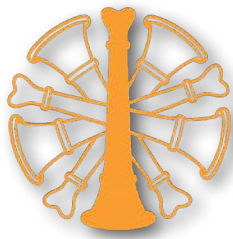


Spring 2025



# CHIEFS

The Official Magazine of the International Association of Fire Chiefs



## Going Beyond Training: Higher Education in the Fire Service

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Advice  
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Building Wildfire  
Resilience  
Page 16

Legislative  
Update  
Page 18

*And much more!*

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# CHIEFS



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# Evolving Leadership

**BELIEVE IT OR NOT**, fire chiefs have been around since the Roman Empire, but what exactly we do, how we do it, and who we work with has changed repeatedly throughout firefighting history.

One thing that hasn't changed is our core purpose: saving lives and property. Chiefs and officers lead because good leadership improves emergency response outcomes. It's that simple.

Or is it? In practice, our roles are about a lot more than strong principles. They're subjective, they're dynamic, and they're constantly shifting based on the needs and views of the people we serve. And while those on the "outside" of leadership roles often see our positions as expressions of authority, the truth is that many of us often feel like we have less and less control over the definition of those roles in practice. Chiefs especially end up caught in the crossfire of public opinion and shifting social trends.

I look back at how topics like career progression and public relations were viewed in my recruit days and am amazed at how much they've changed. The way we treat higher education, certifications, fiscal responsibility, and even leadership features like seniority has shifted significantly.

What a person must do to get from probationary firefighter or EMT to fire chief varies a lot more than it once did. There are more pathways to leadership than ever before; there are also more responsibilities, many of them less defined or definable,

*It takes a different kind of person to be a chief now than it did "way back when."*

involved in that leadership now. We have more perspectives to balance, more topics we need to be educated on, and more challenges to face than ever before. These changes aren't innately positive or negative. The truth is, it takes a different kind of person to be a chief now than it did "way back when."

In a lot of ways, that's not an easy thing for the fire service to face. We're a profession built on deep, strongly held traditions. It's one thing to embrace changes in technology or safety, but to change the very definition of what it means to be a leader, a firefighter? That's a whole other story. What we're seeing now is a negotiation, an active conversation that requires the voice of every first responder in the field. We're engaged in a question-and-answer process that's opening up entirely new avenues for us to explore as professionals, whether we do it as career firefighters or volunteers.

Where does accountability start and end? Are we a blue-collar profession or a white collar one? What's the baseline someone has to achieve to be qualified for leadership in a department? Who in our communities do we engage with, and how do we do it?

These are the kinds of questions we're being tasked to explore, and as a collective voice for the fire service's leadership, the International Association of Fire Chiefs has gone all in on answering them. As society and the very nature of firefighting and healthcare themselves change, so do our priorities.

As you read the articles in this edition of *iChiefs*, I encourage you to keep those questions and other similar ones in mind. Your own answers might take years or even decades to form — but every moment you spend educating yourself, listening to the perspectives of others in our field, or developing yourself professionally becomes a part of that self-defining process.

At the end of the day, being a leader was never one thing. Our roles have always been based on the needs of the moment, because the fire service, more than any other organization, has existed from day one to serve a purpose greater than any individual responder or leader.

As long as we stay true to that defining mission, no challenge will be too great for us to adapt to.

**Fire Chief Josh Waldo**  
President & Board Chair



# Not So Old School:

## The Changing Role of Higher Education in the Fire Service

By **Keith Padgett**, Columbia Southern University, and **Emily Sinclair Montague**, IAFC

**P**icture yourself at the firehouse dinner table with the crew attempting to enjoy a meal before the next alarm comes in.

The young 20-something year old says that he or she is planning to take some time to get a degree in fire science. How do you think those other firefighters would react? Most of us can picture it easily.

This younger firefighter hasn't got half the experience they do and has only been around for a short time compared to the other crew members. They haven't earned their dues yet, but here they are, throwing time into a college degree! Most of the other firefighters at the station don't have a degree, and they've done just fine. Who does this young guy or gal think they are?

This attitude has been a common one within fire service culture for many years. It's understandable in many ways, and maybe that's why it's so ingrained in many firehouses across the United States and beyond. After all, the notion of firefighters needing or even wanting a degree is fairly new — but that doesn't mean it isn't worth considering.

### **A NEW EDUCATION LANDSCAPE**

To understand the value of higher education in the fire service, we must consider the *how* and the *why* of relevant degree programs. Like everything else within our fast-paced internal culture, education has to be practical, functional, and efficient to be worthwhile in the eyes of firefighters. It also must produce a clear, beneficial result equal to the time and money invested in it.

Now consider the education landscape of 20 or even 10 years ago. Getting a degree used to require in-person attendance, it generally took at least two consecutive years of study, and it was often prohibitively expensive. Not only that, but having a degree wasn't a guarantee of career progression for most firefighters. Most firefighters were perfectly able to achieve their professional development goals without one.

Firefighting was, by and large, seen as a strictly "blue-collar" profession for much of the field's recent history. In fact, it was viewed specifically as one of the best-paid and most promising careers you could pursue *without* a college degree.

In some ways, this last part is still true — but the overall situation is

quite different now. Most fire-service-related degrees can now be pursued mostly or completely online, though discretion is necessary to make sure your program is properly accredited. With the rise of online education, competition between programs has increased, and prices have decreased in response. The requirements of many of these programs have also become more flexible; it isn't always necessary to complete the courses all at once or consecutively.

Most importantly, however, is the fact that having a degree is now a practical requirement for many leadership positions within the fire service. Whether or not this is fair, necessary, or liked by the majority of firefighters is beyond the scope of this article. It's simply the reality potential leaders have to navigate right now.

### TRAINING VERSUS EDUCATION

One of the barriers that's kept firefighters from considering degree programs is the notion that firefighting is a job you train for, not learn about at a desk. There's this pervasive idea that the skills firefighters need for the job can't be learned in any way other than through hands-on training or on-the-job experience.

There's some truth to this. Certain skills, techniques, and practices are learned best via training exercises. You can't learn how to efficiently advance a line or ladder a building without actually seeing those things done in person — or without doing them yourself countless times. There are many parts of the job that experienced firefighters will say "can't be taught," as they require tactile sense, muscle memory, or lived experience to truly master.

At the same time, firefighting as a whole isn't restricted to these kinds of scenarios. There are many so-called "soft skills" that play a central role in effective firefighting, and while these can certainly be improved during hands-on training, the best way to develop them initially is through proper, structured education. This is especially true for those who intend to occupy a leadership position within their department.

*The notion of firefighters needing or even wanting a degree is fairly new — but that doesn't mean it isn't worth considering.*



Leadership forms at the intersection of training and education. Training gives you confidence, competence, and context; education grants insight, critical thinking skills, and the ability to frame your job effectively. This latter skill refers to one's ability to view their work beyond a given moment, incident, or challenge. "Framing" could also be described as mindset-building.

Another way we could explain the difference between training and education is by translating the terms into *what to do* versus *how to think*. It's helpful to view this through the lens of a specific incident.

Let's say you're a lieutenant responding to a structure fire with your company. Your training will have taught you what specific steps you and your firefighters will need to take to effectively use your equipment, navigate the scene, and follow procedure. Most of this will rely

on muscle memory and a working knowledge of the technical aspects of the job. As a lieutenant, however, your job goes much further than that.

Your education will be the foundation of your ability to manage your company as a cohesive unit, "read" the scene accurately, communicate effectively, and gain insight from the call after it has concluded. It will inform your approach to the technical elements of a working scene and give you a mental framework that helps keep your thoughts, decision-making process, and problem-solving approaches objective. A strong education can also help leaders develop more subtle skills, such as effective methods for handling their own stress response and that of their personnel when faced with a high-stakes problem.

These soft skills are extremely important for any leader or potential

leader to learn. Even if you have no interest in attaining a specific rank, what happens if you become the incident commander on scene due to simple seniority or circumstance? Will you have the soft skills necessary to effectively handle that role in the moment? Every firefighter should at least have the ability to “switch over” to a leadership mindset when necessary. Education is what builds that mindset and allows us to use it both on- and off-scene.

### BEYOND THE CALL

When you reach the rank of lieutenant and higher, education goes from “helpful” to “necessary.” Before this point, you can probably get by on training alone, but it’s never a bad idea to get a head start. In our increasingly competitive field, that head start could be the difference between a promotion and a pass-over a few years down the road. Still, for probationary firefighters, firefighters, driver engineers, and fire equipment operators, the knowledge strictly

necessary to do their job is almost all hands-on and technical.

This isn’t the case for officers. Once you hit this point in your career, you might be asked to be an administrator, human relations expert, program developer, advocate, spokesperson, crisis manager, outreach director, budgeter, scheduler, and more at any given moment. The role you play within your department expands to encompass a huge range of additional skills that aren’t nearly as predictable as those you learned back in F1 Certification.

Handling these roles effectively requires a working knowledge of how personnel relate to each other, how departments relate to their communities, how the local and state government relates to its fire service, and so on. Training can’t help you in these areas.

There’s no training exercise that will teach you how to negotiate better health benefits on the basis of your department’s HazMat response capabilities, for example — but there are courses and degree programs that will. You can’t train for a high turnover rate caused by ineffective communication between stations and higher administration, but the right education program can give you precisely the skills needed to develop a better system and promote its adoption by the relevant decision-makers. 💧

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*Chief Keith Padgett is currently the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Academic Program Director with Columbia Southern University (CSU). Prior to that, he served as the Chief-Fire Marshal for the Fulton County Fire-Rescue Department, a metropolitan sized department in Atlanta.*

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*Emily Sinclair Montague is a communications and outreach specialist with the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). She is an experienced writer with strong family ties to the fire service and an interest in public safety, professional development, and nonprofit advocacy.*





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# Demystifying Grants:

## Cutting Through the Chaos With An Expert's Insight

**T**he process of grant-seeking seems to occupy its own little world of specific language, rules, and strategies that only those with specialized training know how to use. Grant managers are in high demand, specifically because they possess this training and can “speak grant” fluently.

That said, there’s no reason for this process to intimidate those who depend on grants for their programs and initiatives. Having a strong grasp of why and how grants work the way they do will make our fire and EMS leaders far better prepared to take full advantage of all the funding opportunities available to them.

To provide you with that insight, we connected with Akilah Pruitt,

the Senior Manager of Grants and Contracts for the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC).

### **MYSTERY 1: WHY DO GRANTS SEEM TO SPEAK THEIR OWN LANGUAGE?**

**Pruitt:** Grants are very acronym-heavy, and there’s a lot of terminology. Understanding the technical differences between direct cost versus indirect cost, or grant versus contract, and second tier roles like “contractor” versus “sub-awardee” are a few examples. A sub-recipient or sub-awardee is an organization that is “substantially” contributing to the prime recipient’s scope of work, and the prime laws and regulations are flowed down in the sub-awardees’ agreement (but not flowed to Contractors).

A contractor is someone who performs a specific function within the project, but they do this same type of work for various clients. It’s their job. These are totally different roles with their own rules. So, you shouldn’t use the terms interchangeably. Our grants (assistance awards) usually follow Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200) regulations, and Contracts (procurement) usually follow Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) regulations. Navigating and interpreting these regulations can be challenging.

There are a lot of nuances like that. Getting familiar and comfortable with grant terminology is going to make your life easier. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has a four-week course that will give you

a really strong introduction to grant terminology and both pre-award and post-award management. It's called Fundamentals of Grants Management Course and is available via FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI). I highly recommend it. Another great resource for federal grants is a training company called Management Concepts. They offer excellent certificates and certification programs in grants management.

For those interested in grants, the important thing is to be open to learning and give yourself grace as you go about that learning process. You don't have to memorize everything — create yourself a toolbox with links and resources that you can refer to when you need them, and take it from there.

**iCHIEFS:** Visit the website <https://grants.gov> for a comprehensive glossary of grant terms and their uses. Resources like this are easy to access and simple to navigate. If you're interacting with grant proposals or literature, it's a good idea to bookmark a few, and share them with your team.

## MYSTERY 2: WHY ARE GRANT REQUIREMENTS SO COMPLICATED?

**iCHIEFS:** The grant acquisition process can be extremely intimidating for those who aren't familiar with it — especially for those looking to win federal grants, such as those included under the Assistance to Firefighter Grants (AFGs) program or FEMA. Many of these taxpayer-funded grants come with 100-page-plus documents detailing the eligibility and application requirements.

How do you even begin to navigate such a dense, complicated landscape? You can start by reframing it.

**Pruitt:** It's complicated because we're dealing with taxpayer dollars, which is money that's highly regulated and requires a lot of accountability. The sponsor is not only evaluating your proposal application for quality assurance and sustainability, but they are also making sure your organization

is equipped to not misuse or abuse the grant funds. You also need to remember that everyone reports to someone, including the agency or organization awarding this money. Even an agency as big as FEMA is reporting to Congress, and they have to be able to justify the choices they make with the taxpayer money they've been given. This is why compliance is so important.

When I help an organization get the money, I am also trying to make sure they keep that money year over year. If you don't provide enough detail, then you aren't proving yourself to be a good investment compared to other organizations applying for that same opportunity. The problems we're looking to solve are complicated; the solutions are going to be complex, too. You're being asked to show every part of what your project entails and every part it will play in solving whatever problem the sponsor is trying to address with this grant.

**iCHIEFS:** It's important to acquaint yourself with the grant life cycle, if you're not already familiar with it. This cycle is divided into three main phases: pre-award, award, and post-award.

The pre-award phase includes the announcement of the funding opportunity, usually through a Request for Proposals (RFP) or Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), and the submission of proposals. The award phase consists of the evaluation and selection of a proposal (or proposals) by the funding agency. The post-award phase is the implementation, compliance, and reporting phase. The recipient receives the funds and begins implementing them according to their approved proposal.

**Pruitt:** When I get a grant notification that seems to align with the company's mission and/or strategic plan, I'll share the RFP/NOFO with senior leadership. If they want to potentially apply, I set up a meeting with the programmatic team to lay out the terms and conditions. Then I organize all the information and make

sure the whole team understands what needs to happen and when. I break it down. We can then take the process step by step.

Applying for grants doesn't have to be overwhelming just because it's complicated. It's a lot to manage, but if you follow a good standard operation procedure (SOP) or an organized process with respected internal deadlines, it won't be nearly as overwhelming to then follow each step and manage the work one task at a time. When you're mindful of the post-award stage while at the pre-award stage, that prevents a lot of issues at the post-award stage. You might still feel overwhelmed — it's a lot to deal with. That's normal. Just don't let it stop you from moving forward.

**iCHIEFS:** Understanding why each grant's requirements exist and how every step fits into the final selection process will break your work down into a far more manageable format.

For those in the fire service, this means familiarizing yourself with the specific mindset of federal, state, and local government stakeholders who are awarding money entrusted to them by the public through their representatives. The complexity of the process is a byproduct of the high need for accountability and transparency. Approaching your application from this angle can help clarify your purpose and make the process more intuitive for you.

## MYSTERY 3: WHAT MAKES AN APPLICATION STAND OUT?

**Pruitt:** Number one: follow all the requirements of the NOFO or RFP. These are the announcements inviting organizations to apply for a grant and laying out the process to follow for your application. Two: come up with a creative idea to address the problem the sponsor is trying to solve. Show your experience and tell the story of why you're able to handle this money. Share any relative grants you've won in the past. Three: make the effort to show supporting data. Metrics are

*Continued on page 14*

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# Ram Air Gear Dryer TG-6H

The TG-6H heated bunker gear dryer holds as many as 12 pieces of gear, 6 helmets and 18 accessories



Firehouse Labs conducted a third-party, independent field test of the Ram Air Gear drying technology. The company is firefighter-owned and boasts a wide range of products that are engineered to help to dry PPE. Although several models were available, it was decided to test the company's midrange model, the TG-6H, which is a heated bunker gear dryer that's designed to hold as many as 12 pieces of gear, 6 helmets and 18 accessories.

The company stands by its marketing phrase, "Dry Gear Fast," which our independent analysis supported.

## The Review

Over the period of two days, Firehouse Labs thoroughly tested and documented the performance of the TG-6H.

Accounting for variables, including ambient air temperature and humidity, the testing was conducted

under field-level conditions. The gear that was selected for the testing was purposefully chosen to provide a representation of various manufacturers, designs, materials and features. As a control, two sets of identical gear (only slightly varied in size) were in the test group, with one being subjected to a hang-dry option to identify the ambient air-drying capability.

To measure the effectiveness of the dryer, turnout gear weight was measured prior to washing (dry), post-washing (wet) and after it was on the gear dryer for one hour. Even if the gear felt dry, it wasn't considered dry until it was back to its starting weight.

It's important to note that at no time during the test did the evaluator register a temperature that was hotter than the maximum 105 degrees Fahrenheit that was established by *NFPA 1851: Standard on Selection, Care, and Maintenance of Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Fire Fighting*.

## The Results

Testing revealed that 90 percent of the time, the gear was dry within one hour. Outliers to the one-hour result included gear that had thick leather knee pads, integrated belts, large solid areas of reflective material, or inner pocket liners that used moisture-barrier material, essentially trapping moisture between two non-permeable surfaces.

In all but one test, the gear that wasn't back to its starting weight felt dry to the touch, particularly in areas that are prone to holding water, such as the underarm or groin areas of the gear. This is an impressive result considering that the average amount of water in the wet gear was nearly half a liter.

The inner liner of the gear held more water than the outer shells. However, the various pockets, patches, built-in padding in the elbows and knees, and folds in the fabric of the outer shells proved to be the last areas to dry. Areas, such as the neck shroud, could expedite drying with minor adjustments throughout the drying process; however, these adjustments were minimal and didn't disrupt the drying process.

When questioned about variables that could affect drying time, Ram Air Gear representatives mentioned ambient air temperatures, humidity levels and many of the gear manufacturing variables that were discovered during testing. Overall, the results were consistent and proved that the gear dryer would "Dry Gear Fast."

## The Product

The Ram Air Gear product line was designed to maximize airflow to each piece of gear on the system. Opening accessory drying ports didn't reduce the airflow to other areas, and it was noted that there was more than enough airflow to fully inflate any gloves that were placed on the dryer. The controls were easy to understand and had built-in safeguards to prevent user errors that might damage firefighter turnout gear.

The design of this dryer combines impressive airflow volume and consistency, specifically engineered with firefighters' needs in mind. Each unit is sized to fit through a standard doorway and comes equipped with casters, which makes it easy to move without requiring an expensive installation.

Backed by a five-year warranty, this product has proven it can walk the walk, proudly earning the Firehouse Labs Seal of Approval.



At no time during testing was a temperature that was hotter than 105 degrees Fahrenheit registered. That temperature was established as the maximum permissible by *NFPA 1851: Standard on Selection, Care, and Maintenance of Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Fire Fighting*.

Continued from page 11

hugely important. If they aren't as strong as you hoped, you can give context to that.

Tell them why you're improving, explain that your team is growing, and show that you're making an effort to expand the resources you have. That human element is important: emphasize the strength, expertise, and competence of the team you have. Show that you and your team understand each phase of the grant life cycle.

For the writing part of the process, you can stand out by being clear, concise, and backing up your writer with the technical expertise of someone directly in the field. For example, if you're a fire chief, you can pair your grant specialist writer with a firefighter who's participated in or will participate in the program you want funded. Let the people at the heart of the mission give your proposal writer the narrative as they see it.

When you bring these different people together, you can create magic. Having someone like me review your proposal can make sure the budget, narrative, scope of work, and everything else flows. Some of the changes I suggest may be small but can make a big difference in how the proposal is received. In rare instances, for not well thought-out applications, I've recommended not submitting a proposal.

**ICHIEFS:** One area that's often neglected is the form and formatting used in the proposal. Font, spacing, margins, and the physical layout of a proposal all play a role in how your words and data are interpreted by the funding agency's reviewers.

**Pruitt:** An experienced grant reviewer can see how your writing and your format mix and spot any issues that might come up when you go to send in your application. Having a grant manager who fully understands the organization's policies and mission as well as the sponsor's policies and mission means you have someone who can clearly see how the two will

*“Having a grant manager who fully understands the organization's policies and mission as well as the sponsor's policies and mission means you have someone who can clearly see how the two will fit together.”*

*— Akilah Pruitt, IAFC*

fit together. We can also see if your proposal's content and format does the best job of communicating that fit to the agency receiving it.

#### **MYSTERY 4: HOW CAN I MAKE THE PROCESS LESS STRESSFUL?**

**ICHIEFS:** If the grant proposal process is a source of major stress for you, it probably comes down to two issues: unfamiliarity and overwhelm.

The first issue can be remedied by learning from those accustomed to grants and grant writing, whether you do it through direct conversations with an experienced fundraiser, videos, books, courses, or blogs. The second isn't as easy to resolve, but it can be improved by contextualizing the grant process in a way that makes logical sense and honoring internal deadlines outlined by the proposal team.

**Pruitt:** My first year here at the IAFC was chaotic because I was new to the fire service, and people were sending me things at the eleventh hour they wanted funded — everything was a fire, basically. It's like they brought their fieldwork into an office setting ... but this isn't a fire you're trying to put out. You truly can't rush the process for large proposals. I have to take time to read through everything and analyze it, I have to make sure it follows all of the relevant grant laws and regulations, and I have

to be able to give your proposal this deeper level of attention to make sure it's truly a reflection of what we, both my organization and the sponsor agency awarding the money, are trying to do.

Those last-minute asks were difficult because I'm a very detailed oriented person who wants to dot my I's and cross my T's carefully, and we also didn't have a formalized proposal process in place. You can't properly prepare various large grant proposals at the last minute. Deadlines are strict, especially federal grant deadlines, and they give you plenty of time to meet them for a reason. They announce these opportunities months in advance. If you try to start a large grant proposal a week before the deadline, you're going to end up with late nights and early mornings, and possibly garbage. Our programs aren't garbage, and I wasn't going to treat them like they were.

Last year, I led two initiatives to improve the workflow for awards and proposals. I developed standard operating procedures (SOPs) to help us work more efficiently, allowing us to focus on reviewing and submitting proposals with attention to detail and excellence. For post-award management, I implemented a system where all notifications and award terms and conditions for grants are routed to a centralized inbox. This

allows me to communicate clearly with the relevant program staff. I also review, redline, and negotiate terms and conditions to help minimize risk and ensure compliance with policies and regulations. Additionally, a centralized inbox serves as a helpful strategy for business continuity in the event of staff changes. I love the work I do and the people I work with.

**iCHIEFS:** All in all, grants management is a wonderful skill to have. This type of work is very

rewarding yet it can be time consuming. Time is respect.

Firefighters follow protocols established before they're in the field — they have proper training, equipment, and roles. Grant processes are similar; there's no reason to be last minute. Being proactive is key because being reactive is going to stress out you and staff.

**SUCCESS STARTS HERE**

Grants have become crucial in funding programs that support

departments and the fire service as a whole. When you choose to get educated about the grant process, you're showing grant sponsors that your mission is worthy of respect, time, and effort. But when you choose to avoid the process, go into it unprepared, or try to get by with last-minute applications, you tell the same sponsors that your project is an afterthought.

It's up to you to decide which of these realities will define you and your department's potential. 💧

# A Measured Response: Redefining Resilience In Wildfire's New Age

In communications regarding the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG), the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) defines one of its key objectives as the "support [of] community resilience."

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) has repeatedly emphasized the importance of developing "fire-adapted communities," or FACs, as a foundational element of the National Cohesive Wildfire Management Strategy, which is itself "the key framework for addressing wildland fire challenges across the nation," according to the USFA website. One of the tenets of this strategic vision is to "collectively learn to live with wildland fire."

The terms these agencies use are vitally important for fire departments

and other stakeholders involved in wildfire protection, prevention, and mitigation. They indicate the priorities at the heart of the two biggest funders of fire service programs, projects, and initiatives in the U.S. These priorities go on to define the way departments of all sizes operate in and beyond the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). If resilience is one of those priorities, it must become a major focus for all fire service leaders.

The question is, who defines resilience, and how can it be measured? That answer has changed in recent years, and our perspectives are changing, too.

## THE METRICS OF MITIGATION

How do we measure a concept as qualitative as "community

preparedness?" It's simple enough to measure the impact of a wildfire after it's wreaked havoc on an area, but preparedness is, by definition, a matter of what's done before those first embers fall.

Resilience doesn't always equate to preparedness, of course — at least not in the context of measuring the impact of something as far-reaching as wildfire. Still, it's generally safe to assume that a prepared community is also a resilient community and vice versa. Resilience is far more quantifiable, though gathering that data can be deeply unpleasant.

Resilience is a matter of what remains during the "after." It lives in the answers to questions like: How many people were lost or injured? How many homes were destroyed? How many livelihoods were





lost, and what is the monetary cost of all that loss? Fire, after all, is a science. And as with any science, numbers tell the story. Resilience is the differential between what could have been lost versus what was; it's the measurement of who comes back once the soot settles and what they do with whatever is left after the ash is cleared away.

To measure resilience, we have to look at its ugly mirror image. What does it look like when a community is *not* prepared for wildfire? What are the numbers like when a community doesn't come out of a wildfire intact... or at all? The raw data is compared, stored, and weighed.

Then, we compare. We try to be objective and evaluate success or failure from the standpoint of, "Could it have been worse? How much worse? Why are these numbers the ones we ended up with, and what would have made them higher or lower?"

We gather up countless data points, often painstakingly, until they form a more or less complete picture. *Here's what happened. Here's how we succeeded — or failed.* That objectivity gets a lot harder to maintain when you were the one on the fireground. We have to do it anyway. This is the fire service mantra.

Finally, we evaluate. This town did *that* and preserved 80% of its structures.

Another town looked like *this* and, well, now it doesn't exist anymore. One neighborhood evacuated early while another lost five residents. The difference starts as a series of numbers, and we transform them into insight. This is where subjectivity strengthens us, motivating us to keep facing a problem that's getting bigger every time we look.

*How can we do better? How can we save more lives, literally and figuratively?* Maybe the council in Town A adjusted their building codes while Town B prioritized rapid development. Perhaps Neighborhood A had been participating in their fire department's Ready, Set, Go! Program for months, while the people in Neighborhood B didn't even know such a program existed. We ask what makes a community resilient, and then we work backwards from there.

What we discover is preparedness. The equation might come out to something like  $Resilience \div Features \times Decisions = Preparedness$ . We extrapolate from there, identifying the features of and decisions made by a resilient community and codifying them. Where we find those features, we find resilience — and so we also find preparedness.

Preparedness is thus a "score" that represents the difference between a community recovering from a wildfire or being devastated by it. It's literally a life or death calculation. You — fire chiefs, data analysts, program developers — are being asked to make it.

### DEFINING DUTY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Data is actionable, and it doesn't get weighed down by emotion. In the right hands, it can also be very, very good at saving lives. In this red-hazed new reality, fire service leaders must learn to reach out their hands and treat data as the most vital tool in their arsenal. The ways you do so will be varied and unique. In many ways, you are being asked to redefine firefighting on a fundamental level.

If a firefighter's duty is to preserve life and property, then it's a duty they fulfill in community centers and classrooms as much as on scene. If a fire chief's duty is to protect their

community, they do it as much by preparing that community as they do by facing emergencies once they arise. When a chief talks, people listen, and that's a powerful thing. Your job is now to relay the messages data is sending you by translating it into terms and actions your community can understand. This is a duty you'll share with officials and collaborators from all corners of service and industry.

A modern fire chief, especially those leading departments in areas with high wildfire risk, is more than a leader of firefighters. He or she is also a leader of communities, and responders must become advocates as well as personnel. Firefighters are positioned to gather more useful data on wildfire than any other entity, as long as their leaders provide them with the right tools and training to do so.

These leaders must learn to identify the metrics of resilience and share them with the public in actionable terms. As this role has become more and more central to the fire service's mission, resources like the Ready, Set, Go! program and its ready-made communication plans, outreach support classes, and Achievement Management System have evolved to prepare chiefs and officers for effective community planning. The National Fire Protection Association and National Fire Administration have shifted their priorities to match these new, community-led approaches to wildfire preparedness.

Data is the foundation on which these new programs are being built. Empathy and social capital are the impetus that will make them effective. Preparing the public is no longer just a matter of "fighting" fire, but learning to live with it as an unavoidable part of our changing environment. This will be a collective effort requiring an unprecedented level of innovation and collaboration between countless different people. But these are unprecedented times.

In this new world, the call starts years before you see so much as a flicker in the brush; the "scene" is everything worth saving when the inevitable happens. You're already there. So start fighting. 🔥

# Legislative Update:



**Ken LaSala**, IAFC Director of Government Relations and Policy

## Welcome to the 119th Congress

**T**he 118th Congress ended in a rush right before Christmas and left quite a lot of work to finish. In January, President Trump returned to Washington with a Republican-lead House and Senate to finish last year's business and pursue an ambitious agenda. As the 119th Congress gets to work, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) will be working to meet the needs of America's fire and emergency services.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE 118TH CONGRESS

It is important to recognize the significant accomplishments of 2024. We managed to pass the following laws:

- **The Fire Grants and Safety Act (P.L. 118-67):** This new law prevented the expiration of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) programs in September 2024. Instead, the programs have funding authorized through

Fiscal Year (FY) 2028 and their sunset dates were extended until September 30, 2030. In addition, the law authorized \$95 million for the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) through FY 2028 in order to complete the development of and transition to the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS).

- **The SIREN Reauthorization Act (P.L. 118-84):** This law reauthorized a grant program for rural fire and nonprofit EMS systems through FY 2028. The law also removed a

local matching grant requirement. The bill also provided training for treating patients with mental health and substance use disorders.

- **The Firefighter Cancer Registry Reauthorization Act (P.L. 118-147):** This law reauthorized funding for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's (NIOSH) National Firefighter Registry for Cancer. The law authorized increased funding (\$5.5 million) for the program through FY 2028.
- **The Social Security Fairness Act:** This bill repealed the Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provision for first responders, other state and local government employees, and their survivors. The legislation will allow affected fire and EMS personnel to receive the benefits that they deserve for paying into the federal Social Security system. The bill covers benefits payable after December 2023.

These new laws are important because they signify Congress' long-term commitment to their respective programs and intention to fund them. As the Republicans look to pay for President Trump's proposed tax cuts and increased border security spending, they may eliminate unauthorized federal programs. So, last year's new laws were not esoteric exercises.

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS FROM THE 118TH CONGRESS

The 119th Congress has a lot of work to complete from the last Congress. Most importantly, the new Congress must fund the federal government for FY 2025 after March 14, when the current continuing resolution expires.

The House passed \$367.5 million each for the AFG and SAFER programs and approximately \$78.3 million for the USFA in FY 2025. Meanwhile, the Senate Appropriations Committee proposed \$360 million each for the AFG and SAFER programs, and more than \$80 million for the USFA. The IAFC will be working

# While the IAFC works to take care of the unfinished business from 2024, we also have legislative priorities for 2025.

to increase funding for the AFG and SAFER programs and the USFA in both FY 2025 and FY 2026.

Congress also must address the problems of fires caused by the lithium-ion batteries in e-bikes, e-scooters, and other micromobility devices. Last Congress, Representative Ritchie Torres (D-NY) and Senator Kristen Gillibrand (D-NY) introduced the Setting Consumer Standards for Lithium-Ion Batteries Act. The bill would direct the Consumer Product Safety Commission to set standards for the lithium-ion batteries and their charging components in e-bikes and other e-mobility devices. The bill passed the House, and a deal was reached to pass the bill in the Senate. Unfortunately, time ran out and the bill was removed from the final continuing resolution that ended the 118th Congress. The IAFC and its allies will work to pass the bill this year.

The Honoring Our Fallen Heroes Act is another important piece of unfinished business. The bill would grant eligibility for the Public Safety Officer's Benefits program to the families of public safety officers that die or become disabled from job-related cancer. The bill was reported by the Senate Judiciary Committee, but no action was taken in the House. In addition, we need to find a new House sponsor for the bill, because Representative Bill Pascrell, Jr., passed away.

While it is not a legislative item, the IAFC will continue to be engaged in any action regarding the draft Emergency Response Standard by the Occupational Safety and Health

Administration (OSHA). In the late fall, OSHA held an administrative hearing to examine some of the issues relating to the standard in more detail. Chief Matt Tobia, the fire chief of the Harrisonburg (VA) Fire Department, represented the IAFC at the hearing on November 12. Chief Tobia summarized the IAFC's written comments, and urged OSHA to adopt the IAFC's recommendations, including extending the implementation period for 10 years and addressing the cost concerns relating to the proposed standard.

## PRIORITIES FOR 2025

While the IAFC works to take care of the unfinished business from 2024, we also have legislative priorities for 2025. Our top legislative priority will be protecting the federal First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet). The IAFC was a leader in the creation of FirstNet, which is a nationwide broadband network dedicated to the needs of public safety. After the tragedy of the collapse of the World Trade Center towers at 9/11 and communications difficulties with the response to Pentagon at 9/11 and later during Hurricane Katrina, it was clear that the nation's fire, EMS, and law enforcement organizations needed to be able to communicate together effectively.

FirstNet was created in 2012. It currently has more than 29,000 public safety agencies signed up and more than 6.4 million connections. Last year, the FirstNet Board of Directors agreed to invest \$2 billion

to improve coverage, especially in tribal, territorial, and rural areas. It also launched a major 10-year investment plan, including \$6.3 billion to deliver full 5G capabilities.

Unfortunately, FirstNet also faces a statutory sunset in February 2027. The IAFC supported legislation by Representative Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX) last Congress to remove the sunset date for FirstNet. In the 119th Congress, it will be key for the fire service to join with EMS and law enforcement officers across the nation to protect FirstNet.

We also may have an opportunity to fund a nationwide transition to Next Generation (NG) 9-1-1. NG 9-1-1 will allow callers to send video, data, text, and voice information (including location information) to Public Safety Answering Points. This information will improve the service that fire and EMS agencies can provide to their citizens. However, the nationwide transition to NG 9-1-1 may cost as much as \$15 billion. There may be an opportunity to a large spending bill (known as a

“reconciliation” bill) early in the Trump Administration.

Part of that reconciliation bill will extend President Trump’s previous round of tax cuts. During these discussions, the IAFC will advocate for tax incentives for high-rise building owners to retrofit their high-rise buildings with automatic fire sprinklers. This legislation would be the first time that Congress would have created an incentive to install sprinklers in residential buildings.

As you can see, we have a busy agenda for 2025. At the National Fire and Emergency Services Dinner on February 13, both the Trump appointees and the members of Congress started their work for the year. This was an excellent time of year for the nation’s fire and emergency service to begin to show up and advocate for their needs in person. You always can download the IAFC’s Hot Sheet of legislative issues on the IAFC web page ([www.iafc.org/gr](http://www.iafc.org/gr)).

In conclusion, I would like to remember my predecessor, Alan

Caldwell, who passed away in January. He served as the IAFC’s Director of Government Relations and Senior Advisor for Government Relations from 1996 to 2012. He also was a fire chief with the Dunn Loring Volunteer Fire Department in Fairfax County, Virginia, and longtime IAFC member. Alan was a leader of the small community of fire service lobbyists here in DC. He helped create both the AFG and SAFER grant programs. He also was recognized in DC as the fire service’s leader on public safety communications. Alan worked tirelessly even before the tragedy of 9/11 to ensure that fire, EMS, and law enforcement could communicate seamlessly at incident scenes. He played a significant role in the creation of the federal FirstNet. Due to Alan’s tireless efforts, America’s fire and emergency service is better prepared, staffed, and funded to deal with the growing number of crises facing America. 💧

*Ken LaSala is the IAFC’s Director of Government Relations & Policy.*

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# The Human Equation:

## Why Data is More Than Numbers



One of the key lessons taught by the data-centered programs and projects at the International

Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) is this: data can tell a story. It's vital that leaders of every rank understand how powerful harnessing data can be — both for the communities we serve and for ourselves.

Simply put, the power of data is the ability to use information to make better decisions, solve problems, and understand the world around us. Data provides mission-critical information that allows us to improve existing services and innovate for the future. Data provides us with the “words” we need to tell a story — but data alone doesn't tell a story.

Enter geographic information systems (GIS). By pulling data into GIS software, we can process various types and formats of data and integrate them using geography as a common framework to visualize problems and solutions. Through GIS, we turn our “data words” into a digital story presentation, visually communicating complex data sets that can more easily make an impact.

Regardless of the data and how we present it, we must humanize it. When we share our digital story, we can't forget that behind every number is a person, a community, a life. The objective is subjective when it comes to preserving life and property. Learning to gather, analyze, and use data effectively requires us to bridge the quantifiable and the unquantifiable. We don't collect data for knowledge's sake, but for the sake of those it serves.

On the fireground, there are no dollar signs or numerical outcomes floating above the incident. One cannot quantify the sounds, sights, smells, and emotions present. But back at the station, the challenge is to turn those unquantifiable

experiences into reports, charts, and visuals that tell the story of strategy, tactics, inputs, outcomes, successes, and lessons learned.

It's easy to view total objectivity as a strength in this process — but is it? Is analysis ever truly objective, and should we, as members of a lifesaving profession, want it to be?

At no time were these questions more poignant for me than when IAFC President Josh Waldo and I observed fire suppression efforts in Los Angeles at the Palisades and Eaton wildfires. We witnessed the valiant efforts of firefighters on the front lines, the exhaustion of leaders mustering resources, and the devastation on the faces of those whose lives were forever changed. Community risk ratings became miles of unrecognizable debris punctuated by fire officials' resolve to prevent this from happening again. In times like this, “why” becomes the narrative. Here, in this painful and humbling space, we use data to shift the conversation from “why this happened” to “what must be done.”

When a chief fire officer engages with the humanity behind the volumes of data they gather, objective facts take on intensely subjective dimensions — ones that can be painful to witness.

If the data shows one community lost everything while another, seemingly equally at risk, preserved 80% of its structures, we must ask why. The answers are often as much about the people in those communities as they are about the hard data.

By pursuing the stories behind our data, we uncover the impact of subjective issues like community engagement, local politics, personal circumstances, and access to information on incident outcomes. In treating these elements as equal to objective facts, we've revealed truths that have completely shifted our approach to preparedness, mitigation, and recovery. It's the responsibility of all fire service leaders, from chiefs to newly appointed officers, to embrace those truths and use them to drive real change.

I am proud that the IAFC is on the front line of this new “data-ground.” Fire departments are expanding data use to improve service delivery and operations at an unprecedented level. From training firefighters to developing on-the-ground solutions, every change starts with us.

We must continue leading in this changing world — data is our tool to navigate and interpret it.

**Rob Brown**

IAFC Chief Executive Officer & Executive Director



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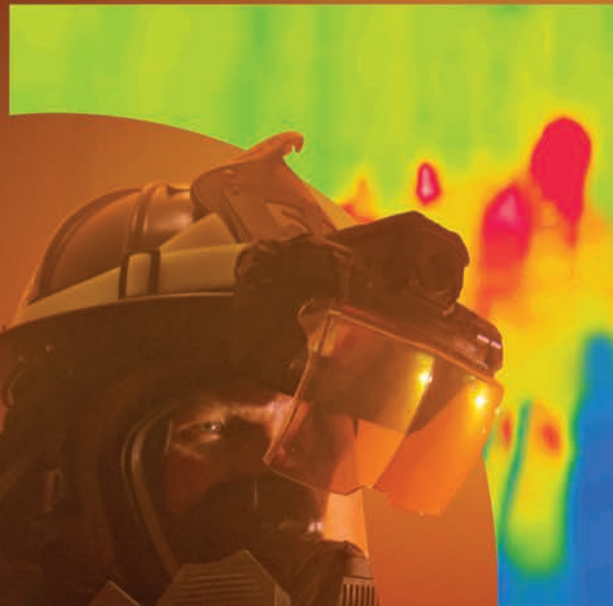


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