designed for Municipal and Provincial government administrators and elected officials.

Facilitated in person and virtual focus groups explored complex issues and gathered deeper insights. Focus groups included AMANS and Emergency Management Organizations.

Regional working groups were held in-person across Nova Scotia to better understand local challenges and opportunities directly from those with boots on the ground. The engagement process deliberately included career and volunteer firefighters and fire service leadership, municipal administrators and elected officials.

This governance review truly reflects the realities, needs, and priorities of those most directly impacted by fire service delivery. It emphasizes representation, accessibility, and trust-building across all stakeholder groups.

A full list of engagements can be found on Page 5.



387 attendees

participated actively in **29 workshops** covering diverse topics relevant to the governance of fire services in Nova Scotia.



30+ interviews

were completed to gather in-depth qualitative insights from various stakeholders.



400 fire survey responses

were collected from **fire service participants**, reflecting widespread input on vital issues.

100 government survey responses

were gathered from **municipal and provincial** officials, ensuring governmental perspectives were included.



Key Themes

Throughout the engagement, key themes arose that were heard consistently across the province, across ministries and across stakeholder groups.

Funding and Financial Sustainability

This is a pervasive challenge across all departments. Many fire departments face a lack of funding for operations, equipment, training, and capital replacement. There's a desire for more provincial and federal funding and a call for standardization in funding models across municipalities. Departments often rely on fundraising, which is a significant time drain for volunteers. The high cost of fire apparatus and equipment is a major budgeting concern, with departments "barely squeaking by". There's a perceived inequity in funding via the tax system, and fire services are often funded differently than police or EHS, despite being expected to provide critical services. Opportunities include decontamination grants, PPE grants, and calls for the province to fund the fire school and underwrite fire department insurance.

Training and Standardization

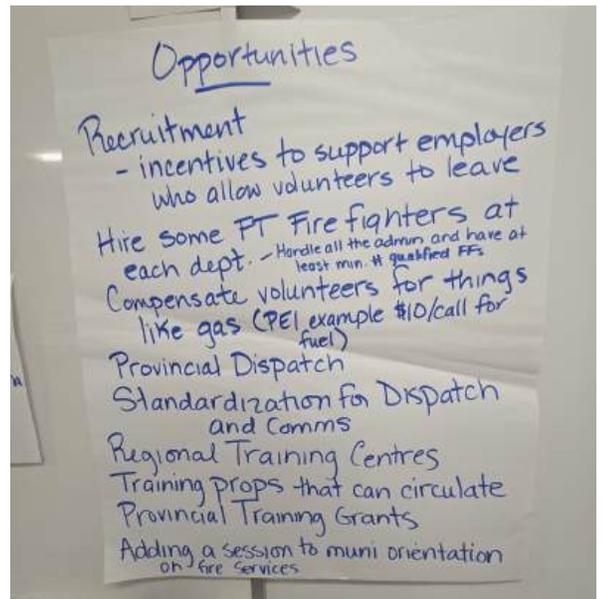
There is a consistent demand for standardized training across the province. Current training modalities are seen as a weakness, with internal instructors not always NFPA certified. The cost of training is prohibitive, and there's a need for compensation for loss of wages when volunteers take time off work to attend training. Opportunities include regional training centers, mobile fire training units, and a centralized training website. The concept of a common training standard for Level One certification is a recognized opportunity.

Recruitment and Retention

This is a major challenge for volunteer fire services due to changing demographics, the significant time commitment required for calls, training, and fundraising, and the cost for recruits to gain training. There's an aging population and a smaller recruitment pool. Opportunities include incentives for volunteers, such as tax breaks for volunteers or their employers who allow volunteers to leave work for calls, covering license plate costs, and recognition of service. A provincial recruitment campaign is also suggested.

Governance, Authority, and Accountability

There's a significant lack of consistency across governance models and legislation (Acts) leading to unclear authority regarding who departments report to (commissioners, councils). Concerns include conflicting legislation, the "may" vs. "shall" language in the MGA, and a lack of understanding by municipalities of their role, responsibility, and liability. Concerns over "authority having jurisdiction" came up in multiple areas in the province, leading to confusion on fire scenes and in the overall governance and management of departments. There's a strong sentiment that decisions need to come from the province, as councils are reluctant to make unpopular changes. Opportunities include a single standard overseer, a fire service coordinator role, and potential amalgamation of departments for efficiency.



Key Themes

Dispatch and Communication

Inconsistency in dispatch systems is a major challenge, with multiple dispatch models and varied training for dispatchers. Issues include call hand-off delays for mutual aid, a lack of standardized training for dispatchers, and communication overload on main channels. The idea of a provincial dispatch system or a centralized dispatch is an opportunity.

Health, Safety, and Wellness (including Cancer Prevention)

Firefighters face significant health risks, particularly cancer prevention. There is a need for an effective PPE management program and framework. Mental health support is a critical concern, with calls for proactive programs, easier access to debriefs, and equal access to support as EHS and Police. Issues also include inconsistent or lack of clear understanding of WCB coverage for volunteers. Participants emphasized the importance of establishing a definitive interpretation of if and how Occupational Health and Safety legislation applies to volunteer and composite fire services.

Equipment and Infrastructure

The high cost of equipment, aging apparatus, and the desire for standardized equipment are recurring challenges. Some departments lack basic infrastructure like showers, while others have specialized equipment like hovercrafts, indicating a wide disparity. Opportunities include province-wide procurement for equipment and regional sharing of resources.

Level of Service (LOS) and Risk Assessment

Defining and maintaining an adequate Level of Service (LOS) is a critical theme. Across Canada, Councils are responsible for setting LOS, but there's a need for clear standards to measure against and clear definition of this responsibility in Nova Scotia. Community risk assessments are seen as a tool to establish appropriate LOS.

Interoperability and Mutual Aid

The importance of mutual aid agreements is recognized, though some are informal. There's a need for cross-training with other agencies, better communication for mutual aid calls, and standardization of equipment to ensure interoperability.

Medical First Response (MFR)

The burden of Medical First Response (MFR) calls is a significant concern for fire departments. MFR is often not covered by funding and is seen as being absorbed into operational budgets, with departments suggesting it should either be billed back to the province or not done. This downloading of services to fire departments is unsustainable.



Conclusion

The What We Heard process engaged fire and associated service representatives extensively across Nova Scotia through province-wide workshops and discussions. Participation was strong, and the perspectives shared demonstrated remarkable consistency across regions, regardless of community size or location. The challenges, needs, and opportunities voiced were aligned in both content and urgency, highlighting shared priorities for the future of the fire service sector.

Across the province, participants identified common themes: the need for sustainable funding models, standardized and accessible training, improved recruitment and retention supports, clearer governance structures, consistent and coordinated dispatch systems, enhanced health and safety measures, equitable access to equipment and infrastructure, defined levels of service based on risk assessments, stronger interoperability and mutual aid arrangements, and sustainable approaches to Medical First Response. These themes were not isolated to specific areas, but rather reflected a unified view of the sector’s realities and aspirations.

The next stage in this process is the development of the Governance Study Report, which will build on this input to present clear, evidence-based recommendations for the future governance of fire and associated services in Nova Scotia. These recommendations will aim to address the challenges and opportunities identified through engagement and to provide a roadmap for a sustainable, coordinated, and effective service model for years to come.



MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE AND ADMIN WORKSHOPS

- Tuesday, July 22 - Yarmouth
- Tuesday, July 22 - Sydney River
- Wednesday, July 23 - Shelburne
- Wednesday, July 23 - Saint Bernard
- Wednesday, July 23 - Antigonish
- Thursday, July 24 - Liverpool
- Thursday, July 24 - Annapolis
- Thursday, July 24 - Amherst
- Friday, July 25 - Lunenburg
- Friday, July 25 - Middleton
- Friday, July 25 - Pictou County

VIRTUAL SESSIONS

- Wednesday, August 6th, 2 pm - 4 pm
- Friday, August 8th, 2 pm - 4 pm

FIRE SERVICES WORKSHOPS

- Monday, July 21 - Brookfield
- Tuesday, July 22 - Yarmouth
- Tuesday, July 22 - Sydney River
- Tuesday, July 22 - Baddeck
- Wednesday, July 23 - Shelburne
- Wednesday, July 23 - Saint Bernard
- Wednesday, July 23 - Antigonish
- Thursday, July 24 - Liverpool
- Thursday, July 24 - Annapolis
- Thursday, July 24 - Amherst
- Friday, July 25 - Lunenburg
- Friday, July 25 - Middleton
- Friday, July 25 - Pictou County
- Saturday, July 26 - Elmsdale
- Saturday, July 26 - Kentville

VIRTUAL SESSIONS

- Wednesday, August 6th, 7 pm - 9 pm
- Thursday, August 7th, 7 pm - 9 pm

ADDITIONAL WORKSHOPS

- AMANS Board
- EMO Coordinators
- Atlantic Fire Chiefs Conference
- Department of Emergency Management
- Department of Municipal Affairs

Report Prepared By:



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