

**Board of Visitors for the National Fire Academy
Fiscal Year 2019 Annual Report
September 10, 2019**

Meeting Schedule

March 19, 2019

May 6, 2019

Sept. 9-10, 2019

The U.S. Fire Administration's (USFA's) Board of Visitors for the National Fire Academy (NFA) (Board) reviewed the NFA in three areas of responsibility and submits the following report for Fiscal Year (FY) 2019.

An examination of NFA programs to determine whether these programs further the basic missions which are approved by the Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

The NFA continues to be a mission-critical organizational unit within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/FEMA. It directly supports FEMA's USFA mission to support citizens and first responders to ensure that, as a nation, we work together to build, sustain and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from and mitigate all hazards.

In FY 2018, the Board spent a significant amount of time evaluating and making recommendations for changes to the Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program at the NFA. The Board convened four subcommittees composed of a broad range of stakeholders representing national fire and emergency service organizations. After thoughtful deliberation, the Board unanimously approved the recommendations of each subcommittee at its Aug. 27-28, 2018, meeting directing NFA staff to move forward with the changes. The update given by staff during our Sept. 9-10 meeting indicates that the changes are on schedule and a great amount of work has taken place internally and externally to implement the new EFO Program. The tremendous work of staff involved in managing the transition, working with subject matter experts and contracts, and communicating with students enrolled in the current program is commendable.

One of the changes in the new curriculum will be that the class will work through the two-year program as a cohort, which will strengthen the relationships made during the program. External communications with stakeholder organizations, presentations at national fire service conferences and social media efforts have been effective and should continue as the transition from the old to the new takes place. Of particular note is the work being done by staff with the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) EFO Section and the Black Chief Officers Committee, which have been enlisted to help recruit a diverse pool of EFO student applicants as well as potential instructors. NFA staff should be complimented for its partnership with the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and the First Responder Center of Excellence for sharing the work being done by these organizations, especially in the areas of fire service cancer prevention and behavioral health.

The work being done, and the interest from fire service personnel across the nation, shows the success of the Managing Officer Program which is now entering its fifth year. The NFA's Managing Officer Program is a multiyear curriculum that introduces emerging emergency services leaders to personal and professional skills in change management, risk reduction and adaptive leadership. Acceptance into the program is a meaningful step in professional development as a career or volunteer fire/emergency medical services (EMS) manager, and includes all four elements of professional development: education, training, experience and continuing education. The update given by program staff shows the value the nation's fire service has placed in this program and the volume of students who are applying. NFA staff relies on a partnership with state fire training academies which play an integral role in this program as they are delivering the courses required before an individual can apply to the campus-based program at the NFA. The program is successful but will need to be scheduled for an evaluation in the next year or two as it will be passing the five-year mark. To recognize the limited staff at the NFA, and the time commitment needed to implement the updated EFO Program, the Board suggests that the Managing Officer Program evaluation takes place after the EFO transition is successfully completed. More than 500 students are currently involved in this program and more than 200 applications are being received by NFA staff on an annual basis.

The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) under the National Fire Programs Division at USFA has been working with the NFA to offer NFIRS training for end users. This program focuses on how agencies can access their own data through the data warehouse to receive timely information. This group is also working with IAFC on regional training deliveries. Currently NFIRS captures data on more than 28 million incidents a year. In the past year, this program had to abolish and combine two positions to create a new NFIRS position. This causes concern for the Board because the work done by these two positions will no longer be done. The Board's NFIRS subcommittee will engage with NFA staff to enhance awareness of the program and to identify needs.

The NFA continues to play a vital role by serving as a single point of contact for national, state, local, tribal and territorial fire and EMS stakeholder groups by soliciting their input on course development, delivery and outreach. The NFA also supports federal partners, including: Department of Justice/Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); Department of Defense (DoD); Department of State; and other components. In addition to its federal partners, the NFA continues to work closely with all major fire and emergency services stakeholders.

On Sept. 21 and 22, the NFA is convening a strategic planning workshop bringing together diverse fire service leaders, fire service research partners, and those engaged in fire and emergency services higher education programs to evaluate and redefine the role of the NFA in serving professional development throughout the American fire service. The Board commends NFA staff for the work being done to evaluate changes needed to bolster professional development of the nation's fire service. The Board looks forward to hearing the outcome of the upcoming meeting.

The Board requests that NFA staff continue, and expand, outreach efforts through and with partner organizations and increase visibility at national fire service events to share training and education opportunities available for career and volunteer members with a focus on increased

participation of all elements of the fire and emergency services. This outreach should include presentations and information booths at selected regional and national fire service conferences. Use of various social media platforms is highly encouraged to attract a diverse audience.

Outreach should also be targeted to affinity groups that represent underrepresented fire service personnel such as the Black Chief Officers Committee, the International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Service (Women in Fire), the National Association of Hispanic Firefighters, and others. The outcome of this initiative should focus on increasing diversity among students and instructors.

National Fire Academy Overview

Resident classes are reserved for those requiring high-level discussion/interaction, specialized simulation or modeling capabilities, close supervision and counsel, or the introduction of new subject areas. The NFA continues to leverage its resources through delivery of regional and state courses and a growing number of online distance-learning courses. The Board continues to actively encourage evaluative research and targeted efforts that positively and significantly impact workplace and student diversity.

Work recently completed by NFA staff to update fire prevention, community risk reduction, fire and arson investigation, and EMS classes is greatly appreciated as it shows the diverse work done by career and volunteer fire personnel around the country and, equally important, the diverse portfolio of classes offered, developed and managed by the NFA.

The replacement of burn cells on campus for the hands-on fire and arson investigations program and the continued instructional partnership with the ATF is to be applauded. Because of attrition of fire investigators around the country due to retirement, this program has a significant backlog of students that needs to be addressed. This will require additional funds to be allocated for burn cells, additional classrooms, lodging, course and instructor costs, and student stipends for travel. The Board recommends NFA staff to explore partnerships which could allow fire investigator training to be offered off campus.

The following chart reflects the student completions in each of the course delivery areas. Data for 2019 will be available after Dec. 1, 2019:

	2016	2017	Change %	2018	Change %
NFA-sponsored resident	7,298	6,107	-16.3%	6,547	7.2%
NFA-sponsored non-resident	4,966	5,409	8.9%	5,712	5.6%
State sponsored	24,333	25,835	6.2%	23,265	-9.9%
State approved	9,644	9,362	-2.9%	8,802	-6.0%
Colleges/Universities	4,949	5,537	11.9%	5,449	-1.6%
Online self-study	52,067	50,523	-3.0%	52,168	3.3%
Total	103,257	102,773	-0.5%	101,943	-0.8%

The NFA staff continues to pursue new applications for technology in course delivery, administration and information dissemination. The NFA continues to add courses to the materials download feature, giving state fire training agencies and contract instructors direct access to NFA two-day and six-day course materials. This provides users with real-time access to NFA course materials. Currently, 60 courses are available that state fire training offices can download. Access to these course materials is also available to state EMS organizations.

The NFA awards Continuing Education Units for all NFA courses through the International Association of Continuing Education and Training. This is extremely beneficial to a growing number of NFA students who are required to meet continuing education requirements for certification. In addition, the NFA is a “Preferred Provider” with the International Code Council (ICC). This program recognizes and promotes ICC-approved educational opportunities as they relate to codes, standards, building construction and other subject areas.

The American Council on Education (ACE) will conduct a review of 41 existing NFA courses on Nov. 5-6, 2019. The ACE review process provides an independent and objective third-party assessment of the NFA’s academic quality, as well as tangible benefit for students who can use the credits to pursue higher education through other academic institutions.

The Board supports NFA staff efforts to reestablish the analysis that crosswalks and compares NFA classes to national fire service standards. In addition, work is being done to ensure that NFA classes, which include the National Incident Management System (NIMS), be evaluated and updated over the next year to meet the new FEMA NIMS standards.

The NFA continued a systematic study of its resident courses with students and their supervisors to determine long-term training effectiveness. During FY 2019, 487 students and 399 supervisors responded to the Long-Term Evaluation. As with previous years’ responses, students indicated they were able to transfer the training skills and learning to their jobs, and supervisors reported improved performance. The data show:

Long-term evaluation reporting elements	2016	2017	2018	2019
Students reporting they were able to apply NFA training at home	91.2%	96.4%	91.0%	94.3%
Students reporting NFA training improved their job performance	94.4%	96.6%	97.1%	96.3%
Students reporting they shared NFA training with their peers	97.7%	99.0%	97.9%	95.1%
Students reporting they conducted formal courses with NFA material	24.4%	26.6%	24.8%	23.6%
Students reporting they established new policies and procedures based on NFA training	72.5%	69.3%	77.1%	72.5%
Supervisors reporting improved performance from NFA training	90.9%	85.5%	90.9%	89.4%
Supervisors reporting improved departmental performance	86.6%	88.4%	91.1%	86.9%
Supervisors who say they will recommend NFA training to others	96.7%	95.7%	97.4%	96.4%
Supervisors reporting NFA benefits outweigh costs	91.6%	99.2%	94.7%	92.4%

Note: Data reported was derived from NFA Long-Term Evaluation Forms sent to both students and their supervisors four to six months after the NFA training class ended.

An examination of the physical plant of the National Fire Academy to determine the adequacy of the facilities

The size, age and scope of the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) campus facility continues to offer both challenges and opportunities. The historic nature of many of the NFA buildings also needs to be noted due to the complexity these add to the ongoing maintenance and repair work done on campus. On behalf of students and other stakeholders, the Board appreciates the tremendous support FEMA has provided to address capital improvement and maintenance issues on campus. We applaud the continued outstanding work of the NETC Management, Operations and Support Services (MOSS) Division to manage the physical plant and numerous activities held on campus each year.

While much progress has been made, particularly relating to Americans with Disability Act compliance and energy efficiency, deferred maintenance continues to be a critical issue. Currently, there remains about \$35 million in deferred maintenance. Replacement of aging roofs and heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems on campus is greatly appreciated and long overdue. The HVAC and roof replacement schedule, as proposed by NETC's MOSS, needs to be completed in a timely manner. The Board recommends that FEMA establishes an additional annual \$5 million deferred maintenance allocation for the NETC campus. The Board commends FEMA and NETC staff in their ongoing efforts to upgrade and maintain the aging physical infrastructure.

The replacement of the 20-year-old fire alarm and detection system on the entire campus needs to be a priority not just for life safety reasons, but also because the USFA should be the role model for the nation in the fire prevention arena.

Campus facilities include the library and the Publications Center which continue to provide essential support for NFA students. However, there remains a long-documented need to expand the NETC facilities to accommodate the addition of 300 students per semester. While the NETC maintains one of the highest utilization rates in the DHS, additional classroom, lodging and support space are required for the NFA to continue fully supporting the broader DHS/FEMA mission.

The NETC campus also needs a state-of-the-art physical fitness, health and wellness center for use by students, instructors and staff so the NFA can lead the fire service by example as it does in so many other areas.

The NETC's MOSS team should request additional funds specifically to address aging driveway and parking surfaces throughout the campus. Frequent rain showers in the region, and snow and ice in the winter months, clearly show the stagnation of water and the impact poorly paved areas have on the safety of staff and students who walk and drive on these surfaces.

Installation of solar panels on appropriate campus facilities (four buildings to date) should continue along with the replacement of lighting fixtures with energy-efficient (LED) solutions. While the goal of all buildings having solar panels would be the desired outcome of the Board, we realize that is not realistic nor possible because of the historic preservation constraints many of the structures on campus are governed by. The Board commends MOSS staff for its ongoing efforts to seek energy-efficient options across the campus.

The Board is pleased to see the plans for the redesign of the main entrance area to enhance the safety and security of staff and students with a visually appealing portal, with construction to begin soon. The work done by NETC's MOSS and NFA staff to create a secure and professional appearance, while preserving the historic trees along the main entryway, is appreciated.

The Board was appreciative of the long-standing efforts to create and implement an online admissions application process. This system is currently being used by Emergency Management Institute students with NFA students to follow in the next semester. The ultimate goal is to be a paperless system.

Of most concern during the Board's two-day visit was in the area of information technology (IT) and systems. Simply stated, the staff at the NFA are very limited in the ways they can communicate with students and support of off-campus programs. Specifically, the NETC needs enhancements to the campus-wide wireless system to include unrestricted Wi-Fi, file-sharing capabilities and access to information via cloud-based solutions.

To meet current technology requirements, the NFA needs to continue to upgrade the classroom environment. Although there have been recent improvements, students and Board members

experience issues with internet connectivity and campus-wide access. As an example, the FEMA firewall prevents access to many sites necessary for research, collaboration and data storage.

While the Board understands the complex nature and importance of information security, and the need for the DHS to protect the work of full-time staff and various assets, there is an immediate and business need for the NFA to be able to communicate with students off campus. In comparison, the DoD has figured out a way for military service academies to conduct their educational programs for the men and women attending these institutions using current technology without impacting IT security. We ask that DHS give the IT needs of the USFA and NFA the same attention so they can accomplish their mission of serving fire service personnel across the country. The Board recommends appropriate funding, and DHS IT staff support, to improve internet and data access on and off campus, and the campus IT infrastructure to support the growing number of courses that are delivered to complete the FEMA mission.

With the growth and importance of IT, the Board once again recommends that the NFA and USFA seek a full-time Chief Information Officer and create a branch to oversee and manage all enterprise functions.

An examination of the funding levels for National Fire Academy programs

The USFA and the NFA continue to demonstrate commendable stewardship with respect to fiscal responsibility. While the operational budget has remained relatively stable, inflation results in higher costs for operations. It is imperative that the NFA receive an increase in funding to maintain its mission and the expected role it plays within DHS/FEMA.

The USFA bears the cost of NETC maintenance. Appropriate cost sharing needs to be addressed by FEMA.

The NFA is unique in the federal government because its specific mission is to train state, local, tribal and territorial first responders and their leaders, not primarily federal employees. A reduction in resident classes at the NFA would result in a degradation of incident management capabilities, community risk reduction, hazardous materials response, and arson detection and prosecution.

While there is a cost to both on-campus and off-campus training, it is important to recognize that every emergency and disaster starts locally. To the extent that a community has a well-trained, well-led cadre of first responders, that emergency stays local. If it is poorly handled, or if it is so large that the local forces are overwhelmed, it may trigger a state and federal response. It is in the interest of both DHS and FEMA to try to keep local emergencies local. As of Sept. 30, 2019, there were 28,428,813 total incidents reported to NFIRS from 24,102 fire departments for 2018, and there were 59 presidentially declared major disasters reported in 2017 per https://www.fema.gov/disasters/year?field_dv2_declaration_type_value=DR.

While training has a cost, the lack of training is even more expensive in terms of life loss (both civilian and firefighter), property damage, litigation, economic impact and societal effects.

According to the USFA data, in calendar year 2018, there were 82 on-duty firefighter fatalities and 3,655 civilian fatalities (<https://www.usfa.fema.gov/data/statistics/>). The National Fire Protection Association estimated that there were 58,835 firefighter injuries in calendar year 2017. Reports from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health state that some of these deaths and injuries could have been averted through training. Above all else, the NFA was created to prevent those tragedies. The Board continues to recommend an emphasis on firefighter health and safety as a part of the overall training mission which the NFA has proactively embraced with the recruitment of a new training specialist to oversee its new firefighter health and safety curriculum area. The recently offered pilot classes have all been well received and show the benefits of the currency and relevancy of the responder health and safety curriculum.

Throughout FY 2019, visionary leadership was provided by the U.S. Fire Administrator, Chief G. Keith Bryant, and Deputy Fire Administrator, Dr. Denis Onieal. Chief Tonya Hoover, NFA Superintendent, now in her third year, is actively involved with the Board of Visitors to ensure the timely and relevant delivery of effective training and educational courses by well-qualified instructors. The Board is honored to collaborate on the implementation of the superintendent's vision for the future. Finally, the Board would like to thank the dedicated and passionate staff of the NFA, National Fire Programs Division and MOSS, who are responsible for the USFA's success.

The Board would like to recognize and thank three talented individuals who have spent many decades serving the nation's fire service who have retired or will be retiring from the USFA over the next few months. Terry Gladhill, Branch Chief for Training, Administration, Planning and Analysis Branch; Deputy NFA Superintendent Dr. Kirby Kiefer; and Deputy U.S. Fire Administrator and former NFA Superintendent Dr. Onieal. All three have made a lifetime of friends and, more importantly, have made a significant impact on the training and education of career and volunteer firefighters from around the country and around the world.

The Board also thanks outgoing Vice Chair Steven P. Westermann for his outstanding leadership and congratulates him for his successful and enduring career in the fire service.

The Board applauds USFA for 45 years of dedicated service to the nation's fire service.

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