

MICHIGAN VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER NEEDS & COVID-19

FINDINGS & STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE



MICHIGAN
TOWNSHIPS
ASSOCIATION



REPORT OUTLINE

POINTS TO ADDRESS

About the Survey

Key Findings

Service Delivery

Health & Safety

Recruitment

Retention

Interviews

Strategies for the Future

ABOUT THE SURVEY

COMPOSITION



26

counties



82

townships



72

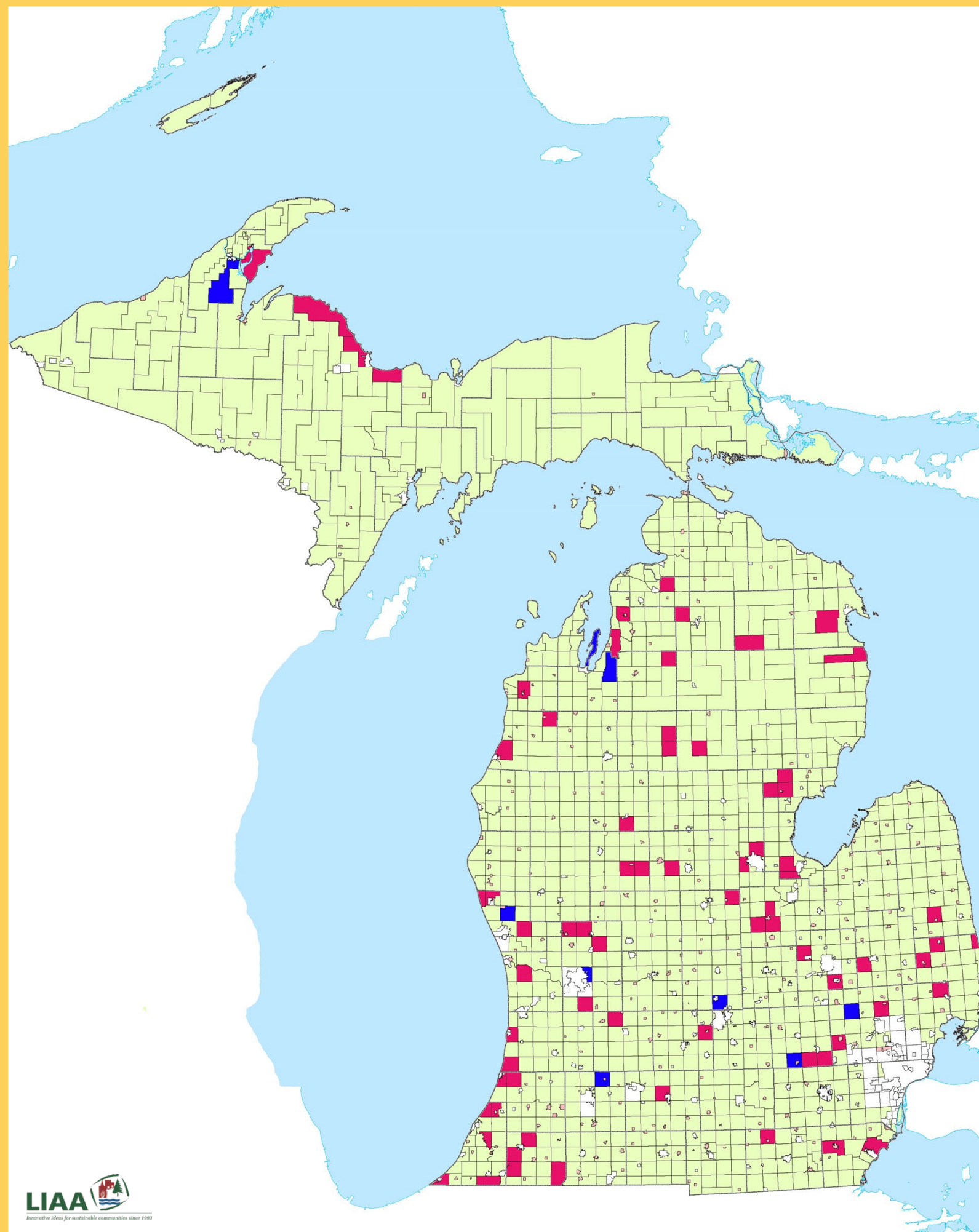
respondents



9

interviews

ABOUT THE SURVEY SCOPE



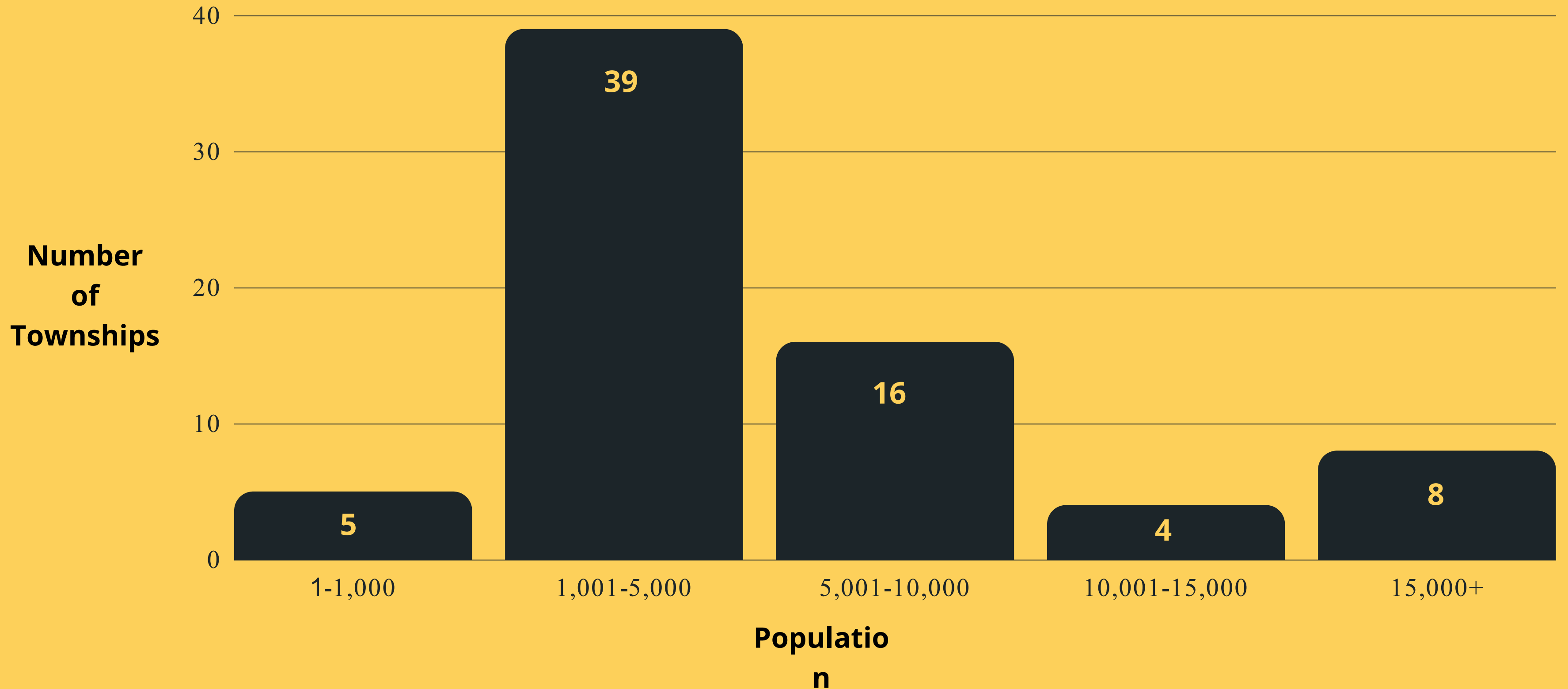
completed survey



completed survey & interview

ABOUT THE SURVEY

NUMBER OF TOWNSHIPS BY POPULATION



ABOUT THE SURVEY LIMITATIONS

This survey had a small sample size of 72 respondents (n=72)*.

These 72 respondents represented 82 different townships, of Michigan's 1,240 total townships.

The small sample size of the survey may limit the study's generalizability, as well as the statistical significance of some findings.

*Not all respondents answered every question. The following data shows results only among respondents who answered a specific question.

KEY FINDINGS

The majority of respondents reported that obtaining PPE was a problem during COVID-19.

Concern among about COVID's effect on recruitment efforts is mixed: the majority of survey respondents considered recruitment a problem* during COVID, yet multiple fire chiefs who were interviewed did not think COVID would have any effect on recruitment efforts.

Retainment became less of a problem for fire chiefs during COVID, as compared to the period pre-COVID.

*respondents reported "somewhat of a problem" or "a significant problem"

SERVICE DELIVERY OF NOTE

75%

of respondents work for a fire department that provides EMS or first response services

53

reported that the number of firefighters responding to each call **decreased*** during COVID as compared to the period pre-COVID

69%

reported an **increase**** in the degree to which proper precautions and safety measures were followed

*respondents reported "somewhat decreased" or "greatly decreased"

**respondents reported "somewhat increased" or "greatly increased"

SERVICE DELIVERY OF NOTE

68

reported **no change** in a firefighter's ability to do his or her job effectively during COVID as compared to the period pre-COVID

74

reported **no change** in the fire department's overall ability to meet service delivery needs and serve the community during COVID as compared to the period pre-COVID

59%

reported **no change** in a firefighter's ability to to be properly outfitted for a call during COVID as compared to the period pre-COVID

HEALTH & SAFETY NEEDS OF NOTE

62

reported that
obtaining PPE was
a problem* during
COVID-19

86

reported that
infection control
practices **increased****
during COVID-19 as
compared to the
period pre-COVID

58

reported that
firefighters' concern
about transmitting
COVID-19 to family
members was
a problem*

*respondents reported "somewhat of a problem" or "a significant problem"

**respondents reported "somewhat increased" or "greatly increased"

RECRUITMENT OF NOTE

80%

of respondents reported that recruitment was **a problem*** during COVID, the same percentage reported pre-COVID

work hours

were reported as having the greatest negative impact on recruitment

most effective recruiting methods:

- employee referral
- social media
- township website

*respondents reported "somewhat of a problem" or "a significant problem"

RETAINMENT OF NOTE

58%

of respondents said
retention was
not a problem*
pre- COVID

67%

of respondents said
retention was
not a problem*
during COVID

**biggest factors
affecting
retainment**

- work hours
- compensation
- type of work

INTERVIEWS COMMON THEMES

DIFFICULTY OBTAINING PPE

The majority of interviewees said PPE was difficult to obtain early on in the pandemic, with some reporting difficulties that persisted into the summer--one fire chief had not been able to get gowns until July, while another was still unable to secure N95 masks or gowns midway through the summer.

CHIEF-LED CREATION AND ENACTMENT OF NEW POLICIES TO LIMIT SPREAD OF INFECTION

Lacking one unified message of how to run their fire departments during COVID, some fire chiefs created and enacted policies of their own. Multiple interviewees reported that they changed their response models, limiting the number of firefighters who entered a home during a call, and making it mandatory for firefighters to report directly to the fire station ahead of a call, as well as back to the fire station after a call, to help limit the potential spread of COVID.

INTERVIEWS COMMON THEMES

LACK OF CONCERN ABOUT COVID'S EFFECT ON RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

The majority of fire chiefs interviewed did not think that COVID would have an effect on their fire department's recruitment efforts. Instead, one fire chief noted that he had just had someone apply to work at his department, while another interviewee noted that he had been hiring during the pandemic. Another fire chief suggested that the pandemic may have had a positive effect on recruitment, making people more aware of the job and its importance.

LACK OF CONCERN ABOUT COVID'S EFFECT ON RETAINMENT EFFORTS

The majority of interviewees did not think that COVID would have an effect on their department's retainment efforts. One fire chief noted that there are "so many things out there [that are] way more scary than COVID".

STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

ADVOCATE FOR STATE SCHOOLING INITIATIVES

Over and over, fire chiefs said the biggest barrier to recruiting new volunteer firefighters was the time commitment involved not only in the actual work, but also in the many hours of required schooling. While the educational burden required to become a firefighter cannot be reduced, the state could provide aid to lessen the financial burden incurred by initiating a state-level initiative to reduce the cost of schooling for volunteer firefighters, or offer tax relief on their education costs. In advocating for this change, recruitment and retainment numbers could increase for the better.

STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

APPLY FOR FEDERAL GRANTS TO TARGET A YOUNGER DEMOGRAPHIC BY DEVELOPING INCENTIVES

Multiple fire chiefs spoke about the need to get a younger demographic interested and involved in volunteer firefighting. On the township level, for departments with paid on-call volunteer firefighters and those with unpaid volunteers, incentives could improve firefighter recruitment and retention. For example, if a firefighter goes on a certain percentage of calls per year, money could be deposited into a retirement account for the firefighter. In order to develop these incentives, individual fire departments will need to apply for federal grants and put any money received towards recruitment and retainment efforts.



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