



Questions for a New Fire Chief to Ask

You have been appointed/elected to the position of fire chief for your local fire department. Congratulations. In many cases the newly appointed/elected fire chief may experience challenges in acquiring knowledge about their organization. The 5th bugle on the fire chief's badge carries significant responsibility and duties that must be carried out. Many times, the organizational challenges will not wait for the new fire chief to get up to speed. This guide has been developed to provide sample questions the newly appointed fire chief might ask.

What questions should you be asking your first day/week on the job?

Career/Volunteer Staffed Organizations

General Questions

- How much autonomy do I have in this position?
- What is the background of those who I report to?
- What is expected of me as fire chief?
- What is the background and history of those that I manage?
- What is the community climate in reference to the fire department?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the organization? Are the strengths and weaknesses shared? Are the identified weaknesses part of a plan to address?
- Are there any informal leaders in the department that need to be talked to/cultivated early on?
- What type of government oversees the fire department and who is in charge (fire district vs. village, vs. city; strong mayor or city manager type government)?
- What type of relationship did the previous chief have with the political leaders?
- What kind of fire prevention program does the organization have?
- What are the general public education initiatives of the organization?
- Has a community risk reduction plan been completed?
- Is there a strategic vision document?
 - Who created the strategic vision?
 - Is the strategic vision plan followed?
 - When was the strategic vision plan created/updated?
- Are there current mutual aid and automatic aid agreements in effect?
- Does the organization's training program comply with:
 - OSHA



- Local policy
- Standard Operating Procedures
- Is the current training program adequate?
- How does the organization get along with other city departments?
 - Street
 - Council
 - Clerk
 - Law Enforcement
- Does the organization have SOP's or SOG's, where are they, and are they followed always or are they collecting dust on the shelf?
- What is the name of 2 of the next-door fire chiefs? Can a meeting be arranged with both of them to receive coaching/advice?
- Who is the county EMA Director? Setup a meeting to discuss - training opportunities - funding available - logistical support?
- Ask the question what is the role of the EMA Director in a tornado event?
 - Large fire event?
 - Chemical/Biological event?
- Where is the EOC?

Funding/Budget

- What is the operating budget?
- What funds remain in the operating budget?
- Is there an opportunity to acquire additional operating funds within the current budget year?
- What is the overtime budget?
- Is the overtime budget appropriately funded?
- What are the funding streams available to the fire department budget?
- What is the capital equipment budget?
- What is the age of the apparatus?
- Is there an apparatus replacement plan?
- What is the age of the fire stations?
- What is the rehab/replacement plan for fire stations?
- Is there a need for a new fire station?
- Is there a specific criterion for adding a fire station?
- What is the age of the SCBA's?
- Is there a replacement plan for the SCBA's?
- Can I solicit donations?
 - Walmart
 - Firehouse Subs
 - Home Depot
 - Etc.

Insurance

- Who is the insurance agent for accident and health / workers compensation?
- Who is the insurance agent for vehicles and buildings?
- Who is the insurance agent for liability?



- Who is the city personnel director?
 - What role does the personnel director play in a firefighter injury?

State EMS Certification

- Are we certified with the state to provide EMS?
- When does the EMS certification expire?
- Who is the medical director?
- Do we have a prescription to administer oxygen?

Legal

- Who is the legal counsel?
- Does the organization have litigation pending right now?

State Fire Marshal

- Have someone notify the State Fire Marshal of the change in fire chiefs.
- Do we report responses monthly to the State Fire Marshal?
- Request a copy of the Fire Department Self-Assessment document.
- Request a copy of the Fire Training Self-Assessment document.
- What training is available?
 - Where is that training conducted?
- What certification level are our firefighters/officers?

OSHA

- Are we in compliance with OSHA for training?
- Are we in compliance with OSHA general guidelines?
 - What are the minimal guidelines.

State and Federal Grants

- Do we have any state grants still open? Call the state grants programs.
- Do we have any federal grants still open? Call the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program in Washington DC.

Disciplinary Processes

- What is the organization's disciplinary process?
- Do we enforce the rules? If not, which ones don't we enforce and why not?

ISO

- What is the insurance services office rating?
- When was the last time ISO visited our fire department?
- Obtain a free copy of the fire suppression writing schedule from the insurance services office.
- What is our ISO rating?
 - How does that rating impact the community?



Local Community Contacts

- What is the name of the president or chief executive of the Chamber of Commerce for business contacts.
- What service clubs are active and when do they meet?

Career

General Questions

- What is our current authorized full time staffing level?
- Is our authorized staffing level adequate?
- What is the number of career staff we would need to meet adequate?
- Do we have a formal hiring process?
- What is our career applicant processing process?
 - Is it efficient?
 - Is it responsive?
- Do we have a list of tangible benefits for career?
- Do we have a list of intangible benefits for career?
- How do we recruit career staff?
- How do we select career officers? Is it effective?

Labor

- Where is a copy of our labor agreement?
- When does the current labor agreement expire?
- What is the working relationship with the union?
- If career, who is the union president and what type of relationship has he/she had with the chief in the past?
- Can I get a meeting with the Union president in the next three days?

Volunteer

General Questions

- What is our authorized staffing level for volunteers?
- What is the activity level of our current volunteer staffing?
- Do we have anyone who has expressed interest in joining that we have not processed?
- What is our volunteer applicant processing process?
 - Is it efficient?
 - Is it responsive?
- Do we have a list of tangible benefits for volunteers?
- Do we have a list of intangible benefits for volunteers?
- Is there a formal awards program?
- Do we host an annual awards banquet?
- How do we recruit volunteer members?
- How do we select volunteer officers?
 - Is it effective?
- Do we allow facial hair for interior firefighters?
- Do we conduct annual physicals for interior firefighters?
- Do we require firefighter certification for interior firefighter?



- If so, what level?
- Is there an annual review process for chief?
 - Who conducts the review?

What questions should you be asking when you have been fire chief for 3 years?

- What is the status of your organizational planning?
- Do you have a strategic vision document?
 - Who created the strategic vision?
 - When was the last time it was updated?
- Do you have a vehicle replacement plan with budgetary impact?
- Do you have a fire station refurbish plan with budgetary impact?
- Do you have a fire station replacement plan with budgetary impact?
- Do you have an additional fire station replacement plan with budgetary impact?
- Do you have a plan to reduce the community ISO rating?
- Do you have a plan to comply with NFPA 1710/1720?
- Do you have a plan/need to become an accredited agency?
- Do you have an active labor/management program?
- Do you have lunch/dinner with the Mayor/Board President/Union President at least every six months?
- Do you have plans to develop a training center if you don't have one with budgetary impact?
- If you were asked to justify the number of career positions you currently have, could you create a document that is based upon facts?
 - What is the criteria for the data?
- Is there a need for a consultant to evaluate the fire department?
- Have you assessed your compliance with OSHA rules?
- Have you assessed your compliance with NFPA standards?



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