

EMS Workforce Retention Research Now Available For Download

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The research behind the *Keeping The Best!* workbooks and guides is now available for download at www.vdh.virginia.gov/OEMS/Locality_Resources/RetentionResearch.asp

Using this research, you and your community can better understand the issues, problems and success stories of retention efforts both in Virginia and on a national level.

Three different approaches were used to gather data during the research phase of the project.

- **Demographic Research** – This research used the Virginia Department of Health, Office of Emergency Medical Services databases, the Bureau of Labor Statistics research, Census Bureau 2000 data, the Virginia Employment Commission research, and recent articles and publications on retention.
- **Benchmarking** – 12 EMS leaders representing 39 agencies were interviewed to determine retention practices and approaches. The survey data form used during the interviews is enclosed in Appendix I.
- **Focus Groups** – 3 focus group meetings were held around Virginia in an attempt to understand retention issues at all levels in an organization.

Four market segments were identified within the fire and/or rescue function and the names of the agencies are listed for each segment including:

1. Backbone Agencies
2. Growth Agencies
3. Foot Soldier Agencies
4. Paramedics

The Research Phase identified nine key findings:

1. The demand for career and volunteer EMS personnel will grow. The population of Virginia residents 65 years of age and older is projected to grow over twice as fast as the general population over the next five years.
2. Fifty-one (51) percent of all certified EMS personnel are affiliated with volunteer fire and/or rescue agencies.
3. EMT's account for sixty-seven (67) percent of all EMS certifications, followed by Paramedics at eleven (11) percent.
4. The pool of 16 – 34 year old volunteers is decreasing. In sixty (60) percent of all Virginia counties, this segment will grow less than the population as a whole.
5. Virginians are working longer hours and have less ability to get time off from work to volunteer.

6. There is an increased competition for available volunteers. Approximately thirty-five (35) percent of people volunteer from some religious activity/organization. Approximately eight (8) percent of people volunteer for hospitals or other health organizations.
7. EMS turnover rates are not well tracked. National estimates put it at between sixteen (16) and twenty-five (25) percent for EMT's and five (5) to nine (9) percent for Paramedics. Interviews with selected Virginia EMS agencies indicated the turnover averaged nineteen (19) percent of volunteers and eleven (11) percent of career EMS personnel.
8. Training is both a barrier to and an enabler of retention. Studies report that the time and expense of training is a barrier to attracting and retaining EMS personnel. Benchmark EMS agencies in Virginia reported that, on average, seven months is required to prepare a volunteer to perform all aspects of their job. Studies also report training can be an enabler of retention. Benchmark EMS agencies in Virginia report training is a motivator if it is accessible and interesting.
9. Benchmark EMS agencies in Virginia use more than one program to address retention. A variety of retention programs were identified including competency based pay, social functions, new member orientation training, mentoring, using team based decision making, flexible shift scheduling, and grooming for leadership.

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