
2024 Colorado Fire Service Needs Assessment Survey Results Report

August 18, 2025



**Prepared by the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention
and Control**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview of Project

The Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC) is required to complete a fire service needs assessment every two years by Colorado Revised Statutes Section 24-33.5-1231 Local firefighter safety and disease prevention fund. A census of those fire departments was conducted from November 2024 through December 2024. This report provides the results of that data collection effort.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this Needs Assessment Evaluation is to provide the DFPC with a comprehensive account of current resource capacity and training needs of the fire departments across the State of Colorado. The intention of the project was to complete a census (as opposed to a sample) of all fire departments of the state. This includes fire departments staffed by career personnel, volunteers, or departments that are combinations of the two.

The specific evaluation objectives for the investigators at DFPC were to develop an effective data collection instrument that meets the needs of DFPC, to implement the statewide survey of fire departments in a way that maximizes potential participation in this data collection effort, to provide DFPC with a data file of the collected survey results and a summary report of those data that can be used to characterize the current state of fire department resource capacities and potential training needs in Colorado. Overall, the purpose of the project can be summarized as using the census of fire departments to serve the DFPC informational needs for it to engage in effective program and resource management practices.

Survey Results

The results are presented in Section III, titled "Summary of Results." To complete the census of Colorado fire departments' current resource capacity and stated training needs, a survey of all fire departments in Colorado was conducted via an online survey instrument. That survey process began in November 2024 and ended in December 2024. Several mass emails to all fire chiefs in the state (and/or other key personnel in a given department) were sent during the data collection period.

The 2024 Needs Assessment Survey was considerably shorter than the 2022 survey (41 questions in 2024 vs 103 in 2022). The survey response rate was lower than in 2022, partially due to the shortened timeframe to complete the survey. In 2022, 239 departments (or 70%) completed the survey, whereas in 2024, 194 departments (or 57%) completed the survey.

Key Survey Takeaways

- The responding fire departments need an additional 1,121 career and 1,142 volunteer firefighters over the next 2 years.

- Fire departments report needing 753 new and replacement apparatuses over the next two years.
- To meet their equipment needs, fire departments would need to spend over \$25,282,489 over the next 2 years.
- Eighty-two percent (82%) of fire departments do not anticipate having adequate funding to address their top three needs.
- Seventy-seven percent (77%) of fire departments cite time commitments as a barrier to obtaining state fire certifications.

The overall ranking of needs showed that personnel was the top need followed by apparatus, training, facilities and equipment. Eighty-two percent (82%) of fire departments indicated they do not have adequate funding to address their top three needs.

The DFPC will use the information to help develop strategies to address the needs of Colorado's Fire Service. This is an effort that will take more than DFPC, it will take the creativity, the skills, and the efforts of everyone engaged in or served by the Colorado Fire Service.

1. Introduction: Purpose of the Evaluation

The State of Colorado, through the Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC), Department of Public Safety, has conducted a resource capacity and training needs assessment evaluation of fire departments across the State of Colorado. A census of those fire departments was conducted from November 2024 through the end of December 2024. This report provides the results of that data collection effort.

The DFPC is required to complete this survey every two years by Colorado Revised Statutes Section 24-33.5-1231 Local firefighter safety and disease prevention fund. The last extensive survey was conducted in 2022.

The purpose of this needs assessment evaluation is to provide DFPC with a comprehensive account of current resources capacity and training needs of Colorado's Fire Service. The intention of the project was to complete a census (as opposed to a sample) of all fire departments of the state. This includes fire departments staffed by career personnel, volunteers, or departments that are combinations of the two.

The specific evaluation objectives for the project were to develop an effective data collection instrument that meets the needs of the DFPC, to implement the statewide survey of Colorado's Fire Service in a way that maximizes potential participation in this data collection effort, to provide DFPC with a data file of the collected survey results and a summary report of those data that can be used to characterize the current state of fire department resource capacities and potential training needs in Colorado. Overall, the purpose of the project can be summarized as using the census of fire departments to serve the DFPC informational needs for it to engage in effective program and resource management practices.

2. Data Collection Process

The data collection process for this evaluation consisted of the investigators sending an email request for fire chiefs or their designated representative at the department (i.e. an individual with sufficient knowledge of the department to complete the survey fully) to complete an online survey instrument consisting of 41 question items. The first mass email to all Colorado fire chiefs (through a contact list provided by Division of Fire Prevention and Control) was sent in Early November 2024. The open period for participation was closed on December 31, 2024.

The DFPC ultimately ended with 194 completed surveys, a reduction from 2022 which included 239 responses. The census of Colorado fire departments thus had a participation rate of 57 percent (57%).

3. Summary of Results

A. Department Contact Information and Demographics

Respondents were first asked to identify their name, title and the fire department they represented. The survey yielded a mix of career, combination and volunteer departments allowing for good representation of the needs for each department type (Figure 1).

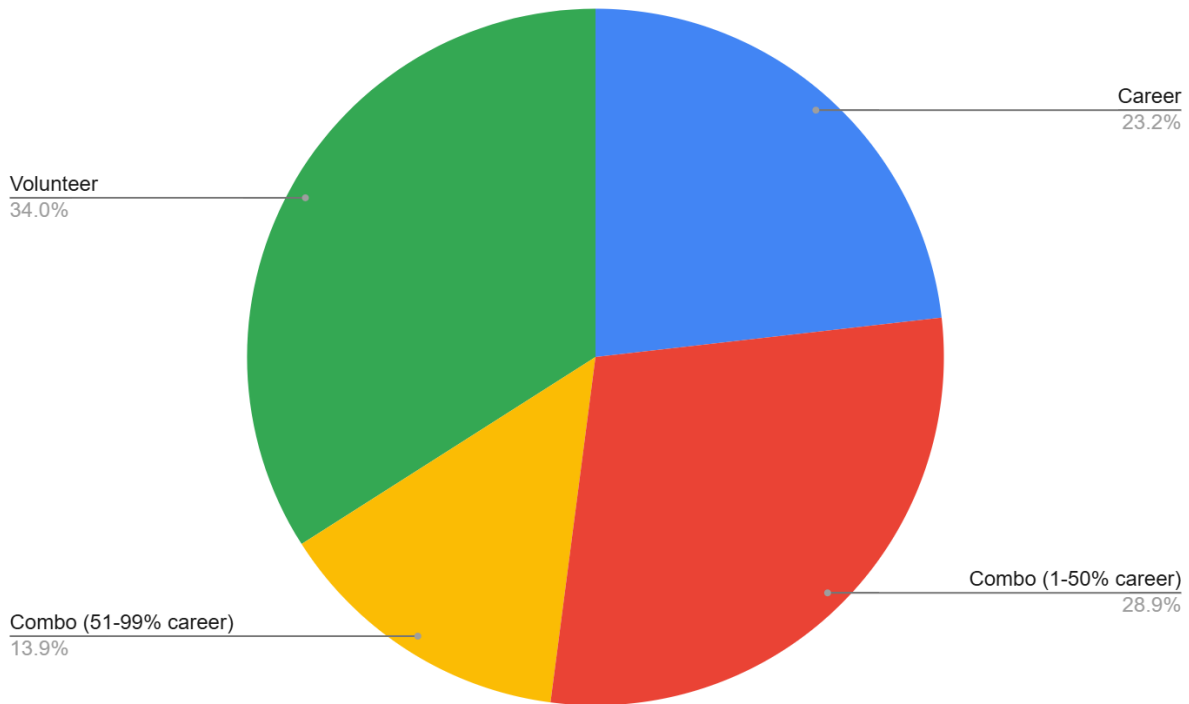


Figure 1: Fire Department Type

A major goal of this survey was to understand the financial situation the fire departments face. Throughout the survey the fire departments were asked if they have the funding to meet their identified needs. In order to provide context for those questions, understanding the revenue sources is key.

The majority of fire departments (87%) are funded through property tax (Table 1). Therefore, any changes in property tax revenue may have a detrimental impact on a fire department's ability to meet the service needs of its constituents. In addition, 87% also indicated that they anticipate a reduction in funding over the next two years.

Table 1: Budget Percentages by Revenue Categories

Revenue Category	Average - All Department Types	Average - Career	Average - Combination	Average - Volunteer
Property Tax	87%	80%	94%	81%
Sales Tax	18%	40%	17%	5%
Fundraising	25%	4%	17%	48%
Donations	41%	16%	40%	61%
Grants	56%	47%	55%	62%
Other	20%	31%	19%	13%

Other revenue categories utilized by departments: Wildfire assignments, fees (wildfire mitigation, EMS/ambulance, permits, etc.), oil and natural gas revenue.

Responses: 194

Grants made up 5% of the total revenue for the fire departments yet provide a critical funding stream. The top 3 grants fire departments are planning to apply for over the next 2 years are, in order, DFPC Colorado Firefighter Safety and Disease Prevention Grant (FFSDPG), FEMA Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG), and the DFPC Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant (VFA). However, by type of department, VFA is tied with the FFSDPG grant for volunteer departments, and the AFG is the highest for career departments (Table 2).

Table 2: Grant Opportunities Fire Departments Will Pursue in the Next Two Years

Grant	Total (All Department Types)	Career	Combination	Volunteer
DFPC Colorado Firefighter Safety and Disease Prevention Grant	79%	58%	84%	88%
FEMA Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG)	65%	60%	71%	60%
DFPC Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Grant	53%	2%	53%	88%
FEMA Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant	40%	40%	47%	30%
Private Grant Funding Programs (i.e Firehouse Subs, etc.)	0%	0%	0%	0%
FEMA Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Grant	31%	22%	36%	30%

Grant	Total (All Department Types)	Career	Combination	Volunteer
None	7%	13%	8%	2%

NOTE: Respondents were allowed to check all that applied to them

Responses: 194

B. State of Fire Department Personnel and Personnel Needs

Table 3 lists the reported number of paid and volunteer fire fighters. We conducted a weighted average based on fire department type using the [USFA's National Fire Department Registry](#) and found that an estimated 68% of firefighters in Colorado are volunteers, while the remaining 32% are paid.

Table 3: Current Department Staffing by Position Type

Position Type	Total Number
Paid Firefighters	4401
Volunteer Firefighters	3093

Responses: 194

Table 4 shows the breakdown of personnel needs over the next 2 years. Seventy-two percent (72%) of departments indicated they do not anticipate having the funding for these additional personnel.

Table 4: Additional Staffing Needs in the Next 2 Years

Position Type	Number Needed
Paid Firefighters	1121
Volunteer Firefighters	1142

Responses: 194

Key Takeaways on Staffing

- **Significant Volunteer Presence:** Volunteer firefighters play a crucial role, with the median number of current volunteer firefighters being 15, compared to a median of 2 current paid firefighters. Notably, 46 departments reported having no volunteer firefighters, and 56 departments reported having no paid firefighters.
- **Need for More Staff:** There's a considerable need for additional personnel over the next two years, with a median of 2 additional paid firefighters and 3 additional volunteer firefighters needed.

- **Funding Constraints:** A substantial majority (140 out of 194) of departments do not anticipate having the funds to bring on these additional personnel over the next two years, highlighting a significant challenge in meeting their staffing needs.

C. Firefighter Training and Certifications

Colorado is a voluntary certification state, meaning you do not have to hold any certification to become a firefighter. Many departments require certification to show their communities they have the requisite skills to serve them. In areas that do not participate, that does not indicate a lack of training and preparedness, just that they conduct training outside of the formal state system. 58% of responding fire departments report requiring state certifications. Of those not participating, many are part of the Colorado Municipal Certification Board (CMCB). Members of CMCB departments are trained to the same national standards used by the State.

The reasons many departments do not participate in the state certification program is outlined in Table 5. Overall time commitment is the number one reason. This may be a function of the large number of volunteer firefighters in Colorado. They need to find ways to manage careers, family, and fire department commitments. Gaining fire certifications is time consuming, however the requisite training time is necessary to ensure they have the skills necessary to safely respond to any incident.

Table 5: Challenges to Seeking State Certification

Challenge	Percentage of Surveyed Fire Departments
Time Commitment	77%
Difficulty Maintaining Certifications	53%
Access to Training Facilities / Props	36%
Access to Instructors	34%
Overall Cost	25%
Lack of Value	13%
Other	1%

NOTE: Respondents were allowed to check all that applied to them

Responses: 91

Wildland Firefighter Training

Wildland firefighting training is different from structural training and is overseen by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG). The tactics, PPE, and equipment are different from those used in structural firefighting. Due to the risk of wildfire in Colorado, ensuring that all firefighters have the basic NWCG training is important. Eighty-seven percent (89%) of survey respondents state they provide NWCG basic firefighter classes to their firefighters. Thirty percent (30%) of

the survey respondents reported needing assistance to conduct the training. Basic wildland fire training includes S-130 Firefighter Training and S-190 Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior, along with L-180 Human Factors in the Wildland Fire Service, Incident Command System (ICS) -100 Introduction to ICS and IS-700 National Incident Management System (NIMS): An Introduction. Once a firefighter completes basic training they are certified as Firefighter Type 2 (Crew Member).

If the firefighter wants to maintain their certification beyond the first year, they must take the RT-130 - Wildland Fire Safety Annual Training Refresher and pack test, a physical assessment of the firefighter’s ability to work in remote areas. In order to be approved to work on a federal lead wildfire, firefighters must have a “red card”. This is proof of their training, as well as that they have completed the annual refresher training and pack test. Sixty-eight percent (60%) of fire departments required their firefighters to take the RT-130 class and pack test. Twenty-six percent (26%) reported needing assistance to conduct the training.

Beyond the basic wildland firefighting, firefighters can pursue advanced certifications. Eighty-seven percent (75%) of fire departments stated that their firefighters seek these advanced certifications, including Firefighter Type 1 (Squad Boss) and Single Resource Boss.

Training Priorities

The following two tables (Tables 6, 7) provide the training priorities identified through this survey. Table 6 identifies Firefighter I, Fire Apparatus Driver/Operator Pumper, Fire Officer I, Firefighter II, and Fire Apparatus Driver / Operator - Pumper as the top five priorities for certification.

Table 7 identifies Interior Firefighter, Driver / Operator, and Fire Leadership as the top three priority training levels.

Table 6: Top Five Priority Certification Levels

Certification / Training Level	Percentage of Surveyed Fire Departments
Firefighter I	66.49%
Fire Apparatus Driver / Operator	61.00%
Fire Officer I	48.96%
Firefighter II	42.78%
Fire Apparatus Driver / Operator - Pumper	42.70%
Hazardous Materials Awareness	41.20%
NWCG Single Resource Boss qualifications (Engine Boss, Crew Boss, etc.)	36.08%
Fire Instructor I	35.05%

Certification / Training Level	Percentage of Surveyed Fire Departments
Hazardous Materials Awareness/Operations	33.50%
NWCG Firefighter Type 2 Basic Wildland Firefighter (FFT2)	27.83%
NWCG Firefighter Type 1 Squad Boss (FFT1)	26.20%
36-Hour Basic Firefighter	25.00%
Fire Officer II	22.16%
Hazardous Materials Technician	20.10%
Live Fire Instructor (1403)	19.07%
Incident Safety Officer	16.49%
Fire Apparatus Driver / Operator - Aerial	15.40%
Fire Apparatus Driver / Operator - Tender	10.30%
Fire Instructor II	10.30%
Fire Investigator	7.73%
Fire Inspector I	6.70%
Fire and Life Safety Educator I	4.64%
Fire Officer III	4.60%
Other	3.09%
Fire Instructor III	2.06%
Fire and Life Safety Educator II	2.06%
Airport Firefighter	2.00%
Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist I	1.00%
Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist II	0.51%

NOTE: Respondents were allowed to check all that applied to them

Responses: 194

Table 7: Top Five Priority Training Focus Areas

Certification / Training Level	Percentage of Surveyed Fire Departments
Interior Firefighter	79%
Driver / Operator	60%

Certification / Training Level	Percentage of Surveyed Fire Departments
Fire Leadership	55%
Wildland Fire Response	53%
Vehicle Extrication	52%
Electric Vehicle/Lithium-Ion Battery Fire Response	45%
SCBA Skills	34%
Water Supply	33%
Exterior Firefighter	32%
Grant Application / Management	23%
Traffic Incident Management (TIMs)	14%
Resiliency / Peer Support	13%
Man vs Machine (equipment entrapment)	10%
Fire Prevention / Education	9%
Fire Department Administration	9%
Other	3%

Other training focus topics: EMS, structural collapse, fire investigation, wildland drone operation, photovoltaics

NOTE: Respondents were allowed to check all that applied to them

Responses: 194

When asked how DFPC can support local training programs, the needs identified covered all aspects of training. Table 8 shows the support needs of Colorado's fire departments.

Table 8: Resources Needed from the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control

Support Requested	Percentage of Surveyed Fire Departments
Access to Training Classes	65%
Access to Training Props / Facilities	56%
Access to Qualified Instructors	48%
Access to Written Testing	42%
Hybrid Firefighter I Academy (Combination of self-study, live virtual instruction, skill videos, and in person skills days)	42%
Virtual Training Classes	39%

Training Program Development Support	30%
Waive Testing Fees	18%
Other	5%

Other opportunities for support: Mobile ARFF props, grants to teach wildland classes, align state programs with CMCB, make certification tests available in Spanish

NOTE: Respondents were allowed to check all that applied to them

Responses: 194

D. Facilities

Table 9 identifies the types of improvements fire departments are in need of over the next two years. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of fire departments do not anticipate having adequate funding to implement these improvements.

Table 9: Improvements/New Construction Needed in the Next Two Years

Needed Improvement / Construction	Percentage of Surveyed Fire Departments
Improvement / remodeling of existing station	61%
Addition to existing station(s)	38%
New constructed station(s)	37%
Addition or replacement of exhaust / ventilation system	34%
Installation of backup power	32%
Other	12%
No new facilities or improvements currently needed	8%

Other(s): Building and maintaining training facilities, storage, fitness equipment, airflow lockers

NOTE: Respondents were allowed to check all that applied to them

Response: 194

E. Apparatus

Apparatus is the most expensive piece of equipment both in terms of initial purchase and on-going maintenance. The survey asked departments to document the new and/or replacement apparatus they need over the next two years. Table 10 provides the number by apparatus type sorted from most to the least. Only twenty percent (20%) of fire departments believe they have the funds available for their apparatus needs.

Table 10: New or Replacement Apparatus Needed in Next Two Years

Apparatus Type	Number Needed
Engine / Pumper (Type 1)	140
Wildland Brush Truck (Type 6)	109
Ambulance / Other Patient Transport	79
Command Vehicle (SUV)	92
Water Tender	95
WUI Engine (Type 3)	79
Command Support Unit	39
Aerial Apparatus (Mid-mount, Rear-mount, Tiller, Tower)	32
EUV / ATV / Snowcat	17
Heavy Technical Rescue Vehicle	19
Quint (Engine / Ladder Combination) Vehicle	23
Logistical Support Apparatus (Air, Light, Rehab, etc.)	10
Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT) Vehicle	11
Fire / Rescue Boat	6
Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting (ARFF) Vehicle	2

Responses: 194

F. Equipment

The equipment required for firefighting includes the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that protects the firefighters to thermal imaging cameras that help them see in low visibility environments. Having the proper equipment is critical not only to firefighters' safety and health but to allow them to address any incident. Firefighter safety is a top priority and having the proper PPE is the best way to reduce risks to them. The Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) provides protection from superheated gases, smoke and other toxic gases. Often due to budget issues, an SCBA mask may be assigned to a seat on an apparatus rather than an individual firefighter.

Another area of risk to the firefighter is contaminated PPE. The contamination on PPE has been linked to higher cancer rates found in firefighters over the general population. One way to ensure the firefighters have properly cleaned gear is to wash it in a bunker gear extractor. These are specially designed machines that clean the gear without harming the gear's protective properties. Another option is to give each firefighter two sets of bunker gear so that

one can be cleaned while the other is worn on incidents. The cost of two sets of bunker gear is a limiting factor for many fire departments.

Table 11 details the equipment needs for the fire departments that participated in this survey. In addition to the number, the average costs for these items are also included to provide an idea of the overall costs of addressing this need.

Table 11: Equipment and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Needs

Equipment Type	Number Needed	Average Per Unit Cost ¹	Estimated Costs to Meet Current Needs
Structural Firefighting PPE (coat and pants) - Initial sets.	1707	\$2,675	\$4,566,225
Structural Firefighting PPE (coat and pant sets) - Second sets	1515	\$2,675	\$4,052,625
Nomex Particulate Hoods	2127	\$75	\$159,525
Structural Gloves	2000	\$70	\$140,000
Non-Leather Helmets	1429	\$279	\$398,691
Structure Boots	1970	\$248	\$488,560
SCBA	1255	\$8,128	\$10,200,640
SCBA Mask	1607	\$369	\$592,983
Wildland Firefighting PPE	1646	\$242	\$398,332
Wildland Boots	1778	\$300	\$533,400
Wildland Gloves	1497	\$35	\$52,395
Wildland Helmets	1363	\$87	\$118,581
Wildland Line Packs	953	\$199	\$189,647
Wildland Fire Shelters	1231	\$525	\$646,275
Thermal Imaging Cameras	202	\$5,000	\$1,010,000
Air Monitoring Equipment (4-gas monitor)	166	\$1,069	\$177,454
Bunker Gear Extractor	45	\$15,000	\$675,000
Tech Rescue PPE	902	\$978	\$882,156

¹ The average cost per unit was based on the contracted prices DFPC used for the Direct Distribution of PPE funded through HB22-1194. Actual market prices will be higher.

		Total Needs:	\$25,282,489
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Responses: 194

Other equipment needs: Extrication equipment, radios, hoses + tools, compressor for SCBA cylinders, hazmat suits, vehicle stabilization struts, cold weather jackets, mobile satellite phones and wi-fi, ballistic vests + helmets, battery vent fan, cardiac monitors, etc.

G. Overall Needs

The final questions in the survey asked the fire departments to rank the needs related to personnel, training, apparatus, facilities, and equipment. Overall ranking showed that personnel are the top need followed by apparatus, training, facilities and equipment. Eighty-two percent (82%) of fire departments indicated they do not have adequate funding to address their top three needs.

IV. Challenges

The survey asked a number of narrative questions to better understand the overall challenges facing the Colorado Fire Service. This section will summarize the information provided through these narrative responses.

A. Challenges Faced by Fire Departments

The challenges reported by fire departments are diverse and interconnected, impacting their overall operational capabilities and ability to serve their communities effectively. Here's a summary of the key themes:

- **Funding and Financial Constraints:** This is a pervasive challenge, with departments citing insufficient funding for operations, equipment, apparatus replacement, facility maintenance and upgrades, and staffing (both paid and volunteer). Specific issues include reliance on limited or declining tax revenues, difficulties in passing mill levies, and the rising costs of equipment, fuel, and insurance.
- **Staffing Shortages:** Many departments, particularly volunteer and combination departments, struggle with recruitment and retention of personnel. Factors contributing to this include the time commitment required, lack of benefits, aging volunteer base, increased training requirements, and competition from other demands on individuals' time. Paid departments also face challenges with staffing levels and the ability to offer competitive wages and benefits.
- **Equipment and Apparatus Needs:** Departments frequently report needing to replace aging or outdated apparatus and equipment, as well as acquiring new specialized equipment to meet evolving needs (e.g., wildland firefighting, technical rescue, EMS). The high cost of these items, coupled with limited funding, creates a significant hurdle.
- **Training Demands:** Meeting increasing training requirements and ensuring personnel have the necessary skills is a major challenge. This includes the time commitment for volunteers, the cost of training programs, access to qualified instructors and training facilities, and the need for specialized training (e.g., wildland, technical rescue, EV fires).

- **Facility Issues:** Many departments face challenges with aging or inadequate facilities, including the need for repairs, upgrades (e.g., ventilation systems, backup power), expansions to accommodate growth, or even new station construction. Funding for these capital projects is often difficult to secure.
- **Wildland Fire Preparedness:** Given the increasing risk of wildfires, many departments highlight the challenges of adequately preparing for and responding to wildland fires. This includes the need for specialized equipment, training, and interagency coordination.
- **Grant Funding:** While grants are a vital funding source, departments often face challenges in identifying suitable grant opportunities, navigating complex application processes, and securing awards, especially for equipment requests.
- **Administrative Burden:** The increasing administrative requirements associated with grants, reporting, and compliance can strain the limited resources of smaller departments, particularly those staffed primarily by volunteers.
- **Community Demographics and Needs:** Some departments note challenges related to changing community demographics, increased call volumes, and the expanding scope of services they are expected to provide (e.g., EMS, community risk reduction).\

B. Challenges in Securing Grant Funding

Securing grant funding is often critical for fire departments to address their needs, but they face several obstacles:

- **Complexity of Application Processes:** Grant applications can be lengthy, complex, and require significant time and expertise to complete, which can be a challenge for departments with limited administrative staff or volunteer grant writers.
- **Limited Grant Opportunities:** The availability of grants may not always align with the specific needs of a department, or the funding amounts may be insufficient to cover the total cost of a project.
- **Increased Competition:** There is often intense competition for available grant funds, making it difficult for all deserving departments to receive awards.
- **Specific Eligibility Requirements:** Grant programs often have strict eligibility criteria that some departments may not meet.
- **Matching Fund Requirements:** Some grants require matching funds from the department, which can be a barrier for those with limited local revenue.
- **Focus on Specific Priorities:** Grant funding priorities may shift over time, and departments' needs may not always align with current funding priorities.
- **Difficulty in Securing Funding for Certain Items:** Some departments report particular difficulty in obtaining grant funding for specific types of equipment, such as apparatus.
- **Administrative Burden of Grant Management:** Managing grant funds and meeting reporting requirements can be time-consuming and require specific expertise.

C. Challenges in Meeting Training Needs

Providing adequate training for fire personnel presents several challenges:

4. **Time Commitment for Volunteers:** Volunteer firefighters often have limited time outside of their regular jobs and family responsibilities, making it difficult to attend lengthy or frequent training sessions.
5. **Cost of Training Programs:** Tuition fees, travel expenses, and the cost of instructors can be significant, especially for departments with limited budgets.
6. **Accessibility of Training:** Access to training facilities, qualified instructors, and specialized training programs may be limited, particularly for departments in rural or remote areas.
7. **Maintaining Certifications:** Ongoing training and recertification requirements can be burdensome for both paid and volunteer staff.
8. **Balancing Basic and Advanced Training:** Departments need to provide foundational training for new recruits while also offering advanced and specialized training for experienced personnel.
9. **Scheduling Conflicts:** Coordinating training schedules that accommodate the availability of both paid and volunteer staff can be challenging.
10. **Lack of Local Training Resources:** Some departments may lack the internal capacity or resources to conduct their own training programs.
11. **Keeping Up with Evolving Standards and Technologies:** The fire service is constantly evolving, requiring ongoing training to keep personnel up to date on new techniques, technologies, and best practices (e.g., EV fires, wildland tactics).

D. Challenges in Recruiting and Retaining

Recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters is a growing concern for many departments:

- **Decreasing Availability of Volunteers:** Changing demographics, increased demands on individuals' time, and a decline in community involvement contribute to a shrinking pool of potential volunteers.
- **Time Commitment Required:** The time commitment for training, meetings, and emergency responses can be a significant deterrent for prospective volunteers.
- **Lack of Benefits and Incentives:** Unlike paid firefighters, volunteers typically do not receive salaries or comprehensive benefits packages.
- **Increased Training Requirements:** The increasing complexity and rigor of training requirements can be a barrier to recruitment and retention.
- **Aging Volunteer Base:** Many volunteer departments have an aging membership, with fewer younger individuals stepping up to fill their roles.
- **Physical Demands of the Job:** The physically demanding nature of firefighting can deter some individuals from volunteering.
- **Liability Concerns:** Potential liability associated with emergency response can be a concern for volunteers.
- **Lack of Community Awareness and Support:** A lack of public understanding of the role and needs of volunteer fire departments can hinder recruitment efforts.
- **Competition from Other Volunteer Opportunities:** Individuals may choose to volunteer their time for other causes.

- **Burnout and Stress:** The demands of emergency response can lead to burnout and stress among volunteers, contributing to attrition.

E. Other Challenges and Needs

In addition to the previously mentioned challenges, fire departments reported a variety of other needs and concerns:

- **Need for Improved Communication Systems:** Reliable and interoperable communication systems are essential for effective emergency response, especially across different agencies and jurisdictions.
- **Desire for More Collaboration and Networking:** Opportunities to share best practices, resources, and collaborate with other fire departments and agencies are highly valued.
- **Need for Public Education and Outreach:** Many departments emphasize the importance of public education programs to prevent fires and other emergencies, as well as to increase community support for the fire service.
- **Challenges Related to Wildland Urban Interface (WUI):** Departments in WUI areas face unique challenges related to access, water supply, and the need for specialized equipment and training.
- **Impact of Increasing Call Volumes:** Some departments are experiencing rising call volumes for both fire and EMS services, straining their resources.
- **Need for Mental Health Support for Firefighters:** The demanding and often traumatic nature of the job highlights the need for mental health resources and support for fire personnel.
- **Challenges with Volunteer Retention Due to Increased Demands:** Even beyond recruitment, retaining volunteers is difficult due to the growing responsibilities and time commitments.
- **Need for Updated Technology and Data Management:** Implementing and maintaining modern technology for dispatch, record-keeping, and data analysis is a challenge for some departments.
- **Concerns about Regulatory Burdens:** Some departments express concerns about increasing regulations and administrative requirements.
- **Need for Succession Planning:** Ensuring a smooth transition of leadership and knowledge within departments, especially volunteer organizations, is a concern.

F. Impact of Unmet Needs on Public Safety

The inability to address the challenges outlined above has significant consequences for the safety and well-being of the communities served by these fire departments:

- **Delayed Response Times:** Understaffing, outdated apparatus, and lack of necessary equipment can lead to delays in responding to emergencies, potentially worsening outcomes for victims.

- **Reduced Operational Effectiveness:** Without adequate training, equipment, and staffing, firefighters may not be able to perform their duties safely and effectively, limiting their ability to control fires, perform rescues, and provide medical aid.
- **Increased Risk to Firefighters:** Using outdated or inadequate equipment and lacking sufficient training increases the risks of injury or even death for firefighters.
- **Inability to Meet Growing Demands:** As communities grow and the types of emergencies evolve, departments with unmet needs may struggle to provide the necessary level of service, leaving residents vulnerable.
- **Higher Insurance Costs:** Inadequate fire protection capabilities can lead to higher insurance rates for property owners in the community.
- **Loss of Volunteer Personnel:** Frustration with inadequate resources, increased demands, and lack of support can lead to volunteers leaving the fire service, further exacerbating staffing shortages.
- **Decreased Community Safety:** Ultimately, the cumulative effect of unmet needs is a reduction in the overall level of public safety and an increased risk of loss of life and property.
- **Strain on Mutual Aid Systems:** When individual departments are under-resourced, it puts a greater burden on neighboring departments through mutual aid agreements, potentially stretching regional resources thin during large-scale incidents.
- **Difficulty in Implementing Prevention Programs:** Limited resources may hinder a department's ability to invest in fire prevention and community risk reduction programs, which are crucial for proactively reducing emergencies.

V. Conclusion

Based on the results of this survey, the Colorado Fire Service has needs that far exceed their current funding. This has not yet limited their ability to meet the needs of their constituents, however, without the funding to add personnel, update apparatus and equipment, and adequate training the firefighters are at risk. The Colorado Fire Service, along with their partners, need to work on solutions that will allow all of Colorado's fire departments to meet their community's needs. These issues are not isolated to one department and as a result, the stress on the Colorado Fire Service is statewide.

There are many efforts underway to address these needs. The Colorado Fire Commission is working to address recruitment and retention and put forth a recommendation to address firefighter training; the Colorado Legislature put forward \$5 million through HB22-1194 and an additional \$10 million through SB22-002 to address funding needs for PPE and firefighter mental health. The annual FFSDPG and VFA grants are also available to address PPE and equipment needs. These are steps in the right direction to support the people who serve the citizens of Colorado and those that vacation in the State.

The DFPC will use the information to help develop strategies to address the needs of Colorado's Fire Service. This is an effort that will take more than DFPC, it will take the

creativity, the skills, and the efforts of everyone engaged in or served by the Colorado Fire Service.