

Volunteer & Combination Fire Chief Resource Guide



Colorado State Fire Chiefs – Volunteer & Combination Section
Leadership for Colorado's Fire & EMS Services

Purpose and Scope

This document is intended to be a resource for all volunteer & combination fire chiefs in the performance of their duties. Whether they are new to the rank, new to Colorado or a veteran Chief that is hitting a new experience, we hope this document shares knowledge, experiences, and connections to support the success of the individual and success for their agency.

This document is intended to be specific to Colorado. There are many resources focused on supporting Fire Chiefs in general, such as:

You're the Fire Chief, Now What? Guidance for New & Interim Chiefs. International Association of Fire Chiefs, Executive Fire Officers Section and Volunteer & Combination Officers Section. August 2019.

https://www.iafc.org/docs/default-source/1vcos/vcos_efo_newinterimchief_100daysguide_finaldigital.pdf

A Leadership Guide For Volunteer Fire Departments, 4th Edition. 2011. Snook, Gasaway, and Holman, International Association of Fire Chiefs.

A Leadership Guide for Combination Fire Departments. 2008. Windisch and Crosby. International Association of Fire Chiefs.

Professional Development for the Leader in a Department Staffed with Volunteers. International Association of Fire Chiefs, Volunteer & Combination Officers Section.

https://www.iafc.org/docs/default-source/1vcos/vcos_profdevresourcesdoc_newinterimfirechiefguide.pdf

Wildland-Urban Interface Chief's Guide. International Association of Fire Chiefs, Wildland Fire Policy Committee. <https://indd.adobe.com/view/b8eca079-0226-4e41-8685-2cffa88f32e3>

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Opening Statements

Purpose and Scope

Serving your community in the role of Fire Chief is simultaneously one of the most rewarding experiences and one of the most taxing. It is impossible to appreciate the gravity of the role until you are in it. Knowing this, we've assembled this guide as a resource to help both new fire chiefs and fire chiefs who are new to Colorado be successful.

This document does not replace guides and resources assembled by IAFC and others, but is intended to supplement those resources. If you have suggestions on future additions or edits, please reach out.

Relationships

Our success as Fire Chiefs is dependent on our relationships. We have to build relationships with our members, our boards or city councils, and our fellow districts or departments. An often overlooked and underutilized group of relationships are with our fellow fire chiefs from across the state. We have nearly 400 fire chiefs in Colorado that manage departments larger, smaller, or similar in size to yours. There is a good chance that others have encountered some of the challenges you're facing and can be a resource. There will be things you've learned or experienced that can benefit your peers.

We've asked a range of identified subject matter experts to assemble this content. If you don't know where to turn, everyone who has contributed to this manual is willing to be contacted and asked questions. We hope for the list of potential contacts to grow and this can be the start of your network as you assume your role in Colorado.

Colorado State Fire Chiefs

History

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Sections

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Contacts

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Resources

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Agency Assessment

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Getting your bearings from your new role

- Internal promotion vs. outsider
- Who to talk to for background
- What are the priorities?
- When to wait and when to run
 - Is your agency expecting immediate resolution of outstanding issues?
 - Do you need to take time to get all bearings first
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Human Resource Management

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Human Resource Management (Ireland Stapleton)

- Background Resources
 - Links from VCOS
- Colorado Resources
 - Name, Agency, email
- Watch Out Situations - When to Get Help
- Volunteer Recruitment & Retention
 - Program Ideas
 - LOSAP
 - Pension
- Civil Rights and Workplace Concerns
- FLSA and how it applies
- LODD
- Suicide prevention

Special Districts

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Special Districts (Assist from SDA)

- Background Resources
 - Links from VCOS
- Colorado Resources
 - Name, Agency, email
- Title 32
- Revenue Sources and limitations
- Special Districts Association
- Legal
- Statutory Deadlines and Benchmarks

Municipal and Other Departments

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Municipal and Other Departments (**Assist from CML?**)

- Background Resources
 - Links from VCOS
- Colorado Resources
 - Name, Agency, email
- Funding from Towns
- Revenue Sources and Limitations
- Is there a statute for Municipal, industrial, or non profit?

Finances

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Finances (Third Party Vendor SDS)

- Background Resources
 - Links from VCOS
- Colorado Resources
 - Name, Agency, email
- Budgeting 101
 - What is a fund
 - What is a line item
 - Capital Definitions
 - Operating Definitions
- Other Revenue Sources
 - Specific Ownership Tax
 - Impact Fees
 - **Inspection Fees**
 - Fundraising
 - Grants
- TABOR
- Prioritizing Items
- Recession Planning
- Reserves
 - Types of Reserves
 - Required Reserves (e.g. TABOR and Contract Commitments)
 - Reserve strategies and pros/cons
- Calculating Mil Levies
- Audits
 - Red Flags

Planning For The Future

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Planning for the Future (Steck)

- Background Resources
 - Links from VCOS
- Colorado Resources
 - Name, Agency, email
- Strategic Planning
 - Links for local departments
- Fleet, Facilities and Equipment Replacement
- Demographic resources

Training & Certifications

Background Resources

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Colorado Resources

Colorado Fire Training Officers Association (CFTOA)

Division of Fire Prevention & Control (DFPC)

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Colorado Municipal Certification Board (CMCB)

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Incident Qualification System (IQS) and Wildland Certifications

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Wildland Urban Interface

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Wildland Urban Interface

- Background Resources
 - Links from VCOS
- Colorado Resources
 - Name, Agency, email
- CWPP

State-Wide Mutual Aid

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State-Wide Mutual Aid (White & Novak)

- Background Resources
 - Links from VCOS
- Colorado Resources
 - Name, Agency, email
- Surge

Consolidations

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Consolidations (ESCI Qualman)

- Background Resources
 - Links from VCOS
- Colorado Resources
 - Name, Agency, email
- Examples
- Considerations
- Models (merger vs authority vs assumption, etc.)

Other Resources

Fire Chief Contracts & Separation Agreements

Many fire chiefs who serve special districts or municipality negotiate a contract in order to provide some protection and uncertainty. Details of a contract should be worked out specific to your situation with your agency. Remember that the agency's attorney has a duty to represent the best interests of the agency, so personal representation is recommended for contract negotiations.

Compensation - A contract should consider a starting salary/compensation package at the time work begins, but should also consider how increases will be considered. Will it be a set percentage every year? Should it be a cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) based off a specific consumer price index (CPI) at the end of the year? Will it have a merit component, and how will metrics for that be determined? Are annual bonuses an option, and if so, how do you qualify for one? As Boards can change, an agreement that is clear on this particulars can provide for the most certainty and ensure consistent expectations for all parties.

Other perks - Consider if access to an agency vehicle, phone, etc is appropriate. If so, the terms and expectations of those should be considered and addressed in the contract. Flexibility in contracts can be nice but can cause issues with interpretation during disagreements. Outlining the process for settling disagreements can also be appropriate.

Separations - None of us should enter a contract expecting to not finish the contract, but we know that things change and things can happen. The process for an at-will separation should be clearly outlined. The benefits afforded to the Chief in the case of an at-will separation should also be clearly articulated and explained. Examples may include:

Severance payment - This can be a set dollar amount, set number of months at current salary, or an increasing amount based on years of service. Terms to consider include how many months, if it is whole months or fractional months (worked 5.5 years = 5 months or 5.5 months of payment), how payments will be made (lump sum or distributed), and additional benefits. Note that FPPA and PERA are not eligible on severance payments.

Insurance - Will the agency provide health insurance after an at-will separation? If so, for how long? At what level (employee only, family, whatever you had at time of separation)?

Communications - This is possibly the most important if you hope to gain employment after your separation. How will your separation agreement be communicated publicly? What will happen when someone calls the agency for a reference check? It is recommended that statements for an at-will separation be approved by all parties (Board and Chief) so they are balanced and represent everyone's interests. Mud slinging hurts your chances of reemployment and hurts the agency's chances of attracting top talent if it seems like there are major issues. Relationships will likely be strained during this type of separation, so inclusion in a contract OR in a separation agreement can be important.

Separation agreement - If you reach the need for a separation agreement, ensure both the agency attorney and an attorney specifically representing you have reviewed. Ensure that all parties agree that the terms of the contract (or additional terms) are included and addressed. This will need to be executed by staff without you involved, so a clear agreement is best for all involved.

Remember that any money needed to fulfill contract obligations must be addressed in your annual budget. You should calculate the maximum amount that would be paid out at any point in the year and that needs to be set in reserve to meet budgeting requirements.

We hope that you never need this section of the report. If you do, I hope you've set yourself up well to take care of you, your family, and the best interests of the agency you served.

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Resources

- Contacts
- **Links**
 - **SDA**
 - **Board Member Manual**
 - **DFPC**
 - **NWCG PMS docs**