



# **Police Officer-Firefighter Cross-Training and the Public Safety Department Integration**

City of Woodbury, MN  
ICMA 2009 Program Excellence Award Application  
Strategic Leadership and Governance Award  
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### **Brief Summary of Project:**

Since 2005, the Woodbury Public Safety Department has undergone a significant organizational change that has included fully integrating their Police, Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) divisions. The integration of this department has resulted in police officers being cross-trained as either paramedics or firefighters and has improved the overall efficiency and effectiveness of emergency services in the City of Woodbury. The culmination of this effort came in March of 2007 when police officer/firefighters began responding to fire calls during their shifts.

### **Project Description:**

Woodbury, Minnesota was founded in 1858 and is located just southeast of St. Paul, the state capital. Woodbury's first major housing development didn't come until 1955, but since then rapid growth has occurred both residentially and commercially. In fact, during the past 30 years Woodbury's population has increased over 500% from 10,300 residents in 1980 to an estimated 59,000 in 2009. Needless to say, the rapid increase in population has required city services to expand quickly as well in order to meet demands.

One of the areas that needed to adapt the fastest due to the growing population base was city's public safety services. Before 1993, emergency fire response services were performed by a private corporation that also provided the city's emergency medical services. The city decided to make emergency fire response a municipal service in 1993, but it realized that the new Fire Department could not also provide advanced life support services by itself due to staffing and budget constraints. To resolve this problem, the city decided to take the innovative approach of training police officers as paramedics in order to provide advanced life support services in an efficient and cost effective manner.

Then in 1996 the city decided to combine its police, fire, and emergency medical services into one department under the leadership of the Public Safety Director to provide a better structure for

the hybrid staffing model that had been developed. The new department quickly found success in this new model as proven by a cardiac save rate that improved to over 50 percent annually. This can be compared to the national average rate of less than 10 percent. The city was very satisfied with the service improvements made as a result of these changes; however, only eight years later the city realized that it would need to go one step further in order to meet the ever increasing demands of its population.

In 2004, the city recognized a need to think more strategically about how its Public Safety Department was staffed and about how it delivered its fire and emergency medical services. Factors leading to the need for this review were: 1) The city's population increased by 275% from 1991 to 2005 while the number of Paid-on-Call (POCs) staff remained static; 2) several unresolved issues remained after the city began assigning police personnel to paramedic training and service in 1995 and with the merger of Fire, EMS, and Police into one department; 3) the need to add full-time employees in both the Police and Fire Divisions to offset the demands of population growth was creating significant financial pressure, and at the same time the city had recently lost approximately \$1,000,000 in local government aid due to state budget cuts; 4) the recently hired city administrator wanted to develop a long-range organizational and staffing plan to frame funding requests.

Therefore, a Fire/EMS Task Force was created in late 2004 consisting of elected officials, city staff, city commission members, and Woodbury citizens. The task force made a series of recommendations regarding appropriate service standards and performance measures to meet community expectations:

Fire Response:

- Initial response of five personnel on the scene in less than nine minutes 90% of the time
- Secondary or backup response of six personnel on the scene in less than 13 minutes 90% of the time

### EMS Response:

- One paramedic on the scene in four minutes or less 90% of the time
- Two EMTs and an ambulance on the scene in less than 11 minutes 90% of the time

### Fire Inspections:

- Inspect 100% of high occupancy facilities and 50% of retail stores, offices, etc. annually

The Fire/EMS Task Force also tackled the question of how the Public Safety Department should be aligned and staffed in order to achieve the new service standards. The group also recognized that the final solution would need to meet the increased demand for police services as well. After considering 12 different organizational structure options, the task force recommended a full Public Safety Integration Model. This option consisted of cross-training police officers to be firefighters or paramedics and includes hiring additional fire and police personnel to meet service level demands. The primary benefit of this model is that it will help improve fire response times, since on-duty police officers are always among the first to respond. This option will also cost substantially less than moving forward with other options, such as a traditional 24-hour, full-time fire department, in the long run.

The city's Public Safety Department recognized early on that the cross-training of police officers as firefighters and fully integrating their public safety services would require significant ideological and cultural changes. To bring the new plan to fruition, Public Safety employees were surveyed to find out "*what makes us the best at what we do and what would it take for us to get better?*" With an 80% response rate, the results showed that the department needed to address long-standing communication and staffing issues before moving forward.

The next step included a two-and-a-half-day retreat in October of 2005 for department supervisors from police, fire, and EMS with the purpose of discussing the survey results and to get as many people "rowing in the same direction" as possible. This retreat was followed by a two-and-

a-half-day retreat for the entire department in February of 2006 with the theme “*What will it take for us to move from good to great?*” It consisted of identifying department issues, thinking about how to resolve those issues, and creating an action plan to implement the integration model.

A course of action, which came to be known as the *1,000 Day Plan*, was set in motion in the following weeks and the department began to see its effects almost immediately. As of today, all of the police command staff and nine police officers are trained as firefighters and have been responding to fire calls during their shifts since March 1, 2007. New police officers are being cross-trained as firefighters or paramedics to further meet the demands in those areas. The department has been able to streamline other processes and is better able to focus on their mission critical duties as a result of additional efforts that have occurred before and after March of 2007, examples include:

- A reduction paperwork and more utilization of technology that has created an average time savings of one hour per-day, per-officer, allowing our officers to concentrate on more mission critical tasks.
- Elimination of a redundant communications center on August 1, 2006. This has freed up the equivalent of a .75 FTE which can be used in more mission critical areas.
- Fire inspections were transferred from Fire Division to the Inspection Services Division of the Community Development Department to provide for more expertise and consistency in this area.
- Liquor licensing was transferred to the City Clerk’s Division allowing the Public Safety Department to dedicate more time to crime analysis

While the 1,000 Day Plan officially came to a conclusion in fall 2008, the efforts of this plan will continue to be built upon. The Public Safety integration model and action plan has allowed Woodbury to streamline and improve its public safety services. Since many of the changes are still relatively new it is difficult to provide final analysis; however, the city expects to see budget

savings compared to traditional fire staffing models, increased efficiency, and improved response times with lives and property saved. The city will track its success by the established benchmarks, through the yearly employee survey, through the biennial community survey, and through budgetary measures.

While 2008 data is largely unavailable at this time, early indications show that the new staffing model and *1,000 Day Plan* have already begun to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the city's public safety services. The city's ability to respond to fire emergencies with five firefighters in less than nine minutes has increased from 55 percent and 53 percent in 2005 and 2006 respectively to 75 percent in 2007. As mentioned previously the ultimate goal for this measure is to reach our response standard 90 percent of the time. Furthermore, the city reached its goal of having a secondary response team of an additional six firefighters arrive on the scene of a major fire in less than 13 minutes in both 2006 and 2007. The city also expects to achieve our benchmarks under EMS response within the next three to five years and was able to perform a fire inspection of 99 percent of the occupancies scheduled for inspection in 2007.

Woodbury has always been very proud of the accomplishments made by our Public Safety Department, but now outside organizations are taking notice of our innovative approaches. The city has received several awards and recognitions as a result of our Public Safety Department integration, including: the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs' Local Government Innovation Award, the League of Minnesota Cities' City of Excellence Award, a feature in Law Enforcement Technology Magazine, and our program was chosen as a case study in the ICMA's recently published book, "What Works: How Local Governments Have Made the Leap from Measurement to Management." While the city takes the awards and recognitions to heart, we know that it will take a great deal of hard work and dedication to make our changes a long-term success story.