

Lessons Learned Through Consolidations

By: Daniel A. Podlogar
Assistant Chief
Lawrence Township Fire Department
1165 South Locust St
Canal Fulton, Ohio 44614

A proposed research project submitted to the Ohio Fire Executive Program

May 6, 2016

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that the following statements are true:

1. This paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.
2. I have affirmed the use of proper spelling and grammar in this document by using the spell and grammar check functions of a word processing software program and correcting the errors as suggested by the program.

Signed:



Printed Name: Daniel A Podlogar

ABSTRACT

The Lawrence Township and Canal Fulton Fire Departments have worked gradually together to provide increased services to their communities for many decades through consolidating fire and emergency services. The problem this research explores is the lack of planning for uniform operations and support activities while sharing equipment, facilities, and personnel. This research was used to recommend changes that would enhance the current service model.

The questions explored by this research project include: 1. What are the different types of shared services and legal requirements? 2. What legal implications can be expected when sharing resources? 3. How have other entities addressed sharing of services? 4. What changes can be made to the existing system to improve operational and administrative efficiency?

The research to answer these questions included: a literature review of a local feasibility report and the industry-specific book supporting it and a number of academic resources, including: research manuals, industry texts, periodicals, other feasibility studies, data from department databases, and information available on the Internet. Further analysis was performed utilizing an external survey done via the Ohio Fire Chiefs website and continued by conducting interviews with area fire chiefs involved with organizational consolidations.

The research indicated that the benefits of consolidations outweighed the concerns through proper planning and building of relationships. Recommendations for improvement included: transitioning into a permanent organizational structure, combining administrative and operational procedures, equalizing tax structure, and planning for the decrease of duplications of personnel and equipment. Future research should look toward more specific methods of planning to solve the challenges identified in this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT 2

ABSTRACT..... 3

TABLE OF CONTENTS..... 4

INTRODUCTION 6

 Statement of the Problem..... 6

 Purpose of the Study 6

 Research Questions..... 6

 Background & Significance 7

 Jurisdictional Background 7

 Past Collaborative Efforts 8

 Lawrence Township Fire Department 9

 Canal Fulton Fire Department 10

 North Lawrence Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. 11

 Current Collaborative Efforts 11

LITERATURE REVIEW 21

PROCEDURES..... 31

 Definition of Terms..... 32

 Limitations of the Study..... 34

RESULTS 36

DISCUSSION 43

RECOMMENDATIONS 56

 Established Recent Changes to Operations..... 56

Recommendations Moving Forward with Operations.....	58
REFERENCES	63
APPENDIX 1 – JURISDICTIONAL BOUNDRIES & STATION LOCATIONS	67
APPENDIX 2 – DEPARTMENT DATA.....	68
APPENDIX 3 – SURVEY RESULTS	69
APPENDIX 4 – SURVEY QUESTIONS.....	73
APPENDIX 5 – CHANGES TO OPERATIONAL SERVICE MODEL.....	78
APPENDIX 6 – HYPOTHETICAL ORGANIZATIONAL CHART	79

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

For many decades, the fire departments of Lawrence Township (LTFD) and Canal Fulton (CFFD) have progressively worked together to provide the community with increases in services. *The problem this study will investigate is that while currently sharing equipment and facilities, CFFD & LTFD have yet to create a plan for uniform operations and support functions.* With decreasing revenues and increasing pressures, politicians are now looking for more progressive ideas toward consolidation of services (Lawson, 2011, page 1).

Purpose of the Study

Many factors can influence consolidations of fire departments (Snook & Johnson, 2014, p 1). *This research will be used to recommend changes that will enhance the current sharing of operational resources.* It is important to understand the dynamics involved with mergers and consolidations prior to implementation (Shoemaker, 2014, p 6; Snook & Johnson, 1997, p 2). Information gained from academic evidence-based sources on the subjects of public department mergers, consolidations, and contracts will be shared with stakeholders of the community in an effort to distribute knowledge and expand perspectives prior to making changes of such magnitudes.

Research Questions

The following questions will be answered by this descriptive research:

1. What are the different types of shared services and legal requirements?
2. What legal implications can be expected when sharing resources?
3. How have other entities addressed sharing of services?

4. What changes can be made to the existing system to improve operational and administrative efficiency?

Background & Significance

In today's political and economic climate, many public entities look for ways to do more with less through consolidations and collaborations. Special taxing districts, like fire consolidations, are “the fastest growing form of government” (Slivinski, 2014, page 1). It is not hard to envision why this statement is true for fire departments. For many years, fire departments like Canal Fulton (CFFD) and Lawrence Township (LTFD) have faced difficulties associated with growth, reduced resources, and decreasing tax revenues. However, communities thinking about consolidations as an option should have enough foresight to incorporate planning. This effort will make these transitions fluid, as well as, fiscally responsible.

Fire districts in Ohio have existed for nearly 100 years (Shoemaker, 2014, page 6). Many cooperative services come in different forms such as mutual aid, partial or full consolidations, and contracts (Snook & Johnson, 1997, p 16). Canal Fulton and Lawrence Township have progressed through many of these forms of agreements over the years.

Jurisdictional Background

Lawrence Township is in Stark County, Ohio, just north of Massillon, west of Canton, and south of Akron. The township surrounds The City of Canal Fulton and combined has approximately 13,000 residents in 34.6 square miles. In addition, the area of North Lawrence is found within the township on the southern border, is not incorporated, but has a small

concentration of residents similar to a village. Currently, LTFD and CFFD service the northern half of the township from the township limits in the south, east, and north to a boundary made up of State Route 21, Weygandt Rd, McCune Rd, Arcadia Rd and along the western border with Wayne County (See [Appendix 1](#)). North Lawrence Volunteer Fire Department Inc. (NLVFD) is contracted by the township trustees to cover everything south of the above explained border. CFFD is the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) inside the city limits (shown in [Appendix 1](#)). LTFD is the AHJ of the whole township for all inspections and prevention activities only. Responses in the contracted area fall under NLVFDs AHJ. Under the current shared service contract between the city and township, 24 hour staffing is accomplished through rotating 12 hour shifts (day/night) on a weekly basis. The department assigned to staff the shift is responsible for responding to both jurisdictions.

Past Collaborative Efforts

Prior to 1982, Canal Fulton responded to all calls in the city and was contracted by the Lawrence Township trustees to handle calls in the northern half of the township; the southern half was contracted to NLVFD, and still is to this day. Due to changes in political climates and operational models over the years, LTFD and CFFD now work side by side in a collaborative effort to cover all calls in the northern half of the township and the city. All three departments utilize automatic and mutual aid with each other, but efforts between LTFD and CFFD to form a joint fire district have left uncertainty in what role NLVFD will play in the future.

Lawrence Township Fire Department

LTFD was formed in 1982, as a result of the continued increasing costs (contract negotiations asking double from the previous years) of contract coverage from Canal Fulton Fire (MAS, personal communications, March 29, 2016). The newly formed fire department was established by the Township Trustees in order to service the more populated northern end of the township. The lesser populated southern end of the township was already contracted for coverage by a private fire company (NLVFD). The department started as an all-volunteer agency with one firetruck and an ambulance. As services demanded, the department transformed from volunteer, to paid per call, and then into part-time in 1997 in conjunction with CFFD. Currently, LTFD has no full-time personnel.

LTFD responds to the north-eastern half of the township and the City of Canal Fulton under a joint staffing contract with CFFD. The population in this area of the township is approximately 5131 in the unincorporated areas. LTFD responded to 589 calls for service in 2013 and 589 in 2014, only while providing LTFD on-duty coverage (Lawrence Township/City of Canal Fulton, 2015). The total calls combined for both departments are 1162 (2013) and 1197 (2014) (Lawrence Township/City of Canal Fulton, 2015). LTFD accomplishes 24 hour a day coverage by rotating crews and dividing equally the costs of staffing with CFFD; four personnel from 0600 until 1800 hours and three from 1800 – 0600 hours. Currently, an increase to four a night on weekends is being discussed at safety meetings.

LTFD maintains roughly 40 members on the roster and is staffed with all part-time employees. 36 of these employees are members of both LTFD and CFFD. LTFD services over half of the township land, from approximately State Route 21 northeastward at an angle from one corner of the township to the other, which equals 17.3 square miles. The other areas in the

township are divided between Canal Fulton city limits (2.42 square miles) and NLVFD coverage area (14.88 square miles) within township limits.

LTFDs area is 97% without fire hydrants; consequently, the township owns specialized equipment for water distribution. Tanker 1, which carries 3000 gallons of water, responds on virtually every fire response in the township. Additionally, the township owns a gator for rural search and rescue responses. CFFD lacks these capabilities, but cooperatively has water rescue unit and gear, including a boat that LTFD lacks. LTFD has one station located at 12270 Strausser St NW, just outside of the city limits.

Canal Fulton Fire Department

CFFD was formed in 1874 and originally serviced both the city and northern township area for fire and medical services. CFFD began as an all-volunteer agency and also transitioned from paid on call to part time in 1997 as collaborative efforts with LTFD arose. CFFD has no full time staff, but does employ 43 part-time personnel, 36 of which are also on LTFD.

CFFD covers 2.42 square miles inside the city limits and 17.3 square miles of Lawrence Township from approximately State Route 21 northeastward at an angle from one corner of the township to the other; the same area as described for LTFD above (see [Appendix 1](#)). CFFD rotates the same staffing responsibilities and hours, as described above, with LTFD to share staffing costs. The population within the city is approximately 5500 inside the city. CFFD responded to 573 calls in 2013 and 608 calls in 2014, only while providing CFFD on-duty coverage (Lawrence Township/City of Canal Fulton, 2015). The total calls combined for both departments are 1162 (2013) and 1197 (2014) (Lawrence Township/City of Canal Fulton, 2015). CFFD has two stations located at 1165 South Locust St (Station #1) for primary staffing,

operation, and responses; and 393 North Milan St (Station #2), which serves as a training building for both CFFD and LTFD. The South Locust station is currently where CFFD and LTFD collocate and respond to service calls.

North Lawrence Volunteer Fire Department, Inc.

NLVFD is a private fire company, established in 1954, as an all-volunteer agency to serve the rural area around North Lawrence and township area south of State Rt. 21 and Weygandt Rd. Today, NLVFD is a combination part-time, paid on call, and volunteer organization with 42 members. NLVFD staffs 4 personnel per day on a 24 hour basis, with assistance from a FEMA AFG grant. The department covers approximately 14.88 square miles in the southwest area of Lawrence Township, as well as, portions of the adjacent townships by contract (Tuscarawas, Baughman). NLVFD responded to 575 calls in 2013 and 654 in 2014 total in all their contracted areas. Calls that NLVFD covered within the southern contracted part of Lawrence Township totaled 238 (2013) and 261 (2014). NLVFD has one station located at 4052 Alabama Ave NW North Lawrence, Ohio. The three departments can be compared using the map and data distribution within the township as described in the [Appendix 1](#) and [Appendix 2](#).

Current Collaborative Efforts

LTFD and CFFD did not utilize each other for automatic mutual aid for at least 15 years after the formation of LTFD (MAS, personal communication, November 9, 2015). With the drop in availability of volunteers during the daytime, they started to use each other for responses and

formed the joint staffing agreement in 1997 (MAS, personal communication, November 9, 2015). While CFFD had a strong established history of leadership and qualified medical personnel, LTFD struggled at times with organization and with forming roots in the community and its members (MAS, personal communication, November 9, 2015). Problems manifested in the form of changes in leadership every couple of years. In 2008, a change in fire administration allowed the two departments to realize that they could work together to benefit the community they served by making joint decisions on staffing hours (MAS, personal communication, November 9, 2015).

The fire and ems system in our community has made dramatic changes to service models since the 1990s due to the decreased availability of volunteers. Like researchers have discovered with the Netherland's volunteer service, many members found their time divided between an increase in work demands and the demands of the fire service, which decreased availability of members (Vogel, 2014, page 18). This same element of change drove the push to part-time staffing in LTFD and CFFDs situation.

Our emergency system had to adjust to be effective. In 1997, a joint staffing agreement was initiated to assist in coverage of calls during daytime hours for both communities. This measure called for each department to staff two EMTs or Paramedics from 0800 until 1600 hours on a rotating weekly basis. This change was in response to increased call volume and a decrease in the availability of volunteers during daytime hours. This measure allowed each governmental body to contribute equally to the cost of staffing services. No matter who was on duty, the crews responded to both LTFDs and CFFDs areas, regardless of jurisdiction.

As demand rose, both entities looked for ways to adapt the system. First in 2002, the city and township administrations increased the number of personnel on duty to three in an effort to

enhance care while enroute to the hospital. Next in 2003, the hours of staffing were increased to 0700 until 1900 hours, to account for the increase in call volume during that timeframe. In 2006 the hours of staffing increased again by keeping duty crews on until midnight. Finally, 2008 saw the first 24 hour staffed service. One department provided 12 hours of coverage from 0600 until 1800 hours with three personnel, and then the other department provided coverage with three personnel from 1800 – 0600. The departments operated out of different stations and only had access to the equipment in that respective station. In order to even payroll and staffing, the departments switched between day-and-night staffing every Saturday on day-shift.

In 2012, both departments decided to increase staffing to four personnel during the hours of 0600 until 1800 hours. This effort provided the following benefits: allowed better compliance with NFPA 1710 (2010) (four personnel to man an engine), allowed the tanker to be deployed in areas without fire hydrants on the initial response (three on engine and one in tanker), but only when operating out of LTFDs station. The greatest benefit, however, allowed personnel to run two medical calls simultaneously during peak hours of call volume (2 per ambulance). This move decreased the number of times mutual aid was needed to cover overlapping calls.

Unfortunately, the staffing was not able to be increased at night due to budget restrictions on staffing line items for both entities (MAS, personal communications, November 9, 2015). This predicament is a limitation of the joint staffing contract, which provides that both entities staff equally. This concept of equality has restricted one or the other from making necessary changes if the other cannot afford to do so. The current recommendation to City and Township elected officials from both fire administrations has been to find a way to fund the increased staffing at night (MAS, personal communication, March 29, 2016).

In April 2013, Lawrence Township and Canal Fulton partially consolidated emergency

services by moving the Lawrence Township equipment and staff into the newer Canal Fulton fire station, which was a more centralized location within the service area. Both stations are one and a half miles away from each other and offered much duplication of staff and equipment. In fact, many times the same crew just switched stations by driving to the other station at shift change. All frontline equipment is now housed at the CFFD station and available for immediate deployment by either department while on duty. Front line equipment includes; engines, ambulances, tanker, rescue, boat, and applicable seasonal equipment (grass unit, ice rescue). The township station is now used by the active Northwest Fire Explorer program and to store extra equipment or equipment out of service for repair: for example, storage for grass fire units in winter, ice rescue in summer, and ambulances that rotate to the main station monthly.

The partial consolidation of 2013 allowed both entities to entertain a trial “living together” arrangement as the end result of a multiple year-long feasibility study. The study was initiated in March of 2010 and completed by a feasibility committee of ten. The committee was formed and spearheaded by township and city officials to investigate the possibility of a consolidation. The ad-hoc committee, headed by D. Knight and made up of township trustees, city council members, an assistant fire chief (who had been a member of all three fire departments at different times), and residents of all three response areas, voted for the following recommendations:

1. Joint fire district (JFD) to start immediately (2 votes)
2. Living together arrangement with strong consideration of JFD (4 votes)
3. Living together only (3 votes)
4. None of the above (0 votes)
5. One member absent (no vote)

(Knight, 2011, page 21)

This recommended living together arrangement was approved and implemented by both entities in April 2013. LTFD front line vehicles were moved to CFFD Station 1, and both departments began operations from this station. This change allowed for all primary equipment to be housed in one location for immediate deployment by either agency. Since both departments respond to either jurisdiction while on duty, all specialized equipment, i.e. tanker, gator, boat, and water rescue, are now available for immediate response. This adjustment enhanced shift operations by having a continuity of staffing in one location. Further, the move allowed for recalled personnel to assemble in one location. In the past, recalled personnel had logistical trouble in responding to second calls while assembling at separate locations.

The third department discussed previously, NLVFD, Inc. has been observing the changes in LTFD and CFFD's emergency response model and remains involved from a contracted agency role. The department has gone through their own changes in staffing and is currently operating with four personnel on a 24 hour a day basis (BW, personal communication, February 22, 2016). The department has been involved in discussions of a fire district in public safety committee meetings and remains an interested stakeholder. It remains to be seen what role the department will decide to take with a consolidation approaching in the future. Discussions suggest involvement would be preferred (MAS, personal communication, March 29, 2016).

For as much progress has been made, growing pains still exist. The collocation of the two departments has simplified responses and logistics, but complicated administrative efforts. A number of issues have been experienced since the consolidation such as: contradicting standard operating procedures or SOPs, contrasting department expectations and rules, differences in chain of command, separate budget priorities, and process breakdowns. Some of these problems

are more evident than others, but all should be addressed.

Specifically, both departments operate under different SOPs, which conflict at times (Lawrence Township Fire Department, 2014). This problem makes it difficult for personnel to know what action to take at any certain time and complicates training. For instance, some personnel are only on one department or the other (as of April 2016, 36 are members of both, 7 just CFFD, 4 just LTFD). In this circumstance, when both departments are responding to a call essentially as one entity, with a mixture of members, what SOPs are followed? Is it dependent upon the on-duty department responding? For example, the city has an open burning ordinance, which must be followed regardless of which department responds, and the township observes state regulations. Township personnel are familiar with state law on open burns, but not specifics of city ordinances. These situations lead to confusion on service calls for Officers/OICs and frustrations for personnel and residents. The impact has created a negative and contentious environment at times. It is difficult to maintain proficiency and regularity with two differing systems.

From 2013 until 2016, some personnel were officers on one department only, but still belong to both. When working for one their rank is officer, but when working for the other it is firefighter. This example leads to a “You’re not my boss today” mentality at times. When are they officers and when are they just firefighters? Many of these topics are discussions officers have at joint meetings. This problem is being addressed by combining officer forces with vacancies as opportunities present, but still remains a problem today. As of March of 2016, all lieutenants and one captain have been integrated. No command level staff have been integrated.

The current service model requires the on-duty department, whether LTFD or CFFD, to respond to both jurisdictions during its shift. Through staffing, the departments attempt to have a

joint department duty officer. If this is not possible, personnel may not have been trained in the proper preplans, MABAS (mutual aid box alarm system) response policy, or specific hazard involved with the response. Who is responsible when the agency having authority is not present? An example of this is when CFFD responds to the township for a structure fire and no LTFD personnel are present, or vice versa. The concept leads to many difficult questions. These concepts are being addressed through joint training and officer integration, but should have had prior planning. Mistakes in response, improper SOP training, and lack of accountability for personnel have occurred as a result.

Discipline is another interesting problem that arises from the current state of affairs. The problem occurs when a member of both departments has a disciplinary issue with one entity. If a member breaks rules, for instance, and is suspended from one department for an infraction, is that member allowed to respond and work with the other department? If the answer is yes, because they are separate agencies, then the whole disciplinary system breaks down. If the answer is no, then can the member have a grievance because they are being disciplined for no reason by the other agency? Many more questions than answers come up with each “what if”.

One distinct example is the driving policies. One jurisdiction allows drivers to operate vehicles under 21 years old, with six points or more on the member’s driver license, and with certain infractions, and one does not. When joint scheduling and responding in each other’s vehicles are part of the service model, this quickly becomes an issue. The issue has been investigated, but no attempt has been made to bring the two entities together on this topic.

Another specific example of administrative problems occurs when one entity has very particular rules about HR policies that conflict with the other entity. For instance, one department has a number of different pay rates than the other, i.e. probationary employee, firefighter only

rate. It is difficult for supervisors to assign a pay rate without knowing which department is paying nor what pay rate that person is currently receiving. This concept is especially intrusive on paid on call responses. At times, employees have had different pay rates while on duty vs doing station or administrative work and to complicate matters, may have a completely different rate for the other agency. This circumstance leads to the employees wanting paid from the rate that is the highest and may lead to an unfair burden being placed on one entity. To further this point, the agencies differ on how to calculate the hours worked for employees coming in for paid on call responses. While one agency has very specific calculations to adhere to, the other uses a rounding up stipend system of calculation. Again, the processes lead to confusion as to who gets paid by whom and for what rate. Remember, 36 employees can be paid by either entity. Some of these decisions on procedures are not in the department's direct control to change, which increases the complexity for change as more people and departments become involved.

Similarly, each department seems to have its own identity, philosophy, and expectations from its command and administrative staff. Each department has facets that are, at times, more regimented, and others that tend to be more laid back and laissez-faire. While the command staff of both departments has attempted to come together on issues that crop up, they each have their own way of dealing with problems. The differing ways that problems are dealt with between the two agencies is creating an "I'll just go ask the other chief then" atmosphere. There is speculation that in the long run, this concept will lead to creating a rift between the command staff. It is unknown how long two different administrations can continue to agreements without bringing the staff together under one clear hierarchy. Both chiefs agree that one command structure would benefit operations and communications and both support the effort toward a district (MAS, personal communication, March 29, 2016; Knight, 2011, page 4).

Last but definitely not least, a discussion of the finances of each entity is warranted. LTFD is funded almost wholly by levies that are derived from property taxes. The property tax system is affected by the rise and falls of property values in the area and has been negatively affected since the downturn in 2008. CFFD is funded by a yearly budget that is ultimately one department in the City of Canal Fulton. The city receives most of its revenue through income taxes. Both entities have been negatively affected by the decreasing trickle down tax revenue supplied through the state to the local governments. Both departments receive billing money generated by ems transport. The township's billing money is retained into a special account and used to replenish supplies and purchase ambulances per state law. The city's billing money is placed into the general city fund.

The problem with separate budgets is apparent when it comes to making changes to the system and establishing parameters for pay scales. Many times one entity has been limited on funding for one reason or another that inhibits the other from progressing. Trying to get both administrations to agree to changes in pay structure, response models, and staffing has been a challenge for all involved. City annexations have placed an additional strain on discussions in the past.

The fact that the two departments have had similar budgets in the past and in recent years should be of no surprise, because essentially they employ and staff the same workforce and hours. Both departments have two fire trucks, two ambulances, a grassfire truck each and a comparable number of other assets. The officer staff of both departments consists of one chief, one Assistant Chief, and a parallel number of lower ranking officers.

In summation, many changes to the service model for emergency operations of the fire departments of LTFD and CFFD have been made since 1997. Not all of the changes have had

positive effects on the departments. Many of the changes could have been planned out for better possible outcomes. Future changes to the system should be geared toward planning changes to achieve more efficiency at the departmental organizational level, whether or not a joint district is achieved. Topics for consideration that have been discussed in consolidation meetings to improve efficiency include, reducing duplication of personnel and equipment, standardization of administrative and operational procedures, and reduction of costs associated with having two fire departments. Unfortunately, many argue that a number of these discussion items cannot be accomplished unless a fire district is formed due to lack of permanency of agreements (MAS, personal communication, March 29, 2016). These topics are all great reasons to justify a research study of this nature to hopefully shed light on what can positively impact the departments moving forward. Furthermore, this research hopes to expand upon the feasibility study done in 2011 to add to the viewpoint from the fire administration's side.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will include four areas: levels and legal requirements of consolidations, challenges associated with collaboration and consolidations, how other entities have done consolidations, and the potential benefits associated with collaboration and consolidations.

Elected officials and government leaders recognized the need for collaborations since the early 1900s. (Shoemaker, 2014, page 6). One of the earliest examples, the Safety Department of Oakwood, Ohio consolidated police, fire, and medical services into one department by cross-training staff (City of Oakwood, 2015). Around the same time, politicians and fire service leaders across the country, and around the world, were considering similar cost saving measures. Contra Costa County, California created a fire district in 1964 becoming one of the earliest and most successful efforts throughout the country (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 5). Consolidations of these types require much extensive legal knowledge.

In order to understand the viability of any type of collaboration or consolidation, the concerned parties must first understand the different levels and legal requirements for each. A township, village, or city can provide fire protection in a number of ways, by itself or by another party. Certain rules exist when an entity does not provide for its own fire department. In that case, the entity must appoint a “Fire prevention officer” (Ohio Auditor of State, 2016, page I-2; ORC 737.22). According to the Ohio Township Handbook (Ohio Auditor of State, 2016), there are four principle ways of townships obtaining fire protection;

1. Maintain a regular township fire department employing one or more persons to maintain and operate firefighting equipment
2. Buy the equipment and contract with a volunteer fire company to use and operate it

3. Contract with another township, village, city, or private fire company
4. Unite with one or more other townships or municipalities, or any combination thereof

(page I-12)

Maintaining a regular fire department and contracting with a volunteer fire company, numbers one and two above are the most common ways to provide fire protection. They are not usually interpreted as consolidations or collaborations.

Numbers three and four, contracting and creating fire districts are more common as joint ventures (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 18). In-between these categories are a number of different ways to collaborate. Automatic aid and mutual aid are two simple forms of intergovernmental agreements. Oftentimes, fire departments in Northeast Ohio use automatic aid agreements, called mutual aid box alarm systems, to procure additional resources spontaneously when needed. Mutual aid requests are filled upon calling for further resources and are permissible under ORC 9.60 (Lawriter, 2003). It is important to note that not all areas use these types of systems.

Other collaborations fall under the auspices of a contract. These contracts are allowed by Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 9.60, which permits a township to contract for fire and EMS services (Lawriter, 2003). Typically speaking, contracts are a short term, temporary solution that can be terminated simply while evaluating performance criteria (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 19). Chief Comstock agreed that using existing tax monies by contract was not a good long term solution to finance a service district (Knight, 2011, page 5). Many entities choose to progress through different types of collaborations as needs arise. Knight (2011) outlined a living together arrangement in the LTFD and CFFD feasibility study as a compromise due to lack of votes for a district (page 5).

Uniting with another entity is commonly done through a joint fire district (JFD). JFDs are created through a provision in the Ohio Revised Code, section 505.371 (Lawriter, 2002; Ohio Auditor of State, 2016, page I-14). When a JFD is created, a fire district trustee board, composed of a recommended minimum of 5 representatives of varied jurisdictions, is responsible for the administration of the district (Ohio Auditor of State, 2016, page I – 14; Knight, 2011, page 4). Additionally, Knight (2011) describes that the new trustees of the district must be paid, a clerk must be hired to attend to the financials, and the body can be paid to meet no more than 13 times per year (page 4). Fire districts occur in a number of ways including one or more departments. The district would be a legally occurring merger and is considered a more permanent relationship according to Snook & Johnson (1997, page 19). An important point to understanding the laws pertaining to the ORC is that it remains flexible enough to provide for customization while still meeting the needs of the individual members cooperating (Shimek, 2013, page 9).

Differing standards, SOPs, rules, regulations, visions, and values can become areas of contention. As with any organizational change, adjustments should be anticipated and not taken lightly (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 60). Feasibility studies are steps in the right direction, as with any consolidation strategy, they should be well planned (Preuer, 2014, page 12). Snook & Johnson (1997) found many organizations that complete in-house studies have a lower success percentage than those that use consultations (page 61). This fact suggests that second party consultation such as an expert in fire district legalities would be beneficial. The in-house study done by the feasibility committee made some educated and beneficial recommendations, however, some parties have not bought-in yet. In any case, the benefits are outweighing the problems, which is not to say improvements cannot be made.

Problems associated with consolidations include the standards and SOPs that have been

set forth by the respective departments. Due to the availability of recent information, this research looks to the consolidation of dispatch centers within Ohio for answers. One study from Cleveland State University found that among the most notable challenges for consolidating dispatch centers was training and standard operations (Shimek, 2013, page 7). Three fire departments in Medina experienced a number of similar challenges that could not be overcome (Crumley, 2014, page 9). These challenges were associated with certification standards among different fire departments looking to consolidate and eventually resulted in departments walking away from the table (Crumley, 2014, page 9).

These issues are significant in the fact that the nature of the problem, if left unaddressed, can cause severe repercussions on progress. Retired Chief Preuer (2014) makes a valid point stating their needs to be a commitment to the blending process (page 13). Adding to this point, Retired Chief Crosley (2014) discusses considerations including, but not limited to, operating procedures and command structures (page 17). To further these examples, one study obtained information from a dispatch center, the RED Center, on the challenges associated with its own consolidation (Shimek, 2013, pages 25 – 27). The first response was that standardization of policies and procedures were the biggest challenge (Shimek, 2013, page 29).

A number of other factors can cause problems with consolidations. Snook and Johnson (1997) warn that fear of losing identity can be problematic (page 11). Likewise, Shoemaker (2014) identifies pride of ownership with strong ties to the community can be a limiting factor (page 6). Resolutions to these issues can be integration of current staff into new organizational structures, and hiring new employees until the problems are diminished. Gaining buy-in from existing staff is imperative to the process.

In line with the concern of standards, differing SOPs and rules give conflicting guidance

to staff during consolidations. It is nearly impossible to manage two systems of doing something in a consolidated organization (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 18). Knight (2011) lists strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to consider in the feasibility report for LTFD and CFFD, but does not address uniform operations or support functions (pages 9 – 10). It would be wise to account for strategies to address administrative challenges for the future. A number of sources list the integration and blending of standard operating procedures, rules and regulations, and operation systems as planning items to account for during consolidations (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 18; Cravens, 2008, page 12; Foster, 2008, page 42; Crosley, 2014, page 17).

The overarching vision and values of entities are of concern when looking into consolidations. For successful outcomes to occur with consolidation, the parties must build a sense of trust and be committed to the effort (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 20). Setting expectations was of high priority for one study conducted (Shimek, 2013, page 8).

Expansion of boundaries continues to hamper some efforts of consolidations. Cities have the ability to annex township land, which has been a source of contention (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 18). Even Knight (2011) acknowledges that annexation has been problematic between the two entities studied (page 3). Some sources suggest developing and cultivating relationships with each other in an effort to understand each entities concerns (Shimek, 2013, pages 8 & 25). Other sources stated the cost of participation in collaborations was high, but must be outweighed by the benefits (Perrault, McClelland, Austin, & Sieppert, 2011, page 296). Attempts have been made previously to create a Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) or Tax Increment Financing (TIF) projects, but have not been successful as yet (MAS, personal communication, Feb 28, 2016).

In order to combat the challenges associated with collaboration and consolidation, stakeholders should research options for procedures and processes first in order to plan for problems and concerns (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 2; Foster, 2008, page 43). Many of the problems and challenges discussed in the previous sections are listed as common issues within the literature reviewed. Much of the literature outlines ways that other entities were successful in their goal to collaborate.

Planning was one concept repeated over and over in the literature material reviewed (Shimek, 2013; Crosley, 2014, pages 16-17; Preuer, 2014, page 12; Snook & Johnson, 1997). While Preuer (2014, page 12) argued that to avoid pitfalls, a real feasibility study must be done. Porter (2014, page 8) states that involving all stakeholders is important in the planning process. Approaching planning to include considerations for all aspects of the process, including points of view and long term outcomes, are suggested (Crosley, 2014, page 18). Going back to an earlier challenge, one dispatch center director recommends establishing standardized policies and procedures in advance (Shimek, 2013, page 29). Planning measures such as consideration of SOPs, integration of staff functions, and strategic visions for the future can decrease the anxiety and resistance to consolidation measures (Preuer, 2014, pages 12-13).

Mergers can encourage a department to develop certain needed planning. Strategic plans can be initiated when a new organization is formed (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 19). A strategic plan allows entities to look for a strategy for replacement of apparatus, purchases of supplies and fire equipment, duplication of equipment, centralized operations, and coordination of training while consolidation is taking place (Knight, 2011, page 6). In LTFD and CFFD's case, a feasibility study was done involving many of the stakeholders in the community, but not to the planning degree suggested by the literature reviewed.

Some collaborations can be successful through functional means such as maintenance, training, or dispatching coming together (Rielage, 2013, page 16). Other collaborations must occur through the formation of a new organization. Snook & Johnson (1997) outline different types of successful collaborations from mutual aid, automatic aid, partial, functional, or operational consolidations up to full mergers (page 17). Many of these options are described in other research as being successful to varying degrees. Many dispatching services have been consolidated as a means of saving money on expensive capital items, increasing grant allocations, and expanding communication services (Crosley, 2014, page 16). However, one research study on feasibility of dispatching found that cost vs. quantity was a big factor, and the measure did not have the savings it was assumed to have (Shimek, 2013, page 6).

The benefits are as varied as the different types of collaborations and consolidations. Some list many benefits, while others argue that the perceptions of benefits are different for different stakeholders (Heinonen & Wilson, 2013, page 1). Other sources contend that the special districts created are less than ideal for accountability (Slivinski, 2014, page 1). In any case, the following section will detail the types of benefits that the literature listed and what types of consolidations they relate to.

Many of the benefits discussed deal with the improvement of service models to residents. Snook and Johnson (1997) found that the formation of alliances often allowed for quicker and more efficient service delivery (page 2). However, Heinonen and Wilson (2013) reasoned that residents sometimes see a tradeoff whereby services are unchanged, but cost more (page 3). Locally, Knight (2011) listed achieving a more efficient operation and decreasing response times as strengths associated with the formation of a fire district (page 6).

Another big contention for benefits of collaborations relates to monetary effects.

Reductions in funding are listed as one of the primary motivations for politicians and fire service leaders alike (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 2). Many articles and research found that positive effects in cost savings have transpired through combining forces (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 2; Matarese, Chelst, Fisher-Stewart, & Pearsall, 2007, page 14; Cravens, 2008, page 12; Knight, 2011, page 6; Rielage, 2013, page 14; Shoemaker, 2014, page 6; Crosley, 2014, page 17). The concept of combining the command staff of both LTFD and CFFD was attempted by the entities in the past. From 2005 until 2008, when the present administration took the reins at LTFD, both departments (LTFD and CFFD) employed the same fire chief (MAS, personal communication, March 29, 2016). The approach was reversed in January 2008 due to conflicts of interests and perhaps personalities (MAS, personal communication, March 29, 2016). Through discussions in safety meetings, it does not seem to be “on the table” as an option in the future.

Opportunities to avoid or reduce costs associated with programs are advantages many look for as budgets tighten and services expand (Matarese et al, 2007, page 14). Rielage (2013) introduced the idea of a hybrid approach in order to progressively expand as budgets allowed more services to be provided (pages 14-15). This effort uses benchmarks to sustain growth and an approach that allows planning to develop in stages. Many members of the political entities are concerned over the cost of progress vs. remaining small and in control (Knight, 2011, page 7). The measures employed by LTFD and CFFD emulate this concept (see [Appendix 5](#)).

Lastly, the equal distribution of tax rates is explored and championed by Crosley (2014), reducing the argument of subsidization by certain jurisdictions (page 17). Many arguments have been raised that one jurisdiction augments the other. Steele (2002) found that without periodically reviewing sharing of cost for services, different jurisdictions can be encumbered

with a disproportionate share of costs (page 21). Concerns of this nature were voiced in meetings from the current feasibility study (Knight, 2011, page 5). This concern needs addressed not only with each entity, but through public education as well.

Not everyone saw mergers as having positive changes to budgets. Foster (2008) states that overtime costs rose, but eventually decreased when initial training decreased (page 42). Slivinski (2014) believes that special districts, such as the one contemplated with LTFD and CFFD, create a way around spending limits and eventually decrease accountability in government (page 1). Additionally, he believes that the cost associated with a district is not necessarily in line with the quality of service it provides and may be higher than comparable conventional government services (page 12). In line with that thought process, Heinonen and Wilson (2013) observed almost a third of residents think that consolidations will save money, and an even larger number believe it will actually reduce quality of services (page 2). These mindsets need to be publicly addressed so that residents can be educated on the goals and objectives behind the creation of collaborative efforts.

In summary, the literature reviewed was vastly in favor of consolidations and collaborations, if done correctly. The ORC allows consolidations by law and it is actually encouraged by the political powers in the state (Crosley, 2014, page 15). There are a number of challenges including loss of identity, combination of standards and SOPs, and finding an equal ground on vision and values of the organization. Many other entities have had success with consolidations and found ways to improve their organizations. An attempt was made to find a parallel experience, as two departments fully operating out of one station with two different command structures, but none was found through the efforts of this research. Nevertheless, the

benefits to consolidations can outweigh the concerns if the stakeholders take time to properly plan for the interests of all parties involved.

PROCEDURES

This research project began by reviewing the efforts of a feasibility committee to study a joint fire district in the areas of Canal Fulton and Lawrence Township. Research continued by reviewing a number of academic resources, including research manuals, industry texts, periodicals, other feasibility studies, data, and reports from resources of the author, department databases, and information available on the Internet.

A survey was electronically distributed to approximately 600 fire departments in Ohio using the website maintained by the Ohio Fire Chiefs Association in an effort to collect data on fire districts. A link to the survey was made available for the 1400 plus members of OFC looking at the latest news on the “Call Out” list, which is a mass e-mail blast that goes out to the entire membership of OFC. The e-mail blast was an effort to find the limited number of departments that are members of collaborative department ventures. Due to low participation (only 18 responses), the survey was redistributed to the same groups again on August 31, 2016 and to 275 plus OFE Alumni group members for completion and distribution. The audience should include departments from volunteer, part-time, combination, and full-time agencies, with special attention paid to those that have engaged in consolidation efforts. Departments that are not part of or considering collaborative efforts were noted but excluded from the results by a series of contingency questions. Special attention was given to departments that had a similar department makeup as the entities discussed within this paper.

The survey data was used to understand certain aspects of fire district formation. Data described the types of consolidations present in Ohio. The data also allowed a comprehension on the challenges that were met by other fire departments during their efforts toward consolidations.

Attention was paid to how other departments formed consolidations. Lastly, the benefits of those efforts were compiled and reviewed.

99 surveys were returned, and the data was analyzed by using the tools provided by Google Forms. The results were used to provide insight to the ways fire districts are formed, the challenges met, and the benefits encountered. This information was then disseminated to the appropriate audience to continue to discuss the options for our associated entities.

To further investigate consolidations, different fire chiefs involved in consolidations in our immediate area were contacted to find out what experiences, concerns, and benefits have been encountered through their departmental processes. The data was used to validate the research throughout this project. This information was then recorded and processed to add validity to many of the concepts and findings of the literature review and survey results.

Definition of Terms

Collaboration. To work with another person or group in order to achieve or do something (Merriam-Webster.com, 2015).

Contract. An agreement with specific terms between two or more persons or entities in which there is a promise to do something in return for a valuable benefit known as consideration (Law.com, 2015).

Merger. The joining together of two corporations in which one corporation transfers all of its assets to the other, which continues to exist. In effect one corporation "swallows" the other, but the shareholders of the swallowed company receive shares of the surviving corporation. A merger is distinguished from a "consolidation," in which both companies join together to create a new corporation (Law.com, 2015).

Consolidation. Interagency cooperation (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 17).

Partial consolidation. Organization remains legally separate, but a special group is formed to handle specific functions... joint staffing of a fire station (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 17).

Jurisdiction. The authority given by law to an (organization) to ... rule on legal matters within a particular geographic area (Law.com, 2015).

Joint Staffing Agreement. The agreement drafted between the City of Canal Fulton and Lawrence Township to provide for integrated staffing of the departments.

Living Together Arrangement. An arrangement whereby two fire departments remain separate, but occupy the same fire station for a trial basis (Knight, 2011).

Feasibility Study. An analysis and evaluation of a proposed project to determine if it is technically feasible, is feasible within the estimated cost, and will be profitable (BusinessDictionary.com, 2015).

Fire District. A fire district is an established tax district. This may include several cities or towns. It may also be a rural area. You can almost think of this as a co-op. (FireServiceInfo.com, 2015).

Private Fire Company. A nonprofit group or organization owning and operating firefighting equipment not controlled by a firefighting agency (Lawriter, 2015).

Mutual Aid. This is an agreement between jurisdictions for the mutual assistance in the event of major events... smaller departments depend upon mutual aid agreements (FireServiceInfo.com, 2015).

Automatic Mutual Aid. Usually a pre-agreed upon procedure for implementing mutual aid...

pre-established automatic mutual aid. A city may agree to always take the runs for another in some remote location. (FireServiceInfo.com, 2015).

SOPs. Written guidelines that defined precisely how operations were to be conducted (FEMA, 1999).

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study was the use of a 17 year old resource as a primary reference. The resource was utilized by this study due to the way a local feasibility committee relied on it in their own study. In order to be comparative and expand on certain findings of that initial feasibility study, the document was utilized in a forefront manner. The resource is an industry specific book specializing in this topic and this author has not found a newer replacement for specific material contained within it. Further, the feasibility study itself was utilized in order to link the older document to this research.

Further, no instance of an exact service model, such as the one being utilized in the case of LTFD and CFFD, could be found for comparison. Many collaborations and fire districts around the State of Ohio have formed and progressed through different phases. Some such as Bath/Copley and New Franklin/Clinton Fire Departments utilize shared stations. However, no examples have been found through this project that shared a primary station for operations. Parallel to this finding, the feasibility study, which looked to many different jurisdictions in 2010 through 2012, could also not find a comparable “living together” example (Knight, 2011, page 5).

Additionally, another limitation of this study is that it looks at a special taxing district from a limited perspective. This research was focused on assisting with decisions concerning the fire departments of LTFD and CFFD. This research does not look at a comprehensive view of the social, political, and financial aspects of both entities. Unfortunately, due to the limited scope and time constraints of this project, it will not cover an all-encompassing look at Canal Fulton and Lawrence Townships. It does, however, refer to documents throughout the research that have covered a broader spectrum of both jurisdictions and found similar recommendations.

RESULTS

The survey was completed online by 99 respondents after being distributed to 1400 plus members of the Ohio Fire Chief's Association and 600 plus Ohio departments. The survey was e-mailed through the "Call Out" e-mail blast of the Ohio Fire Chiefs and posted on the "Latest News" section of the association's website on July 29, 2015. By August 30, 2015, the link received 333 hits, but only 18 responses. The survey was redistributed the next day utilizing the same resources as the first time, but adding the 275 plus members of the Ohio Fire Executive Alumni group for completion and distribution. The effort resulted in 99 respondents by mid-October. The survey results can be found in [Appendix 3](#).

Analyzed first was the type of respondent and department demographics. The survey was filled out by a variety of officer ranks, including; Fire Chief (60%), Assistant, District, or Deputy Chief (22%), Captain (8%), Lieutenant (7%), and 2 Firefighters. This fact adds some validity and accuracy to the results due to the high level of employees filling out the survey. The survey was completed by respondents from Municipal (50%), Township (48%), and other (2%) departments. No private fire companies responded. The types of departments responding were Combination (40%), Career (34%), Part-time (15%), Volunteer (6%), and other (4%). Of the respondents, over 83% employed 25-100 members, under 25 members just 13%, and over 100 at only 3%. Most departments responded to over 1500 calls per year with 63% responding, 750-1500 calls (17%), and under 750 calls (19%). Lastly, most department's budgets were over 1.5 Million (66%), half-a-million up to 1.5 Million (17%), and under half-a-million (16%).

The first research question dealt with the types of collaborative efforts that departments were involved in, resulting in a great deal of responses. The top two responses mutual aid (78%)

and automatic mutual aid (MABAS) (73%) vastly outpaced the rest. Contracts (28%), other (17%), and fire/ambulance districts (15%) were the next three, followed by operational merger (9%), functional merger (5%), and lastly partial merger (2%).

The second question asked if the respondent's department is considering, or has considered in the past being part of a fire district. The answer was mostly split with 47% acknowledging yes they had, and 52% stating that the department had not. Next, the survey asked those that answered yes to considering a fire district, if they were part of a district currently, in which 23 respondents answered yes.

The next seven questions dealt with the following aspects:

- legal considerations that arose with the creation of a district
- reasons for considering a fire district
- what was planned, processed, or procedure considered in order to succeed
- the challenges faced while taking steps toward a district
- benefits since consolidation
- would you do anything different
- negative consequences of the district

The top legal considerations while forming a district according to the respondents were sources of funding (69.6%), integration of staff (39.1%), and integration of buildings and equipment (37%). Other strong considerations included promotion/demotion of staff (34.8%), Collective-bargaining contracts (28.3%), and private citizen opposition (19.6%). Merging a private fire department into the system was the smallest concern, with only 2 respondents advising. These findings are interesting since the lowest concern (merging a private fire company) found in the study appeared to be one of the biggest issues for the consolidated

departments in the Stark County area. As evidence, one nearby chief stated that creating a new funding stream (tax levy) has been a challenge and was actively being opposed by members of a nearby private fire company (GM, personal communications, March 29, 2016).

The top three reasons departments considered looking into a fire district were increasing services to the community (75.5%), monetary savings (including reduction of funding or resources, 71.4%), and reduction of duplication of equipment (55.1%). These same reasons are discussed in LTFD/CFFD safety committee meetings and have been documented in the community feasibility report (Knight, 2011, page 6). Very few respondents identified with public (2) or political pressure (7) as reasons to form a district. Other considerations included standardization (26.5%) and grant funding opportunities (18.4%) as valid considerations. These last considerations are of great concern in speaking with the fire chief of LTFD (MAS, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Next, respondents were asked what plans, processes, or procedures were utilized for success of the district. The answers were as varied as the response choices; however, strategic planning for future (49%), standardizing SOPs and operations (44.9%), and planning to integrate staff (42.9%) resulted in the top three. Other responses included: standardizing payroll, scheduling, discipline (36.7%), process to address personnel fears (34.7%), combining training (34.7%), procedure to joint purchase (32.7%), and plans to decrease equipment (26.5%). The only choice with a low response rate was plans to decrease staff at two percent. Many of these responses have begun to be addressed at the department level in the case of LTFD/CFFD. Unfortunately, many other plans and processes are hindered by the fact that the two departments are still currently governed by separate entities and both still must account for its own fire

protection in case the other entity backs out of the current agreement (MAS, personal communication, March 29, 2016).

Departments were asked whether their consolidation efforts were successful, in which 22 answered yes. What benefits has your department seen since the consolidation was the next question to those who answered yes. 78.3 percent of respondents answered that there was a marked increase in services, and 73.9 percent stated that the operation was more efficient. Next ranked was equality in tax structure (69.6%), reduction in response times (65.2%), and monetary savings and increase in training efforts tied at 56.5 percent. Rounding out the most responses were a decrease in duplication of equipment and an increase in accountability tied at 47.8 percent responding. Only one respondent found that a decrease in taxes was a benefit. This fact pattern fits in line with the items discussed at LTFD/CFFD safety committee meetings. The goal for the safety forces is to provide more coverage and services with the same funding. The push is for more fiscal responsibility in local government; including the elimination of duplication of resources.

Additionally, respondents were asked if they had to do it over, knowing what they know now, would anything change. This open-ended question resulted in 10 responses that would not change anything, 3 would have accounted for funding issues better, any 1 response for each of the following; better planning, better communication, close a station right away, and shouldn't have closed a station. Many chose not to respond. One chief at a nearby, newly created fire district advised that funding would be less of a problem if all stakeholders were in agreement (GM, personal communications, March 29, 2016).

Lastly, departments were asked if there were any unintended consequences resulting from the consolidation. This question had fewer responses than other questions. Loss of personnel (6

responses), loss of department pride/moral/identity (4 responses), and increase in funds needed (3 responses) were the top three. Other responses included one response each and were reduction of manning, political infighting, and decrease in accountability. All chiefs interviewed through this research agreed that regardless of how well things are planned, many unintended results and issues will arise out of consolidations (MAS, personal communication, March 29, 2016).

Including as many stakeholders as possible in the planning process should minimize these types of problems (Knight, 2011, page 6).

In addition to the survey results obtained, meetings and interviews were held with area fire district chiefs in an effort to obtain feedback on the following material in the survey, but in a more central manner.

- Legal issues that arose
- Benefits
- Reasons for forming
- Unintended consequences
- Challenges

In person interviews were held with three local chiefs on various dates, LTFD, CFFD, and Erie Valley Fire District (Navarre, Ohio). Additionally, two fire district chiefs (East Wayne Fire District, (Dalton, Ohio area) and Sandy Creek Fire District, (Minerva, Ohio area) were contacted via telephone for comment on consolidations. Many answers were directly in line with the findings of the research herein.

Many of the interviewed chief's responses to questions were similar or had familiar themes. The formation of many of the districts revolved around daytime staffing issues or lack thereof. Erie Valley's area was using mutual aid for many of their responses during daytime hours even though two departments serviced the area (0.3 miles apart) (RA, personal communications, February 23, 2016). Parallel with that finding, both chiefs from Sandy Creek

and East Wayne expressed the need to increase operational efficiency during daytime hours (GM & AS, personal communications, March 29, 2016). LTFD/CFFD joint staffing program created in 1997 came about due to the same dilemma.

While Erie Valley's Chief stated that the formation was supported by most of the stakeholders, both Sandy Creek and East Wayne have had legal issues with some of the parties involved (RA, personal communications, February 23, 2016) & (GM & AS, personal communications, March 29, 2016). Legal issues discussed included back taxes, withdrawal from the district by stakeholders, and personality conflicts.

Challenges discussed through the interview process revolved around funding and adherence to new entity's SOPs (identity issues). East Wayne FD Chief stated that creating a new funding revenue has been problematic in the community, especially with some members of the community actively campaigning against the tax (GM, personal communications, March 29, 2016). Sandy Creek was able to pass a 4 Mil levy on the first attempt, although by very few votes, and suggested public outreach and education planning in the future (AS, personal communications, March 29, 2016). While Erie Valley is too new to experience this string of problems, in LTFD/CFFD's case, plans for educational public opportunities should be taken seriously.

Many of the responses from area chiefs about benefits of consolidations amounted to the same as the survey. All interviewees replied that service was increased to the community almost immediately, plans were being formed for the reduction and duplication of equipment, and that changes to response times have been positive (RA, personal communications, February 23, 2016) & (GM & AS, personal communications, March 29, 2016). Further, both Sandy Creek and

East Wayne have made standardization of SOPs and joint training priorities (GM & AS, personal communications, March 29, 2016).

A summary of responses is included in [Appendix 3](#).

DISCUSSION

This section will review and integrate the data found through the literature review and survey process. The interpretation of the data is in no means meant to fully conclude or prove any certain hypothesis or other, but rather bring all significant aspects of the research findings together in proper perspective. The idea of fire department consolidations is an ever-changing and fluid topic that needs further consideration and research.

This research was tasked with identifying and recommending changes that would enhance the current sharing of operational resources by the Canal Fulton and Lawrence Township Fire Departments. The two departments have looked for ways to collaborate in order to be fiscally responsible since the 1990s. As described in the background and significance section, many distinct changes have occurred through the years to bring the two departments together in operations (see [Appendix 5](#)). The study was intended to identify and describe different levels of consolidations and the legal requirements for each, identify problems and challenges encountered, indicate any plans, procedures, and processes that are needed to craft consolidations, and recognize potential benefits. Further, the study looked to see how other entities have addressed sharing of services. The information obtained through the literature review, survey, and interviews provided parallel findings when analyzed.

In order to understand and identify the different levels and legal requirements of consolidations, the literature review looked to the Ohio Township Handbook and the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) for answers. In the Ohio Township Handbook, the literature review identifies that a township must appoint a fire prevention officer, but has different options as far as fire protection (Ohio Auditor of State, 2014, page I - 12). Fire protection may be performed in a variety of ways, including: maintaining a regular fire department, contracting with a volunteer

fire company, contracting with another government entity, and forming a joint fire or ambulance district (Ohio Auditor of State, page I – 12). A number of these options involve the use of consolidations. The survey asked respondents, “What types of collaborations is your department involved in?” The associated data indicated that over 78% of departments surveyed participated in mutual aid agreements. Over 73% of departments surveyed participated in automatic aid agreements, both of which are forms of simple fire department consolidation contracts. These types of collaborations allow for additional help upon request or in the event of large incidents from separate agencies. Both are considered to be temporary or single incident ventures. Further, other contract services accounted for over 28% of the collaborations surveyed. CFFD & LTFD participate in both these forms of consolidations currently. Contracts between entities are allowed under Ohio Revised Code 9.60; however, some believe these agreements are short-term solutions (Snook and Johnson, 1997, page 19). Area fire districts agree that more permanent agreements are indicated for solutions to service larger areas (GM & AS, personal communications, March 29, 2016).

Secondary collaborations indicated by the survey include operational (9%), functional (5%), and partial mergers (2%), in which a low percentage of respondents indicated involvement in. The weak percentage of involvement in these types of collaborations seems to suggest that they are transitional in nature. There are two examples of partial consolidations (New Franklin/Clinton and Copley/Bath) in an adjacent county, but none operating as a primary response station. Many more responded that they were currently part of a fire district (15%), which could support the reasoning that JFD consolidations are a more permanent and stable solution. Presently, LTFD and CFFD participate in a partial functional merger whereby one department lives in and operates out of the other department’s station. Each department staffs for

a different timeframe per day, in order to split 24-hour coverage and share costs. Both departments utilize, train on, and drive each other's equipment. The administrative staff and governmental entities still remain separate, as do the discipline, human resources, and payroll of each department.

The current state of operations evolved out of a feasibility study completed in 2010 and culminating in 2011 (Knight, 2011). These types of studies are common and indicate steps in the right direction towards consolidations (Preuer, 2014, page 12). After meeting and reviewing consolidations for over a year, feasibility study committee members indicated by voting that the living together contract would be temporary with a strong consideration of a joint fire district in the future (Knight, 2011, page 12). The present survey indicated a concern by respondents where funding sources and equalities in funding sources are involved. Almost 70% of those responding to the survey considered this issue a primary concern. Many of these topics were also concerns of the feasibility study (Knight, 2011, page 7). East Wayne Fire District currently operates from existing funds due to lack of voter approval for a tax levy, which concerns administrators for future service continuation (GM, personal communications, March 29, 2016). To accentuate the point further, Steele (2002) suggests reviewing the costs of sharing services periodically in order to identify inequality or deficiencies in tax structure (page 21). For these reasons, it would suggest a JFD would allow all residents receiving service from the fire department to pay the same amount across the board to support it, instead of trying to match up city income tax against township levies which may vary.

Moving forward, the literature review indicated that joint fire districts are created through a provision of the Ohio revised code section 505.371(Lawriter, 2002). The feasibility study investigated and entertained the idea of creating a joint fire district between the City of Canal

Fulton Fire Department and the Lawrence Township Fire Department (Knight, 2011, page 3). Joint fire districts essentially join one or more fire departments into one entity, creating a separate special taxing district (Lawriter, 2002). The new entity, or JFD, crafts a Board of Trustees consisting of members from government entities being joined with members of the community (Ohio Auditor of State, 2014, page I - 14). JFDs are legally occurring mergers and considered a more permanent relationship than contracts (Snook and Johnson, 1997, page 19). The formation of the Board of Trustees is fairly straightforward in law and consists of each governmental entity appointing representative(s) as well as agreeing on additional ones. Erie Valley chose a structure of two city and two township members coupled with an alternating fifth member every two years, which was agreeable to all parties involved (RA, personal communication, February 22, 2016). The survey completed indicated that 15% of respondents were currently part of a fire or ambulance district. Furthermore, over 47% of those answering had considered now or in the past being part of a fire district.

Fire districts, being legal entities, require assistance from outside consultation. While elected officials are able to form a district by majority vote, other concerns such as funding, financials, and legal particulars are considerations (Knight, 2011, page 4). Snook and Johnson (1997) indicated that entities using in-house studies have a lower success rate than those using consultations (page 61). Chief Comstock, Chief of the Western Reserve Fire District and an attorney, has been consulted on occasions in conjunction with the feasibility study and the possible formation of the fire district. Involving subject matter experts is one of the most important steps to successful consolidations according to a leading fire and ems consultant firm (R.W. Hanifen, personal communication, September 8, 2015).

The research survey also contemplated what legal issues arose during the consolidation process, in an effort to learn what to expect moving forward. According to the question asked, many legal issues took place during consolidations of other departments. The concern of consolidation funding sources was the top response. Chief Comstock indicated that a district could start initially on existing money, but would not be a good long-term solution to financing a district (Knight, 2011, page 5). The feasibility committee listed “offers representation for entire area” as one strength of a fire district (Knight, 2011, page 6). In fact, “no fire or police district” was listed as a weakness in a community plan back in 2010 (CFCPCC, 2010, page 17). A fire district levy, if approved, would equalize the cost of fire protection between city and township residents regardless of location. Crosley (2014) explains this exact concept of equalization of tax rates to refute the argument of subsidization of different jurisdictions (page 17). This apprehension has been made by a variety of stakeholders at CFFD and LTFD consolidation meetings (MAS, personal communication, November 9, 2015). When asked what benefits resulted from successful consolidations, respondents replied equality of tax structure occurred 70% of the time! Conversely, a decrease in taxes only resulted 4.3% of the time.

Rielage (2013) introduces a remarkable idea for expansion of services through a hybrid approach in order to progressively expand services as more funding allows (pages 14 – 15). The idea uses benchmarks to allow growth, and approaches this through planning to develop different stages of the service. This concept almost mirrors the progression of operations that CFFD and LTFD have already experienced throughout the years (see [Appendix 5](#)). The suggested implication of this type of approach would be to continue to proceed with a JFD in order to bring the two departments into one command structure that would share the same mission, values, and vision for the future.

Additional legal issue responses to the survey involved the integration of personnel and assets. According to respondents, integration of staff (39%), Board of Trustees formation (37%), integration of buildings and equipment (37%), and promotion/demotion of staff (34.8%), were the next highest responses, all being nearly equivalent. These responses bring to light the issue of planning, which was identified in the survey responses as ways to respond to these legal difficulties. Many of the concerns involve anxiety to change by personnel. According to Preuer (2014), resistance to consolidations by department members can be decreased through planning measures (pages 12 – 13). In the example of East Wayne, planning may have decreased the amount of kickback from some entities not eager about the newly formed district (GM, personal communications, March 29, 2016). Many of these planning measures are identified and emphasized in the survey responses as ways toward successful outcomes for consolidations.

The integration of buildings and equipment was mentioned and accounted for in the feasibility study as a strength (Knight, 2011, pages 6 & 10). It was again identified in the survey as a high concern for respondents. As a result of the analysis, 48% of departments surveyed were successful in decreasing duplication of equipment, and 26% saw a reduction of maintenance for buildings and equipment. All local chiefs interviewed in conjunction with this research indicated that cost savings measures indicated here are in progress or being planned for in the future (RA, personal communications, February 23, 2016) & (GM & AS, personal communications, March 29, 2016).

CFFD and LTFD have a number of duplications of personnel and equipment such as stations, vehicles, and tools, which may not be necessary to duplicate with a combine JFD. Ideally, some stations and equipment could be phased out or eliminated altogether over time, examples include: engines, ambulances, grass fire units, rescue tools, air packs, and officer

personnel. One barrier to this concept while the departments remain separate is the easy undoing of the current living together contract for services. In order to proceed with any cost saving measures this concept would furnish, the departments need to create a binding legal agreement, which a JFD consolidation would provide.

For as much as the two fire departments attempt to work together, they still remain divided on some aspects. The feasibility study did not include specific fire department planning for the integration of staff, SOP's, and administrative procedures. Promotion and demotion of staff have also never been addressed by planning in the case of CFFD and LTFD, and continue to be a source of uncertainty and unease. These areas of apprehension rated highest among respondents when questioning them about efforts towards planning. Forty-five percent indicated a process to standardize SOP's and operations was imperative to successful consolidations. Plans for the integration of staff and processes to standardize administration procedures (payroll, scheduling, and discipline) valued just behind at 43% and 37% respectively. These high response rates could indicate a strong need for planning at the department level. In fact, the number-one reply indicated that almost half of respondents thought strategic planning for the future was the most heavily contemplated concern for success with fire district consolidations.

This impression that planning should be incorporated into consolidations was echoed by the literature review. Many concepts of planning were encountered in the material. There are many forms of planning the fire department can engage in to ensure direction for the future: strategic, futuring, operational, organizational, and master planning (Wallace, 2006). Porter (2014) supports an approach to planning where all stakeholders are involved (page 8). Canal Fulton and Lawrence Township both participated in the feasibility study, which was done from an omniscient viewpoint, and included many stakeholders from the community. Unfortunately,

little time was spent meshing operations and support functions at the department and operational levels. Completing these tasks may have a positive impact on current department operations and sustainability (Shimek, 2013, page 7; Crosley, 2014, page 17). This data is suggestive of a need for a better commitment to the internal process of blending the departments.

Other issues identified through the literature review included identity loss, visions for the future, and differences in the values of individual departments. Each of these notions was considered by respondents in their efforts toward consolidation by accounting for differing planning actions. Additional planning activities by respondents amounted to procedures to combine training (35%), procedures for joint purchasing (33%), plans for the decrease of equipment (27%), and procedures to cross train staff on equipment and duties (22%). Judging by the strong response to this question, the value of planning should not be underestimated.

Identity loss was identified in the feasibility study, survey (40%), and through the literature review. Many respondents surveyed experienced a loss of personnel (40%) and identity (27%) for their respective departments. The chief of Sandy Creek FD indicated that the concern of identity loss was one of his biggest cultural concerns with changing the names of the departments (AS, personal communication, March 29, 2016).

This concern has been recognized and previously addressed by LTFD and CFFD administrative staff by offering reciprocity for either department's members in order to combat the identity loss factor indicated by some of the reviewed material (Shoemaker, 2014, page 6). In fact, as of the start of 2016, only seven of CFFD members and four of LTFD members out of 47 total members remain separate. The departments have a combine 35 members who work on both departments essentially rendering this concern moot. As evidence, one respondent noted that his department suffered some loss of personnel, but that the members were not very active ones.

Another respondent advised that the members that did not “buy in” to the consolidation eventually left, but the department did what was best for the residents and department and not individual members. LTFD and CFFD may experience a minimal occurrence of this concept, but recent hiring practices have included new members to both departments by default. New members are even issued uniforms with both departments’ patches on either sleeve to further combat differences and save on uniform resources.

Another concept that was identified in the survey, but has already been addressed was that of staff cross training. Both departments have varied equipment, in which some are very specialized. With the partial functional consolidation in April of 2013 and as a mandate of the insurance companies involved, all staff of both departments received training on each other’s apparatuses in order to be covered on insurance programs. Special training, such as swift water and ice rescue has occurred in an effort to cross train staff on specializations. Further, all active department members are level 2 state certified firefighters and Paramedics, or EMTs that are interested in becoming Paramedics. 56.5% of those surveyed indicated that their departments possessed more capable and trained staff after the consolidation.

Efforts for joint purchasing are limited at this time due to the incomplete nature of the current agreement. Both departments continue to purchase, maintain, and house all equipment necessary to meet NFPA standards and ISO parameters. Attempts have been successful with maintaining or combining firefighting apparel, ID tags, database reporting, SCBA masks, and personal protective equipment for each member. Additionally, the activities of fire prevention, training, and testing of equipment have shared costs since 2013. Thirty-five percent of respondents to the research survey indicated that combining training was vital to a consolidation.

These successful measures not requiring a JFD to be in place have come to culmination; there is very little more that can be done in these matters.

In alignment with other survey questions and the literature resources, respondents were asked to recognize challenges the department faced while taking steps toward consolidation. Not surprisingly, the top three answers were, in order, fear of a loss of control (60%), political problems (54%), and trust issues (44%). Other concerns listed organizational barriers (42%), personality conflicts (38%), and timing of efforts (27%) as additional roadblocks. Almost all concerns listed in the feasibility study related to one or more of those listed in the survey. Many of these concerns are hotly contested by one party or another; examples include: annexation by the city of township land, costs associated with buildings still being assessed, and the loss of control by all parties involved (Knight, 2011, page 7). Snook & Johnson (1997) recognize the need for trust and commitment to be present in all parties in order to proceed with efforts (page 20). Erie Valley FD found the process of creating a JFD to be simplified when most stakeholders were in agreeance and had positive relationships throughout the process (RA, personal communication, February 23, 2016). Unfortunately history, recent and past, have added barriers to relationships of stakeholders involved. Sources recommend redeveloping relationships and trust besides making efforts to understand stakeholder's concerns as a means to keep moving forward (Shimek, 2013, page 8 & 25).

Interesting to note is the low incidence of SOPs and operational roadblocks answered in this section of the survey, at only 2%. This occurrence is consistent with the notion that many of the topics and concerns that could have been dealt with through departmental and operational planning were completed at that level. Implicated is the fact that if successful at that level the concern did not impact the actual consolidation at the next step. This could be a learning point

for LTFD and CFFD. Many of these concerns can and should be dealt with at the lowest level. Albeit, having one hierarchy in an organization to address these issues in a consistent and united manner would be preferred as it is nearly impossible to manage with two differing systems (Snook & Johnson, 1997, page 18).

Lastly, respondents were asked to ascertain any benefits, whether perceived or factual that the department enjoyed as a result of the consolidation. An increase in services to the community was the number-one answer reported at an incidence of 78.3%! This demonstrates a direct relationship to the reasons departments looked into consolidations (75.5% wanted an increase in services). The relationship between the two questions would support the deduction that many departments were, in fact, successful in obtaining their primary goal of increasing services to the customer base. In reality, all chiefs interviewed through this study indicated an increase in services to the community through their consolidation efforts. Erie Valley FD began a daytime staffing program to address missed calls (RA, personal communication, February 23, 2016). Sandy Creek FD initiated a 24 hour a day EMS response service with four personnel to replace a private service that increased reliability of service to the area (AS, personal communication, March 29, 2016). Finally, East Wayne FD has started a staffing program with existing money, but is looking at a long term solution to fund it through an area-wide levy (GM, personal communication, March 29, 2016).

Relating to increasing services, response times in many communities are an important facet of service. Furthermore, response time benchmarks can be found in NFPA standards and ISO ratings. Departments found that 65% of the time the consolidation was successful in reducing response times for the community. This is true when analyzing the response statistics from LTFD and CFFD's Firehouse® database. Since the operational consolidation, which is at a

more centralized location within the response area, residents have realized a drop in response times from prior to consolidation 6 minutes 9 seconds down to 3 minutes and 49 seconds after consolidation, on average.

The second relationship of interest in this answer set refers to fiscal savings. In past questions, 71.2% of respondents were interested in achieving economic savings with the consolidation. When asked about benefits, 56.5% actually received some form of monetary savings, another 13% admitted a reduction of personnel costs, and an added 8.7% reported a reduction of associated administrative costs. By calculation, a potential 78.2% of respondents may have received some type of cost savings through the success of the consolidation. This high percentage would propose that many consolidations do, in fact, save precious resources. One limitation in the line of questioning is that we cannot determine where the savings was incurred. There could also be a possible overlap in the responses obtained. LTFD and CFFD could realize savings by reduction of stations, engines, ambulances, grass fire units, air packs, rescue equipment and administrative personnel, but not until there is a permanent agreement in place between entities. The cost savings is difficult to calculate at this point with so many variables to operations and staff involved but could include the cost of replacing the previously mentioned equipment in the future as well as current maintenance costs.

In summation, consolidations, like JFDs, are as varied in concerns as rewards. Much of the research suggests that entities get out of it what they put into it. Relationships must be fostered, and trust must prevail in order to move forward and work together. Planning becomes a critical factor in success of the proposed project and involvement by all stakeholders is paramount to success. Cooperating, participating, and communicating throughout the planning process will create excellence in the planning process (Wallace, 2006, page 249). If these actions

are taken, a number of positive outcomes such as decreased response times, cost savings, and unity of mission, vision, and values can be accomplished for the betterment of all involved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research conducted looked into different facets of fire department consolidations, including joint fire districts. The research is intended to recommend changes that will enhance the current sharing of operational resources for Canal Fulton and Lawrence Township Fire Departments.

Established Recent Changes to Operations

While speaking about recommendations, it is important to understand that many changes occurred to the operations of LTFD and CFFD in the timeframe this research took place. These changes affected the efficiency of both departments. The topics and problems like; SOPs, training, scheduling, fire prevention, and consolidation, explored in this research did not occur in a vacuum, and were constantly changing as needs surfaced. The following changes occurred as this research was being conducted:

1. Department SOPs were integrated, approved, and accepted by the respective departments to simplify operations while functioning from one station. This low-cost effort was accomplished through cooperation of the four members of the current command staff (chiefs and assistant chiefs). This effort has been successful in combining SOPs for both departments, but not improving them. Training efforts continue to enhance the integration of combined SOPs into operations for all members involved.
2. Department training has been integrated into a single system under the supervision of one assistant chief. The departments' chiefs authorized CFFD's assistant chief to develop this system as a joint effort to assist with training weaknesses. Efforts to improve deficient skill sets such as; drafting, rural water

flows, ice and water rescue, and off-road vehicle operations have been developed. Personnel now possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to operate each other's vehicles and equipment.

3. Both departments have recently combined the organizational function of scheduling into one position for continuity of operations. The chiefs authorized the LTFD assistant chief to complete the part-time duty schedules for both departments. Additionally, this assistant chief handles and reassigns all call-off shifts and approves trades. This no-cost effort has been successful in creating one point of contact for scheduling of all part-time employees, regardless of shift or department, and simplified the sign up and shift assignment process for personnel. Personnel describe the continuity and cohesiveness of scheduling as seamless, as if it actually were one department.
4. The departments have combined Fire Prevention Bureau (FPB) efforts into one office and system. Currently, a Captain and Lieutenant (who are each employed by both departments in the same rank and capacity) work in conjunction to complete fire education, inspection, and investigation activities. Fire prevention resources are now utilized in a unified manner. There is one phone number and one point of contact, which reduces confusion for the public and businesses. This effort had no associated cost, but a big impact in community relations.
5. Both departments' chiefs declare a desire to form a joint fire district in the future with help from industry specific expert consultation (MAS & RD, personal communication, April 26, 2016). This effort is still being investigated by both political entities with consultation provided by Attorney and Fire Chief Chip

Comstock. Currently, legal resolutions are being drafted to initiate measures toward a joint fire district. Using expert consultation will assist with gaining buy-in from all stakeholders and involve the correct participants in the process. The research suggested that the benefits to developing a fire district outweigh the hazards and problems.

Recommendations Moving Forward with Operations

These solutions are recommended by this research from the position of LTFD and CFFD's situation. With the desire to consolidate into a fire district being considered by both political entities, the following recommendations will assist with that effort in mind. The recommendations will focus on increasing operational and administrative structure and efficiency. Many of the recommendations aid in the simplification of combining the two departments in the near future.

1. Establish one command structure with consultation options:
 - a. When creating a fire district, the new board will need guidance for instituting a new command structure. During consolidations, the research has identified that apprehension of personnel selection is an area that has been problematic. Consideration and planning efforts should occur in order to limit complications and include all proper personnel in the process.

It is further recommended that all chief grade officer staff have the option to apply and be assessed for the position of fire district chief. There are a number of highly educated chief grade officers. It is not recommended in LTFD/CFFD situation to use outside personnel due to the highly

specialized and unique structure of the departments. Further, there should be a cost savings associated with the reduction to one fire chief; approximately \$15,000 could be realized through this change. It is also recommended to have a testing company conduct a written and oral assessment of candidates for the position of fire district chief at a cost estimated to be \$7000.00.

After the appointment of the fire district chief by the fire board, it is recommended to allow the chief to develop his/her own system of officer appointments to consider KSAs of current staff as they relate to the job descriptions, current levels of certifications, and other strengths of officers considered. This process can be done at no cost from within the current department's staff, as positions are filled. Job descriptions should be developed using the proposed existing organizational chart (see [Appendix 6](#)).

2. Plan for a more formalized tax structure that brings equality to all residents serviced through the fire district. This effort should include placing a 4.5mil levy for the district on the ballot in year two of the fire district. The district, in year one, can be initiated with existing funds to be agreed upon in the resolutions of the entities involved. The 4.5 mil amount of the levy includes all current operating costs and considers capital items and staffing needs for the near future. A committee of elected officials, fiscal officers, and fire administration can be utilized to develop a strategic plan and budget for the future.

Education of the public, community groups, and stakeholder involvement will be important missions when seeking special district funding. Plans for formalized tax restructuring and fire service modeling shall be established prior to efforts toward education. The city and township shall establish proposals, in conjunction with county resources, to decrease and dissolve the established funding for the fire department in lieu of a more permanent tax structure, when approved. These proposals shall be championed and disseminated by all stakeholders in an effort to educate voters.

3. Plan to increase administrative efficiency by the following recommendations:
 - a. Combine the functions of grant writing, payroll, and discipline for both departments into joint positions with position specific job descriptions in an effort to prepare for one joint district structure. These tasks can be assigned to administrative staff and completed internally by the chiefs, like the other examples given; training and scheduling, with little to no cost.
 - b. Develop mission, vision, and values of the departments through the work of a committee. The committee should be formed with interested representation from all levels of both organizations. This effort can be accomplished with minimal cost associated with occasional meetings and mostly done while on duty.
4. The newly combined SOPs need reviewed for weaknesses and deficiencies through the use of a risk management system. State specific fire department policies and training can be realized through the use of these

management systems such as Lexipol or similar outside source. This task can be initiated by the officers of both departments by reviewing the existing SOPs. A cost estimate for this measure is approximately \$10,000 for the first couple years.

5. Plan for changes in the organization that can realize a cost savings and allow for fiscal responsibility to increase services by reallocating funds. Establish a committee to plan for the reduction of resources as follows:
 - a. Reduce duplication of vehicles.
 - i. 4 engines can be reduced through the sale of the 1985 and 2000 engines to produce approximately \$150,000
 - ii. 4 ambulances can be reduced to 3 ambulances, saving \$175,000 by not replacing the aging 2003 unit
 - iii. 2 grass units can be reduced through the sale of 1 grass unit, saving \$90,000 by not replacing the aging 1988 grass unit
 - b. Reduce duplication of equipment
 - i. 2 SCBA fill stations can be reduced to 1 fill station, saving a \$70,000 replacement
 - ii. 28 SCBAs reduced as vehicles are not replaced as needed, at a value of \$7000.00 per unit not replaced
 - iii. 6 heart monitors to 4 monitors, saving \$33,000.00 per unit not replaced
 - c. Additional savings from consolidations
 - i. Fuel cost: Estimated \$2000.00 per year
 - ii. Insurance cost: Estimated \$4000.00 per year

iii. Repairs cost: Estimated \$16,000.00 per year

In order to accomplish these recommendations, both communities should redouble efforts towards planning, to include: Township Trustees, City Council, residents, and fire department staff. The research suggested a number of different ways to reduce challenges and problems through planning. Many of the planning efforts required will come at the department level after a decision to combine departments is solidified. Where consultation is preferred, a cost estimate has been given. Existing monies could be used to fund the district until residents could pass a joint district levy for operating capital. Education of the public on these issues is paramount to the success of this endeavor. Further, plans to reassess the operations and the efforts of the district should be accounted for within the process.

Future research should look for specific methods that will assist with blending fire departments together to include a look into JFDs. The research identifies many different processes, challenges, and benefits of fire department consolidations, but does not identify specific solutions. Specific planning measures should be the focus of any further research to add to the list of tools for success.

REFERENCES

- Business Dictionary.com. (2015). What is feasibility study? Definition and meaning. Retrieved March 25, 2016, from <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/feasibility-study.html>
- Canal Fulton Fire Department. (2014). *Standard Operating Procedures*. Canal Fulton: Author.
- Canal Fulton Community Plan Citizens' Committee and Stark County Regional Planning Commission. (2010, January). *Canal Fulton Community Plan*. Canal Fulton, Oh: Author.
- City-Data.com. (2015). Canal Fulton and Lawrence Township search. Retrieved from <http://www.city-data.com/city/Canal-Fulton-Ohio.html> & <http://www.city-data.com/township/Lawrence-Stark-OH.html>
- City of Oakwood. (2015). *Public Safety*. Retrieved from website: <http://welcome2oakwood.com/safety.htm>
- Crosley, S. (2014, October). Is a fire district the answer to your fiscal crisis? Yes...No...Maybe? *InCommand*, 8, 16-18.
- Cravens, S. (2008, April). Riding with North Shore FD. *EMS Magazine*, 12. Retrieved September 2, 2015, from <http://www.emsworld.com/article/10321113/riding-with-north-shore-fd>
- Crumley, M. (2014, October). Medina's story...hurdles that stalled forming a district. *InCommand*, 8, 9.
- FEMA. (1999). *Developing Effective Standard Operating Procedures for Fire and EMS departments* [report # FA-197]. Retrieved August 15, 2015, from <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/fa-197-508.pdf>

FireServiceInfo.com (2015). Basic glossary of firefighting and rescue terms. Retrieved from

<http://www.fireserviceinfo.com/glossary.html#P>

Foster, D. (2008, August). Merged fire and EMS. *Fire Chief* 52(8), page 42 – 45.

Heinonen, J. & Wilson, J.M. (2013). *Resident perceptions of public-safety consolidation*.

Retrieved from Michigan State University, PCASS website:

[http://policeconsolidation.msu.edu/resources?combine=&field_source_tid=All&field_subject_area_tid\[\]=83](http://policeconsolidation.msu.edu/resources?combine=&field_source_tid=All&field_subject_area_tid[]=83)

Knight, D. (2011). *Report of the ad hoc committee to study the feasibility of a joint fire district;*

Canal Fulton & Lawrence Township. Canal Fulton, OH: Author.

Law.com. (2015). Contract, Merger, Jurisdiction. Retrieved March 25, 2016, from

<http://dictionary.law.com/>

Lawrence Township Fire Department. (2014). *Standard Operating Procedures*. Canal Fulton:

Author.

Lawrence Township/City of Canal Fulton. (2015). Firehouse (Version 7.15.25) [Database].

Retrieved from <http://cloud3.firehousesoftware.com/oh/northwest/>

Lawriter - ORC - 9.60 Contracts for firefighting agency, private fire company, or emergency medical service organization. (2003, March 19). Retrieved March 25, 2016, from

<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/gp9.60>

Lawriter - ORC - 505.371 Joint fire district creation. (2002, January 25). Retrieved March 25,

2016, from <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/505.371>

Lawson, G.R. (2011). *Consolidation will help Ohio's local governments if compensation*

package costs are properly managed. Retrieved from the Buckeye Institute website:

www.buckeyeinstitute.org/.../10-31-11-Rethinking-Ohios-Government- Structure-
Final%20for%20Release.pdf

Matarese, L., Chelst, K., Fisher-Stewart, & Pearsall, A. (2007, May). Public safety concept in the post-9/11 world. *Public Management*, 89(4), 14 – 17.

Merriam-Webster. (2015). Collaboration. Retrieved March 25, 2016, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collaboration>

National Fire Protection Association. (2010). *NFPA 1710: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments*. Retrieved from NFPA website: <http://www.nfpa.org/codes-and-standards/document-information-pages?mode=code&code=1710>

Ohio Auditor of State. (2016). *Ohio Township Handbook*. Retrieved from Ohio Auditor of State website:
<https://ohioauditor.gov/publications/Final%20Township%20Handbook%202016.pdf>

Perrault, E., McClelland, R., Austin, C., & Sieppert, J. (2011). Working together in collaborations: successful process factors for community collaboration. *Administration in Social Work*, 35, 282-298. doi: 10.1080/03643107.2011.575343

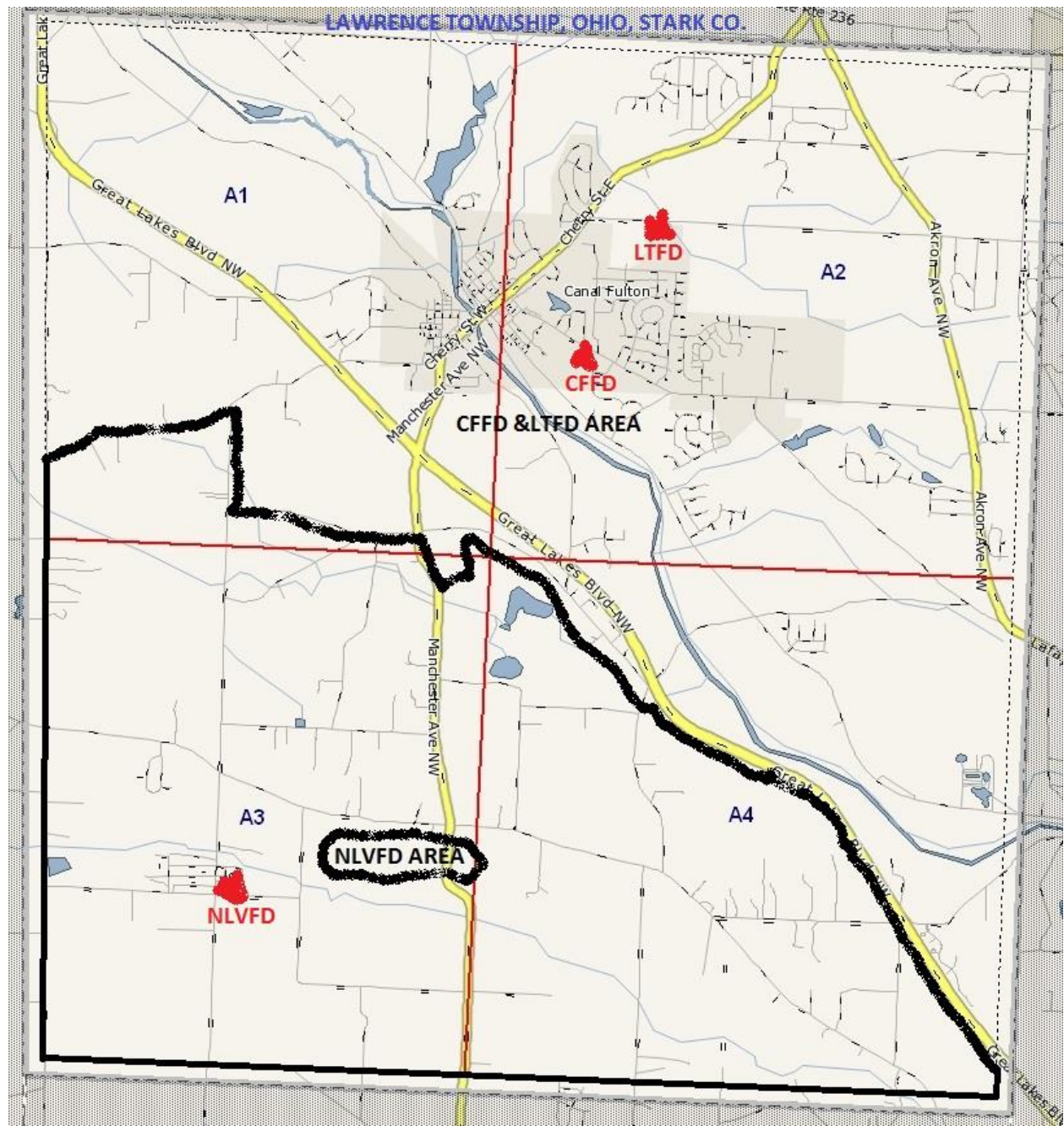
Porter, J. (2014, October). A joint fire district that works. *InCommand*, 8, 8-9.

Preuer, J.D. (2014, October). First things first: feasibility before strategy. *InCommand*, 8, 12-14.

Rielage, R.R. (2013, April). Consolidation considerations and inquiring minds. *Fire Chief*, 57(4), 14-16.

- Shimek, D. (2013). Feasibility study of consolidating public answering points in Perry County, Ohio. *Urban Publications*, Paper 760. Retrieved from http://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/urban_facpub/760
- Shoemaker, M. (2014, October). A brief history & rationale for fire districts in Ohio. *InCommand*, 8, 6-7.
- Slivinski, S. (2014). *Out of sight: how special taxing districts circumvent spending limits and decrease accountability in government*. Retrieved from Gold Water Institute website: <http://goldwaterinstitute.org/article/out-sight-how-special-taxing-districts-circumvent-spending-limits-and-decrease>
- Snook, J.W. & Johnson, J.D. (1997). *Making the pieces fit*. Boston : Jones and Bartlett.
- Steele, J.M. (2002). *Determining a township's fair share, Municipal fire protection contracts*. Retrieved from OFC website: <http://associationdatabase.com/aws/OFCA/pt/fli/16306/false>
- Vogel, T. (2014). *Volunteer firefighters and their intention to remain active* (Master's Thesis, University of Twente, Enschede, Netherlands). Retrieved from <http://essay.utwente.nl/66147/>
- Wallace, M. (2006). *Fire department strategic planning* (2nd ed.). Tulsa, OK: Pennwell.

APPENDIX 1 – JURISDICTIONAL BOUNDRIES & STATION LOCATIONS



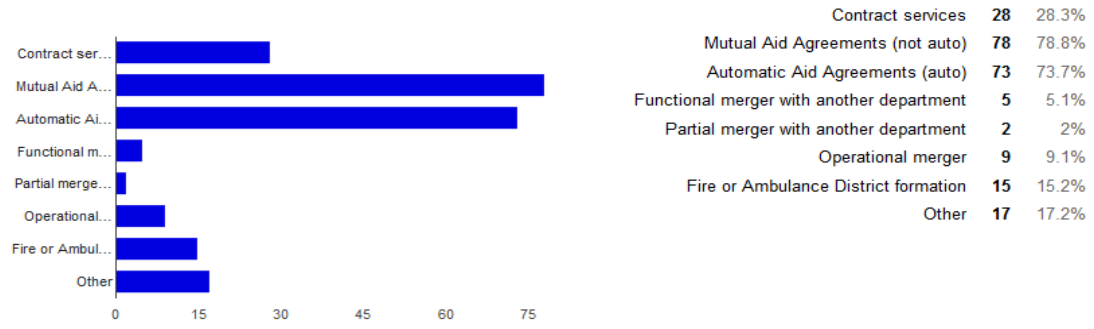
APPENDIX 2 – DEPARTMENT DATA

	LTFD	CFFD	NLVFD	TOTAL
POPULATION SERVED	5131	5500	2441	13072
AREA COVERED	16.5	2.42	15.68	34.6
% POPULATION COVERED	40%	42%	18%	100%
DEPARTMENT RUN VOLUME 2013	589	573	575	1737
DEPARTMENT RUN VOLUME 2014	589	608	654	1851
DISTRICT VOLUME 2013	398	741	238	1377
DISCTRICT VOLUME 2014	397	766	261	1424
# MEMBERS	42	45	42	91* ¹
STATUS	PT	PT	PT / VOL	
SCHEDULE	24 hr	24 hr	24 hr	
BUDGET	482,050	492,475	420,000	
Data found from department FH databases and City-Data.com 2015				

¹ 38 members of CF & LT are on both departments, the total represents the actual number of members on all departments. District volume reflects calls inside LT.

APPENDIX 3 – SURVEY RESULTS

Which forms of collaborations is your department involved in?



Is your department considering, or has it considered in the past, being part of a fire district?

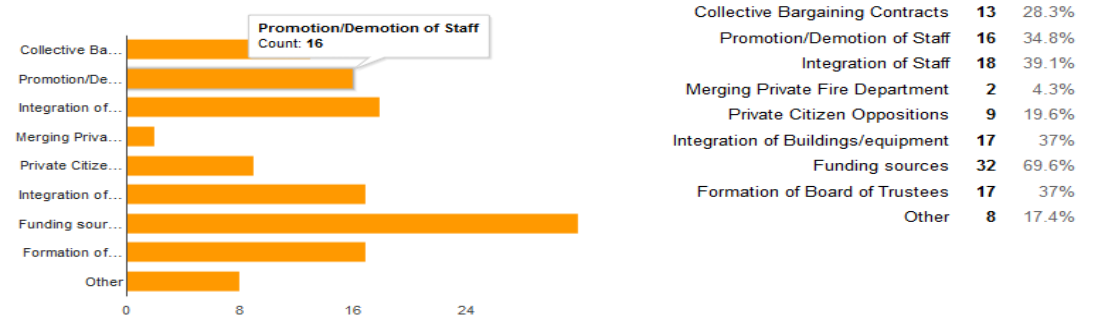


Consolidation Information

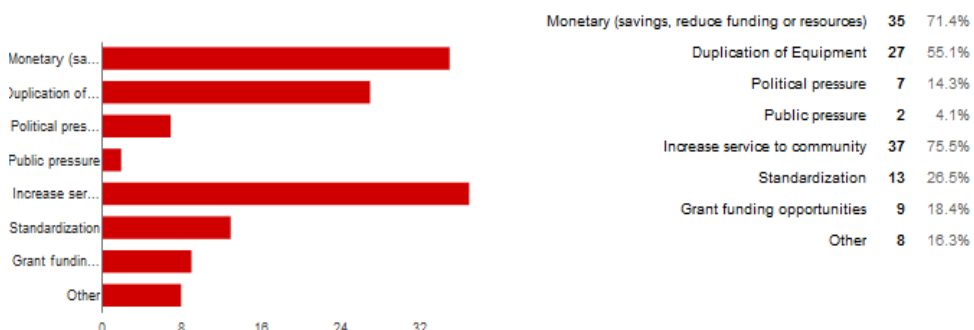
Is your department currently part of a fire or ambulance district?



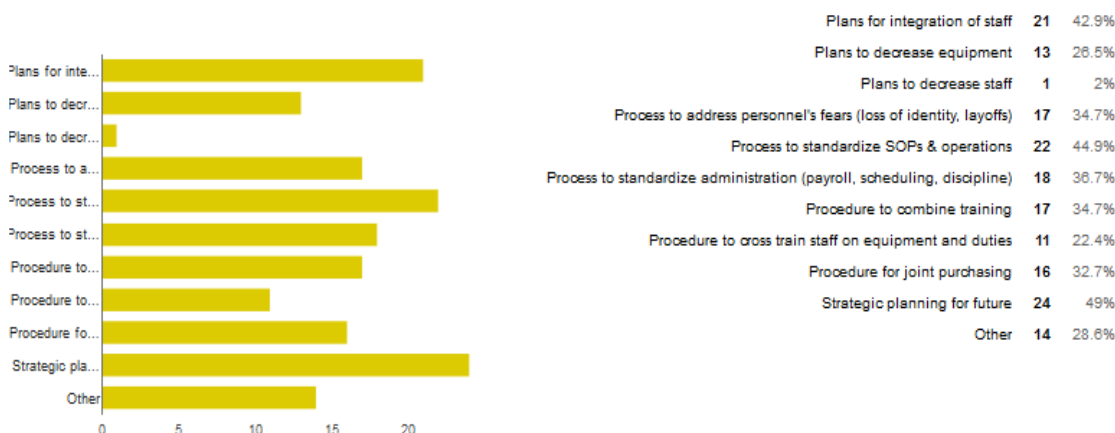
What legal issues arose during the consolidation process?



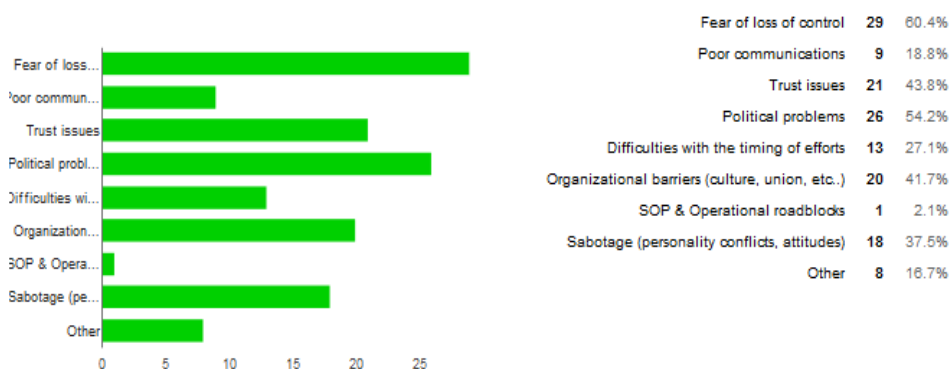
What are the reasons your department considered or is considering being part of a fire district?



During your efforts toward consolidation, what plan, process, or procedure was considered in order to succeed?

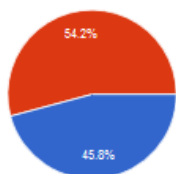


What challenges did your department face while taking steps toward consolidation?



Successful Efforts

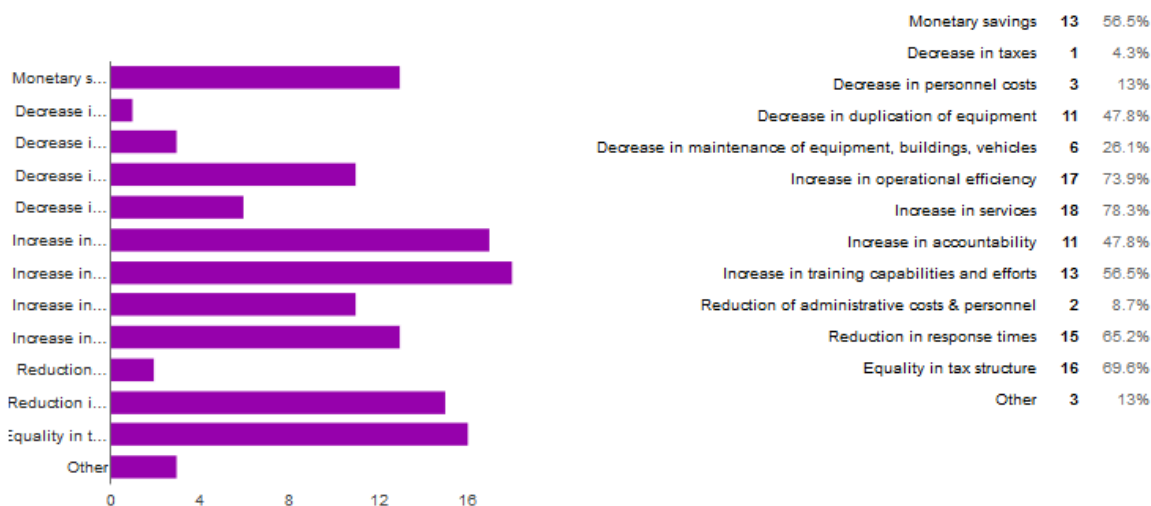
Was your department successful in their efforts toward consolidation?



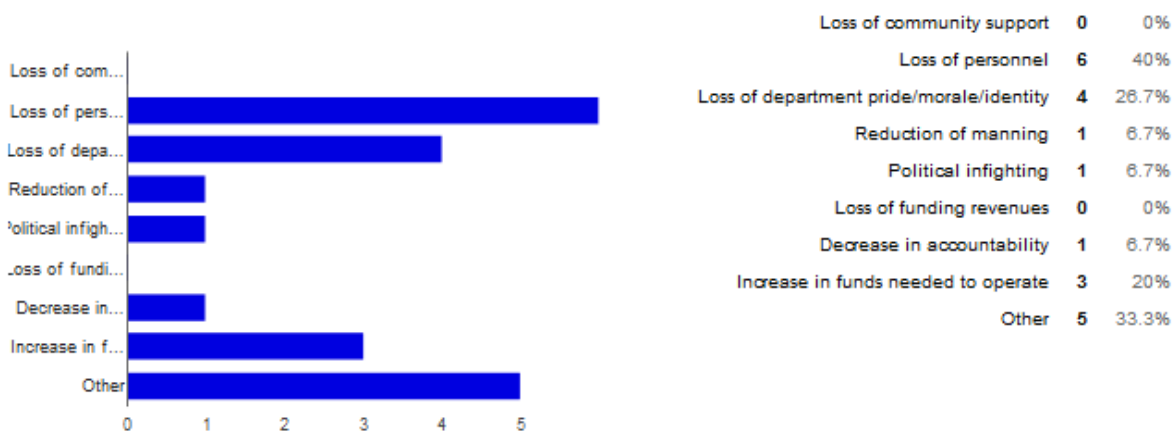
Yes 22 45.8%
No 26 54.2%

Benefits

What benefits has your department seen since the consolidation?

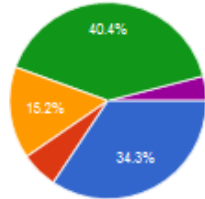


Were there any unintended negative consequences from the consolidation?



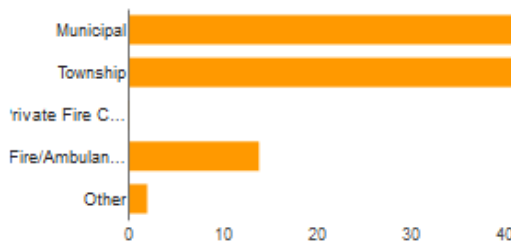
Department Demographics

Which best describes your type of department?



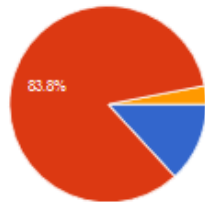
Career	34	34.3%
Volunteer	6	6.1%
Part-time/Paid on-call	15	15.2%
Combination	40	40.4%
Other	4	4%

What category best describes your jurisdiction's make-up?



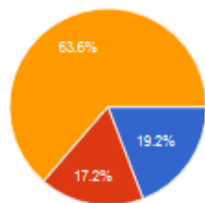
Municipal	50	50.5%
Township	48	48.5%
Private Fire Company	0	0%
Fire/Ambulance District	14	14.1%
Other	2	2%

How many members does your department employ?



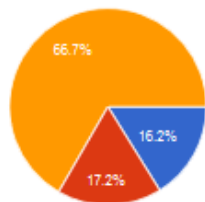
0-25	13	13.1%
25-100	83	83.8%
over 100	3	3%

What is your department's run volume?



0 - 750 calls total	19	19.2%
750 - 1500 calls total	17	17.2%
over 1500 calls	63	63.6%

What is your department's budget?



up to 500,000 dollars	16	16.2%
500,001 - 1,500,000 dollars	17	17.2%
over 1,500,000 dollars	66	66.7%

APPENDIX 4 – SURVEY QUESTIONS

Proposed Draft of Questions 5-14-15 Form

This survey is meant to obtain information about fire district consolidations for an applied research project through the Ohio Fire Executive Program of the Ohio Fire Chief's Association.

What is your name?

What is your rank?

Which forms of collaborations is your department involved in?

(can be more than one)

- Contract services
- Mutual Aid Agreements (not auto)
- Automatic Aid Agreements (auto)
- Functional merger with another department
- Partial merger with another department
- Operational merger
- Fire or Ambulance District formation
- Other:

Is you department considering, or has it considered in the past, being part of a fire district?

- Yes
- No

Consolidation Information

Is your department currently part of a fire or ambulance district?

- Yes
 No

What legal issues arose during the consolidation process?

- Collective Bargaining Contracts
 Promotion/Demotion of Staff
 Integration of Staff
 Merging Private Fire Department
 Private Citizen Oppositions
 Integration of Buildings/equipment
 Funding sources
 Formation of Board of Trustees
 Other:

What are the reasons your department considered or is considering being part of a fire district?
 (can be more than one)

- Monetary (savings, reduce funding or resources)
 Duplication of Equipment
 Political pressure
 Public pressure
 Increase service to community
 Standardization
 Grant funding opportunities
 Other:

During your efforts toward consolidation, what plan, process, or procedure was considered in order to succeed?

- Plans for integration of staff
 Plans to decrease equipment
 Plans to decrease staff
 Process to address personnel's fears (loss of identity, layoffs)
 Process to standardize SOPs & operations
 Process to standardize administration (payroll, scheduling, discipline)
 Procedure to combine training
 Procedure to cross train staff on equipment and duties
 Procedure for joint purchasing
 Strategic planning for future
 Other:

What challenges did your department face while taking steps toward consolidation?
(can be more than one)

- Fear of loss of control
- Poor communications
- Trust issues
- Political problems
- Difficulties with the timing of efforts
- Organizational barriers (culture, union, etc..)
- SOP & Operational roadblocks
- Sabotage (personality conflicts, attitudes)
- Other:

Successful Efforts

Was your department successful in their efforts toward consolidation?

- Yes
- No

Add item



After page 3 [Continue to](#)

Page 4 of 5

Benefits

What benefits has your department seen since the consolidation?

- Monetary savings
- Decrease in taxes
- Decrease in personnel costs
- Decrease in duplication of equipment
- Decrease in maintenance of equipment, buildings, vehicles
- Increase in operational efficiency
- Increase in services
- Increase in accountability
- Increase in training capabilities and efforts
- Reduction of administrative costs & personnel
- Reduction in response times
- Equality in tax structure
- Other:

After the consolidation and knowing what you do now, would you have done anything different?
Please provide a brief description.

Were there any unintended negative consequences from the consolidation?

- Loss of community support
- Loss of personnel
- Loss of department pride/morale/identity
- Reduction of manning
- Political infighting
- Loss of funding revenues
- Decrease in accountability
- Increase in funds needed to operate
- Other:

Department Demographics

Which best describes your type of department?

Combination includes some combination of two or more or the other choices

- Career
- Volunteer
- Part-time/Paid on-call
- Combination
- Other:

What category best describes your jurisdiction's make-up?

(can be more than one)

- Municipal
- Township
- Private Fire Company
- Fire/Ambulance District
- Other:

How many members does your department employ?

- 0-25
- 25-100
- over 100

What is your department's run volume?

- 0 - 750 calls total
- 750 - 1500 calls total
- over 1500 calls

What is your department's budget?

- up to 500,000 dollars
- 500,001 - 1,500,000 dollars
- over 1,500,000 dollars

APPENDIX 5 – CHANGES TO OPERATIONAL SERVICE MODEL

- 1997- STARTED ON DUTY STAFF 8-4
- 2002 – INCREASE STAFFING TO 3
- 2003 – INCREASE STAFFING HOURS 7-7
- 2006 – INCREASE STAFFING LEVELS 6-12
- 2008 – 24 HOUR STAFFING
- 2012 – INCREASE STAFFING TO 4
- 2013 – STATION / EQUIPMENT MERGER
- ????? – JOINT FIRE DISTRICT

APPENDIX 6 – HYPOTHETICAL ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

