BFD/SKFR Consolidation Communications Plan

The void created by the failure to communicate is soon filled with poison, drivel, and misrepresentation.
—C. Northcote Parkinson

Purpose of this Document

This document provides practical suggestions for fire service leaders and managers to ensure sufficient communications within their departments and with external stakeholders.

Goals of the Communication Plan

• Ensure the elected officials are an active and integral part of the overall Communication Plan.
• Improve communication to and from citizens, businesses, and organizations.
• Improve two-way communication within the two participating jurisdictions.
• Enhance and improve community and media relations.
• Breakdown feelings of “us vs. them” between two participating jurisdictions.
• Increase awareness, interest, and participation of employees in the goals and activities of the consolidation.
• Build organizational pride among employees and positive identification with consolidation.

Develop a Basic Communications Plan

• What key messages do we want to convey?
• To what key stakeholders do we want to convey the key messages?
• What's the best approach to reach each key stakeholder, including who/how should the message be conveyed?
• How will we know if you're reaching these stakeholders or not?

Communication Objectives

• All Audiences
• Internal Audiences: All Members of BFD and SKFR
• Internal Audiences: Targeted Leadership
• External Communications: Stakeholders
• External Communications: Public/Media

What the Consolidation Team must communicate
The team must communicate about the status, details, and decisions regarding the development of the consolidation work plan. The team must communicate the following:

- The process for developing the work plan.
- The progress made in developing the work plan.
- The details of the work plan before decisions are made.
- The funding issues regarding the implementation of the consolidation work plan.
- The net benefits of implementing the consolidation work plan.

**All audiences**

- Communicate key meeting dates.
- Communicate what the law requires.
- Communicate issues being considered by the team.
- Communicate decisions made by the team.
- Communicate benefits and risks of the consolidation work plan.

**Internal audiences**

- Communicate all consolidation meetings (dates/times/location).
- Communicate policies, procedures, and key issues that may impact staff.
- Educate staff on the process of developing a consolidation work plan.
- Educate staff on the strategic objectives of each project task within the consolidation work plan.

**External audiences**

- Communicate all consolidation meetings (dates/times/location) with general public.
- Communicate all consolidation meetings (dates/times/location) with neighboring fire departments.
- Communicate key issues and decisions that may impact the general public.

**Key Essentials**

- **Key Messages:** Key messages will be developed by the consolidation team.

- **Truthfulness:** One of the paramount principles of communication will be accurately reporting past events to earn future trust.

- **Responsibility:** Each jurisdiction’s fire chief is responsible to disseminate information and inform their internal and external publics.

- **Consistency:** To maintain a consistent message, staff from the two participating jurisdictions will receive assignments to develop joint press releases that will be delivered by the local fire chief.
• **Frequency**: Communication will occur proactively rather than waiting for problems to arise and then communicating. This will require regular communications.

• **Expectations**: All fire department leaders must ensure our citizens and members receive timely, relevant and reliable information regarding the consolidation work plan.

**Communication Milestones**

- Monthly Reports on Progress to the Executive Board of the KCFCA
- Quarterly Reports on Progress to the general KCFCA meetings
- Monthly Reports on Progress to the Kitsap County Fire Commissioners
- Monthly Reports on Progress to the Executive Board of the KCFCA
- Weekly updates for SKFR and BFD members and workgroup leaders from Fire Chiefs
- Quarterly updates for WFC/WSCFF/WFCA/WSFFA
- Develop Joint Press Releases Announcing Key dates, process and advantages

**Target Audiences**

Identified internal target audiences include:

- BFD and SKFR Elected Officials
- BFD and SKFR Chiefs
- BFD and SKFR Labor leaders
- SKFR Volunteer Leaders
- BFD and SKFR Officers/Managers/Department heads
- BFD and SKFR uniform members
- BFD and SKFR non-uniform members
- SKFR Volunteer members

Identified external target audiences include:

- CKFR
- Neighboring Fire District Leaders
- Harrison Hospital
- Olympic Ambulance
- Local Healthcare providers
- Business Community
- Community Leaders/Clubs
- Kitsap Regional Coordinating Council
- Kitsap Elected Officials (any outside of the two fire departments)
- General Public/Media
- WFC
- WFCA
- WSCFF
- Kitsap DEM
- Kitsap CenCom
• KCSO, POPD and BPD leadership
• Kitsap Fire Commissioners and Chiefs Association

**Communication Process**

**Methods:** The primary methods used to disseminate information and/or educate:

**Electronic Communication:** This includes but is not limited to such communication vehicles as targeted emails, web sites, newsletter, internal mail lists, Chiefs updates, labor newsletters, volunteer newsletters, surveys, weekly Friday updates, and other means of rapid information dissemination.

**Printed Communication:** This includes printed or copied documents as needed to fulfill the communications objectives. These include talking points, fact sheets, program newsletters, news releases, newsletter articles for partner and association newsletter, progress reports, brochures, training materials, booklets, and other items as necessary.

**Verbal Communication:** This includes speaking engagements, presentations, and formal training classes in a variety of forms including classroom style, videotaped, videoconferencing and computer based training, and computer conference style education. Meetings may include executive level briefings, team briefings, office or unit staff meetings, customer meetings, partner meetings, provider meetings, and stakeholder briefings. This can also include word of mouth from members to citizens.

**Visual Communication:** Often this will include materials to be used in presentations, speaking, or training. These include PowerPoints, videotapes, and other visual charts, graphs, posters, and pictures.

**Communications Strategies**

Consolidation communication strategies will be multi-faceted and carried out using a variety of communication methods. Key strategies include:

**Information Only:** Determine if the communication is “information only.” Once determined, that will drive the types of communication methods needed – relying more on utilizing the traditional electronic communications channels (email, email newsletters, weekly updates, etc.).

**Seeking Feedback:** Determine if the communication is seeking feedback. If so, the means of communicating that information is more complex and should involve actively engaging staff either through a conversation, meeting, task, class, or activity. This is to ensure that the information exchange is effective.

**Managers as Key Communicators:** Rely on management and member leader groups at all levels to help communicate key messages and receive feedback. It will be critical to be strategic on who, how, and how often these managers will be used to help carry messages.
• Video Conferencing and BKAT.

• Getting Staff’s Attention: Rely on various staff meetings to help communicate critical issues and decisions. In order to get staff’s attention on major changes, they need to hear it from their own managers in their own meetings. Likewise the community needs to hear from their Fire Chief, not a staff support person or other jurisdictions Fire Chief. Support staff plays a key role for the Fire Chiefs by developing the desired communication.

**Communication Tactics**

1. Information and Awareness – All Audiences
   A. Information
      Meet with peers and subordinates on a regularly scheduled basis.
      Frequency: Monthly
      Responsibility: Fire Chiefs
      Track questions and follow up issues.
      Frequency: As identified by the Fire Chiefs
      Responsibility: Fire Chiefs

   B. Develop Fact Sheets on Critical Issues
      Develop fact sheets to be used with external audiences on critical issues. These will be developed on an as needed basis.
      Frequency: As identified by the Fire Chiefs
      Responsibility: Fire Chiefs

   C. Feedback
      Review and make suggestions for improvements to key issues in the work plan as defined:
      - Press Releases
      - Internal / External Surveys
      - Key Presentation materials
      Frequency: Monthly
      Responsibility: Consolidation Communication Team

2. Internal communications: All BFD and SKFR Members
   A. Consolidation Communication Team’s message
      At the team’s discretion, include information that reinforces the importance of the work plan and what it means to citizens and members of the two jurisdictions. Help them understand how it affects them.
      Frequency: Monthly
      Responsibility: Consolidation Communication Team

   B. Fire Department News letters
      Periodic articles provided to members of the two fire departments (electronic employee newsletter) on featured consolidation activities.
Frequency: Depending on existing publication/circulation times
Responsibility: Fire Chiefs

C. Member Feedback loop
Maintain and publicize a member feedback loop where questions can be posed and answered through regular email messages, web site, or other means. Track questions / answers.
Frequency: On-going
Responsibility: Fire Chiefs

3. Internal communications: Targeted Managers/Staff/Committees
   A. Manager Meetings
Meet as needed with managers or department-wide committees to share important information. Identify issues that they need to communicate. Send critical reminders and info to managers pertaining to consolidation issues on an as needed basis.
Frequency: On-going
Responsibility: Fire Chiefs

4. External Communications: Stakeholders
   A. Stakeholder presentations
Present consolidation updates in formal meetings of organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, and others. Determine stakeholder groups applicable, build schedule.
Frequency: Dependent on meeting dates
Responsibility: Fire Chiefs

   B. Communication with other fire agencies
Identify a point of contact for other fire agencies on consolidation issues. Share successes on a regular basis; also good way to determine barometer on new ideas, approaches. Focus on CKFR more regularly as a phase two consolidation agency by providing their chief and commissioners regular updates on progress especially with their transition language.
Frequency: Monthly
Responsibility: Fire Chiefs

   C. Statewide Conference Participation
Participate in statewide conferences, symposiums, and summits. Communicate successes and failures.
Frequency: On-going
Responsibility: Consolidation Communication Team

5. External communications: Public/media
   A. Consolidation related news releases
Work with support staff to develop message as directed by the Consolidation Communication Team.
Frequency: Ongoing  
Responsibility: Fire Chiefs or designee

B. Consolidation fact sheets  
Create fact sheets on issues or decisions as needed for use with the public and/or news media.  
Frequency: On-going  
Responsibility: Fire Chiefs

C. Media Response  
Be available to respond to media inquiries relating to consolidation as needed. All members of each participating department and the members of the Consolidation Communication Team agree that a central point of contact for the media is necessary. The point of contact will be the two Fire Chiefs.  
Frequency: On-going  
Responsibility: Fire Chiefs

D. Legislative/elected official response  
Be available to respond to legislative and elected official inquires relating to consolidation as needed.  
Frequency: On-going  
Responsibility: Fire Chiefs