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Clark County Fire & Rescue: Partnership Proposal

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Clark County Fire & Rescue
Partnership Proposal
Concordia University
Samuel Gillenwater

Abstract

Over the last decade and a half Homeland Security (HLS) has evolved to combat our nations threats. Emergency preparedness is one area that must remain in a continuous state of increasing improvement. Federal entities, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have developed hundreds of plans, policies, and procedures to mitigate a wide range of emergency situations from natural disasters to terrorism. This paper will address the collective approach our federal agencies want to see at the local level, and more specifically how first responders can combine efforts to deliver a more effective service. First Responders are the foundation to our nations stability and mitigating elements.

Clark County Fire & Rescue (CCF&R) is a combination fire department in Clark County, Washington. They cover over 155 square miles, including the cities of La Center, Ridgefield, and Woodland, serving a population of approximately 40,000. CCF&R is staffed with full-time, part-time, resident, and volunteer firefighters, all who are trained to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1001 standard (Nohr, 2018). A significant portion of its district is residential, business, industrial, marine, and railroad responsibilities. They protect several areas of critical infrastructure including the main west coast rail line, several electrical substations, multiple government buildings, two-primary high pressure natural gas transmission lines that run from the Canadian border to the Midwest, nearly a fourteen-mile stretch of Interstate 5, and the main freeway from Mexico to the Canadian border. Clark County Fire and Rescue respond to approximately 3,600 fire and medical calls each year and are governed by a five-member board of elected Fire Commissioners (Nohr, 2018). This department's mission involves operations that closely resemble elements of homeland security as their day to day function includes preparing, responding, mitigating, and recovering from various emergency situations.

Partnership Proposal

Clark County Fire & Rescue, and District 3 operating out of Hockinson, Washington, are in preliminary discussions involving a merge. This project will address some of the smaller in-house details regarding CCF&R and a potential merge applicable to daily operations. This proposal paper is not intended to facilitate a merge, but to identify areas that CCF&R can improve, with the intent to help aid in a merge. The full scope of two merging districts is far too large for this paper. With an eventual merge, or not, these proposals can help improve Clark County Fire & Rescue's function overall.

Desired Outcome

Clark County Fire & Rescue wishes to position themselves in an effective state for considering a merge. Some members of the department probably feel a merge is not necessary while other veterans see it as mandatory. Many consolidating professionals view a merge as a process with many strengths.

“A merge is exactly what it implies. One department simply absorbs the other and provides protection to both areas. Although at the onset a merge might sound like a difficult way to combine resources; it is in fact the quickest, most practical, and often the least expensive method” (McGrath, 2018).

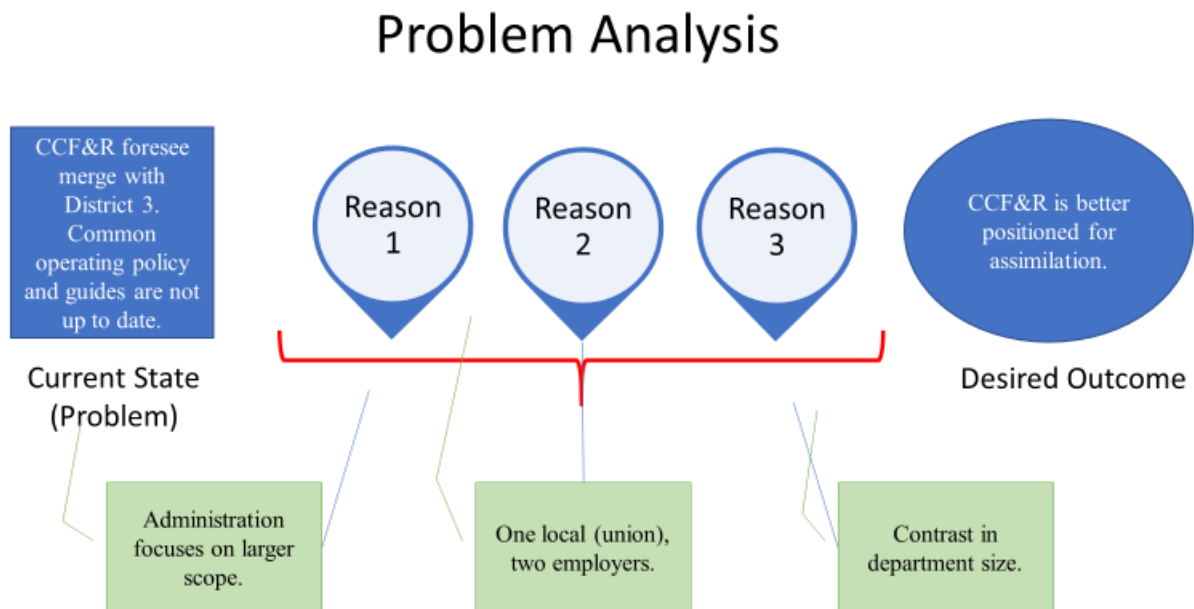
Overall CCF&R wishes to maintain a productive service to the people and area they are responsible.

Problem Statement

The Clark County Fire & Rescue is a small, understaffed, and underequipped department tasked with large a responsibility. When considering a merge between departments, there are many

large areas of operation, logistics, and strategical pieces to consider. Often when a merge occurs, the most common points of function can be overlooked. Unfortunately, this can become a problem for decision makers because they will not have the most current and updated information to make decisions. Below is a graphic simply illustrating an overview for this issue.

Figure 1: Problem Analysis



Holien, L. (2017). Problem analysis. [Infographic]. Portland, OR: Concordia University Portland.

The administration office for Clark County Fire & Rescue is located at a different site than the station. The administrative staff do not frequently deal with the policies and guidelines many of the station personnel operate under. For CCF&R, the task is left for the battalion chief, who deals with many other roles and who still adheres to the station's response responsibilities. This leaves things like the stations Facility and Equipment Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG) unattended, none of which have been updated in the last five years. Additionally, the two departments could have very different SOG's altogether. Another reason for this assimilation not transitioning smoothly is the two entities sharing one union, (local 3674) but operating under two separate employers. Working under two separate collective bargaining units, the issues and

conflicts trying to be resolved are often not aligned. This in return, can cause the two entities to handle problems in a totally different manner. Consequently, leading to a divergent approach with policy and the basic day to day function each entity operates under. This can become problematic when working towards merging under one employer. Another issue to consider is the contrast in department size. CCF&R is much smaller operating from one location, while District 3 has many stations in various locations. Consequently, the policy and guidelines are going to be much different. For CCF&R it will be vital for all SOG's and operating documents to be current, as well as available for dissemination and revising.

Proposal Objective

The objective of this proposal is to implement methods in such a fashion that CCF&R will be better positioned to develop a working relationship with District 3. To do this, Clark County Fire & Rescue must recognize similar operating policies between the two departments, capitalize on applicable areas for joint mitigation, resource assistance and establish plausible mitigating elements for collaboration suited for the preliminary stages of a departmental merge.

Potential Solutions

Potential methods that can be implemented to achieve these desired outcomes:

Option #1; continue business as usual. At the moment, information is not available to make decisions on a merge, and it is not totally clear what areas of operation will have to be addressed. Potentially, CCF&R could not address underlining problems or try to build a working relationship with District 3. Instead CCF&R can wait for a merge to be approved then know exactly what areas must be addressed and address them as they arise.

Option #2; Address issues with common operating functions and develop a joint partnership agreement to build working relationships and continuity between the two entities.

Option #3; Hire a third-party person or group to act as an Administrator/ Liaison at the time of the merge being approved.

Below is a table evaluating the pros and cons of each option.

Analysis of Options

Figure 2: Analysis of Options

	Pros	Cons
Option 1 Business as usual	Will not add more work or cost money.	Can greatly increase the chances for a more problematic merge.
Option 2 Partnership Agreement	Will provide better continuity between the two entities. Better positions CCF&R for negotiations. More proactive.	Doesn't specifically address innerworkings of merge.
Option 3 Administrator/ Liaison	Would be much easier logistically and doesn't add to CCF&R's existing workload.	Would require additional funds. Could require a budget increase. Could cause staff resistance.

Recommendations

Utilizing a joint partnership agreement parallel to mitigating elements is the most productive and beneficial option for both the departments involved. A partnership agreement will induce a better working relationship between CCF&R and the foreseeable merger, District 3. Also, putting CCF&R in a better position for discussion regarding this topic. With option 2, a partnership agreement is the most applicable at this time, and the best method for assimilating personnel in the future. Below are four components that should be considered by Clark County Fire &

Rescue. The four components are Develop Standard Operating Guidelines, Mutual Training Strategies, Joint Staffing of Station and Apparatus, and a Joint Safety Program. All four components culminate to an effective partnership agreement and move CCF&R closer to their goals.

1. Develop Standard Operating Guidelines

1.1 Level of Application | Operational

1.2. Timeline of Completion | Short Term

1.3. Compliant stakeholders | Both Departments

1.4. Objectives

Provide cohesive operational guidelines for emergency, and non-emergency situations.

1.5. Overview

Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG) provide a Vital piece of structure when responding to any emergency situation. Being first on scene, first responders and their leadership must often make quick adjustments best suited to mitigate the scenario. SOG's provide a sense of direction and cohesiveness for all parties involved. Currently, both departments have their only separate set of guides.

1.6. Discussion

Standard Operating Guidelines will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of employees, as well as improve on-scene safety. Having personnel trained in similar procedures provides the knowledge other responders will operate in similar methods, allowing for a unified approach

when considering any incident. This will decrease the likelihood of on-scene confusion that could lead to a delay in response.

1.7. Recommendations

- 1.7.1. Provide reoccurring reviews of guidelines to ensure current information with changing tactics, strategy, and equipment.
- 1.7.2. Allow for consistent and continual use of standard operating guidelines during routine response.
- 1.7.3. Provide initial and quarterly education to employees in their use.
- 1.7.4. Keep guidelines electronically filed for easy access to all department employees.

2. Mutual Training Strategies

- 2.1. Level of Application | Functional
- 2.2. Timeline of Completion | Short Term
- 2.3. Compliant Stockholders | Both Departments
- 2.4. *Objectives*

Establish foundation for training program management and implementation.

2.5. Overview

Over recent years the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has recognized the importance of local government working cohesively. It has become increasingly common for public agencies to collaborate on certain programs. Cooperative training programs are a means to

mutually increase the efficiency of its personnel and develop better continuity between two agencies (FEMA, 2011).

2.6. Discussion

For CCF&R, personnel are not required to annually pass their initial physical fitness test. This is uncommon for many public agencies who have a majority of first responder personnel. A strategic plan for training will evaluate current training levels and determine future goals and training objectives. Strategies are created to develop curriculum, culminate resources, and establish a training schedule. By developing mutual training strategies, consistency from both departments can be reached. This can also produce personnel with the same certification levels established by the plan.

2.7. Recommendations

2.7.1. Establish a personnel group to develop common training strategies, identify goals, and set objectives.

2.7.2. Establish these key components in the collective program:

- ❖ Annual training plan
- ❖ Training manual
- ❖ Centralized training
- ❖ Training standards

2.7.3. Keep strategies, goals, and objectives electronically filed for easy access

3. Joint Staffing of Fire Station and Apparatus

3.1. Level of Application | Operational

3.2. Timeline of completion | Long Term

3.3. Compliant Stakeholders | Both Departments

3.4. Objectives

Provide for the distribution of equipment and deployment of personnel consistent with Washington State Legislature (WAC 296-305-05002). Ensure fire stations are equipped and staffed to the level required for delivering service to its assigned jurisdictions.

3.5. Overview

Given that the area protected by a fire station may change due to annexation, merger, or contracted protection, a perfect fire station location today may be a poor location in the future. It is important to not overlap response areas of other departments. This leaves fire stations more accountable for the areas they are responsible for. However, fire departments are rarely able to afford the staffing they require. Jointly staffed stations create more alternatives for departments regarding the deployment of emergency resources. Sharing personnel between the two departments can effectively bring staffing levels closer to its said requirements.

3.6. Discussion

Joint staffing a fire station can be very beneficial for both departments and an operational opportunity that can prove to be very effective when managing resources. “Consolidated departments stand to gain greater efficiency, standardization that leads to easier and less expensive equipment purchasing, reductions and eliminate duplications of materials and services and benefit from a larger pool of collective wisdom and experience” (Marlin, 2012).

3.6.2. Approach methods:

1. One fire department supplies a firefighter for each shift and another fire department contributes an apparatus, engine, or officer. The personnel would be made up of both departments each day.
2. One fire department staffs the fire station on a said number of shifts while the other department staffs the station on the remainder of the shifts.
3. One fire department staffs the fire station for a said number of days/months of the year. For the remaining months the other fire department would staff the station.
4. One fire department would staff a fire engine while the other would staff a medical unit.

3.7. Recommendations

- 3.7.1. The personnel used for joint staffing should be equal or exceed the level of certification present with the cooperating department.
- 3.7.2. The departments should cover a deployment plan before entering a joint staffing agreement.
- 3.7.3. Provide a single Incident Command for leadership to supervise emergency operations and personnel. This will set a single vertical communication chain.

4. Joint Safety Program

- 4.1. Level of Application | Functional
- 4.2. Timeline for Completion | Short Term
- 4.3. Compliant Stakeholders | Both Departments

4.4. Objectives

Establish an effective cooperative program in-line with federal standards to promote the safety of personnel on -duty in the fire station and at the emergency scene.

4.5. Overview

A formalized safety program is in the interest of all department employees. A formalized program will address safety concerns, accident investigation, and maintain safety procedures. In addition, a joint safety program allows both departments to monitor the safety performance while under a partnership agreement.

4.6. Recommendations

4.6.1.

1. Review of safety concerns identified by department members.
2. Maintenance of effective agency safety procedures.
3. Implementation of safety procedures.
4. Exposer control practice and monitoring.
5. Rig cleaning policy.
6. No smoke capture system.
7. Evaluate and revise existing safety procedures.
8. Maintenance of records of accidents, exposers, mistake incidents.

4.6.2. Establish an on-going safety training program and set monthly meetings.

4.6.3. Incorporate training activities and address the key concepts/tasks above.

Appendix A

Project Plan

Goal: The goal of this project is to help induce a better working relationship between CCF&R and a foreseeable future merger, District 3. As well as better position CCF&R for discussion regarding this topic. With an eventual merge, or not, these proposals can help improve Clark County Fire & Rescue's overall functions.

Background: Clark County Fire & Rescue wishes to position themselves in an effective state for considering a merge. Some members of the department probably feel a merge is not necessary while other veterans see it as mandatory. Many consolidating professionals view the merge as a process with many strengths.

Project Objectives: *Develop a joint partnership agreement*

- Proposal will suggest partnership agreement and specifically address common operating policy(s).
- Addresses staffing.
- Equipment allocation.
- Jurisdiction assistance.
- Safety program.

Deliverables, Tactics, and Timeline:

- Propose the use of a developed partnership agreement outline.
- Analyze completed inventory of updated Facility and Equipment Standard Operating Guidelines.
- Proposal will suggest all developments happen within the year 2018.
- The proposal of a partnership agreement will also help CCF&R address issues the department has with (WAC 296-305-05002).
- Establish most applicable areas for partnership agreement parallel to mitigating elements.
- Finalize proposal for a partnership agreement, intended for the summer months (June-August) and the remainder of the year.

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