



Crook County Fire and Rescue

Organizational Assessment

November 2024





Rafilson and Associates
19151 NW Chiloquin Drive
Bend Or 987703
(773) 255-9532

Matt Smith
Fire Chief
Crook County Fire and Rescue
500 NE Belknap Street
Prineville, OR 97754

Dear Chief Smith,

We are pleased to present this comprehensive organizational assessment for Crook County Fire and Rescue. Ensuring effective and cohesive fire and emergency services is vital to the safety and well-being of the community, and this report reflects our commitment to supporting the department's growth and operational excellence.

This assessment is grounded in data and feedback provided by Crook County Fire and Rescue personnel, offering a thorough analysis of the department's structure, staffing, operational strategies, and organizational culture. We have included actionable recommendations aimed at strengthening existing practices, enhancing collaboration, and promoting overall effectiveness within the department. Implementing these recommendations will support Crook County Fire and Rescue in its mission to deliver reliable, responsive, and strategic emergency services to the community.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all participants who contributed their time and insights throughout the assessment process.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with Crook County Fire and Rescue. We look forward to supporting the department's continued success and its efforts to provide exceptional service to the community.

Sincerely,

Fred M. Rafilson, Ph.D.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
INTRODUCTION	6
DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW	9
ANALYSIS AND KEY OBSERVATIONS	11
RECOGNITIONS	11
KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT	12
<i>Communication Effectiveness</i>	12
<i>Trust and Transparency</i>	14
<i>Collaboration and Team Dynamics</i>	15
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	17
EMBRACE THE RESULTS OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT	18
STANDARDIZE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS	21
BUILD COMMUNITY AND ADDRESS CONFLICTS	24
STRENGTHEN THE STRATEGIC PLAN.....	27
ENHANCE LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY	29
FOSTER AN EMPOWERING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ...	34
LEADERSHIP TRAINING	37
PHASED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN	39
EMBRACE THE RESULTS OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT	40
STANDARDIZE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS	42
BUILD COMMUNITY AND ADDRESS CONFLICTS	44
STRENGTHEN THE STRATEGIC PLAN.....	46
ENHANCE LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY	47
FOSTER AN EMPOWERING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ...	50
LEADERSHIP TRAINING	52
CONCLUSION	54
APPENDIX A - DOCUMENTS REVIEWED	55
APPENDIX B - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	57
APPENDIX C - RESOURCES.....	63

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Crook County Fire and Rescue Organizational Assessment

This organizational assessment of Crook County Fire & Rescue was commissioned by the Board and Senior Leadership to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the department's internal dynamics. The assessment aims to offer an objective view of CCFR's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement across key focus areas. These areas include department climate and culture, communication effectiveness, strategic goal achievement, conflict dynamics, leadership effectiveness, and change management readiness.

Through in-depth interviews with personnel at all levels and a thorough review of relevant documents, this assessment offers valuable insights into how well the department fosters collaboration, transparency, and productivity. The findings and subsequent recommendations are designed to address root challenges, enhance operational effectiveness, and support the department's long-term success as it prepares for future growth.

In recent years, Crook County Fire and Rescue (CCFR) has undergone significant operational changes, including a major remodel of their main fire station, changes in leadership and supporting the new collective bargaining unit. Concurrent with these advancements, CCFR faces several pressing challenges: a vast service area, strained resources due to industrial growth, and consistent staffing shortages. These challenges have, understandably, created some internal conflicts, logistical complexities, and impacted overall morale.

This assessment acknowledges CCFR's proactive investment in identifying areas for improvement through a structured evaluation process. It also highlights the need for strategic workforce planning, conflict resolution training, and further investment in leadership development to maintain service quality and foster a positive work environment.

Recognitions: While this assessment primarily identifies growth opportunities, it's crucial to acknowledge CCFR's numerous strengths, which serve as essential foundations for future success:

- **Leadership Acknowledgement:** CCFR's Board and senior leadership should be commended for proactively addressing evolving challenges by undertaking this organizational assessment.
- **Member Commitment:** Department wide, members have demonstrated a strong commitment to the agency's success and are eager to contribute to positive changes.
- **Strategic Planning for Growth:** The Fire Chief and Board have proactively planned for community growth and industrial development, including new industries like data centers.
- **Supportive Leadership:** Members value leadership's flexibility in accommodating personal situations.
- **Respect for Chain of Command:** Members demonstrate a strong respect for hierarchy, indicating a willingness to follow established protocols.

- **Effective Planning Calendar:** The Board's calendar enables focused discussions on key areas like financial planning, governance, and community engagement.
- **Union-Management Communication:** Meetings between union representatives and management promote ongoing dialogue and collaboration.

These strengths provide a solid foundation as CCFR moves forward with the recommended improvements.

Key Recommendations: Building on the organizational strengths identified above, the implementation of the following recommendations will further enhance the effectiveness and resilience of Crook County Fire & Rescue.

1. **Embrace the Results of the Organizational Assessment:** Form a cross-functional team to address the recommendations herein and ensure progress, fostering a more engaged workforce.
2. **Standardize Communication Channels:** Establish clear and consistent communication protocols to enhance transparency and ensure effective information flow.
3. **Build Community and Address Conflicts:** Provide department wide conflict resolution training to improve morale and create opportunities for relationship building.
4. **Strengthen the Strategic Plan:** Reassess the department's strategic plan, incorporating feedback from members and the community to ensure alignment with long-term goals.
5. **Enhance Leadership Accountability and Transparency:** Establish consistent policy enforcement and regularly use tools to gauge employee morale, fostering stronger trust between members and leadership.
6. **Foster an Empowering Organizational Culture:** Delegate responsibility and authority to members, encouraging ownership of special projects, which will boost morale and growth.
7. **Leadership Training:** Provide comprehensive leadership training across all levels to improve team management, communication, and decision-making skills.

Effective change management at CCFR requires strong guidance from the Board and senior leadership, along with the active commitment of every member. While leadership sets direction and provides support, success relies on each member's role in fostering a collaborative environment and helping these changes take root. Embracing this assessment as a unified team is a crucial first step toward building on strengths, bridging gaps, shifting perceptions, and creating a more unified, resilient future.

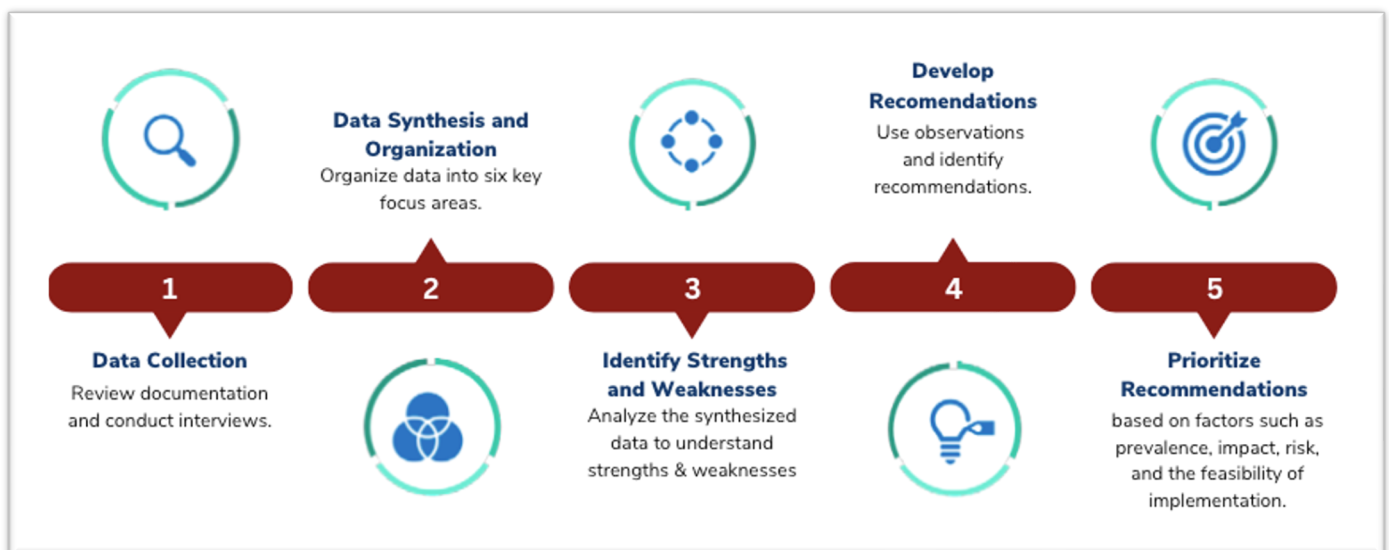
Recognizing the scope of these recommendations, the assessment proposes a phased implementation approach, with extended timelines, multiple participants, and the recommended use of professional services that can be used to ensure manageable, steady progress.

INTRODUCTION

This organizational assessment of Crook County Fire & Rescue provides a comprehensive evaluation of the department's climate, communication effectiveness, and progress toward strategic goals. By employing a structured methodology that integrates both qualitative and quantitative data collection, this assessment offers an objective evaluation of the organization. The analysis identifies strengths and areas for improvement across key areas such as department culture, leadership perception, and change readiness, culminating in actionable recommendations to enhance performance and cohesion.

Scope of the Project Our organizational analysis focused on work environment, information flow, goal alignment, conflict resolution, leadership perception, and readiness for change, to assess and enhance overall effectiveness.

Methodology Rafilson and Associates (R&A) conducted the assessment using a structured, systematic approach to ensure a thorough and objective analysis. The following steps were taken:



- 1. Data Collection:** First, R&A reviewed internal documents and interviewed department and board members, analyzing both internal and external materials and engaging key stakeholders to ensure a thorough organizational assessment.
 - Document Review:** As part of the organizational assessment, we conducted a thorough review of internal documents to provide insight into the department's policies, procedures, and strategic priorities. Each document was analyzed in relation to the study's goals. Key materials, including policies, performance reports, and strategic plans, were evaluated to identify strengths, gaps, and improvement opportunities. Findings from this document review were cross-referenced with interview data to validate trends, identify inconsistencies, and enhance our overall understanding. A complete list of reviewed documents is available in [Appendix A](#).

- **Interviews:** All career members and Board members of Crook County Fire and Rescue were invited to participate in individual in-person interviews. In cases where onsite discussions were not feasible, web meetings were arranged to ensure full participation. Each interview was conducted between a representative from R&A and the individual employee. Participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential. Employees were also made aware that interviews were recorded to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information collected. Crucially, participants were reassured that no recordings, transcripts, or personally identifiable information would be shared with the department, fostering an environment of open and honest feedback. A complete list of interview questions is available in [Appendix B](#).
2. **Data Synthesis and Organization:** The collected data was synthesized and organized into key focus areas: department climate and culture, information flow, goal alignment, conflict resolution, leadership perception, and readiness for change. These insights offer valuable data, foster constructive discussions, and support the adoption of innovative ideas and practices.
 - **Clarifying Roles:** To ensure consistency throughout the analysis and recommendations, this report utilizes the following leadership hierarchy for a clear understanding of the department's structure:
 - **Board of Directors:** Provides governance and oversight, sets departmental policies, approves budgets, evaluates the Fire Chief's performance, and ensures the department aligns with community needs and long-term strategic goals.
 - **Senior Leadership:** Includes the Fire Chief and Division Chiefs, who are responsible for strategic decision-making and overall departmental leadership.
 - **Command Rank:** Includes the Battalion Chiefs, who provide operational leadership and manage emergency responses.
 - **Lieutenants:** Hold supervisory roles, overseeing daily operations and guiding crews during emergency situations.
 - **Line Staff:** Firefighter/Medics who serve as the frontline responders, handling direct emergency response tasks.
 3. **Identification of Strengths and Weaknesses:** While our review highlighted many strengths within the department, the goal of this report was to identify areas with potential for improvement. Through a structured and comprehensive analysis of the data, we carefully examined patterns, trends, and critical factors that impact the department's overall effectiveness, focusing on areas where growth and development could further enhance performance.
 4. **Development of Comprehensive Recommendations:** Based on our analysis, we created detailed observations that offer insight into the organization's current state within each focus area. From these observations, we formulated targeted recommendations to address identified challenges and reinforce existing strengths. Each recommendation

includes specific objectives, suggested tasks to achieve those objectives, and additional narrative explaining the rationale and approach for the recommended actions.

5. **Prioritization of Recommendations:** The recommendations were then prioritized in an implementation plan tailored for Crook County Fire and Rescue. This plan features a timeline that sequences recommendations to build momentum, with each success laying the foundation for the next. Individual implementation timelines are provided for each recommendation with a detailed schedule based on the recommended start time.

This methodology ensured a thorough, objective, and actionable assessment of the organization's current state, recognizing its strengths while also identifying areas for improvement. This approach provides a solid foundation for informed decision-making and strategic planning.

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

Crook County Fire & Rescue (CCFR) is an emergency response agency serving a rapidly growing community of approximately 26,000 residents in Central Oregon, which includes the City of Prineville and the communities of Powell Butte, Juniper Canyon, and Lone Pine.

CCFR operates from three fire stations, providing fire protection services across a coverage area of 450 square miles and ambulance services extending over 3,000 square miles. The agency is staffed by approximately 50 emergency responders, including 33 career members, supported by numerous students and part-time members, organized into three shifts to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Annually, CCFR responds to approximately 3,600 calls for service annually, demonstrating the agency's critical role in the community. In recent years, the district has experienced substantial growth, with a nearly \$900 million increase in taxable valuation and over \$5 billion in industrial growth, reflecting the area's ongoing development.

- **Mission, Vision & Values** Crook County Fire and Rescue exists to protect, preserve and support the people and property within its service area by using available resources in a manner that demonstrates fiscal and functional responsibility and accountability. Their vision is to provide the best fire and EMS service possible with the money the community provides and support a work environment that attracts and maintains excellence.

Crook County Fire & Rescue

OUR CREDO We are humble professionals that continually strive to maintain trust with our members and the people we serve We maintain integrity at all times- we recognize we are always under the watchful eye of the community we serve We will serve with care and compassion

Our Values

Integrity	Professionalism	Accountability	Humility
Candor	Dependable	Respect	Transparency

- **Core Services and Programs:** Crook County Fire & Rescue (CCFR) delivers a comprehensive range of services to protect the community. Their core functions include fire suppression, where line staff are trained to handle fire emergencies and provide essential EMS support. Rescue operations encompass managing complex incidents, such as motor vehicle accidents and industrial emergencies. Additionally, CCFR is committed to public education and community risk reduction, with firefighters and EMTs actively engaging with residents to promote safety practices and prevent emergencies. These services reflect CCFR's dedication to community protection and preparedness.
- **Key participants:** The success of Crook County Fire & Rescue (CCFR) relies on a collaborative effort from three main groups. The Fire Board provides strategic direction, policy-making, and financial oversight. The senior leadership, command rank, and administrative staff manage daily operations, financial planning, and policy implementation. The line staff, consisting of lieutenants, firefighters and EMTs, form the backbone of CCFR, delivering essential services like fire suppression, EMS, rescue operations, and public education, while engaging directly with the community to uphold the organization's mission and values.
- **Key Challenges:** CCFR faces several significant challenges including managing an expansive service area (450 square miles for fire protection and 3,000 square miles for ambulance services) relative to its department size. The addition of large industrial data centers further strains resources. Staffing shortages, exacerbated by recent retirements, promotions, and vacancies have affected operational continuity and strained remaining personnel. Additionally, the fire station relocation introduces logistical challenges. Internal conflicts have arisen, affecting morale and effectiveness. These challenges highlight the need for strategic workforce planning, conflict resolution, and strong leadership to foster a positive work environment and maintain service quality as the department navigates these challenges.
- **Opportunity:** The members of Crook County Fire & Rescue are clearly dedicated to the organization's success. By actively listening to the members' insights and feedback and incorporating their perspectives into decision-making processes, the organization has an opportunity to address challenges more effectively. Embracing the results of this study will strengthen the team and support the implementation of strategies that drive the organization forward, fostering a more resilient, cohesive department and enhancing overall morale as they work toward achieving their goals.

ANALYSIS AND KEY OBSERVATIONS

This analysis details numerous strengths in addition to several challenges facing CCFR. Many of the challenges identified are common among fire departments, particularly those that are smaller and experiencing rapid growth. However, addressing these challenges is essential for the long-term success and continued development of Crook County Fire & Rescue. This section provides a detailed summary of our findings and insights, forming a foundation for the department's future growth and transformation.

As outlined, our organizational analysis focused on key areas: work environment (collaboration, communication, and trust), information flow (efficiency of communication channels), goal alignment (progress toward strategic objectives), conflict resolution (management of internal conflicts), leadership perception (effectiveness of leadership styles), and readiness for change (preparation for upcoming transitions). Rather than categorizing recognitions and recommendations solely by these focus areas, the proposed strategies leverage the organization's strengths to provide holistic solutions that address multiple operational challenges simultaneously and identify opportunities for future growth.

Recognitions

It is important to note that this section is intentionally brief, as the primary objective of this analysis is to identify areas for growth and development. However, the brevity of this section should not be interpreted as a minimization of the department's many positive attributes. Crook County Fire & Rescue has numerous strengths, and these should be acknowledged as essential building blocks for future success.

- **Leadership Acknowledgement:** The Board and senior leadership at CCFR should be commended for taking proactive steps to address the department's evolving challenges by undertaking this organizational assessment. Leadership's commitment to identifying areas for improvement—especially amidst the complexities of ongoing staffing vacancies, which have led to increased overtime costs, loss of revenue and emotional strain on remaining personnel—demonstrates a forward-thinking approach to maintaining operational continuity, service quality, and member morale. By initiating this study, CCFR leadership is showing a clear dedication to fostering a positive work environment, enhancing internal processes, and ensuring the department's long-term success.
- **Member Commitment and Willingness for Improvement:** Across all levels of the organization, members have demonstrated a strong commitment to the department's success and are eager to contribute to positive changes. Employees remain dedicated to their roles and express a readiness to engage in processes that promote collaboration, transparency, and overall department growth. This willingness to participate in change reflects a motivated workforce that can be leveraged to drive future improvements. This is evidenced, in part, by the 97% participation rate in the interview process. Only one employee

did not participate in the interview, which appears to be due to being unavailable rather than a lack of willingness.

- **Infrastructure growth:** Across multiple interviews, it's evident that the Fire Chief and Board has a strong grasp of high-level, long-term strategic and financial planning needed to accommodate the community's infrastructure growth given the arrival of new industries like data centers.
- **Recognizing Leadership Support and Flexibility** Members expressed gratitude for instances where leadership demonstrated flexibility and support for employees dealing with personal situations, such as caring for spouses or children, by ensuring they were covered despite limited leave. This commitment to finding solutions during difficult times is commendable and reflects positively on the department's efforts to support its members.
- **Respect for Chain of Command:** The team demonstrates a solid respect for and understanding of the need to follow the chain of command. The respect for this hierarchy not only supports leadership but also promotes a culture where responsibility, communication, and collaboration throughout the department can thrive.
- **Board Planning Calendar:** This well-organized calendar effectively outlines key topics for board meetings and work sessions throughout the year. Its structure allows for focused discussions on critical areas, such as financial planning, strategic objectives, governance, and community engagement, ensuring timely attention to essential matters. Quarterly work sessions enable in-depth examination of important topics, demonstrating the department's commitment to continuous improvement and effective governance. Overall, the calendar provides a strong foundation for guiding the department's activities and goals.
- **Union-Management Communication:** The implementation of structured meetings, such as the monthly labor-management meetings, has created a consistent platform for open communication between union representatives and management, fostering collaboration and ensuring ongoing dialogue on key concerns.

Key Opportunities for Improvement

Interviews with members across all ranks offered critical insights into the department's operational challenges. Although individual perspectives can sometimes lead to varied interpretations, the consistency of feedback indicates that the concerns outlined below are both genuine and significant, warranting their emphasis in this report.

Through in-depth data collection and analysis, we identified three key overarching themes that significantly shape the culture at Crook County Fire and Rescue: Communication Effectiveness, Trust & Transparency, and Collaboration & Team Dynamics. These themes are outlined below, along with an overview of the findings related to each.

Communication Effectiveness

Communication effectiveness has consistently emerged as a major challenge within the department. Members at all levels have expressed concerns about inconsistent and unclear

communication, which has led to confusion and operational inefficiencies. The following are the key issues identified concerning communication within the department.

Issues Identified	Observations
Ineffective communication from senior leadership	Ineffective communication from senior leadership was among the most frequently cited concerns, with 88% of command and line staff indicating agreement on the issue. Members specifically noted inconsistencies in communication, which led to confusion surrounding policies, procedures, and strategic goals. These communication gaps have resulted in inefficiencies and operational challenges.
Awareness of departmental goals	Less than 25% of line staff indicated that they were familiar with departmental goals, and less than 35% of lieutenants reported awareness of these goals. A significant percentage of senior and command chiefs expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the department's communication regarding goals. The lack of goal awareness throughout the department presents a significant challenge, as it hinders alignment between members' daily activities and the department's broader strategic objectives.
Comfort raising concerns with leadership	Only 56% of line staff reported feeling comfortable raising concerns with lieutenants, while only 33% of lieutenants felt comfortable raising concerns with battalion chiefs and/or senior leadership. This suggests that there is a gap in upward communication within the leadership hierarchy, potentially creating barriers to addressing issues or implementing improvements at higher levels of the organization.
Perception of value of communications	While many members acknowledged that leadership maintains an open-door policy, most felt that attempts to communicate were often unproductive. Many perceived Senior leadership as being primarily focused on strategic and financial objectives rather than operational issues, leading to a sense that information shared by members was disregarded. This has contributed to a belief that senior leadership may be resistant to change and not fully attuned to the operational challenges faced by members, creating a disconnect between leadership's vision and the realities on the ground.

Trust and Transparency

Trust and transparency are significant challenges within the department, with members expressing concerns about inconsistent communication, perceived favoritism, and lack of follow-up on key initiatives. These issues contribute to distrust, reduced morale, and a disconnect between leadership decisions and frontline needs. Addressing these gaps is essential for improving communication, collaboration, and cohesion across the organization.

Issues Identified	Observations
Distrust within the organization	Trust issues are prevalent across all levels of the organization, with each rank expressing concerns about the reliability and intentions of others. Members cite frustrations with micromanagement, inconsistent treatment, lack of autonomy, and insufficient transparency, leading to distrust not only toward senior leadership but also among peers and other ranks. Leadership acknowledges these concerns and attributes many of them to conflicting priorities and inconsistent communication, which further erodes trust throughout the department.
Concerns over consistency, leadership transparency and equitable treatment	To understand concerns over leadership transparency and equitable treatment, it is important to note that issues within the department often arise from perceptions of favoritism, inconsistent treatment, and insufficient follow-through on policies and feedback from members. Notably, unaddressed inconsistencies in applying SOPs during emergency responses and a lack of follow-up on initiatives such as members surveys signal to employees a limited commitment to their concerns.
Sense of disconnect between leadership and operational realities	There is a shared perception that leadership is somewhat disconnected from the operational realities faced by frontline members. Many feel that leadership decisions often do not align with the day-to-day challenges in the field, leading to frustration and inefficiencies. Line staff report limited opportunities to take on appropriate responsibilities, and when given responsibilities, they are often not trusted to make their own decisions. Additionally, members feel that their input is frequently ignored. This disconnect further erodes trust and cohesion within the department.

Collaboration and Team Dynamics

Collaboration and team dynamics emerged as significant concerns, particularly in both within-shift and between-shift interactions. The following observations outline specific challenges in collaboration, communication, SOP adherence, and conflict resolution, emphasizing the need for improved processes to enhance teamwork and efficiency within Crook County Fire & Rescue.

Issues Identified	Observations
Effective Collaboration within Shifts	While 67% of senior leadership and command rank reported effective within-shift collaboration, this agreement dropped to 56% among lieutenants and further to 44% among line staff. This decreasing trend in perceived collaboration from higher-ranking to lower-ranking personnel suggests that those in senior roles view teamwork within shifts more favorably than those directly involved in daily operations. Such discrepancies highlight potential gaps in team cohesion and communication dynamics across different levels.
Lack of collaboration and communication between shifts	<p>Senior leadership and command rank reported that inconsistent communication causes line staff frustration, with important updates often delayed or inconsistently shared. The lack of face-to-face communication and insufficient dissemination of critical operational changes—such as staffing and equipment decisions—contribute to a sense of exclusion among line staff.</p> <p>Line staff described shifts as operating like "individual islands," with varying leadership philosophies, inconsistent procedures, and different interpretations of task standards, leading to confusion—especially for newer members. This issue is further complicated by the need for many members to work additional hours on different shifts, exposing them to inconsistent operations and cultures. Lieutenants noted that this inconsistency results in friction and cliques between shifts; while some shifts collaborate effectively, others remain isolated, negatively impacting communication during shift transitions.</p>
Inconsistent adherence to SOPs	While command rank did not mention the issue, a majority of lieutenants and line staff expressed frustration over inconsistent adherence to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The uneven application of SOPs during emergency responses has led to significant confusion, particularly for new members, reducing efficiency and increasing the risk of errors during critical situations.

	<p>This challenge is compounded by the fact that a large proportion of response members are students or part-time employees, which further elevates the risk.</p>
Ineffective conflict resolution process	<p>All members reported inadequacies in conflict resolution - concerns were voiced by 5 out of 6 senior leadership and command rank, 78% of lieutenants, and 67% of line staff. Senior leadership and command rank noted that close working relationships in shared spaces made direct conversations challenging, creating friction and hindering effective conflict resolution. Lieutenants observed that direct discussions were often avoided, leading to unresolved conflicts and a toxic environment due to perceived lack of accountability. Leadership was frequently viewed as dismissive of concerns, with limited follow-up, and friction between shifts—exacerbated by inconsistent practices—intensified conflicts.</p> <p>Line staff echoed these frustrations, citing mistrust in leadership as conflicts often bypassed the chain of command, escalating directly to higher-level chiefs. Perceptions of favoritism and inconsistent accountability further eroded trust in the conflict resolution process. Leadership's approach was described as reactive and short-term, lacking long-term solutions, which led to unresolved tensions.</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Embracing change is critical for any organization, and this is especially true for Crook County Fire & Rescue (CCFR), with its small team and in an industry where outcomes can be a matter of life and death. Implementing the recommended changes can feel overwhelming, but by prioritizing and phasing these initiatives, the process becomes manageable.

This assessment groups identified issues into specific recommendations, each representing a key area impacting operational efficiency and organizational effectiveness. Within each recommendation, individual objectives address specific issues that contribute to the broader goal. For example, under the "Enhance Leadership Accountability and Transparency" recommendation, separate objectives focus on consistent policy enforcement, regular morale assessments, and strategic communication from leadership. Each of these objectives addresses a distinct aspect of accountability and trust-building, yet together they work to strengthen the overall transparency and reliability of leadership within the department. This approach allows targeted actions on individual issues while aligning efforts to achieve a cohesive and meaningful improvement in the department's operations.

Moreover, there is positive overlap among recommendations, where success in one area supports progress in others. For example, improvements in leadership accountability can boost trust and morale, which in turn enhances community-building efforts and conflict resolution. This interconnected approach ensures that progress in one area creates momentum across multiple themes, fostering a more cohesive and resilient department.

Crook County Fire & Rescue is facing substantial demands on its time and resources, making it difficult to prioritize and implement the necessary changes proposed here. This situation is not uncommon in departments that are already stretched thin, as it can be challenging to find the capacity to execute strategic initiatives, even when there's a clear understanding of the need for improvement. Nevertheless, effective change management is essential to ensure long-term success and sustainability.

Our recommendations include the use of external experts where appropriate to alleviate the burden on internal resources. Each recommendation presents suggested tasks for implementation, designed to offer the department a clear and structured roadmap toward achieving each objective. This approach breaks down the process into manageable steps, ensuring clarity and focus, and reducing the likelihood of feeling overwhelmed by the number of strategies outlined. This section of the report is followed by a proposed plan for implementation of recommendations designed to ease the strain of change management on the Department.

Embrace the Results of the Organizational Assessment

Objective: Form a cross-functional team dedicated to overseeing the implementation of key recommendations. Focus on developing clear guidelines and actionable steps to address areas for improvement, demonstrating leadership's commitment to strengthening the organization and fostering internal growth.

Analysis: A significant concern within the organization is a lack of trust, with many employees feeling that leadership has not consistently followed through on critical issues. Specifically, 92% of respondents perceive communication as deficient, 50% believe leadership is resistant to change, and 61% feel leadership is disconnected from operational challenges. Many employees expressed frustration over leadership's perceived failure to act on promised initiatives, which has led to feelings of disillusionment. Although employees understand that certain matters, particularly those related to HR, require confidentiality, there is a prevailing sense that other issues remain unresolved despite leadership's commitments to address them.

It is important to note that this lack of trust is based on employees' perceptions, which may or may not be fully grounded in factual occurrences. The recommendations within this assessment include strategies to better understand these perceptions, improve communication to reduce misunderstandings, and identify actual issues that may require attention.

The department is at a pivotal moment, with an opportunity to strengthen trust and enhance morale. Transparent communication of the results of this organizational assessment and proactive action on recommendations will be essential steps toward building a more positive and productive organizational climate. Embracing these efforts can foster a stronger, more unified team moving forward.

Outcome Implementing a structured approach to addressing recommendations, coupled with consistent and transparent communication, will increase accountability and build trust. By keeping all stakeholders informed of progress, the organization will foster greater engagement, streamline the implementation process, and achieve more efficient, measurable results, driving long-term organizational improvement.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE: Embrace the Results of the Organizational Assessment

OBJECTIVE: Establish a Cross-Functional Implementation Team and Develop a Comprehensive Action Plan

Create a cross-functional team to lead the phased implementation of key organizational recommendations. This team will prioritize initiatives, secure necessary approvals and funding, and set a clear timeline for gradual improvements. Regular communication and feedback will ensure transparency, adapt to needs, and strengthen organizational effectiveness without overloading resources.

Tasks to Achieve Objective:

Secure Funding

- ☐ **Allocate Resources:** The Board and senior leadership should prioritize funding for these initiatives to support long-term improvements and efficiency gains. Set aside funds for both the current and upcoming fiscal years, as the investment is expected to deliver rapid returns by enhancing organizational strength and resilience.
- ☐ **Phase Funding by Priority:** Allocate funds according to the phased timeline of the objectives, ensuring that resources are available as each objective moves into implementation.

Form an Implementation Team

- ☐ **Assemble Diverse Leadership:** Appoint an implementation team composed of a Board member, senior leaders, command rank leadership, and union representatives to ensure a broad range of perspectives in the implementation process.
- ☐ **Define Authority and Leadership:** Grant the implementation team authority to develop and manage the phased plan, with final approval reserved for senior leadership to align with union agreements, financial limits, and operational capacity.
- ☐ **Identify Team Leads:** Designate team leads to coordinate efforts and act as the primary liaison with senior leadership and the Board.

Provide Guidelines and Initial Materials

- ☐ **Set Clear Expectations:** Equip the team with guidelines emphasizing the value of their recommendations, a timeline for action, and accountability in addressing each assessment recommendation.
- ☐ **Distribute Key Materials:** Supply the team with copies of the organizational assessment recommendations and implementation details. Ensure all team members review these documents before the first meeting.

Execute the Phased Implementation Plan

- ☐ **Review the Phased Implementation Timeline:** If necessary, adjust the "Phased Implementation Plan" outlined in a later section of this report to structure objectives based on urgency, resource availability, and strategic impact. This ensures that each objective begins at the optimal time for efficient and effective execution.
- ☐ **Assign Leads for Key Areas:** Designate leads and sub-teams to focus on each of the six remaining primary recommendations from the assessment, aligning them with the phased timeline.
- ☐ **Convene and Finalize Plans by Phase:** Conduct a meeting for team leads to present their initial action plans based on their respective phases. The implementation committee should review, refine, and approve these sub-team plans, ensuring they align with organizational priorities.

Obtain Final Approval and Begin Staggered Implementation

- ☐ **Report to Leadership:** Present the comprehensive phased action plan to the leadership team for alignment and to secure final authorization for each phase to proceed in sequence.
- ☐ **Maintain Open Communication:** Keep employees informed about the phased rollout, providing updates on the start dates of each objective through meetings, emails, and newsletters to ensure transparency and maintain trust.

Gather Feedback and Adjust as Needed for Each Phase

- ☐ **Incorporate Feedback Loops by Phase:** Regularly solicit feedback from employees as each phase progresses, making necessary adjustments to address any emerging challenges or concerns.
- ☐ **Explain Adjustments:** Communicate any changes or delays clearly to prevent erosion of trust, with phase-specific updates on progress and challenges.

Celebrate Milestones to Sustain Momentum

- ☐ **Recognize Progress at Each Phase:** Celebrate small achievements and incremental improvements in alignment with each phase through team meetings, newsletters, or informal gatherings. This phased recognition demonstrates the organization's commitment to positive change and reinforces employee morale and engagement.

Standardize Communication Channels

Objective: Develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy that ensures clear, consistent, and timely information flow across all ranks and shifts. This strategy should foster transparency, ensure members are well-informed and feel valued, and promote an environment where employees are engaged and aligned with the department's objectives.

Analysis: Communication breakdowns have surfaced as a critical issue across all levels of the organization, with 94% of interviewees highlighting communication problems, including 100% of the senior leadership and command rank. The most cited concerns involved communication gaps and an over-reliance on verbal exchanges, which often led to inconsistent messaging as information filtered down through the ranks. Compounding these issues is the lack of clear documentation outlining expectations around communication practices. Without formal guidelines, members are left to interpret communication protocols on their own, leading to variability in how information is conveyed and received across the organization.

Outcome A standardized communication approach will improve transparency, trust, and accountability throughout the department. By establishing clear guidelines and a structured communication framework, members will receive timely and consistent information. This will minimize confusion, enhance accountability, and lead to increased engagement, improved collaboration, and better alignment with strategic goals. Ultimately, these improvements will foster a more cohesive and high-performing organization.

Moreover, meetings between leadership and members have become irregular, with some members reporting that they have not met with leadership for months. This absence of regular communication channels exacerbates the sense of disconnect and further fuels the communication gaps observed throughout the department.

Specific comments from the interviews, such as "communication is reactive, not proactive," "responses are often long-winded and political, rather than helpful," "the message often gets diluted as it passes down the chain of command," and "concerns are swept under the rug," underscore areas needing improvement. Many participants recognized the inherent challenges of sharing timely information in a fast-paced industry, but there was a strong desire for more transparency, with members expressing a need to understand not just the decisions made, but also the reasons behind them.

Effective communication is essential to strengthen multiple facets of the organization, including trust, collaboration, information flow, operational efficiency, conflict resolution, leadership effectiveness, and alignment with strategic goals. Clear, consistent, and timely communication from leadership to line staff will help ensure understanding of procedures, expectations, and long-term objectives.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE: Establish Clear and Consistent Communication Protocols

OBJECTIVE: Establish Comprehensive Communication Protocols for Consistency, Transparency, and Efficiency

Develop and implement a structured communication framework to ensure clear, consistent, and secure dissemination of information across the organization. This includes compartmentalization guidelines, a strategic communication calendar, a designated communication lead, and an evaluation mechanism to monitor effectiveness.

Tasks to Achieve Objective:

Develop Information Compartmentalization Guidelines

- ☐ **Define Roles and Responsibilities:** Assign dedicated individuals or teams to develop guidelines, incorporating input from leadership, union representatives, and all relevant stakeholders.
- ☐ **Establish Communication SOP:** Create a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that outlines different levels of access to information based on roles (e.g., Lieutenants, full-time members, students).
- ☐ **Set Communication Protocols:** Specify the types of information each group should receive, ensuring the right level of detail for effective operations and security.

Implement a Strategic Communication Calendar

- ☐ **Identify Key Topics:** List essential topics (e.g., policy updates, organizational goals, training opportunities) that need regular communication.
- ☐ **Utilize Diverse Channels:** Include both formal (meetings, newsletters) and informal (email briefs, bulletin boards) communication methods to maximize reach.
- ☐ **Schedule Regular Updates:** Define intervals (weekly, monthly, quarterly) for various updates, reinforcing key messages as necessary to support understanding.
- ☐ **Ensure Inclusivity:** Directly communicate with all levels, including students and part-time members, to reduce the risk of message filtering and ensure consistent information sharing.

Appoint a Communications Lead

- ☐ **Designate a Lead:** Appoint a Communications Lead to oversee consistency and clarity in departmental messaging, supported by a small team.
- ☐ **Build a Supporting Team:** Form a skilled team to help manage communication tasks, including newsletters and informational meetings.
- ☐ **Enhance Efficiency with Tools:** Equip the team with software for transcription, summarization, and distribution to streamline meeting note dissemination.

- ☐ **Establish Review Protocols:** Implement a protocol to review and approve all official communications to ensure alignment with organizational standards and correct messaging.

Finalize Plan

- ☐ **Plan review and approval:** Present plan to senior leadership for corrections and make any edits required to receive final approval.

Evaluate and Continuously Improve Communication Effectiveness

- ☐ **Regular Monitoring:** Have the Communications Team routinely evaluate the effectiveness of communication practices and identify areas for improvement, leveraging feedback from surveys or member input.
- ☐ **Adapt Based on Feedback:** Adjust communication protocols as needed to enhance responsiveness, maintain flexibility, and ensure the communication framework remains efficient and aligned with organizational needs.

Build Community and Address Conflicts

Objective: Implement a structured and authentic recognition process to regularly acknowledge individual and team achievements. Pair this with effective conflict resolution strategies designed to address ongoing issues and prevent future conflicts. These efforts will foster a sense of community, trust, and engagement across all levels of the department, ensuring a collaborative and supportive work environment.

Analysis: Although recognition programs exist, many employees view them as inconsistent and insincere. There is a strong desire for more genuine acknowledgment of their contributions, which employees believe would help rebuild trust and improve morale.

With regards to conflict, although certain individuals and teams within the department are recognized for handling conflicts effectively, the overall consensus is that conflict resolution across the organization remains inadequate, fostering resentment and negative feelings. While the establishment of the union has led to improvements, 60% of employees still believe that more focused efforts on conflict resolution are necessary. Notably, only 33% of line staff indicated a need for conflict resolution, suggesting that some crews are managing conflict more effectively than others. This disparity indicates that conflict issues become more apparent as individuals advance in the organization and gain broader perspectives.

While an improved communication plan will mitigate some conflicts, effective resolution requires targeted strategies that address both interpersonal conflicts and formal managerial processes. Given the unique challenges of this industry, where employees live together and face high-stress, life-or-death situations, special attention is needed to resolve conflicts in these environments.

Employee conflict within the department largely stems from perceived lapses in follow-through, accountability, and consistent enforcement. Frustrations have arisen from unresolved issues and a belief that leadership is reluctant to address conflicts directly. One employee noted, “My boss hates conflict and avoids it at all costs,” reinforcing the perception that accountability is lacking. Instances of certain individuals being exempted from rules further erode trust, leaving employees feeling dismissed and disconnected from leadership. This dynamic fosters gossip, which exacerbates conflicts rather than resolving them.

By adopting a consistent recognition process and implementing conflict resolution training, the department will strengthen community ties, enhance trust, boost morale, improve teamwork, and foster an engaged, collaborative workplace culture essential for operational effectiveness.

Outcome: Through the adoption of a consistent, genuine recognition process, and comprehensive conflict resolution training, the department will cultivate stronger community bonds and enhance trust. This will lead to improved teamwork and higher morale. In addition, acknowledging achievements regularly along with efforts to build community will boost engagement, reduce friction, and promote collaboration. In a high-pressure setting where cooperation is critical, these initiatives will significantly enhance operational effectiveness, communication, and the overall workplace culture.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE: Build Community and Address Conflicts

OBJECTIVE ONE: Celebrate and Highlight Successes

Organize informal events such as holiday parties and family gatherings to promote relationship-building and strengthen connections between leadership and members. These efforts will foster teamwork, enhance connections, and go a long way to boost department morale.

Tasks to Achieve Objective:

- ☐ **Include Recognition in Leadership Meetings:** Add a "Successes" section to regular leadership meeting agendas to ensure time is dedicated to acknowledging progress and achievements within the department. Share successes and improvements with Communications Team to ensure members see the organizations growth.
- ☐ **Highlight Achievements Across Communication Channels:** Use monthly meetings, newsletters, or other communication platforms to regularly showcase successes and improvements and recognize the contributions of both leadership and members.
- ☐ **Appoint Event Organizers with Budget Authority:** Assign an individual or small team to organize department-wide events, such as holiday parties, and provide them with a budget to manage event-related expenses like food and supplies.
- ☐ **Increase Leadership Engagement:** Encourage leadership, including Board members and the senior leadership, to engage with members more informally through initiatives like "Coffee with the Chief" or casual walk-arounds to foster open communication and approachability.

OBJECTIVE TWO: Offer Conflict Resolution Training

Develop communication and problem-solving skills to address personality conflicts and cliques that undermine morale and teamwork while ensuring respect for the chain of command.

Tasks to Achieve Objective:

- ☐ **Identify Training Facilitators:** Assign a small group of leadership and Union members to identify and select conflict resolution trainers or facilitators with expertise in mediation, communication skills, and team dynamics.
- ☐ **Develop and Implement the Training Program:** The selected firm should provide a training program that covers essential conflict resolution techniques such as active listening, empathy, negotiation, and mediation skills. The program should incorporate scenarios specific to the department to ensure the training is relevant and engaging. Furthermore, the development of the program must align with the guidelines and procedures outlined in the CBA to ensure compliance with established protocols. All members, particularly supervisors and managers, should be required to participate in the training to ensure widespread adoption and effectiveness.

- ❑ **Incorporate Practical Tools and Ongoing Support:** The selected firm should provide members with practical tools such as communication guides and conflict resolution templates for use in day-to-day interactions. Additionally, the firm should offer ongoing support through follow-up coaching sessions or supplementary workshops to reinforce the training and address any emerging conflicts as they arise.

Strengthen the Strategic Plan

Objective: Enhance organizational success by refining the strategic plan engaging all levels of members and incorporating thorough analysis mechanisms to ensure clear direction, align stakeholders with long-term goals, and optimize resource allocation effectively.

Analysis: Strengthening Crook County Fire & Rescue’s current strategic business plan (April 2023) will serve as a foundation for many of the initiatives recommended in this report. The current strategic plan has notable weaknesses, including limited input from key stakeholders, including line staff and partner agencies. This lack of broad engagement may hinder the plan's ability to address essential operational needs, workforce concerns, and community expectations. Expanding stakeholder participation would create a more comprehensive and effective strategy.

Additionally, the absence of a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats), a vital tool in strategic planning, limits the plan's capacity for proactive risk management and long-term success. The lack of a comprehensive risk management framework, which is critical for addressing potential financial constraints, personnel shortages, or operational crises, makes CCFR vulnerable to unforeseen challenges. An example is the lack of a clear strategy addressing the department's high turnover, a significant operational issue. The lack of a targeted approach to addressing turnover and other challenges prevents CCFR from capitalizing on its strengths and addressing critical weaknesses, diminishing the strategic impact of the plan.

The plan outlines broad goals but lacks measurable outcomes or specific metrics to track progress. This limits the department's ability to evaluate its success or make necessary course corrections. For example, the goal “Operate an appropriate, effective, efficient and safe EMS Program which provides exceptional service.” could include measurables like tracking response times, monitoring patient survival rates, measuring patient satisfaction, ensuring adherence to safety protocols, evaluating cost efficiency, verifying members certifications and training, and assessing the readiness of medical equipment. The absence of such metrics means leadership may be unable to gauge whether strategies are producing desired results.

In addition, the strategic plan is not well-communicated, leaving many employees with limited or no understanding of its goals. This disconnect reduces engagement and alignment with shared objectives. Finally, the plan’s high-level goals are not well-integrated into daily operations, causing confusion and inefficiency in individual accountability and missed opportunities for collaboration. An effective plan should bridge strategy and execution, ensuring that all members understand their role in achieving organizational objectives.

Outcome: By refining its strategic planning process, CCFR will enhance its effectiveness, alignment with mission and goals, and adaptability. This will set a clear direction, improve decision-making, and strengthen communication and accountability, ensuring that members and leadership work toward shared objectives. Regular feedback and reviews will keep the plan responsive, fostering sustainable growth and positioning the organization to meet future challenges.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE: Strengthen the Strategic Plan

OBJECTIVE: Engage an External Expert to Lead a Revitalized Strategic Planning Process

The expert will bring objectivity, best practices, and comprehensive analysis, ensuring the plan reflects operational needs, workforce challenges, and community expectations. By engaging a diverse set of stakeholders, conducting a thorough SWOT analysis, and implementing risk management strategies, the expert will ensure that the strategic plan is measurable, actionable, and directly aligned with CCFR's mission, addressing current operational inefficiencies and turnover issues.

Tasks to Achieve Objective:

- ☐ **Adjust the strategic planning timeline** to span five years, with annual reviews.
- ☐ **Foster leadership support** for strategic planning. The Board and leadership must actively support the strategic planning process by participating in discussions and communicating its importance to all members. Transparent decision-making, regular updates, and empowering the external facilitator and team are key. Leaders should celebrate milestones, remain accountable for execution, and allocate sufficient funding to ensure the process is thorough and successful.
- ☐ **Hire a company with expertise in developing strategic plans** with industry experience, ensuring the facilitator has a successful track record. Request examples of prior plans they developed. Ensure provider offers the following:
 - **Conduct a SWOT Analysis** led by the facilitator, providing a structured evaluation of internal and external factors to clarify the organization's current state and growth potential.
 - **Engage All Key Stakeholder Groups** by ensuring the facilitator includes leadership, line staff, union reps, and community stakeholders in the process.
 - **Facilitate Inclusive Workshops** to foster open dialogue and collaboration, allowing participants to contribute insights and feel ownership in the plan.
 - **Gather Feedback from Surveys and Interviews** for anonymous input from members and stakeholders uncomfortable sharing in groups.
 - **Develop Clear, Measurable Objectives (SMART goals)**, guided by the facilitator, ensuring ease in tracking progress and accountability.
 - **Create a Detailed Action Plan** by breaking down strategic goals into actionable steps, assigning timelines, resources, and responsibilities.
 - **Establish a Process for Regular Review and Adjustments**, turning the strategic plan into a living document with mechanisms for evaluation and updates.

Enhance Leadership Accountability and Transparency

Objective: Strengthen leadership accountability to ensure the consistent enforcement of policies, operational standards, and expectations across all levels of the organization, fostering transparency and trust in leadership decisions.

Analysis: The internal conflicts described earlier are intensified by a perception of leadership's inconsistent policy enforcement and lack of responsiveness. This erosion of trust further extends to include Board members.

There is widespread sentiment among department members that leadership at all levels, including some command rank and lieutenants, does not adequately respond to concerns raised by employees. While leadership listens to these concerns, members often feel they receive a "political" response without substantive follow-through.

Furthermore, members frequently express that rules and policies are applied inconsistently. While they understand the confidentiality surrounding disciplinary matters, there is a perception that some individuals receive preferential treatment. This inconsistency, especially in terms of accountability, has fueled frustration and a lack of faith in management.

Inconsistent application of SOPs across shifts is another major concern, particularly given the need for uniformity in emergency response situations. Non-adherence to SOPs creates operational confusion, especially when members are required to work across different shifts, a common occurrence due to ongoing staffing shortages.

Interviews and document reviews reveal a perception that the Board of Directors relies heavily on the Fire Chief and senior leadership for insights into the department's internal dynamics, without direct engagement with line staff. As a result, the Board's understanding of operational challenges and information flow appears limited, creating blind spots in areas such as conflict resolution, operational difficulties, and employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention. The Board is perceived as taking a passive or "static" approach, with little emphasis on innovation or proactive problem-solving.

While no formal changes to the Board structure are recommended, we suggest implementing additional methods for the Board to gain insight into the organization. These could include regular updates on key data points, such as internal feedback trends and conflict resolution metrics, as well as results from engagement surveys. Providing opportunities for structured engagement with staff, while maintaining clear boundaries to ensure concerns are addressed through formal channels, can further support informed decision-making.

Outcome: By enhancing leadership accountability and transparency, the department will foster greater trust and consistency in its operations. Establishing clear feedback mechanisms and enforcing policies fairly across all levels will reduce confusion, eliminate perceptions of favoritism, and ensure that SOPs are followed consistently. This approach will build a stronger, more cohesive organizational culture where leadership is trusted to act transparently, and members are confident in the consistency of decisions and disciplinary actions.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE: Enhance Leadership Accountability and Transparency

OBJECTIVE ONE: Establish a Document Review Calendar

To foster transparency, trust, and consistency across the department, implement a Document Review Calendar modeled after the Board's Yearly Agenda Calendar. This schedule will ensure key processes, including policy reviews and operational updates, are regularly reviewed, updated, and communicated to the entire department.

Tasks to Achieve Objective:

- ☐ **Identify Key Documents and Policies for Review:** Collaborate across all levels of the department to compile a thorough list of documents and policies that require regular review by leadership, in consultation with department members (e.g., SOPs, incident command systems, response time standards, safety policies, personnel policies, and incident review processes).
- ☐ **Determine Review Frequency and Assign Responsibility:** Establish a suitable review frequency for each document and assign individuals or teams responsible for conducting the review. Ensure appropriate members are consulted for input prior to each scheduled review. These tasks can also serve as leadership development opportunities by involving members in special projects.
- ☐ **Share Draft Schedule for Feedback:** Distribute a draft of the review calendar to key stakeholders, including representatives from line staff and leadership, to collect feedback and confirm the schedule's feasibility and completeness. Once finalized, make the schedule accessible to all members.
- ☐ **Incorporate Regular Feedback.** After each review, coordinate with the communications team to distribute updated policies.

OBJECTIVE TWO: Consistent Enforcement of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

To eliminate confusion, build trust, and enhance operational consistency and effectiveness in saving lives and property, establish a clear, department-wide approach to SOP enforcement across all shifts. A standardized approach supports safety and efficiency at unpredictable emergency scenes, while also allowing for minor, situational adjustments as needed. We recommend developing a process that ensures quick and fair resolution of any variations, providing a balance between maintaining consistency and respecting the need for flexibility, without creating a sense of micromanagement. This will enhance confidence in leadership and enable the department to respond effectively in critical situations.

Tasks to Achieve Objective:

- ☐ **Form a Cross-Sectional Review Group:** Assemble a team representing various levels of the department, including command rank, lieutenants, and line staff, to review and update

current SOPs to ensure they align with the department’s mission, vision, values, and reflect current industry best practices.

- ❑ **Update and Standardize SOPs:** Ensure all SOPs are revised to reflect organizational goals and industry standards. Clearly define the expectations for consistent adherence across all shifts, ensuring no room for misinterpretation.
- ❑ **Establish an Informal Feedback Mechanism for SOP Variations:** Create a channel where employees can provide informal, upward feedback on significant differences in SOP implementation between shifts. This mechanism will allow line staff and lieutenants to share insights or concerns on SOP inconsistencies they observe, helping leadership understand operational variances and address any gaps in a constructive manner.
- ❑ **Provide Comprehensive and Ongoing Training:** Implement department-wide training sessions to ensure all members understand the updated SOPs and are prepared to follow them consistently, while also recognizing and addressing appropriate variations needed for specific situations. Continuous reinforcement will be essential, with leadership offering refresher training as necessary to reinforce standards and clarify when and how slight adjustments may be suitable based on the nature of different incidents.
- ❑ **Introduce SOP in Focus in Communications:** Use regular communication channels to introduce a “SOP in Focus” feature that highlights a specific SOP periodically. This reinforces understanding, reminds members of expectations, and demonstrates leadership’s commitment to maintaining consistency.
- ❑ **Track and Monitor Adherence:** Senior leadership should routinely review reported SOP variations and monitor adherence, holding battalion chiefs and lieutenants accountable for consistent enforcement across shifts when deviations exceed acceptable limits. Provide feedback to command staff, highlighting inconsistencies, improvement opportunities, and successes during scheduled meetings, as specified in the communication plan.

OBJECTIVE THREE: Implement a 360-Degree Review and Employee Morale Survey System

Implementing a 360-degree performance review system and a morale and engagement survey will provide a robust framework for evaluating leadership effectiveness and tracking organizational morale. The 360-degree feedback will allow leaders to receive input from superiors, peers, and direct reports, addressing concerns related to trust, micromanagement, and authority application by ensuring insights from all levels are considered. In addition, administration of morale and engagement surveys will offer leadership and the Board critical data on organizational dynamics and employee well-being, establishing metrics to track progress over time and ensuring members’ voices are continuously valued and heard.

360-degree performance review

- ❑ **Select a Provider to Design the Review Tool:** Identify an external organization with expertise in 360-degree feedback tools. The provider should recommend which roles to review (e.g., senior leadership, command rank, lieutenants) and advise on assessing specific skills, behaviors, and competencies related to their role. The goal is to ensure

feedback is used for personal and organizational growth.

Provider's Responsibilities should include:

- **Design the Tool:** Create a custom 360-degree review tool that covers key leadership competencies using a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions to gather comprehensive feedback.
- **Educate Participants:** Clearly communicate that the 360-degree review is solely for the personal growth and development of each individual, with **results strictly confidential and accessible only to the individual and their direct supervisor**. Emphasize that the feedback is intended for improvement, not disciplinary action, to encourage open and constructive input, and reassure participants that their responses will remain confidential.
- **Launch the Review:** Invite raters—*peers, subordinates, and supervisors*—to provide feedback on selected individuals. The process should be carefully managed to ensure consistency and fairness.
- **Compile Feedback into a Report:** Organize all feedback into a clear, actionable report that preserves confidentiality for all participants and ensures results remain private. Separate quantitative scores from qualitative comments, focusing on key themes rather than outlier responses. The report should highlight both strengths and areas for development, providing a balanced overview for personal growth.
- **Leadership Performance Overview:** Provide a document that highlights the overall strengths and areas for improvement identified in the individual leadership reviews. This document must exclude all personal data, focusing instead on summarizing common themes where leaders are excelling, areas where additional training or support may be beneficial, and identifying opportunities for effective delegation of work.
- ☐ **Deliver Feedback:** Share feedback directly with the individual being reviewed and their direct supervisor only. This feedback should include specific, actionable recommendations for improvement as part of the individual's leadership development. The broader Leadership Performance Overview should be presented separately to senior leadership and the board for a department-wide perspective on leadership strengths and development needs.

Morale and Engagement Surveys

- ☐ **Hire a Firm to Conduct Survey:** Engage a company to conduct surveys, focusing on employee satisfaction, engagement, understanding of department goals and values, trust in leadership, autonomy in roles, communication effectiveness, and organizational dynamics. The process should allow feedback on survey design and timelines, with clear communication emphasizing confidentiality to encourage honest responses. It should also include data analysis, post-survey consultations, and an actionable report for senior leadership and the Board, outlining strengths, areas for improvement, and specific action recommendations based on the data.

- ❑ **Present Findings to Senior Leadership and the Board:** After receiving the results, present the findings and agree on action steps to address concerns and areas needing improvement.
 - **Communicate Results and Planned Actions to Employees:** Share the key insights and planned actions with all employees to demonstrate transparency and show a strong commitment to valuing their feedback and fostering positive change.
 - **Schedule Follow-Up Surveys:** Plan for follow-up surveys every one to two years to assess progress and the effectiveness of implemented changes, helping track improvements in morale and engagement.

OBJECTIVE FOUR: Enhance Real-Time Operational Feedback Mechanisms

Enhance the department's formalized feedback loop to meet operational needs by improving the existing tool used to log, track, and follow up on members concerns. This system should ensure full visibility for all operational personnel, allowing them to monitor the progress of their feedback and understand the steps being taken toward resolution. When resolution is not feasible, clear explanations should be provided. This transparent and accessible process will ensure timely responses, maintain operational awareness, and reinforce accountability across all levels managers

Tasks to Achieve Objective:

- ❑ **Review the Existing Tool:** Determine whether the current tool meets the department's security requirements and operational needs, if required select a new tool. The review should focus on whether the tool includes the following capabilities:
 - Simple task logging and status tracking.
 - Clear assignment of responsibility for each task.
 - Comment threads for updates and ongoing communication.
 - Visibility for members to monitor the progress of their submitted concerns, including whether issues are in progress, resolved, or cannot be addressed (with a rationale provided).
- ❑ **Assign Key Personnel for Oversight:** Designate members to oversee the review, assignment, and follow-up of submitted feedback, ensuring timely action and accountability.
- ❑ **Train Members on the Updated System:** Provide members with clear training on how to use the improved system to log concerns, track progress, and offer input when necessary.
- ❑ **Monitor and Adjust the System:** Include the feedback loop system in leadership's regular review calendar to assess its effectiveness and make necessary adjustments, ensuring responsiveness and transparency are maintained over time.

Integrate with Leadership Meetings: Integrate feedback reviews into routine leadership meetings to keep leadership connected with front-line challenges. Key insights should be shared with the communications team for broader distribution through established channels.

Foster an Empowering Organizational Culture

Objective: Transition to an organizational culture that empowers employees by actively involving them in decision-making processes, fostering inclusivity, and providing opportunities for growth and leadership, while maintaining strategic direction and authority. Strengthen collaboration between leadership and members to create a more cohesive and unified environment, where employees have the authority to contribute meaningfully and develop their skills.

Analysis: High turnover emerged as a consistent theme during the document review and interviews. While the department lacks a formal exit interview process or reliable data on reasons for departures, feedback from command rank, lieutenants, and line staff suggests a perceived culture of control is likely a significant factor. The interviews revealed three core issues negatively impacting morale and operational effectiveness: (1) limited opportunities for employee growth, (2) a pervasive sense of micromanagement and lack of trust, and (3) complications surrounding access to training. Addressing these concerns is crucial to enhancing engagement and trust, and reducing turnover.

A significant concern voiced by line staff and lieutenants is the absence of growth opportunities within the department. Many feel that leadership retains too much control, which prevents lower-level members from contributing meaningfully to decision-making or leadership roles, resulting in a loss of valuable frontline expertise. Despite a strong commitment to the department's mission, employees have reported a diminished sense of autonomy.

Leadership's emphasis on process, though appreciated for its tangible outcomes (e.g., station upgrades), is viewed as insufficient for fostering personal and professional growth—a crucial component of a culture of excellence. Employees understand the department's size limits traditional career advancement but see potential in growth opportunities, such as leading special projects or taking on "acting in charge" roles. These roles could not only develop individual members but also strengthen the department as a whole. Additionally, the document review indicated that while the current division of responsibilities among senior leadership and command ranks is generally well-organized, increasing delegation would boost employee engagement, efficiency, and morale by providing more growth pathways in a smaller organization with limited formal advancement opportunities.

Outcome: Fostering an empowering organizational culture will boost employee engagement and provide clear opportunities for personal and professional development.

Implementing structured decision-making processes and offering more opportunities for members to take on leadership roles, manage projects, or gain specialized expertise will increase engagement, decrease frustration, and create opportunities for accomplishment. This cultural shift will lead to improved collaboration between leadership and members, creating a more unified, efficient, and innovative workplace where employees feel valued and motivated to contribute to the organization's success.

A significant issue identified is the perception of micromanagement and lack of trust in members to fulfill their responsibilities. Employees voiced frustration over being assigned tasks without being granted the authority or trust to execute them effectively. As one member expressed, “I’m not trusted to do my job,” a sentiment echoed by others. This perceived lack of autonomy stifles engagement and prevents members from developing skills essential for advancement. Additionally, some members noted that control over projects is occasionally granted only to be revoked later, further eroding trust and contributing to inefficiencies. Leadership’s reluctance to fully delegate responsibilities not only hampers operational efficiency but also creates an atmosphere of mistrust. Empowering employees to take ownership and respecting frontline input would foster a more collaborative and effective work environment.

While members appreciate the department's financial investment in annual training, access to training opportunities is a persistent concern within the department. High turnover exacerbates the issue, as on-shift training time is frequently dedicated to basic skills for new employees, limiting opportunities to focus on more specialized or advanced skills. Employees have also expressed dissatisfaction with requirements to make up missed time for training or being denied participation altogether. These factors, along with the document review, collectively suggest a need for a more structured and strategic approach to training that acknowledges the department’s turnover challenges and reinforces leadership's commitment to comprehensive employee development. Implementing such a strategy could help reduce turnover, thereby enabling more advanced training opportunities and fostering a more engaged, motivated workforce.

To foster an environment where employees feel valued and empowered, leadership should address these core issues. While leadership maintains ultimate authority over strategic direction, empowering employees with more autonomy, enhancing training access, and promoting growth opportunities will help close the trust gap. Cultivating a culture of empowerment, collaboration, and professional development will boost morale, creating a unified, high-performing workforce that takes pride in the department's success.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE: Foster an Empowering Organizational Culture

OBJECTIVE: Establish a Comprehensive Member Development Strategy

Develop a cohesive training and development plan that aligns with organizational goals and supports employee growth. This strategy should include foundational training, structured leadership development, responsiveness to community needs, and opportunities for member-led special projects, such as equipment management and operational improvements. By integrating these initiatives into the strategic plan, the department can enhance team cohesion, improve service delivery, and strengthen workforce engagement and retention.

Tasks to Achieve Objective:

- ☐ **Conduct a Training and Development Needs Assessment:** Identify current gaps in new member training, leadership development, community responsiveness, and specialized skills. Gather input from all ranks to ensure comprehensive needs are addressed and to identify potential special projects that could provide hands-on experience.
- ☐ **Develop Clear Training and Project Objectives:** Align training and special project goals with the department's strategic priorities, focusing on areas like new member onboarding, leadership readiness, and community engagement. Define criteria for special projects that allow personnel to apply skills in real-world scenarios.
- ☐ **Design a Structured Training and Special Projects Framework:** Create a tiered framework covering foundational skills, advanced development, and leadership training. Include opportunities for special projects at each level to promote practical experience and skill application.
- ☐ **Integrate Leadership Development and Project Management Programs:** Establish a program that prepares personnel for future leadership roles through structured mentorship, "acting in charge" opportunities, and responsibility over special projects, such as leading community outreach initiatives or overseeing safety improvements.
- ☐ **Establish Regular Training and Project Reviews:** Implement periodic assessments of the training and special project program to ensure alignment with evolving community needs and departmental goals. Use feedback loops to adapt projects and training to maximize engagement and effectiveness.
- ☐ **Allocate Resources Strategically for Training and Projects:** Ensure adequate funding, time, and materials are available for both training programs and special projects. Prioritize resources for areas critical to the department's mission and employee development, including projects that directly benefit the community.
- ☐ **Communicate and Monitor Progress on Training and Projects:** Share training goals, project opportunities, and updates across the department to maintain engagement. Monitor outcomes and make adjustments as necessary to ensure training objectives and project goals are being met, fostering a sense of ownership and professional growth.

Leadership Training

Objective: Enhance leadership skills across all levels of the organization to foster effective team management, decision-making, and alignment with organizational values and goals.

Analysis: *Data shows that organizations often face challenges in providing effective leadership training. Studies reveal that 59% of managers who oversee small teams report having received no formal training, and nearly 50% of experienced managers claim to have had minimal leadership training. This lack of training can negatively impact leadership effectiveness, as well as employee morale and development. Improving leadership training is crucial, as it directly influences team dynamics, retention, and the overall success of an organization. Organizations that invest in leadership training not only see improved leadership skills but also experience higher employee engagement and retention rates. (American Psychological Association, 2017)*

In the fire service, promotion processes often prioritize technical skills over leadership abilities, resulting in promotions based more on operational expertise than leadership potential. While CCFR should be commended for considering leadership potential in its promotional and command rank hiring, a gap remains in leadership training, particularly in fostering collaboration, effective communication, and team empowerment. Structured leadership training is essential to equip CCFR leaders with the skills needed to guide, inspire, and manage teams, ensuring cohesion, clear communication, and strategic decision-making under pressure.

Additionally, there is no requirement for members who are newly promoted into leadership positions to undergo structured management training. This training is crucial, as leadership development training provides valuable tools for leaders to prioritize team well-being and efficiency, directly impacting morale, respect, and the quality of service to the community. Without ongoing leadership training, CCFR risks promoting individuals without the necessary skills to lead effectively, potentially affecting both operational success and employee morale.

To address this, CCFR should implement a structured leadership development program, offering continuous training to prepare leaders for sound decision-making in high-stakes, emergency response situations.

Outcome: Implementing comprehensive leadership training will equip leaders at all levels with the skills needed to align with organizational values, foster collaboration, and improve decision-making. This will enhance team management, conflict resolution, and member engagement, leading to a more cohesive and productive workforce. The training will focus on communication, emotional intelligence, and strategic thinking, ensuring leaders can inspire and guide their teams effectively. Using external experts will provide tailored, unbiased training, driving long-term organizational success through strong, capable leadership.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE: Leadership Training

OBJECTIVE: Implement a Tailored Leadership Training Program

Partner with an external provider to design and implement a comprehensive leadership development program tailored to the department's unique needs. This program should address existing gaps in leadership training, particularly in fostering collaboration, effective communication, and team empowerment, ensuring leaders are thoroughly prepared to guide teams and make strategic decisions in high-pressure situations.

- ❑ **Engage a Specialized Leadership Development Firm:** Select a leadership development firm with expertise in creating customized training programs for different leadership levels. The program should blend in-person and online sessions focused on practical leadership skills, emotional intelligence, and operational decision-making. Share findings from the organizational assessment, highlighting areas for improvement, to ensure the training directly addresses Crook County Fire and Rescue's unique challenges and needs. Focus on Key Leadership Competencies:
 - **Values-Based Leadership:** Emphasize the importance of modeling and reinforcing the organization's core values in daily leadership practices.
 - **Team Building & Motivation:** Provide tools for inspiring and motivating teams, promoting inclusivity, and leading change effectively.
 - **Communication & Emotional Intelligence:** Include training on active listening, non-verbal communication, empathy, and fostering relationships within teams.
 - **Mentorship & Feedback:** Train leaders on delivering constructive feedback and coaching team members to foster continuous development.
 - **Critical Thinking & Decision-Making:** Develop leaders' abilities to assess risk, delegate strategically, and resolve conflicts.
 - **Assess Impact & Adjust Program:** Regularly share the results of 360-degree Leadership Performance Overview and morale and engagement surveys with the selected firm. This enables evaluation of the program's effectiveness and ensures curriculum adjustments based on evolving leadership needs and challenges identified through ongoing assessments.
 - **Integrate Continuous Learning:** Ensure the leadership training program includes periodic refreshers and advanced modules for ongoing development, keeping leadership skills aligned with the evolving demands of the organization.

Phased Implementation Plan

Given the numerous recommendations in this report, implementing them all at once could be overwhelming. To simplify the process and promote steady progress, we propose a phased implementation plan to help organize and guide the department. We have intentionally left the duration of each phase flexible, allowing CCFR to set timelines based on their available resources. This approach enables manageable improvements that boost morale and efficiency without overburdening current operations.

While the Board and senior leadership hold primary responsibility for implementing this plan, it cannot be understated that the success of these initiatives relies on the commitment of the entire organization. By building on existing strengths and fostering collective accountability, CCFR can integrate essential updates without disrupting ongoing responsibilities. Together, the organization can maintain its high standards of service in a demanding environment, ensuring positive, sustainable change.

1. Embrace the Results of the Organizational Assessment

2. Standardize Communication Channels

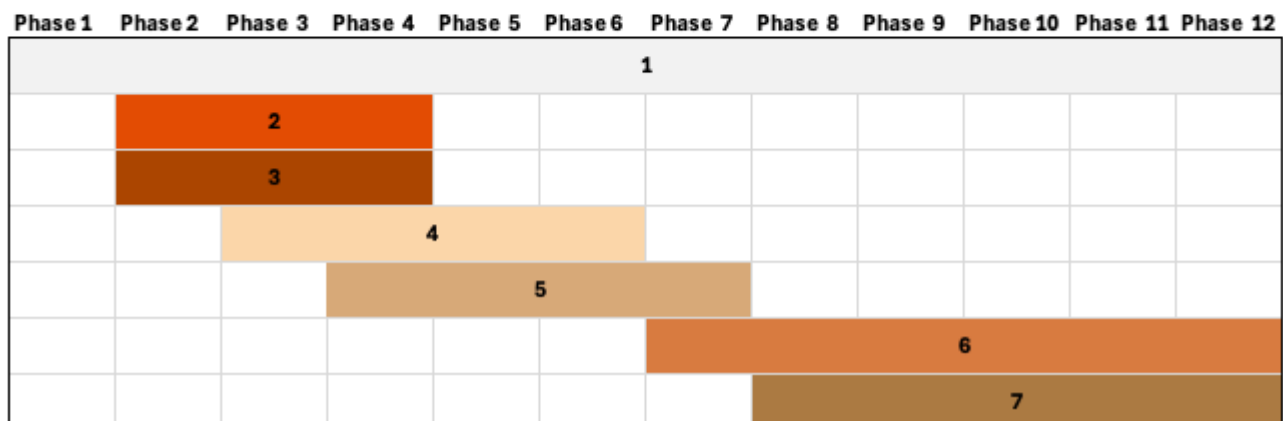
3. Build Community and Address Conflicts

4. Strengthen the Strategic Plan

5. Increase Leadership Accountability and Transparency

6. Foster an Empowering Organizational Culture

7. Leadership Training



Embrace the Results of the Organizational Assessment

Crook County Fire and Rescue has an excellent opportunity to strengthen trust and morale through an immediate and transparent response to this organizational assessment. Leadership's commitment to these recommendations will demonstrate a dedication to collaboration, accountability, and positive change. By acting decisively and implementing meaningful improvements, senior leadership can set a strong foundation for a unified, high-performing department focused on sustainable success.

- **Objective:** Establish a Cross-Functional Implementation Team and Phased Action Plan

Implementation Plan

The tasks below offer a suggested sequence of tasks to help achieve objectives. Further explanations and details were provided in the [analysis section](#).

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7	Phase 8	Phase 9	Phase 10	Phase 11	Phase 12
1											

Stage	Tasks
1	<p>Secure Funding: Allocate flexible financial resources for both the current and upcoming fiscal years to support a phased rollout of initiatives. This includes prioritizing funding according to the phased timeline to ensure resources are available as each objective begins.</p> <p>Establish Guidelines & Authority: Set detailed guidelines for the implementation team's responsibilities, including authority levels, to ensure clear governance throughout the process.</p> <p>Form Implementation Team: Assemble a cross-functional team with leadership, members, and union representation. Designate team leaders to coordinate efforts.</p>
2	<p>Initial Team Meetings: Conduct introductory meetings with the implementation team, distributing copies of the organizational assessment to guide the discussion.</p> <p>Define Action Plan: Assign leads for each primary recommendation and establish sub-teams where needed. Determine phased priorities and establish deadlines, with flexibility for adjustments as new information or needs arise.</p> <p>Establish Communication Channels: Coordinate with the communications subcommittee to ensure regular updates to members, maintaining transparency.</p>
3	<p>Subcommittee Planning: Each subcommittee drafts detailed action plans for prioritized recommendations, actively seeking input from members across departments to ensure broad engagement.</p>

	<p>Team Review of Plans: Subcommittee leads present action plans for review. The implementation team will refine and finalize these plans before submission to senior leadership for approval.</p>
4	<p>Leadership Review and Approval: Leadership reviews the finalized plans, ensuring alignment with strategic goals and resource constraints.</p> <p>Staggered Implementation: Begin implementing each objective according to its designated phase, with continuous monitoring for effectiveness and adjustment as needed.</p> <p>Feedback Collection and Adjustment: Collect feedback at each phase of implementation and make necessary adjustments based on employee input. Communicate any changes to the timeline or objectives transparently to maintain trust and engagement.</p> <p>Celebrate Milestones: Recognize progress at each phase through team meetings, newsletters, or informal gatherings, reinforcing commitment to organizational improvement.</p>

Standardize Communication Channels

Standardizing communication channels is essential to enhance CCFR's daily operations and implement the organizational plan effectively. A comprehensive communication strategy will streamline information flow, minimize misunderstandings, and align all members with the department's objectives. To ensure that everyone receives and fully understands the information, the strategy should emphasize repeated, multi-channel updates, recognizing that people often need multiple exposures in various formats to absorb it effectively. Clear, consistent standards for sharing updates, decisions, concerns, and regular recognitions of departmental successes will boost morale and support the successful execution of strategic recommendations. The communications team responsible should ensure continuous updates on the progress of all recommendations in this report.

- **Objective:** Establish Comprehensive Communication Protocols for Consistency, Transparency, and Efficiency

Implementation Plan

The tasks below offer a suggested sequence of tasks to help achieve objectives. Further explanations and details were provided in the [analysis section](#).

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7	Phase 8	Phase 9	Phase 10	Phase 11	Phase 12
	2										

Stage	Tasks
1	<p>Establish Communications Team: Form a cross-functional team with appropriate representatives from within the department. Assign a communications lead and clarify roles and responsibilities for each team member.</p> <p>Define Communication Philosophy: Establish a philosophy emphasizing transparency, clarity, timeliness, consistency in communication, and the sharing of successes. Ensure this philosophy guides the team's work, fostering open feedback and proactive information sharing.</p>
2	<p>Create SOPs for Communication: Create clear guidelines for information access and communication responsibilities tailored for different groups, such as lieutenants, members, and students.</p> <p>Create a Strategic Communication Calendar: Develop a calendar detailing key topics, preferred channels, and scheduled updates across multiple platforms to maintain regular and structured communication.</p>

3	<p>Build Supporting Team: Establish a team with the necessary skills to assist the communications lead in producing newsletters, organizing informational meetings, and managing updates.</p> <p>Explore and Implement Efficiency Tools: Research and deploy tools like transcription and summarization software to improve the efficiency of information capture and dissemination.</p> <p>Develop Communication Review Protocol: Set up a protocol to review all official communications, ensuring accuracy, clarity, and alignment with organizational goals before release.</p> <p>Plan review and approval: Present the plan to senior leadership for corrections and make any edits required to receive final approval.</p>
4	<p>Launch Regular Communications: Begin rolling out standardized communications across multiple channels to establish consistent, clear, and accessible information-sharing practices.</p> <p>Monitor and Review: Conduct regular evaluations to assess the effectiveness of communication strategies. Utilize feedback to adjust and improve communication practices as needed.</p> <p>Evaluate Communication Calendar: Periodically review and update the communication calendar to reflect evolving needs and ensure consistent information flow.</p> <p>Feedback-Driven Adjustments: Continuously integrate members' feedback to enhance clarity and responsiveness in communication, ensuring the strategy remains effective and aligned with organizational goals.</p>

Build Community and Address Conflicts

Considering the close working relationships within a small department like Crook County Fire and Rescue, as well as the life-and-death nature of the work, building a strong community is crucial. The initial phase should focus on organizing informal events such as holiday gatherings or family-inclusive activities to foster relationship-building and strengthen connections between leadership and members. It's important to recognize that full engagement in these programs will take time, and patience is key. Additionally, conflict resolution training should emphasize enhancing communication skills department wide, equipping all members to prevent conflicts and, when they do arise, resolve them independently whenever possible.

- **OBJECTIVE ONE:** Celebrate and Highlight Successes
- **OBJECTIVE TWO:** Offer Conflict Resolution Training

Implementation Plan

The tasks below offer a suggested sequence of tasks to help achieve objectives. Further explanations and details were provided in the [analysis section](#).

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7	Phase 8	Phase 9	Phase 10	Phase 11	Phase 12
	3										

Stage	Tasks
1	<p>Celebrate and Highlight Successes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint Event Organizers: Designate individuals or a small team responsible for planning and promoting department-wide social events. <p>Offer Conflict Resolution Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify Training Facilitators for Conflict Resolution Training: Assign a team to identify and recommend facilitators with expertise in conflict resolution and interpersonal communication, with final approval from the Board and/or senior leadership.
2	<p>Celebrate and Highlight Successes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish Regular Engagement Events and Celebrate Successes: Create standard department-wide events, such as holiday gatherings and informal opportunities for conversations with leadership (e.g., Coffee with The Chief), while also establishing ways to celebrate individual and organizational accomplishments. These separate efforts aim to build community through consistent engagement and recognition of achievements. • Recognition Focus During Leadership Meetings: Allocate time in senior leadership meetings to address departmental challenges, celebrate successes, and review areas for

	<p>improvement, with a focus on how sharing this information can positively impact the organization. Recognize that celebrating achievements—both individual and team-based—boosts morale, strengthens community, and reinforces a culture of appreciation. When members understand the reasons behind decisions and policies, they feel more engaged and supported. Leaders should adopt a consistent approach to keeping members informed, celebrating accomplishments, and fostering a sense of shared purpose across the organization.</p> <p>Offer Conflict Resolution Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement Comprehensive Conflict Resolution Training: Collaborate with a selected firm to design and deliver conflict resolution training tailored to the department's specific needs. This program should focus on essential skills such as active listening, mediation, and team dynamics, incorporating input from CCFR to ensure relevance and effectiveness. The training will equip all members with strategies for navigating and resolving both interpersonal and operational conflicts, providing tools to handle challenging conversations and enhancing overall team cohesion and communication within the department.
3	<p>Celebrate and Highlight Successes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote, Refine, Monitor, & Adjust Events: Collaborate with the communications committee to promote events and continuously enhance them to boost engagement. Recognize that building full participation may take time. After each event, collect feedback to identify areas for improvement and explore creative strategies to encourage involvement. <p>Offer Conflict Resolution Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highlight Achievements Across Channels: Use newsletters and meetings to communicate and celebrate department progress. ● Provide Practical Tools & Ongoing Support: Start using communication guides and offer coaching sessions to reinforce the training, as well as templates for conflict resolution.

Strengthen the Strategic Plan

An external expert will bring objectivity, best practices, and a comprehensive analysis to CCFR's strategic planning, addressing operational needs, workforce challenges, and community expectations. By engaging stakeholders, conducting a SWOT analysis, and implementing risk management, the expert will ensure an actionable, measurable plan aligned with CCFR's mission. This approach will streamline operations, include strategies to reduce turnover, and empower leadership to focus on high-impact initiatives, supported by a clear evaluation framework for informed, data-driven decision-making.

- **Objective:** Engage an External Expert to Lead a Revitalized Strategic Planning Process

Implementation Plan

The tasks below offer a suggested sequence of tasks to help achieve objectives. Further explanations and details were provided in [the analysis section](#).

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7	Phase 8	Phase 9	Phase 10	Phase 11	Phase 12
			4								

Stage	Tasks
1	<p>Initial Approval: Begin subcommittee work by following the “Embrace the Results of the Organizational Assessment” implementation process to obtain the necessary approvals.</p> <p>Adjust the Strategic Planning Timeline: The Board and Senior Leadership should work together to revise policies, extending the strategic planning timeline to five years. This plan should include annual reviews and a full revision at the end of each five-year period.</p> <p>Allocate Financial Resources: Leadership must ensure that adequate financial resources are allocated to guarantee a thorough and effective process.</p>
2	<p>Hire a Strategic Planning Firm: Select a firm with proven expertise in developing strategic plans specific to the fire service. The chosen facilitator should have a strong track record of success, and examples of previous strategic plans should be requested, along with detailed descriptions of the level of support they provide, such as assistance in developing tracking tools and other necessary resources.</p> <p>Foster Leadership Support for Strategic Planning: The Board and senior leadership must actively support the strategic planning process by allowing time for members to engage in meaningful discussions and clearly communicating the plan's importance to all members. Transparent decision-making, regular updates, and empowering both the external facilitator and the strategic planning team are essential for success. Leaders should celebrate key milestones and remain accountable for the plan's execution.</p>

Enhance Leadership Accountability and Transparency

To strengthen leadership accountability and transparency, we recommend a strategic approach centered around key objectives that will enhance trust, operational effectiveness, and a culture of integrity within the department. By establishing structured processes and creating clear communication channels, leadership can promote consistency, encourage responsibility, and support continuous improvement across all levels.

- **Objective One:** Establish a Document Review Calendar
- **Objective Two:** Consistent Enforcement of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
- **Objective Three:** Implement a 360-Degree Review and Employee Morale Survey System
- **Objective Four:** Enhance Real-Time Operational Feedback Mechanisms

Implementation Plan

The tasks below offer a suggested sequence of tasks to help achieve objectives. Further explanations and details were provided in the [analysis section](#).

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7	Phase 8	Phase 9	Phase 10	Phase 11	Phase 12
				5							

Stage	Tasks
1	Appoint Subcommittees: Appoint separate subcommittees to focus on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document Review Calendar. • SOP Updates and Adherence Process • 360-degree performance review / engagement surveys. • Feedback Loop Optimization
2	Document Review Calendar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Review Calendar: Identify policies requiring annual review, draft a calendar, assign responsibilities, and seek feedback from stakeholders before finalizing. SOP Updates and Adherence Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and Update SOPs: Assess current SOPs and recommend changes if necessary. Develop a process to monitor and ensure adherence. 360-degree performance review / engagement surveys. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select Provider(s): Choose an external firm to design the 360-degree review and conduct the morale survey, tailoring these tools to departmental needs. Operational Feedback Loop Optimization

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate Current System: Analyze the existing feedback tool's effectiveness and assign personnel to oversee ongoing improvements.
3	<p>Document Review Calendar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize and Communicate Document Review Calendar: Communicate the finalized schedule across the department through the communications committee. Seek input when components of the calendar are open for annual review. <p>SOP Updates and Adherence Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement SOP Training and Monitoring: Conduct training on updated SOPs and monitor adherence. <p>360-degree performance review / engagement surveys.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 360-Degree Feedback and Morale Survey Execution: Launch these evaluations, ensure results are confidential, and communicate findings to leadership. <p>Operational Feedback Loop Optimization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train Members on the Updated System: Train members on how to use the improved system to log concerns, track progress, and offer input when necessary. • Integrate with Leadership Reviews: Incorporate feedback into regular leadership meetings to ensure key findings are acknowledged and addressed. Share both areas for improvement and recognitions of progress or accomplishments with the communications chair for broader dissemination through established communication channels.
4	<p>360-degree performance review / engagement surveys.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate Findings: Share the complete results of the engagement survey and the Leadership Performance Overview from the 360-Degree Review with senior leadership and the Board. Provide members with a summary of key findings, emphasizing departmental strengths, reinforcing supportive policies, and outlining action steps for improvement where necessary. This approach keeps members informed by focusing on meaningful insights and planned actions, without disclosing the full report. • Integrate 360 Degree Results into Performance Reviews: Use individual results to better inform leaders and their direct supervisors of strengths and areas for growth. • Continue Reviews: Conduct 360-degree reviews and morale surveys every 1-2 years, incorporating the findings into strategic reviews to track improvements over time and assess progress on key initiatives. <p>Document Review Calendar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update Document Review Calendar: Regularly review and update the document review calendar to ensure it includes all relevant policies and assigns appropriate review frequencies for documents within.

	<p>SOP Updates and Adherence Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Track SOP Adherence and Success: Continue monitoring adherence and provide ongoing training based on identified gaps.• Introduce SOP Communications: Use communication channels to regularly highlight a specific SOP to reinforce understanding of the process and reason behind it.
--	--

Foster an Empowering Organizational Culture

Develop a member development strategy that supports organizational goals and fosters employee growth. This plan will align leadership initiatives and special projects with strategic priorities, empowering members to address operational challenges directly. By defining clear roles and providing opportunities for skill development and project leadership, the organization will build a culture of accountability and autonomy, ensuring that all efforts contribute to its broader vision.

- **Objective:** Establish a Comprehensive Member Development Strategy

Implementation Plan

The tasks below offer a suggested sequence of tasks to help achieve objectives. Further explanations and details were provided in the [analysis section](#).

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7	Phase 8	Phase 9	Phase 10	Phase 11	Phase 12
											6

Stage	Tasks
1	Subcommittee Setup: Form a cross-departmental subcommittee to support the development strategy and oversee special projects, under the direction and final authority of senior leadership. The subcommittee will focus on aligning member development initiatives with organizational goals presented in the updated strategic plan, ensuring appropriate management of resources for approved projects.
2	<p>Strategic Philosophy Recommendations: The subcommittee proposes a strategic hiring and member development philosophy (e.g., focused on attracting qualified candidates, fostering internal growth, and maintaining high morale).</p> <p>Outline of Structured Training and Special Projects: Develop objectives for new member onboarding, leadership readiness, and special projects. Ensure special projects align with departmental priorities and provide opportunities for skill application.</p> <p>Collaborate on Development Pathways: Engage all ranks to identify development needs, special project roles, and clear pathways for personal and professional growth.</p>
3	Identify Special Project Roles: Based on strategic priorities and member input, identify roles and responsibilities for line staff in areas such as equipment management, operational improvements, and "acting in charge" positions.

	<p>Establish Scope and Authority: Define scope, authority, and guidelines for members leading special projects, including budget expectations and decision-making boundaries. Ensure roles allow for practical leadership experience.</p>
4	<p>Resource Planning: Allocate necessary resources (funding, time, materials) for training and special projects. Prioritize projects that address critical community needs and support departmental goals.</p> <p>Leadership Development Integration: Introduce structured mentorship and project management programs to prepare personnel for future leadership roles, including "acting in charge" and community outreach responsibilities.</p>
5	<p>Monitor Progress and Gather Feedback: Use results from morale surveys, the Leadership Performance Overview from the 360-Degree Review, and project assessments to gauge success and alignment with strategic goals. Adjust the program as needed to improve engagement and effectiveness.</p> <p>Recognize and Celebrate Achievements: Regularly highlight members contributions, project milestones, and training accomplishments in newsletters, meetings, and informal events to boost morale and reinforce the importance of development initiatives.</p>

Leadership Training

The development and implementation of a tailored leadership training program should be directly informed by the insights gained from the and the leadership performance overview from 360-degree performance review, the strategic plan, and the employee empowerment initiatives. This program should be customized to meet the department's leadership needs at all levels, ensuring that each tier of leadership receives the appropriate training and guidance to excel in their roles. By integrating these elements, the program will address gaps in current practices and align leadership development with the department's broader goals. To ensure the highest level of effectiveness, the design and delivery of this program should be entrusted to an external expert with a proven track record in leadership development.

- **Objective:** Implement a Tailored Leadership Training Program

Implementation Plan

The tasks below offer a suggested sequence of tasks to help achieve objectives. Further explanations and details were provided in the [analysis section](#).

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7	Phase 8	Phase 9	Phase 10	Phase 11	Phase 12

Stage	Tasks
1	<p>Hire a Specialized Leadership Development Provider: Select an expert firm with proven experience in leadership training, ensuring the program is aligned with the specific needs of the department.</p> <p>Share Organizational Insights: Provide the selected company with key insights gained during the implementation of these recommendations, and include the updated strategic plan, employee development strategy, and results from morale and engagement surveys.</p> <p>Customize Training: Collaborate with the selected provider to design a tailored curriculum that emphasizes communication, decision-making, emotional intelligence, and team building. Ensure the training modules are aligned with the department's core values and mission, reinforcing the leadership competencies needed for long-term success.</p>
2	<p>Deliver Training: Leadership training should be an integral part of the overall employee development strategy across all roles. It should be delivered with consideration for multiple learning styles and structured in a way that allows employees to engage in training while fulfilling their regular responsibilities.</p>

	<p>Assess Impact & Adjust Program: Continuously evaluate leadership development progress using tools such as leadership performance overview from 360-degree performance review and satisfaction surveys to identify areas for improvement.</p> <p>Integrate Continuous Learning: Offer ongoing refresher courses and advanced modules to ensure leadership skills are maintained and enhanced over time.</p>
--	---

Conclusion

The organizational assessment of Crook County Fire and Rescue (CCFR) underscores both the strengths and areas for improvement within the department. CCFR's commitment to its mission of providing reliable emergency services and its proactive steps toward growth and improvement are evident. The assessment's findings, particularly around communication, trust, and strategic alignment, reveal critical opportunities to enhance cohesion, operational efficiency, and member engagement. Implementing the recommendations in this report through a phased approach will not only address current challenges but also position CCFR for sustained success in a rapidly changing environment.

By embracing these recommendations, CCFR can create a more empowered, transparent, and collaborative organizational culture that supports both its workforce and its community. Enhanced leadership accountability, standardized communication channels, and a refined strategic plan will foster a more connected and efficient department. Additionally, investing in leadership development, conflict resolution, and community-building initiatives will reinforce CCFR's strengths, improve morale, and support an adaptive, resilient department prepared to meet future demands.

This report serves as a blueprint for actionable change, and the success of these initiatives relies on the commitment of every member. We encourage CCFR's leadership to continue fostering open dialogue, actively engage members in the change process, and leverage the strengths of its committed team. Together, these efforts will drive CCFR toward its vision of delivering exceptional service and achieving long-term strategic goals for the benefit of the community.

APPENDIX A - Documents Reviewed

The following documents were thoroughly reviewed as part of the document evaluation process. Please note that additional documents, including prior versions of those listed below, were examined but not formally evaluated and are therefore not included in this list.

Board-Administrative Documents	Operational Documents
<p>5-17-24 Personnel Policy Manual</p> <p>2024 Yearly Agenda Calendar with work sessions</p> <p>2023 Yearly Agenda Calendar with work sessions</p> <p>Fire Board Governance Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Duties Policy 12-15-22 • 3-19-20 Revised Ends Policy • 3-19-20 Revised Board Chief Linkage Policy • 1-20-22 Revised Executive Limitations Policy • 1-19-2024 Revised Governance Process Policy <p>Fire Board Minutes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-18-24 Board Meeting Minutes • 2-15-24 Meeting Minutes • 3-21-24 Board Meeting Minutes 4-18-24 Board Meeting Minutes • 5-16-24 Meeting Minutes • 6-20-24 Board Minutes • 7-18-24 Board Minutes <p>Evaluations and Templates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23 Strategic Guide • 3-15-24 District Eval Tool Goal Strategy • 3-21-24 Evaluation • 3-16-23 Evaluation • 3-17-22 Evaluation • 3-18-21 2020 Evaluation <p>Job Descriptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire Chief • 1-20-24 Division Chief of Emergency Operations • 2-8-23 Battalion Chiefs Job Description • Finance Manager 	<p>CCFR TPS Book 5-7-20</p> <p>CCFR ODP Policy</p> <p>FTEP 4-24-10</p> <p>Operational Guidelines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two In Two Out Guideline • Structure Fire Command Guideline • Standard Radio Terminology Guideline • Standard Command Functions Terminology • Staging Guideline • Residential Structure Fire Guideline • Personnel Accountability Report Guideline • Multi-Unit Structure Fire Guideline • Mayday Guideline • Incident Command Guideline • Accountability Guideline <p>Ops Meeting Minutes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operations Meeting 1-10-24 • Operations Meeting 1-31-24 • Operations Meeting 1-17-24 • Operations Meeting 1-24-24 • Operations Meeting 2-28-24 • 3-13-24 Ops • 3-27-24 Ops • 4-3-24 Ops • 4-10-24 Ops • 4-17-24 Ops • 4-24-24 Ops • 5-15-24 Ops • 5-29-24 Ops • 6-6-24 OPS • 6-12-24 OPS • 6-19-24 OPS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical Billing Supervisor 5-1-22 • Part Time Administrative Assistant 8-29-18 • 8-26-24 Administrative Support Specialist • Division Chief Fire Life Safety revised 7-1-19 • Lieutenant revised 7-2019 • Firefighter Paramedic revised 11-2017 • 5-17-23 Fire Prevention Technician Job Description • 5-17-23 FF-EMS Worker Job Description 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-26-24 OPS
Labor Management Documents	Key Administrative Documents
2022-2025 CBA CCFR-5115 final Labor Management Minutes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feb Labor management 2 24 • March labor meeting revised minutes • April labor management • May Labor Management • June Labor Management • July Labor Management Meeting • August Labor Management Meeting 	4-20-23 Strategic Business Plan 2-15-24 Approved 2024 Standard of Cover 23-24 Update Future Growth and Needs District Budget and Budget Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24-25 Final Budget Document • 24-25 Budget Information • 5-16-24 Long Term Financial Plan Updated
Miscellaneous Documents	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Org Chart Budget 2024-2025 • 8-1-24 Shift Assignment Reference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User Emails • Shift cleaning and maintenance weekly duties

APPENDIX B - Interview Questions

The following questions guided the interview process. Interviewers may not have asked every question if prior responses had already covered certain topics. Additionally, additional questions were often introduced to clarify responses or to explore new areas of interest raised by the interviewee.

Board Members Interview Questions

Work Environment:

- How is the current level of collaboration and trust between the Board, leadership, and line staff?
- Are there areas for improvement?

Information Flow:

- Do you believe board's decisions are communicated clearly and effectively throughout the agency?
- Are there any breakdowns in communication that hinder decision-making or strategic planning?

Goal Alignment:

- How does the board ensure that the organization's goals are forward-thinking and aligned with the long-term vision/needs of the community?
- How well do you feel the department's strategic business plan and its key documents (Standard of Cover, Future Growth and Needs and the District's Budget) are aligned?
- In what ways does the board encourage innovation or adaptability in achieving these goals?
- What metrics/benchmarks does the board use to measure progress toward achieving strategic goals?
- What could improve the Board's oversight in tracking progress toward these goals?

Conflict Resolution:

- From your perspective, how effectively does the department manage internal conflicts?
- Do you feel that leadership handles grievances fairly and transparently?
- What steps could be taken to improve the Board's role in ensuring equitable conflict resolution?

Leadership Perception:

- In your opinion, what are the most effective aspects of the department's leadership, and where do you see room for growth?
- What are your thoughts on the tools and processes used to assess the effectiveness of the department's leadership?
- Would you support introducing more formal feedback mechanisms, such as 360-degree reviews, to gather comprehensive feedback on leadership performance?

Readiness for Change:

- As the department prepares for future growth and transitions, what do you see as the most critical areas for improvement?
- What is your assessment of the department's preparedness for these challenges?
- How can the Board better support leadership in navigating these challenges?

Before we wrap up, is there anything we haven't covered that you feel is important to discuss?

Senior Leadership and Battalion Chiefs Interview Questions**Work Environment:**

- How do you ensure collaboration and trust within the organization?
- Describe any challenges you have faced in fostering collaboration and trust?

Information Flow:

- How would you describe the communication between leadership and the rest of the department?
- Describe ways where communication could be improved?
- How effective do you believe the current communication protocols (e.g., structured meetings, email, memos) are in disseminating information to all levels of members?
- Are there any improvements you would recommend?
- How do you ensure efficient communication in critical situations across all teams?

Goal Alignment:

- How do you ensure that departmental goals remain aligned with the Board's strategic objectives, and have you experienced challenges in maintaining this alignment?

- How do you ensure alignment across teams or departments to achieve the goals set by the Board?
- What methods are used to track progress toward departmental goals, and how could this process be made more effective?

Conflict Resolution:

- How have the grievance and conflict resolution processes worked in practice, and what specific aspects do you believe are effective or could benefit from improvement?
- Are there any recurring conflicts that should be addressed to improve overall team cohesion?
- How could additional training or support improve the department's ability to resolve conflicts effectively?

Leadership Perception:

- How do you feel the leadership team's style is perceived by your department and Board?
- Do you believe leadership fosters a positive and productive work environment?
- Would you support a 360-degree feedback mechanism to gather insights from all members?

Readiness for Change:

- How prepared do you feel the department is for upcoming changes or transitions?
- What proactive steps have you taken to ensure smooth transitions?
- What additional support or resources would help facilitate this readiness?

Before we wrap up, is there anything we haven't covered that you feel is important to discuss?

Operational Staff (Lieutenants, Firefighters/EMS) Interview Questions

Work Environment:

- How effectively do teams within the department collaborate, and what specific changes could enhance teamwork?
- Do you feel comfortable raising concerns with leadership or through formal grievance processes?
- What changes could leadership make to improve trust and foster a more supportive work environment?

Information Flow:

- How do you feel about the communication between leadership and line staff?
- Are there any gaps in information sharing that you think should be addressed?
- Have you experienced any breakdowns in communication during critical situations?

Goal Alignment:

- How well do you feel informed about departmental goals and changes?
- Do you feel clarity around your role in achieving these goals?
- Do you have an opportunity to provide input on department and strategic goals?

Conflict Resolution:

- How effective is the conflict resolution process, and what specific changes would improve it?
- Can you identify any conflicts that weren't resolved satisfactorily and suggest how they could have been handled more effectively?
- What additional support or actions could leadership take to enhance conflict resolution within the department?

Leadership Perception:

- How do you view the effectiveness of leadership in supporting the team?
- Do you feel leadership is approachable and responsive to feedback?
- What changes would you suggest to improve leadership engagement with line staff?
- How do you feel about the opportunities for professional growth within the department?

Readiness for Change:

- Do you feel adequately prepared for any upcoming changes?
- What would help improve your readiness for these changes?
- How involved are you in departmental change decisions, and how could the process be more inclusive?
- Are there any gaps in training or resources that could impact your ability to adapt to future challenges?

Before we wrap up, is there anything we haven't covered that you feel is important to discuss?

Support Staff (Admin) Interview Questions

Work Environment:

- How do you feel about the collaboration between support staff and operational teams?
- Are there any areas where you think collaboration or trust could be improved?
- How comfortable do you feel raising concerns or suggestions with leadership?

Information Flow:

- How well are communication channels established between support staff and other members?
- Are there improvements you would suggest for better information flow?
- Have you encountered challenges with receiving timely or relevant information?

Goal Alignment:

- How clearly do you understand the strategic goals of the department, and how your role contributes to these objectives?
- Are there areas where communication of goals could be improved?
- Is there a clear system for tracking progress toward these goals within the support staff?
- What challenges do you face in helping the department achieve its strategic goals?

Conflict Resolution:

- How effective do you feel the current conflict resolution processes are?
- Have they been applied fairly in your observation?
- What additional support or training would help you better navigate internal conflicts?

Leadership Perception:

- Do you feel leadership is responsive to your needs and feedback?
- Do you feel that leadership values and supports the contributions of support staff, and are there areas where more support or recognition is needed?

Readiness for Change:

- How prepared do you feel for upcoming departmental changes, and what challenges do you anticipate?
- What specific improvements would better support you in your day-to-day operations or in preparing for upcoming challenges?

- Are there any specific areas of training or resource allocation that could improve your preparedness for future changes?

Before we wrap up, is there anything we haven't covered that you feel is important to discuss?

APPENDIX C - Resources

Rafilson & Associates, LLC is a leading consulting firm with a strong foundation in industrial and organizational psychology, clinical psychology, personnel assessment, program evaluation, and business operations. The team brings extensive experience across both private and public sectors, partnering with Fortune 500 companies, public safety agencies, healthcare organizations, government bodies, and philanthropic foundations. Their client-focused approach is designed to deliver high-quality, evidence-based solutions that support organizational success and legal compliance. The firm's offerings include psychological evaluations, expert witness services, and custom assessments tailored to meet the unique needs of law enforcement and fire service personnel.

Rafilson & Associates' expertise makes them an invaluable resource for developing and administering various organizational programs. For **360-degree performance reviews**, their consultants bring deep insights into organizational behavior and assessment techniques that can provide comprehensive feedback for employee development. In conducting **member morale surveys**, they apply rigorous, science-based methodologies that accurately capture employee sentiment, helping leaders make data-driven improvements. Their **conflict resolution training** programs leverage the firm's psychology and counseling experience, equipping organizations with strategies to manage and resolve conflicts constructively, enhancing both individual well-being and team cohesion.

The Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO) is a pivotal organization founded in 1979 to represent and support special districts throughout Oregon, fostering cost-effective and efficient public service delivery. With over 900 members, SDAO provides advocacy at the state level, training, resources, and support programs tailored to the unique needs of special districts. The organization is governed by a board of directors elected by members and offers an annual conference for networking and learning. SDAO's services are essential for helping special districts navigate regulatory challenges, improve operational efficiency, and align with best practices for public service delivery. Additionally, SDAO created the Special Districts Insurance Services (SDIS) Trust to offer stable, self-insured solutions for property, liability, and health insurance to its members.

For fire and EMS departments, SDAO's expertise and resources make it an ideal partner for developing a **strategic plan**. Their strategic planning framework, led by experienced consultants like George Dunkel, helps departments assess their current status, set a clear vision for the future, and establish actionable steps to achieve long-term goals. By leveraging SDAO's planning tools and guidance, fire and EMS departments can ensure that their strategies align with operational priorities, resource availability, and community needs. This structured approach helps these departments focus on high-impact initiatives, optimize resource allocation, and improve overall readiness to respond to the evolving demands of public safety.

HowDo, founded in 2017, is a consulting firm specializing in business growth through innovation and technology transformation. With a mission to democratize innovation, HowDo partners with organizations of all sizes—from startups to Fortune 50 companies—to enhance productivity, reduce costs, and drive market leadership. By integrating advanced technologies like AI, blockchain, and cloud solutions, HowDo empowers organizations to build economically sustainable and transformative business practices. Led by industry veterans such as CEO West Stringfellow, who has spearheaded innovation initiatives at companies like Target and Amazon, and Design Co-Founder Lil Abelha, who has developed large-scale products for Microsoft and SAP, HowDo provides an expert, comprehensive approach to strategic business evolution.

For organizations developing **leadership training programs**, HowDo's resources offer invaluable support. Their "Business Evolution" masterclasses, open-source playbooks, and interactive workshops equip leaders with the tools to foster a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. By focusing on data-driven decision-making, goal-setting frameworks, and adaptive team-building techniques, HowDo enables leaders to inspire effective communication, collaborative problem-solving, and forward-thinking strategies in their teams. This unique approach helps build resilient leaders capable of navigating complex challenges and fostering an environment where innovation thrives.