



WASHINGTON FIRE CHIEFS

STRATEGIC PLAN

2020-2025

ESCI Emergency Services
Consulting International

Providing Expertise and Guidance that Enhances Community Safety



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An electronic survey was sent out to the Washington Fire Chiefs membership in June 2018. One hundred and fifty-five members responded with their feedback. That feedback was compiled and provided to the approximately 42 members who physically attended a planning workshop. Those fire chiefs came from all regions of the state to convene in Ellensburg on November 1, 2018, to interpret the survey results and provide their input into the strategic planning process.

ESCI extends its deep appreciation and respect for the time and energy committed by the 155 members who participated in the survey, the 42 representatives who attended the workshop, and especially the WFC staff who did much of the heavy lifting in preparation for the workshop and meeting afterward in a retreat to support the goals established by the workshop participants with a series of objectives and timelines.

PLANNING METHODOLOGY

“You can't expect to meet the challenges of today with yesterday's tools and expect to be in business tomorrow.”

—Anonymous

As the quote suggests, every organization must keep up with the latest tools (which can be methodologies, contemporary thought, or non-traditional problem-solving) to be relevant into the future. History is littered with organizations that did not. A plan—complete with goals, objectives, timelines, assignments, and incremental steps which can be measured—creates a roadmap for an organization to follow. Change or progress starts with a plan. For any organization, public or private, to reach its full potential, it must have a plan. An organization that knows where it is going, knows the environment in which it must operate, and identifies how to get there has the best chance to meet the needs of its constituents and achieve its vision. This planning process has served to refresh the Washington Fire Chiefs continuing commitment to its membership and the fire service statewide, continuing its journey of success.

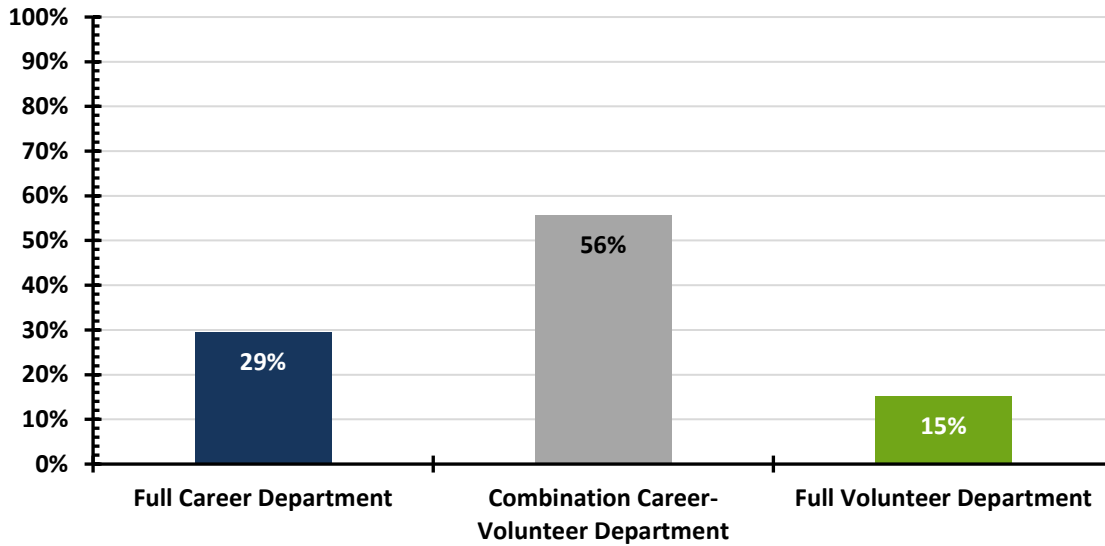
The approach taken in this planning process includes an in-depth environmental scan from the perspectives of the membership of the WFC. The membership of the WFC was invited to participate in an anonymous survey via Survey Monkey® where the survey results came directly to ESCI. The survey was opened on June 13, 2018 and closed at the end of the business day on July 3, 2018. The survey gathered information about participant demographics (type of department, size, and budget), and obtained responses to communication with the association, the legislative efforts of the association, member relationship with the association, and the value of the association to its membership. The participants were also asked to rank the service priorities and planning priorities of the WFC. Finally, a SWOT Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) was conducted. The feedback from all of these areas is summarized in this report.

Membership Survey Results

The survey had 155 participants in the three-week survey window. The following figures illustrate the participant responses and served to guide those who attended a workshop on November 1, 2018. The percentages rounded up to the next whole percent for each response.

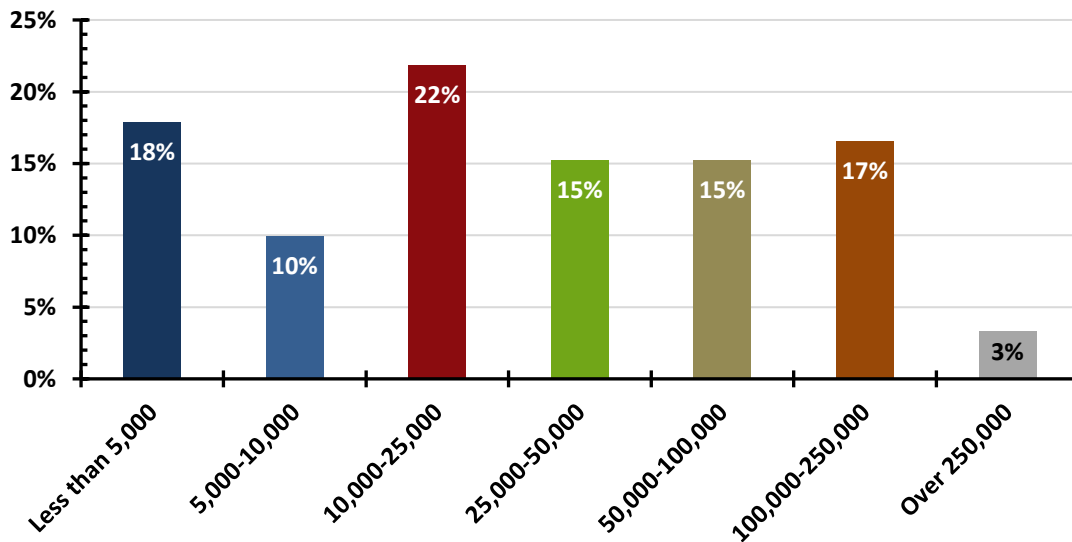
The following figure illustrates the type of organization the respondents represented. The largest majority, predictably, was combination career-volunteer departments, which make up the majority of the fire departments and fire districts in the state.

Figure 1: Department Make-Up



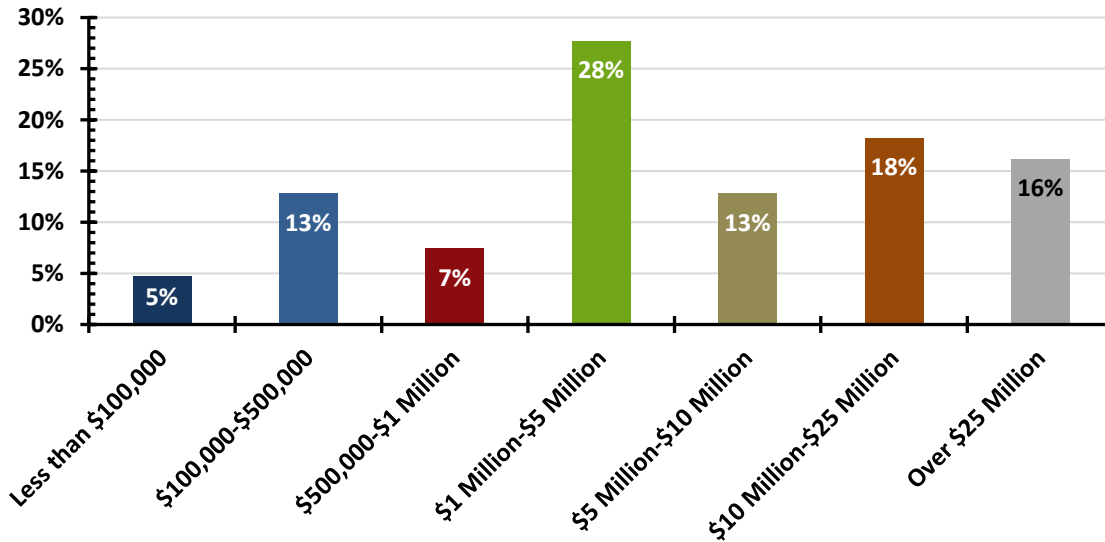
The next figure reflects the size of the population served by the participant agencies. Also not surprising is that the largest group (22% of the respondents) served communities of between 10,000–25,000 population. The second largest service area population was less than 5,000 population (18% of the respondents). The smallest participant group (3% of the respondents) serves the largest population of over 250,000.

Figure 2: Approximate Population of Service Area



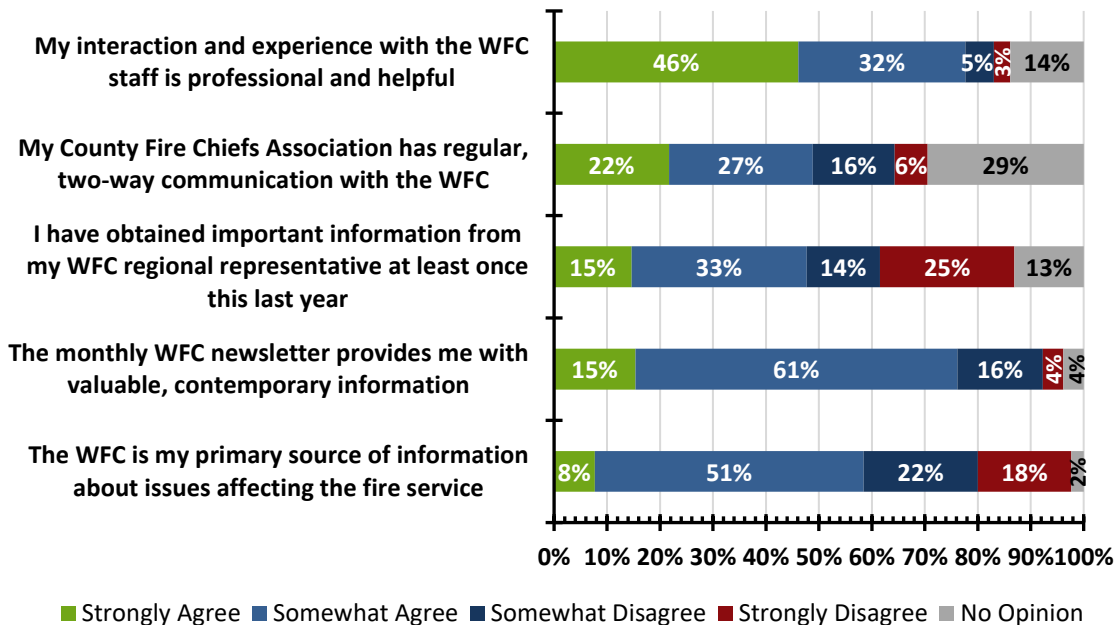
The following figure reflects budget size for the participant agencies. The largest was predominantly in the \$1 million to \$5 million range (28% of the respondents). The smallest agencies in the state financially (budgets of less than \$100,000) represented only 5 percent of the total responses. This perhaps illustrates a key challenge for the WFC to reach and serve the unique needs of these very small agencies.

Figure 3: Operating Budget, 2018



The following figure represents the first service or relationship question posed to the participants, which asks about association-participant agency communication.

Figure 4: Communication



Individual respondents agreed in large numbers that interaction between them and the WFC was professional and helpful, with 78 percent rating this area positively. Eight percent of the respondents had a somewhat negative perspective on this dimension. A larger percentage than the negative responses had no opinion, which may reflect a lack of exposure to the WFC staff.

The county associations fared less favorably as a source of regular two-way communication with the WFC at 49 percent agreeing with the statement. Twenty-two percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement that their county association had regular communication with the WFC. Again, 29 percent of the respondents had no opinion on this question.

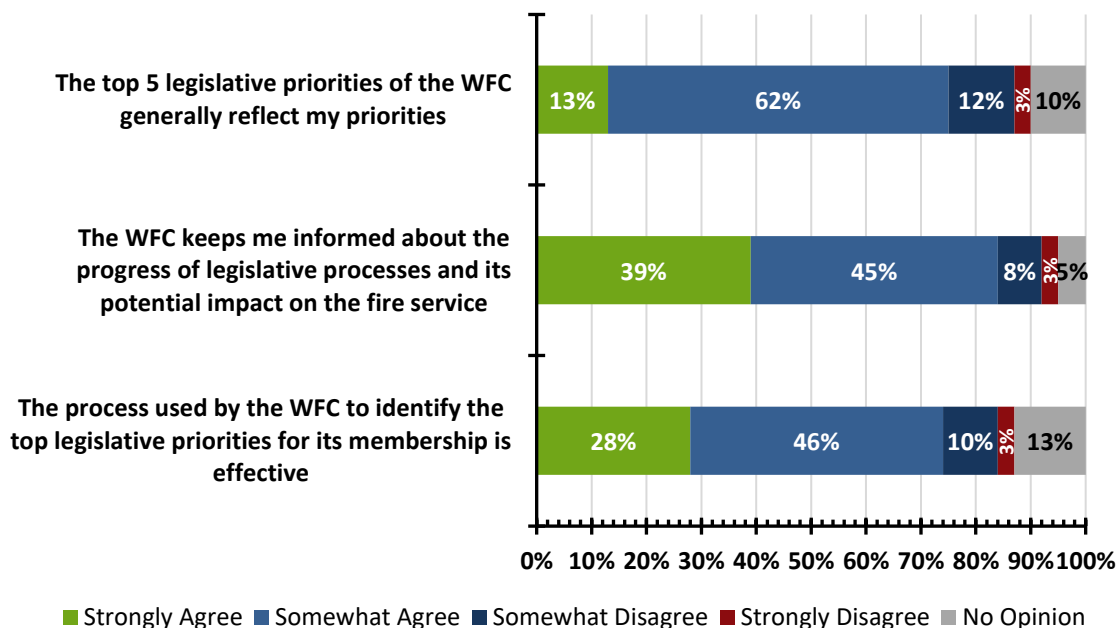
The WFC regional representatives are of questionable value as a source of valuable information to the respondents, with 48 percent of the respondents believing there was important information shared and 39 percent of the respondents disagreeing that there was important information shared. Noteworthy is the percentage of respondents (25%) strongly disagreeing with this statement. This may reflect either low-to-no regional representative activity with the county association, low-to-no attendance by the participant to county associations to receive the information, or no county association for the regional representative to meet with as a source of information dissemination.

There appears to be high satisfaction with the WFC newsletter, with 76 percent agreeing that it is valuable and timely. Twenty percent disagree that it is valuable and/or timely, and four percent expressing no opinion.

Fifty-nine percent of the respondents consider the WFC as their primary source of information on issues affecting the fire service, while 40 percent do not. A relatively high number, 18 percent, strongly disagree that the WFC is their primary source of information on issues affecting the fire service.

The following figure reflects respondent opinions regarding the WFC activities on legislative issues.

Figure 5: Legislative Issues



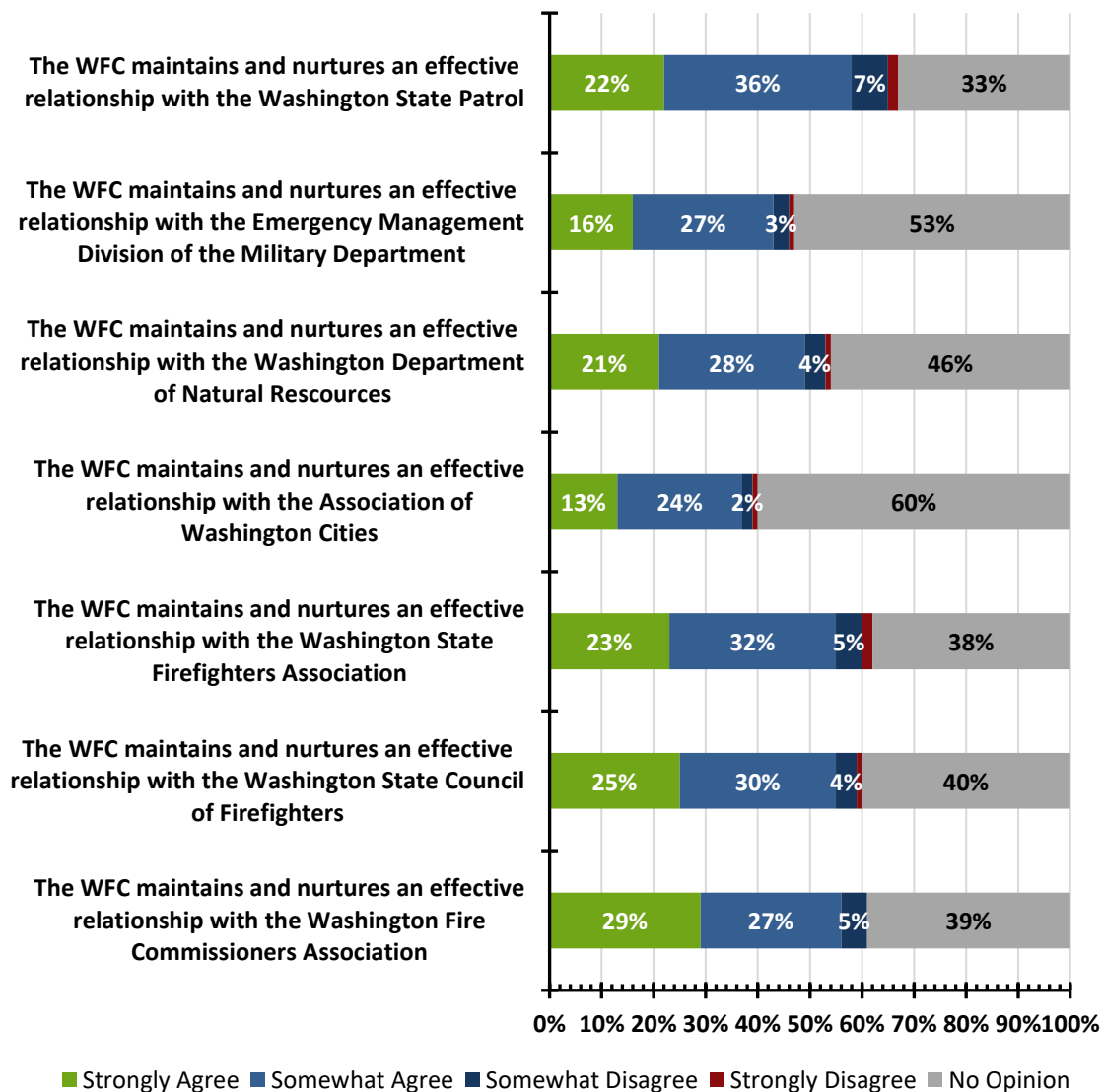
Seventy-five percent of respondents agreed that the top five legislative priorities for the WFC generally reflect their own priorities. Only 15 percent disagreed and 10 percent had no opinion.

The WFC does an excellent job of informing the membership about progress on legislative issues affecting the fire service, with 84 percent agreeing with that statement. Only 11 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement and 5 percent had no opinion.

The process the WFC uses to determine the top five legislative priorities is effective from the perspective of the respondents, with 74 percent agreeing with that statement. Thirteen percent disagree, while 13 percent expressed no opinion.

The following figure focuses on allied agency relationships.

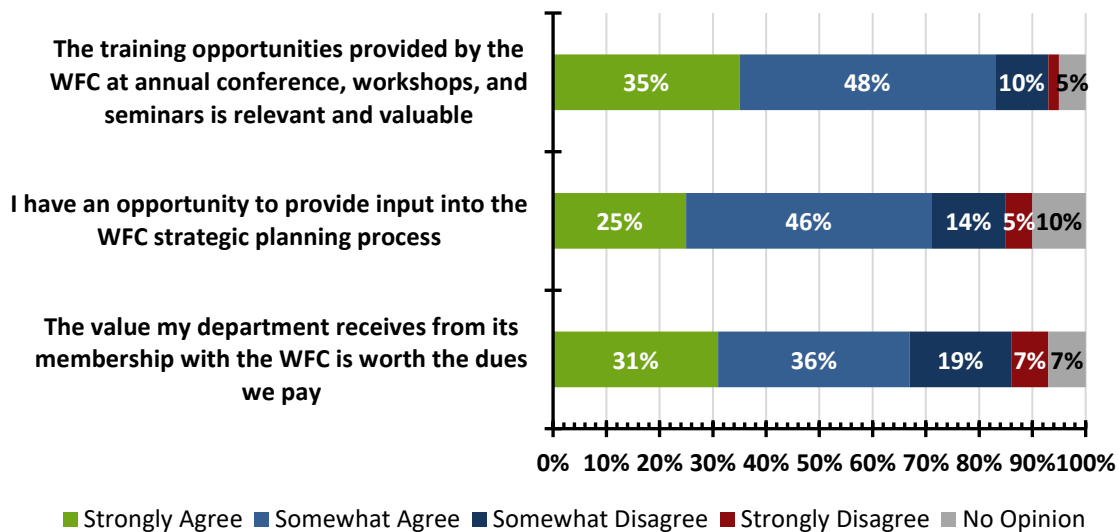
Figure 6: Relationship with WFC



In this category, in most responses the largest percentage of respondents had no opinion regarding the relationships with the allied agencies. This likely reflects no first-hand knowledge of efforts to nurture relationships, nor any first-hand knowledge of ongoing conflict or disagreement with each of the allied agencies. Nonetheless, those who had an opinion were far more likely to agree that the WFC maintains and nurtures relationships with the Washington State Patrol, Emergency Management, DNR, the AWC, the Volunteer Firefighter Association, the State Council of the IAFF, and the Fire Commissioners Association. The relationships with all allied agencies were scored at or near 50 percent. Areas with room for improvement (other than generally keeping the membership informed regarding efforts to maintain relationships with all allied agencies) is with Emergency Management and with the Association of Washington Cities. These two allied agencies scored lowest of those agreeing with the statement, although still much higher agreement than disagreement.

The following figure surveys overall value of the WFC to the respondent and his/her agency.

Figure 7: Value of WFC to Me/My Department

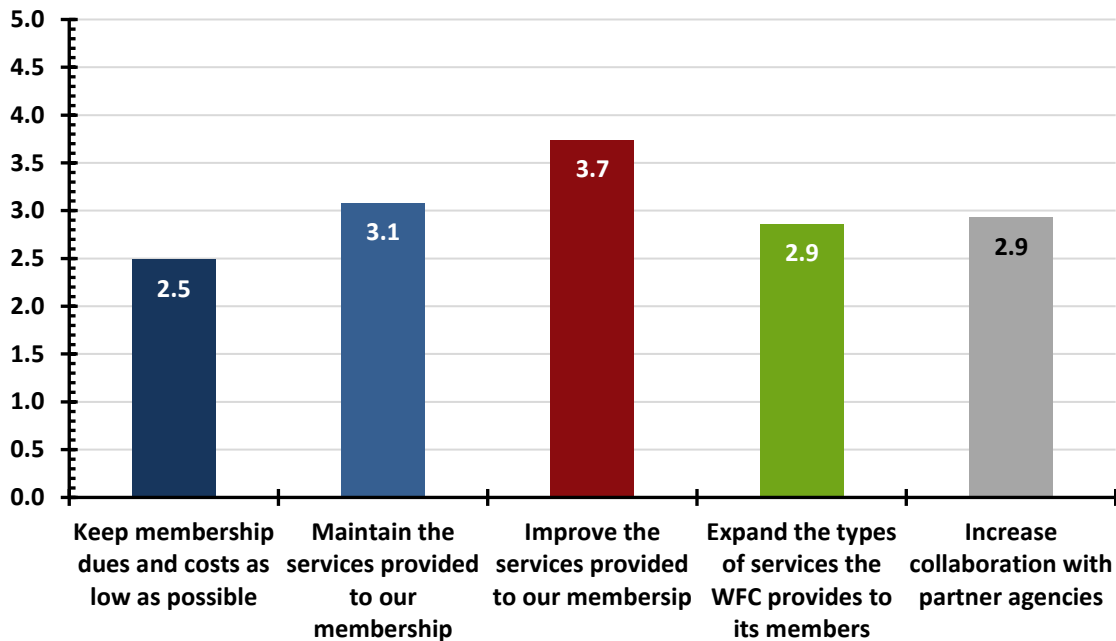


By far, the greatest satisfaction appears to be with the value and relevance of training, conferences, and seminars provided by the WFC, with 83 percent agreeing. Twelve percent disagreed, and 5 percent had no opinion.

Interestingly, 19 percent of the respondents disagreed that they had an opportunity to provide input into the strategic planning process, yet the very act of completing this survey provided the respondents with the opportunity to provide input.

The question regarding the value of the WFC membership being worth the dues paid was answered positively, with 67 percent agreeing the dues are worth the value. Twenty-six percent did not agree, and 7 percent had no opinion.

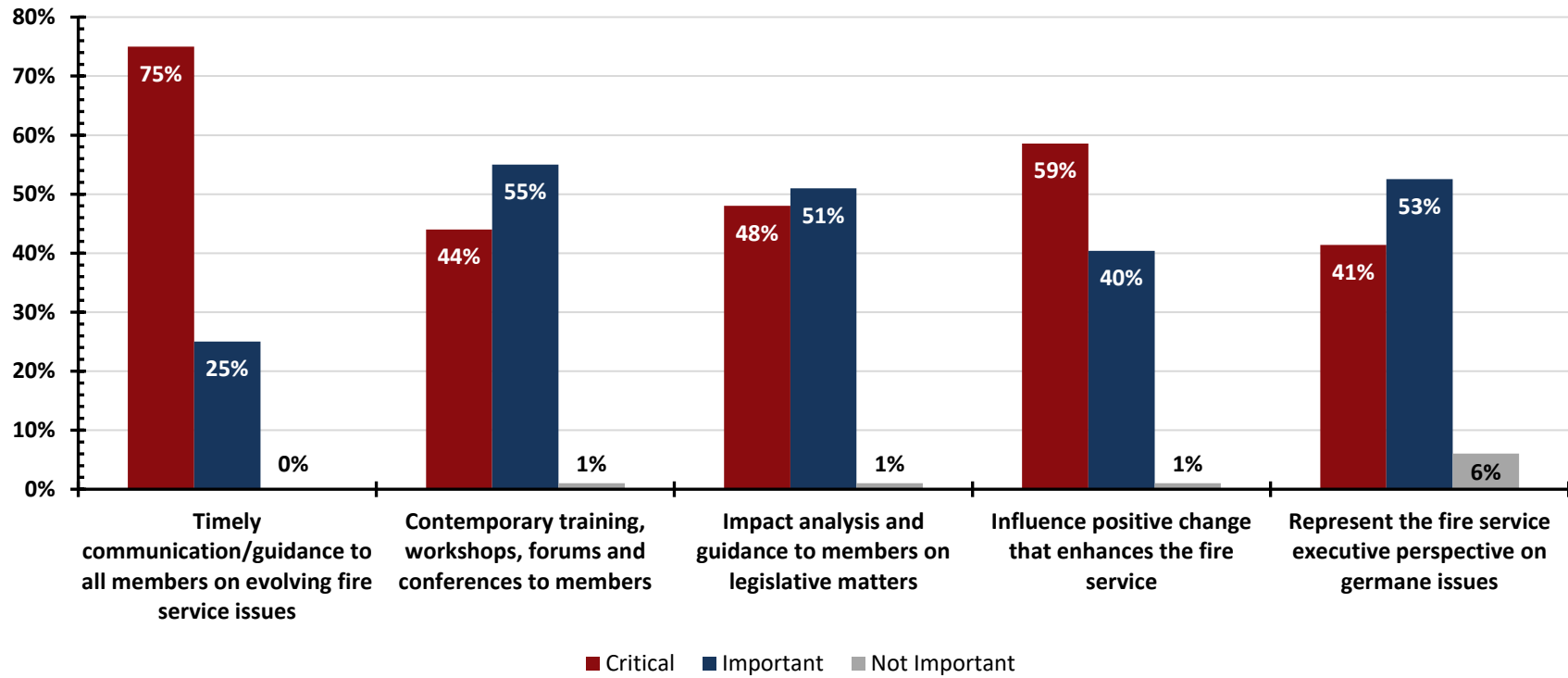
Figure 8: Planning Priorities



Respondents were given the opportunity to prioritize the five planning elements reflected in Figure 8 in order of priority. A score of one is the highest priority and a five is the lowest priority. The scores show little difference in the range between low and high, but the highest priority was keeping the membership dues and costs as low as possible, with the lowest priority being improved services provided to the membership. However, the variance between dimensions is less a mandate and more of an illustration of relatively balanced level of importance between the dimensions.

The following figure focuses on the service priorities from among the list of services provided. In this case, respondents were to determine whether each service listed was a critical priority, an important priority, or an unimportant priority.

Figure 9: Service Priorities



The most critical priority of the listed services from the respondents' perspective is timely communication and guidance to all members on evolving fire service issues, with 75 percent of the respondents identifying this as a critical priority. Zero respondents identified it as not important. The next most critical service priority is influencing positive change that enhances the fire service, with 59 percent of the respondents identifying this as a critical priority. One percent of the respondents identified it as not important. The third priority is conducting an impact analysis and providing guidance to members on legislative matters, with 48 percent of the respondents identifying this as a critical priority. One percent of the respondents identified it as not important. The remaining two service elements—contemporary training, workshops, forums, and conferences, and representing the fire service executive perspective on germane issues—had a majority determine that these were important, but not necessarily critical priorities. For the latter, six percent felt that representing the fire service executive perspective on germane issues was not important.

Planning Workshop

After the results of the electronic member surveys were compiled, a smaller group of members (42) were invited to attend a one-day planning workshop in Ellensburg on November 1, 2018. The existing mission, vision, and guiding principles (values) were reviewed by those in attendance. They are reflected on the following page.

Once the mission, vision, and guiding principles were reviewed, workshop participants reviewed the electronic survey results and identified trends and themes. The SWOT analysis results were the focus, with workshop participants breaking into smaller groups and developed a consensus on the top elements from within the strengths and weaknesses of the association, as well as from the opportunities and threats facing the WFC now and into the future. These elements were identified and prioritized as part of the environmental scan, highlighted in a later section of this document.

From these primary areas, goals and objectives were developed by the workshop attendees. The participants broke into small groups to develop the framework for the goals and subordinate objectives over the course of the rest of the afternoon. There was much vigorous discussion about survey feedback, about dilemmas facing the WFC, and what issues demand WFC resources be applied immediately to address issues.

Upon conclusion of the workshop, WFC staff later met in a retreat format and refined the results of the workshop, assigning timelines and generally focusing on addressing those issues of great importance to the membership and the WFC. The results of these combined efforts are reflected within the remainder of this document.

MISSION, VISION, AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In an effort to maximize physical participation at the planning workshop conducted on November 1, 2018, and executive decision was made to forego review of the mission, vision, and guiding principles of the WFC. Instead, these instruments were carried over from the previous strategic plan and are reflected in this section.

Mission

The WFC’s mission statement should clearly define the primary purpose of the organization’s existence. It focuses on what is truly important to the organization and its members. The mission statement should be understood by all members.

Washington Fire Chiefs’ Mission Statement

Providing leadership through service, education and advocacy.

Vision

In addition to knowing their mission, all successful organizations need to define where they expect to be in the future. The Washington Fire Chief’s vision provides its members with a future view that can be shared, a clear sense of direction, a mobilization of energy, and gives a sense of being engaged in something important. Vision statements provide a direction of how things can be and a sense of organizational purpose.

The Washington Fire Chiefs’ Vision is to be an Organization where:

- Our state-based focus provides high quality services that are responsive to the changing needs of our members and external agencies.
- We can create an environment that provides open, timely, and relevant communication both internally and externally.
- Legislative advocacy will be a primary focus.
- High quality education and professional development meets the diverse needs of our agencies.
- We value each other, the members we serve, and our commitment to the Washington Fire Chiefs’ Mission.

Guiding Principles (Values)

Guiding principles (values) define what an organization considers to be appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. An organization’s fundamental guiding principles define the organization’s culture and belief system, thus providing a foundation in an environment that is always changing. The following are the core values for the Washington Fire Chiefs.

The Washington Fire Chiefs is Committed to the Values of:

- Embracing innovation
- Building collaborative relationships
- Respecting the diversity of people, sections, and organizations
- Promoting accountability
- Ensuring accountability
- Ensuring responsiveness
- Establishing and maintaining effective communications
- Serving with integrity
- Providing technical guidance
- Honoring the traditions of duty, courage, and public service

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

In order to properly formulate strategic initiatives, the workshop participants had to evaluate the organizational environment from the perspective of the broader membership. The workshop participants combined feedback from the membership via the electronic survey and their collective knowledge of the organization to assess the environment in which the association operates. From this, they developed a consensus on the top issues the organization possesses in each SWOT element from the perspective of its membership. Analyzing the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) is the first step in identifying actionable strategies for the future.

To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires some of the same courage that a soldier needs.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Strengths

The identification of organizational strengths is the first step in the environment scan. An organization's strengths identify its capability of providing the services requested by its customers. The organization needs to make certain that its strengths are consistent with the issues it faces. Programs that do not match organizational strengths or primary functions should be reviewed to evaluate the rate of return on precious staff time or organizational effort. The workshop participants identified and prioritized the following WFC strengths:



1. Leadership/WFC Staff
2. Legislative Advocacy
3. Networking/Relationship Management
4. Unified Voice
5. Diversity
6. Communication
7. Collaboration on Critical Issues
8. Educational Opportunities

Weaknesses

Organizational weaknesses, or lack of performance, are also an important environmental scan element. In order to move forward, the organization must honestly identify the issues that have created barriers to success in the past. Weak areas needing improvement are not the same as threats (or challenges), which will be identified later, but rather those day-to-day issues and concerns that may slow or inhibit progress. Internal organizational issues, as identified by the planning team, are typically issues that are at the heart of an organization’s problems. The workshop participants identified and prioritized the following WFC weaknesses:

You can't expect to meet the challenges of today with yesterday's tools and expect to be in business tomorrow.

—Unknown Source



1. Training (Diversify Scope)
2. Legislative Alignment
3. Perception
4. Communication
5. Diversity Between Departments & Lack of Strategy to Address
6. Limited Staff & Staff Turnover
7. Lack of Data Collection for Legislative Issues
8. Succession Planning
9. Regional Representation
10. Time Involvement
11. Relationship Collaboration

Opportunities

An organization’s opportunities and threats are generally derived from the external environment. Opportunities are focused on existing services and on expanding and developing new possibilities inside and beyond the traditional service area. Many opportunities exist for the association:

1. More Regional Communications
2. Tap into Knowledge & Leadership
3. Education the Community
4. More Training Opportunities
5. Legislative Work Involvement
6. Ongoing Communication/Social Media/Innovation & Technology
7. Identifying what does work and build off it
8. Diversified Representation
9. Recruitment & Retention
10. Engagement with Smaller Departments
11. Collaboration Toward Common Goals
12. Mentoring/Succession Planning
13. Regional Education Opportunities

Threats

There are conditions in the external environment that are not directly under the organization's control. The identification of these conditions allows the organization to develop plans to mitigate or respond when a threat or challenge becomes an obstacle. By recognizing these challenges, an organization can greatly reduce the potential for loss or crisis. The workshop participants identified the following threats:

If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less.

—U.S. Army General Eric Shinseki

1. Lack of Relevancy to all Organizations
2. Funding
3. Lack of Participation at Local Levels
4. Lack of Unity
5. Increasing Regulations
6. Succession Leadership/Planning Concerns
7. Rural Department Involvement
8. Political Division (East/West and Career/Volunteer)
9. Failing Legislatively
10. Failing to Look at New Approaches
11. Time
12. Changing Demographics
13. Evolution of Service Demands



STRATEGIC PLAN

Goal 1	Increase membership values in the eyes of current and potential members as measured by membership recruitment and retention data.
Objectives	A. <i>Promote the purpose of the WFC.</i>
	Timeline: Continuous
	B. <i>Provide education to members on how to use existing resources.</i>
	Timeline: Short-term (2020)
	C. <i>Support members in their advocacy of the WFC.</i>
	Timeline: Short-term (2020)
Goal 2	Increase revenues through partnerships with vendors, fire service stakeholders, and the FRWC as measured against historic annual revenues.
Objective	A. <i>Recruit new Bugle members.</i>
	Timeline: Continuous
	B. <i>Identify entrepreneurial opportunities.</i>
	Timeline: Mid-term (2021)
	C. <i>Explore alternative revenue sources.</i>
	Timeline: Continuous
	D. <i>Retain Bugle members.</i>
	Timeline: Continuous
Goal 3	Increase proactive communication and contact with members on critical issues as measured by feedback from internal stakeholders.
Objectives	A. <i>Explore the feasibility of improving communications.</i>
	Timeline: Mid-term (2022)
	B. <i>Measure the effectiveness of current regional representation and find areas of improvement.</i>
	Timeline: Mid-term (2021)
	C. <i>Implement a more efficient and inclusive voting process.</i>
	Timeline: Mid-term (2021)

Goal 4 Provide relevant and timely professional development opportunities as measured by event surveys, event attendance, and event profit.	
Objectives	A. <i>Ensure that presentations synchronize with target audience.</i>
	Timeline: Continuous
	B. <i>Conduct a needs assessment to develop presentation topics.</i>
	Timeline: Continuous
	C. <i>Expand and improve training delivery methods.</i>
	Timeline: Mid-term (2022)
	D. <i>Explore the feasibility and applicability of section/committee structure.</i>
	Timeline: Long-term (2023)
	E. <i>Ensure relevance of professional development opportunities to career, combination, and volunteer organizations.</i>
Timeline: Mid-term (2021)	
Goal 5 Strengthen and improve external relationships as measured by feedback from board members and staff from those organizations.	
Objectives	A. <i>Focus on key organizations including, WFCA, WSFFA, WSCFF, WSAFM, WSRB, DNR, Military Department-EMD, and SFMO/WSP.</i>
	Timeline: Continuous
	B. <i>Coordinate with external stakeholders to improve communications.</i>
	Timeline: Mid-term (2022)
	C. <i>Optimize the exchange of resources with external stakeholders.</i>
Timeline: Long-term (2023)	
Goal 6 Build on existing legislative relationships to maximize influence in the legislative process as measured by our effectiveness on a collective fire service agenda.	
Objectives	A. <i>Evaluate and improve the effectiveness of the legislative priority development process.</i>
	Timeline: Long-term (2024)
	B. <i>Foster a collaborative legislative process that considers our membership variance.</i>
	Timeline: Mid-term (2022)
	C. <i>Lead the effort to support the Washington State Fire Service Coalition.</i>
Timeline: Continuous	

<p>Goal 7</p>	<p>Strengthen support staff relationships and office systems in an environment that is positive and continues to meet the needs of our customers as measured by staff/customer feedback during annual reviews.</p>
<p>Objectives</p>	<p>A. <i>Provide opportunities for timely, regular, and proactive communication for staff.</i></p>
	<p>Timeline: Mid-term (2021)</p>
	<p>B. <i>Provide ongoing professional development for staff.</i></p>
	<p>Timeline: Continuous</p>
	<p>C. <i>Create opportunities for collaborative problem solving.</i></p>
	<p>Timeline: Mid-term (2021)</p>
<p>Goal 8</p>	<p>Provide resources and assistance to members when they are facing a crisis as measured by customer satisfaction feedback.</p>
<p>Objectives</p>	<p>A. <i>Create a file to collect and store resources provided to members in crisis.</i></p>
	<p>Timeline: Mid-term (2021)</p>
	<p>B. <i>Create a tool to assist fire agencies in improving community perception of the fire service.</i></p>
	<p>Timeline: Long-term (2024)</p>
	<p>C. <i>Provide training to prevent and manage conflict and crisis.</i></p>
	<p>Timeline: Continuous</p>

Implementation Methodology

“The three major keys to successful strategic planning and implementation are commitment, credibility, and communication.”¹ These three critical elements are best addressed by appropriate prioritization and completion of objectives, consistently seeking and utilizing input from WFC members and communicating plan status on a consistent basis, and measuring compliance for the established timelines.

WFC Board Communication & Review

Once the strategic plan is adopted by the Board of Directors, operational plans for each objective should be developed (who will do it, what individual tasks are required, and any necessary budget support identified) the Board of Directors may direct staff, may create task teams, or may delegate oversight of the individual effort to the Executive Director or others. In all cases, however, it is paramount that the strategic plan be referred to often and progress be measured and reported out to the membership in appropriate forums.

The WFC must be committed to a regular schedule of status updates and accountability monitoring. The Board of Directors, through the Executive Director, should set up an implementation schedule to ensure regular communication and commitment to the strategic plan:

- Upon Adoption—Executive Director provides summary of strategic plan goals and objectives to the membership at the annual conference. Official development of operational plans begins.
- Board of Director Meetings—Board of Directors should establish a standing agenda item on all regular meetings to track progress of operational plan development and objectives progress.
- Annual Budget Development Plan Review—Board of Directors and staff should consider any budget support necessary to implement the strategic plan as part of the budget development process.
- Annual Updates—The Board of Directors and staff should annually review progress of the strategic plan and update the plan to keep it current. Any revisions should be presented to the membership at the annual conference.

¹ Ahoy, Chris, Associate Vice President of Facilities Planning & Management, Iowa State University, September 1998.

APPENDIX A—INTERNAL SWOT FEEDBACK

The following comments were provided by the respondents of the member survey discussed within the main report. These comments were responses to the SWOT as listed below in the four questions in quotation marks. These responses were from the 155 members who filled out the survey, although not all members completed this section (75% total completion rate). ESCI lightly edited a few responses where proper names were used or individuals, by their description in the comment, were easily identifiable and were personal critiques. In these cases, the thrust of the concern expressed was captured using appropriate language. The results follow:

“In your opinion, what is the WFC’s single greatest strength?”

- Its members and their willingness to support each other!
- Its great leadership.
- Legislative involvement.
- The bringing together of fire commissioners from around the state. It gives us a chance to learn about what is happening in other fire districts that could benefit our district.
- Network of highly trained and experienced professionals.
- Provider of contemporary fire service education and training.
- That it represents the perceived leaders of the fire service to the public.
- Communication with members.
- Membership brain trust
- Support/non-support and monitoring of legislative issues that affect the fire service.
- Education provided is relevant and inexpensive.
- Unity at the top.
- A single unified voice, EVIP certification
- Communication
- Collaboration on critical issues.
- Reach
- They listen. No matter what size or type of District/Department.
- Its members.
- A valuable resource for information and networking.
- Education
- Communication is great!
- The ability to represent the fire service in legislative matters.
- Legislative information and influence.
- I believe the greatest strength is the networking and legislative support.
- Collaboration with partner agencies and prioritization of WA fire service issues. WFC does a great job of education with its annual conference. Positive relationships in Olympia are helpful to meeting our goals.

- Staff and relationships with people of power in Olympia.
- Wide diversity and efforts to identify priorities to take forward legislatively.
- Its group synergy, the ability to bring partners into a discussion in a meaningful way.
- Membership, working with all FD, and FD members and non-members.
- It exists and is in place as a recognizable entity.
- Legislative efforts
- Staying involved with partner agencies and working to provide legislation that is good for our industry.
- Member networking, political strength
- Networking/Training/Information
- Unity of all Chief Officers
- The staff and the membership.
- Consolidating information and sending information out to its members.
- Its legislative efforts.
- Legislative updates
- The network of professionals that can get the smallest district help or the largest district some help when requested.
- It is the only statewide voice for Fire Chiefs.
- The number of members makes it a large organization that can have a single voice impact.
- Its close relationships with the Lobby Group.
- The ability it has to bring Chief Officers together from around the state.
- Force feeding us stuff we don't want or need.
- Ability to connect and engage with the state legislature.
- Network of peers.
- They have a network to reach a majority of the state fire departments and personnel.
- Serves its active members.
- A network of Chief Officers throughout the State.
- Unity
- Robust communication presence.
- Communication
- The annual training conference.
- Collaboration at conferences, seminars, and training opportunities.
- Experience through numbers/membership.
- A single voice to Olympia from the Fire Service (or it should be).
- Legislative management

“In your opinion, what is the WFC’s single greatest weakness?”

- Communication to the members.
- Our weakness is also a strength, it’s the diversity of our organizations. Sometimes it is difficult to have a clear policy or legislative position with so many different size, type, and geographically diverse members. It’s not all bad, our size and diversity can also be a major strength!
- Staff responsiveness at times can be lacking.
- Its inability to come up with five common goals between the commissioners and chiefs for the annual Legislative Day. We cannot possibly be effective when each group has its own five topics, and they are not the same. Add to that the fact that the firefighters’ groups also have their five topics. The legislators cannot possibly be expected to remember, let alone support ten to fifteen topics.
- Not using its resources to help with fire service consolidations to improve services to the community.
- Reaching all of the agencies within the State.
- The WFC does not work with the other agencies to provide a single focused plan to legislators and the public. IAFF, Commissioners, WSFFA often have different agendas when coming together Legislative Day as an example. Legislators then pit each group against each other as not having a clear message/goal, thus they have an excuse for not moving forward.
- Cascade curtain
- Board Turnover—time for organizational leadership and vision to develop. Also lack of financial resources to achieve mission/vision. Need more leg bill tracking, we had some fly under the radar this last year.
- Support and programs of Volunteer Fire Departments is lacking. There are more Volunteer departments than Career departments; however, efforts (%) leans towards representing career. Volunteer Departments need assistance with Safety, Administrative, and Training programs/facilities.
- No one has enough time to dedicate to the various initiatives, committees, work, etc.
- Doesn’t appear to be a motivated organization.
- Paid vs. unpaid departments. Depts with money don’t need you as much but get the most out of you.
- Runs to the bunker first, only addresses an issue when cornered.
- Lack of broad participation from agencies throughout the state.
- Too many Chiefs that have been around too long and unwilling to change for the better.
- Size of the state somewhat limits direct access to WFC for some of the NE agencies. With a little effort on the member it is not difficult.
- Western WA bias.
- I have not experienced anything negative or that I felt needed improvement. I feel that great leadership has moved WFC in great directions.
- I think the Organization is doing a great job.

- Training opportunities at conferences seem to be the same stuff with a different presenter year after year. While these issues may be important, it would be good to look at other training subjects. Additionally, there is a huge gap between the needs of small rural agencies and large city agencies. The all-volunteer or combination agencies seem to get lost in the clamor of the larger agencies. Some smaller agencies may not feel it's worth voicing needs because they won't be heard. There is a difference in the services provided, the delivery of services, and needs of the rural areas who tend to utilize volunteers who are supported by minimal career staff. Adding more legislation to "help" rural areas, sometimes doesn't really help. Perhaps WFC could poll its membership for relevant training topics and split the conference into different tracks based on agency type or training topic. For example, volunteer agency track, combination track, municipal track or leadership track, wildland track, EMS track, etc.
- Administrative support and education although there has been improvement.
- Member participation.
- I believe at times that the WFC fails to take positions that would rock the boat. While cooperative collaboration is important the State Council of Firefighters often take positions that while in the best interest of paid firefighters are not in the best interest of the fire service or the citizens. WFC's focus should be on what is best for the citizens.
- Some regions feel underrepresented by their WFC board rep.
- Participation by departments of all sizes, not just the larger departments.
- Keeping small departments engaged, not all of them have the ability to stay in the loop.
- Need to be more like the WFOA. Lack of meaningful engagement. Not an active player in developing the future fire service.
- Could provide better support to small, rural, and predominantly volunteer departments.
- I believe their funding and staffing is a weakness with all of the efforts they are working on.
- Education. The annual conference is mediocre, at best. If the fire service is facing a leadership vacuum the conference should strive to correct this criticism. There should be a heavy influence of labor/management topics presented. Whether a law firm or various chiefs presented, the body should have a clear understanding of the current focus of labor and challenges others have faces we all could learn from.
- Advanced training for Chief Officers at conferences.
- Media Platform. Tends to be outdated. We need more flash to capture the intended audience.
- Succumbs to the good ole' boys of the state. WFC does not listen to the majority of those that actually have a majority of the issues in the state. Many fire chiefs are volunteer and can't spend days pushing their agendas like many of their paid counterparts. Bigger ears are needed from within the WFC. Just because a legislative item is tough, doesn't mean it shouldn't be a priority. Be outside the box!
- Terrible communication and responsiveness, lack of professionalism, overcharging and abusing funds/resources raised by the various sections with little to no accountability or corrective action offered or taken. If they were in the private sector, they wouldn't be in business long.
- A bit of a drop off in regional communications.
- Lack of self-promotion. "Here is what we can do for you..."
- It needs to improve the quality of training offered. Classes that focus on marketing or selling a service more than providing relevant, high quality information diminish the organizations value.

- A lot of leg priorities appear to be things that impact large municipal departments rather than fire districts, I think the council of firefighters is more in line with the WA Chiefs than the Commissioners association and to me that is backwards.
- Bringing information to the rural and smaller agencies. The focus seems to remain on the larger agencies, or Majority Career Departments.
- It's difficult to work on the variety of needs from departments around the state and focus on just a few issues. For example, the needs of an all career department versus and all volunteer department. I can only imagine how difficult it is to find something to make every organization feel valued.
- They don't hear the little departments.
- Differing types/levels of departments that have varied interests.
- The office's customer service and processes.
- Being the "go to" source for none active members or none members that they should be trying to recruit. People will participate where they find value. Large departments have a pretty fair leadership training inside the department. Small departments really lack this training and their leaders struggle for an extended time until they learn. I think the WFC should be the source for building leaders, provide tools for up and coming officers.
- Maybe not a weakness, but a challenge. The diversity of the group. While we share many issues, the differences between regions and type of departments creates different political needs and desires. JTAC vs Rural training. Volunteer vs Career. Large budget vs small, barely able to buy fuel budgets. Sometimes our needs are in conflict, but taking neutral positions doesn't seem to help anyone.
- Office organization, staff turnover, consistency with policy and procedures, handling issues at the right level, membership process is confusing and unorganized.
- Resources for volunteer departments.
- Lack of regional connection.
- We don't really know what it does.
- Lack of training, webinars, social networking for new chief officers (battalion, division, assistant and deputies).
- Anytime there is a large membership, prioritizing agendas is going to be an issue.
- Getting legislation through that helps fire departments.
- Communication

“In your opinion, what is the single most significant opportunity the WFC should take advantage of in the future?”

- Maintaining our strong relationships that have been built with our partners. When the fire service is “all on the same page,” everyone wins. Because of relationships and communication, that has improved and we find ourselves—more often than not—in agreement.
- The opportunity to educate and provide worthwhile topics at the annual conference. “Motivational speakers” do not cut it.
- Promote consolidations to improve Training, Response, and Customer Service.
- Leveraging legislation to address funding issues at the local level.
- Being the leaders of the fire service, be leaders.
- Firewise education funding.
- Membership. Succession planning. Large city participation.
- Assisting “ALL” departments to be compliant; safety & Health, administrative & documentation, training, and apparatus/equipment/PPE.
- Plastics! Seriously though, figuring out a way to leverage the various skills and abilities of the members in a way that can positively impact the organization.
- Use of the WFC’s website and web services to improve the ability of Fire Chiefs throughout the state to share information and collaborate on relevant issues. The AWC’s hosting of the webinar covering the Janus Decision is an example of the type of meaningful training and support the WFC could be providing to its members.
- Work with the legislature more.
- Company officer training.
- Increase training opportunities, especially free NFA classes.
- Training and interacting with agencies and groups.
- Creative partnerships.
- Continue to maintain and build the respect for the Assoc that has been built by the leaders of the past. WFC truly represents all fire Districts/Departments.
- Wildland fire issues. Appoint a task force of chiefs that understand the issue and go after it hard in the legislature.
- Continue to support and host the conferences and symposiums.
- Recruitment and retention
- Polling membership to identify specific needs from the different types of agencies, also considering their locations.
- Finding a way to vastly improve the new Snohomish County 911 dispatch services.
- Influencing the state Building Code Council and legislators to adopt residential fire sprinklers as the model code (IRC) has already done.
- Enhanced training for both new chief officers as well as support for chief officers of the small rural departments. Many of these individuals operate in isolation.
- The WFC is a well-respected organization that champions noble causes in the interest of public safety. You’ve lost the Spokane metropolitan area and you need to get it back, as well as the chiefs that serve its 500,000+ citizens.

- Keeping membership informed and take input from various regions and other groups to move legislative priorities forward.
- Partnering with firefighters, when it is to both groups interest.
- Work with all Departments, member or non-member.
- Funding to do things.
- More training opportunities offered at a reasonable cost at the regional level.
- At a minimum, statewide unity in the areas of, FD CARES (Fire Department Community Assistance Referral and Education Services) RCW 35.21.930, Active Shooter/Hostile Action events (using a nationally accepted model such as class number PER 353 from TEEEX which is Department of Homeland Security vetted and is NIMS ICS compliant), and CBRNE efforts.
- Better education, hands down.
- Continue lobbying our legislators.
- Communication Technology
- PR with the public. Hit the public state-wide with a campaign that helps them all understand what we do. This will help levy issues on the local levels.
- Collaborating and supporting their sections in a professional and forward-thinking manner.
- Enhanced communication via regional representatives at County Chief and County Commissioner meetings (enhances both communications as well as collaboration across organizations).
- Spreading the “gospel” of public safety relying on first responders.
- Quality courses at conference that apply across all departments big and small. The spring leadership workshop was excellent, more of those would be beneficial. Maybe at the workshop do a networking evening between the two days.
- Continue outreach. Improve membership by spending time in the smaller agencies.
- Partnerships both public and private.
- Put people out in the field to work with small departments one on one.
- Collaboration toward common goals/needs.
- Spearhead more group purchasing, or help to influence costing of State Bid and GPO contracts. First Net is a prime example. We’ve made noise to get First Net passed, but it doesn’t appear that it will save us money. May not even be attractive as other vendors are starting to match the program offerings.
- Positive public opinion
- Interactive online training and meeting opportunities.
- Continued clear and timely communication.
- Create more opportunities for members to be involved with the state chiefs.
- Moving towards advocating for payment of no transport ambulance calls.
- The improved economy.

“In your opinion, what is the single most significant threat the WFC faces in the future?”

- Change and the economy.
- Succession planning.
- The fire service is rapidly losing and not being able to recruit true volunteers. Increased training requirements that volunteers need to take are the same as becoming a career firefighter. That, plus having to pull shifts is turning away the in-district, family-man volunteers. Plus, the unions are not very receptive to volunteers, because the union membership would like to see more career responders. My opinion is that they do not think the volunteers are as good as they are, plus without volunteers, the career would not have to provide training. Career departments and larger departments are not as interested in the WFC because they are more controlled by the unions rather than the leadership of the department.
- Anti-government initiatives that can reduce fire service funding and reduce service delivery.
- Limited taxation/income, pro-rationing, and fire service costs outpacing revenue.
- Unfunded mandates. These requirements from legislature and local governments that come with no funding are a serious burden especially given today’s inflation. PPE that must be replaced every 10 years, tires on apparatus every 7 years, the list goes on.
- Grooming new leadership.
- Attacks on fire chiefs by labor when they are in WFC chairs.
- Safety & Health compliance and training needs/requirements. Small departments, even large that have to cut staff, doing more with less.
- Limited resources of time and money.
- Resistance of highly qualified and experienced Fire Service leaders to move into Chief Officer roles due to the reduced job security and lack of financial incentive provided by non-represented positions.
- Increasing regulation, that doesn’t make for better firefighting.
- Non-listeners
- Lack of collaboration with groups/people
- Legislative priorities. Helping the state fire service achieve proper state-based assistance.
- Politicians
- How to maintain a quality level of service with less staffing.
- Other fire service associations working to get their own agenda forward at the detriment to another association.
- Relevance and leadership of statewide issues.
- Apathy of members.
- The Washington fire service has the strictest regulations (WAC 296-305) in the country. Continued legislative efforts are imperative.
- Rural fire departments not being more engaged.
- Not being in touch with the needs of its members.
- Labor unions as they do not have the public’s interests in mind. Their primary focus is increased wages and benefits, not how that impacts the communities they work in.

- Lack of participation due to a lack of resources at the local level of chief officers.
- Funding limitations, e.g., the 1% cap on annual tax increases.
- Funding
- Budget management while keeping the services provided with current staffing and support.
- Funding and staffing issues at all levels.
- Not working with all groups.
- AWC diminishing management theory. Their attempts to eliminate the fire service as we know it and the persistent practice of hiring Chiefs that are all too willing to be destructive managers.
- Embracing change, we are headed into a new era and we need to be ready to adapt and change rapidly, or the Fire Service as we know it today will collapse.
- Political issues and being overrun by labor.
- Staying on top of new rules/laws/legislation.
- Attacks by special interest groups who target fire administrative funding, operations, and needs at the legislative and justice branches of state government.
- Complacency. You are already there. You take the word of a few instead of the issues of the many.
- Public and section awareness of how they are run, including how funds are managed. Not looking forward on streamlining processes and procedures, not taking accountability and action where needed.
- Lack of engagement due to the shifting culture of the fire service (the Millennial effect). A clear example is the lack of engagement locally (and, really, no info from the WFC) relative to the recent Janus decision and its impact on the fire service.
- Being ham-strung by uninformed politicians that put up barriers through useless policies or laws.
- Becoming too west side big city dominated, and raising costs. The smaller departments and east side will eventually quit being members if nothing applies or the cost is too great for the benefit.
- The loss of volunteers and smaller departments is affecting communities at large. As the smaller communities reduce their ability to, we lose the ability to have them in our association.
- An interior focused self-serving association.
- Changing the face of the fire service because career firefighters don't like volunteers.
- Loss of leadership with retirements. Union firefighters do not want to leave the union to take a chief's job.
- Political division between the different regions of the state. It's tough. Even within some counties (Pierce as an example) we have such different needs between size/types of departments, it's difficult for the County Chiefs to speak on behalf of every department. Most of the time, we are on the same page, but there can be a significant difference between City Fire Departments and Fire Districts, let alone the difference from volunteer and career.
- Lack of funding across fire departments, regardless of size or status (paid v. volunteer). Lack of regional training facilities that offer training for high risk operational incidents (live fire, collapse, CBRNE, etc). North Bend and HAMMER are not an option for many western counties.
- The sheer number of senior chiefs retiring and new chiefs coming in with little or no experience at the state and national level.
- Lack of engagement by department leaders.

- Lack of daytime volunteers.
- The loss of volunteer firefighters from excessive requirements placed upon them.
- Keeping the interest of newer generations of fire leadership that does not necessarily see the benefit of memberships/groups.
- Lack of participation and lack of agreement on issues related to the fire service.
- Finding adequate Fire Chief candidates and the related compression of pay scales.

At the conclusion of the electronic survey, respondents were encouraged to provide open-ended responses to help guide the WFC’s leadership in making the organization even more successful. The question and those response follow.

“Please use the space below to tell us your suggestions or final thoughts for improving the Washington Fire Chiefs.”

- Continue to foster the positive communications and important relationships which have been built! When the real challenges arise, these tools will prove invaluable!!
- Provide the best training possible and promote the benefits of volunteers in the fire service to the legislature. This should include incentives for true volunteers. Not just individuals who join volunteer fire departments for the sole purpose of using it as a stepping stone to a career job.
- Offer Training Opportunities that supplement individual Training Divisions:
 - Technical Rescue
 - HazMat
 - Incident Command/Blue Card for smaller departments
- More collaborative and robust legislative committee. This could be done through having regional representatives, encouraging relationship building with local representatives, and creating a collaborative Fire Leadership Legislative Committee with all fire-based associations (State Council, Commissioners, FF Association, AWC, etc). Although we may not always agree, we are stronger together than we are apart.
- Be the source that pulls the other fire agencies together so we can speak to the public and legislature as one voice.
- WFC Conferences are good. Further limit vendors from trying to sell products during their class presentations.
- Focus... refer to mission statement and operate accordingly. Stay within your span of control and expertise.
- I have been very happy with the services of the WFC, particularly the educational offerings. I hope that can continue for the long run.
- Thank you for the work you are doing to improve the Fire Service in Washington State.
- You do good work lobbying the legislature, but it needs to be more. Get out of the city and into the country where the small depts are struggling to get the job done. Our fires burn just a hot and costs are just as high, but we don’t have the big population bases to pay for everything required.
- Continue with communication and develop classes/training.
- Keep up the great effort and work representing us out here in the sticks and weeds.
- Keep up the great work and forward thinking.

- Change the administrative support conference to the end of the month instead of the second week of the month when a lot of commissioners hold their meetings. Or combine their conference with the main conference and have it as a separate track.
- Encourage participation through committees. Embrace and prioritize CRR, and prevention.
- Great organization, just work on getting Eastern Washington back.
- Please keep up the amazing work. While we may not always reach out and tell the Staff or Board, we appreciate what you are able to do for us.
- It seems the WFC is much more focused on the impacts to fire districts, and many programs are focused on the structure of a fire district and those laws contained and pertaining to RCW 52 - and often seem to neglect or disregard those fire and EMS related matters that might be specific to municipalities.
- Please keep up the great work! We are all here to help as needed.
- Better education
- We need to build more financial resources for future battles.
- Be more dynamic and open your ears and listen to the issues (and many times, the solutions). Don't rely on the few, collaborate with the many!
- Overall, an agency that has great potential with the ability to reach many in a positive and effective manner if they look forward and actually make necessary changes, rather than make excuses where opportunities lie.
- Very supportive and professional staff at the WFC... they do a great job. It is now a very difficult job being a Fire Chief with the changing culture of the fire service (a mix of Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials, and now Gen i'ers...). I would suggest some think-tanks relative to ensuring the next generation stays engaged, continues to support the WFC, and also provides some tools regarding how to ensure the multi-generational fire service continues forward.
- This business has no shortage of egos. Just keeping our eye on the ball that we serve the public on a variety of issues can be difficult. I appreciate all that is done by this group and have benefited from your service for almost 40 years.
- Provide the most bang for the buck, quality courses that are relevant, doesn't have to be some big name high dollar speaker can be other chiefs that have had experiences to share such as process for requesting state mobilization, dealing with an LODD from the perspective of getting the family the benefits they should receive, how to navigate through an insurance claim in the event of an apparatus totaled in a collision or fire, setting up cooperative purchasing, creating your own strategic plan without a consultant, creating a capital improvement plan or business plan, effective communication with elected officials, members and constituents...
- I am receiving and have over the years, a tremendous amount of support from the WFC. I am surprised at the number of agencies that do not participate in the programs offered. More building of the association is important to build a stronger team of Chiefs. I understand the focus on larger agencies, and the issues that they face. I think a better balance can be made to support and build smaller agencies.

- Sorry this term is over used, but appropriate here; Get outside of the box! Serve those that are not your members. The secrets of success should not be a secret. Many members have great departments, what are some of the key issues that make those departments great? Duplicate strategies through training to make more departments successful. Also take the lead on what leadership strategies fail. The WFC should be THE resource for Fire Commissioners, City Administrators, and Mayors to hire and expect good leadership. Tired of watching bad hires cost the citizens millions of dollars and lost time because chiefs and their bosses do not know how the culture, mission, delivery of services and planning go into making a successful department. Deliberate actions are necessary, success shouldn't be an accidental. Thanks for the soapbox!
- Improve the training in the field by making it easier to get instructors that don't need to be paid your whole budget.
- Basics in administrative training for new Fire Chiefs.
- Thank you for all that you do!
- Provide the sections with better service for the money they bring into the organization, especially the ones who are carrying the other sections.
- Continue with the process of creating more opportunities for new and younger chiefs to learn from the senior/veteran chiefs. Set up mentors within the state that a new chief can be in touch with (outside their department) to bounce ideas off. Give more opportunities for chiefs to bring future chief officers (company officers) to networking events as we encourage them to move up the ranks.
- I truly appreciate the work done on GEMT over the past few years. As long as there is follow-through and communication like was exhibited in that process, WFC should be fine.

APPENDIX B—STATUS & ACCOUNTABILITY WORKSHEET

Washington Fire Chiefs

Status & Accountability Worksheet

Implementation Timeline Status: On Target — Delayed or Deferred — Not Currently On Target

Goals & Objectives		
Goal 1: Increase membership values in the eyes of current and potential members as measured by membership recruitment and retention data.	Responsible	Timeline
Obj. A: Promote the purpose of the WFC.		Continuous
Obj. B: Provide education to members on how to use existing resources.		Short-term (2020)
Obj. C: Support members in their advocacy of the WFC.		Short-term (2020)
Goal 2: Increase revenues through partnerships with vendors, fire service stakeholders, and the FRWC as measured against historic annual revenues.	Responsible	Timeline
Obj. A: Recruit new Bugle members.		Continuous
Obj. B: Identify entrepreneurial opportunities.		Mid-term (2021)
Obj. C: Explore alternative revenue sources.		Continuous
Obj. D: Retain Bugle members.		Continuous
Goal 3: Increase proactive communication and contact with members on critical issues as measured by feedback from internal stakeholders.	Responsible	Timeline
Obj. A: Explore the feasibility of improving communications.		Mid-term (2022)
Obj. B: Measure effectiveness of current regional representation and find areas of improvement.		Mid-term (2021)
Obj. C: Implement a more efficient and inclusive voting process.		Mid-term (2021)
Goal 4: Provide relevant and timely professional development opportunities as measured by event surveys, event attendance, and event profit.	Responsible	Timeline
Obj. A: Ensure that presentations synchronize with target audience.		Continuous
Obj. B: Conduct a needs assessment to develop presentation topics.		Continuous
Obj. C: Expand and improve training delivery methods.		Mid-term (2022)
Obj. D: Explore the feasibility and applicability of section/committee structure.		Long-term (2023)
Obj. E: Ensure relevance of professional development opportunities to career, combination, and volunteer organizations.		Mid-term (2021)
Goal 5: Strengthen and improve external relationships as measured by feedback from board members and staff from those organizations.	Responsible	Timeline
Obj. A: Focus on key organizations including, WFCA, WSFFA, WSCFF, WSAFM, WSRB, DNR, Military Department-EMD, and SFMO/WSP.		Continuous
Obj. B: Coordinate with external stakeholders to improve communications.		Mid-term (2022)
Obj. C: Optimize the exchange of resources with external stakeholders.		Long-term (2023)
Goal 6: Build on existing legislative relationships to maximize influence in the legislative process as measured by our effectiveness on a collective fire service agenda.	Responsible	Timeline
Obj. A: Evaluate and improve the effectiveness of the legislative priority development process.		Long-term (2024)
Obj. B: Foster a collaborative legislative process that considers our membership variance.		Mid-term (2022)
Obj. C: Lead the effort to support the Washington State Fire Service Coalition.		Continuous
Goal 7: Strengthen support staff relationships and office systems in an environment that is positive and continues to meet the needs of our customers as measured by staff/customer feedback during annual reviews.	Responsible	Timeline
Obj. A: Provide opportunities for timely, regular, and proactive communication for staff.		Mid-term (2021)
Obj. B: Provide ongoing professional development for staff.		Continuous
Obj. C: Create opportunities for collaborative problem solving.		Mid-term (2021)
Goal 8: Provide resources and assistance to members when they are facing a crisis as measured by customer satisfaction feedback	Responsible	Timeline
Obj. A: Create a file to collect and store resources provided to members in crisis.		Mid-term (2021)
Obj. B: Create a tool to assist fire agencies in improving community perception of the fire service.		Long-term (2024)
Obj. C: Providing training to prevent and manage conflict and crisis.		Continuous