



## NEWS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release**  
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### **ORANGE COUNTY FIRE AND EMS TO PARTICIPATE IN A STATEWIDE STUDY ON VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY**

Orange, VA – The Virginia Fire Chiefs Association (VFCA) announced that the County of Orange Fire & EMS Department has been selected as one of 14 departments in Virginia to participate in a federally-funded program designed to increase the recruitment of volunteer firefighters. The Volunteer Workforce Solutions (VWS) program is being led by the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association, in partnership with the International Association of Fire Chiefs, Environmental Systems Research Institute (Esri), and George Mason University. Funding for the VWS program is provided by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security from a Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant.

The Volunteer Fire Departments located in Orange County currently have approximately 150 firefighters, and would like to recruit 50 additional firefighters. The County's Volunteer Fire Departments protect a population of approximately 33,940 covering 341 square miles.

Research and data collected by the VFCA since 2004 has shown that staffing is consistently the #1 issue facing Virginia's volunteer fire departments. A 2012 Virginia Fire Service Needs Assessment Survey conducted by the Virginia Department of Fire Programs, found that 70% of all survey respondents reported the need for more volunteer firefighters. Because two-thirds of all Virginia firefighters are volunteers, it is critical to bolster and maintain volunteer personnel to adequately protect Virginia's residents and visitors.

"Over the last several years, it has been very tough for many fire departments throughout Virginia to recruit and retain volunteers for a variety of reasons," said VFCA Executive Director Jimmy Carter. Carter stated that "most volunteer fire departments are struggling to bolster their volunteer workforce in order to provide the optimum level of protection for residents. The VWS program attempts to identify and mitigate the recruitment and retention problems facing volunteer fire departments while assisting the departments and elected officials in effectively planning their future emergency response systems."

As part of the VWS program, the County of Orange Fire & EMS will use a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Segmentation Study to take an in-depth look at their community by measuring demographic, cultural and economic data to predict the best way to recruit volunteer firefighters. The basis of the Segmentation Study is that just like people; communities also have unique "personalities" that can be analyzed to identify the characteristics and traits that will attract a viable and sustainable volunteer firefighter workforce. "Tapestry Segmentation has been used successfully by government agencies, businesses and organizations to better understand population segments, how to reach them, and serve them," says Jennifer Schottke, Senior Manager of Fire/EMS and Public Safety Policy at Esri. These studies are designed to provide a roadmap for each community and suggest recommendations that can further advance the recruitment of volunteer firefighters.



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In addition to the Tapestry Segmentation information, the VWS program highlights its **Everyday Heroes Campaign** which advertises the right message to the right audience through personal outreach and recruitment events. The campaign also includes one central website, [www.EverydayHeroVa.org](http://www.EverydayHeroVa.org) to direct prospective volunteers to a respective fire department and to provide other resourceful information.

Upon completion of the VWS program, the effectiveness and success of the program will be evaluated by Esri, George Mason University, the IAFC and the VFCA with the goal of providing a roadmap for further advancing the recruitment of volunteer firefighters in Virginia. A formal program analysis and report will be submitted to FEMA at the program's closure.

In addition to the County of Orange Department of Fire & EMS, the following fire departments are also participating in the Phase II portion of the VWS program:

- Albemarle County Fire Rescue
- Botetourt County Emergency Services
- City of Hampton Fire and Rescue
- Clarke County Fire and Rescue Association
- Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department.
- Fairfax Volunteer Fire Department (City of Fairfax)
- Franklin Fire and Rescue/Hunterdale Volunteer Fire Department (City of Franklin)
- Henry County Department of Public Safety/ Martinsville Fire and EMS
- Leesburg Volunteer Fire Company
- Manassas Volunteer Fire Company
- New Kent County Fire-Rescue
- Purcellville Volunteer Fire Company
- Shenandoah County Department of Fire and Rescue

For more information on the VWS program can be found at [www.EverydayHeroVa.org](http://www.EverydayHeroVa.org) or by contacting John Harkness, Orange County Fire and EMS Chief, at (540) 672-7044.

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