

Board of Visitors for the National Fire Academy Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report

Meeting Schedule

Dec. 6, 2022

March 8, 2023

August 7, 2023

Introduction

The Board of Visitors (Board) for the National Fire Academy (NFA) plays an important role in supporting the academic stature of the NFA. From the Federal Register:

The purpose of the Board is to review annually the programs of the National Fire Academy (Academy) and advise the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), through the United States Fire Administrator, on the operation of the Academy and any improvements therein that the Board deems appropriate. In carrying out its responsibilities, the Board examines Academy programs to determine whether these programs further the basic missions that are approved by the Administrator of FEMA, examines the physical plant of the Academy to determine the adequacy of the Academy's facilities, and examines the funding levels for Academy programs. The Board submits a written annual report through the United States Fire Administrator to the Administrator of FEMA. The report provides detailed comments and recommendations regarding the operation of the Academy.

Thus, the Board's role is to:

- Review NFA programs to ensure they fulfill the basic mission of the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA).
- Ensure that NFA facilities are adequate for their assigned purposes.
- Ensure appropriate funding levels for NFA programs.
- Provide advice and recommendations to the USFA via an annual report of its activities.

The Board reviewed the NFA in the first 3 areas listed above. The NFA Board of Visitors was glad to gather in person at the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) in Emmitsburg, Maryland, for the August meeting to review NFA programs, facilities and funding. After receiving briefings from USFA program representatives, the Board offers this report in fulfillment of the fourth responsibility.

The Board would like to emphasize the following:

- NFA continues to have urgent vacancies in essential staff and leadership positions. Currently 18% of positions at NFA are unfilled. Addressing this requires streamlining of the hiring process. The Board recognizes the hiring process may be beyond the control of NFA staff. Filling vacancies takes 6 to 12 months to complete, interfering with attracting and retaining desirable candidates.
- It is imperative that the USFA and NFA obtain the required funding to maintain their mission and the expected role they play within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/FEMA.
- NFA continues to champion the need for a state-of-the-art, on-campus, physical and mental health and wellness center to model the expected behaviors taught to students.

National Fire Academy programs

The NFA provides training and education to over 67,000 career and volunteer fire and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel per year (84,395 average over 5 years). Classes are delivered in person on NFA's campus, through online synchronous and asynchronous courses, through partnerships with state and metropolitan fire training organizations, and with institutions of higher education.

U.S. Fire Administrator Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell continues to invigorate the USFA through enhanced grassroots outreach, affinity group engagement and a new Strategic Plan, including:

- Establish the USFA as the leader of the nation's fire and EMS.
- Prepare the nation's fire and EMS to prevent, prepare, respond and mitigate all hazards.
- Inspire fire service research and technology innovation.
- Establish a prepared, resilient and engaged USFA workforce.

Dr. Moore-Merrell also continues to emphasize integrating EMS priorities into NFA's offerings, enhancing the capture of data and the capacity to use that data to empower activities, and the ongoing enhancement of wildland urban interface (WUI) offerings with special attention to the impact of climate change. The NFA maintains the goal of a student-centric approach with current and relevant professional development opportunities for career and volunteer fire and EMS personnel.

Education, training and partnerships

A robust spectrum of courses and course delivery options demonstrates the evolution of the NFA with the changing fire service and the emergence of new teaching technologies.

Mediated courses: During fiscal year (FY) 2023, the NFA fully implemented the migration to Blackboard as the platform for the learning management system (LMS). The Board continues to support the growth of mediated course offerings where appropriate, as an effective and efficient mode of training delivery, especially for students who are not able to attend campus.

NFA Online: During FY 2023, NFA Online Self-Study completions totaled 37,554.

The NFA **State Fire Training Systems Grant** program offers \$20,000 to each state fire training system/academy. The complications and costs of administrative overhead and burden of work results in a decision in some states to not accept or use these grant funds. During FY 2023, there were 32 state fire training grant recipients. These funds can be used to hire instructors, pay for training costs, and support a wide variety of local delivery training efforts for all facets of the fire and EMS service nationwide. The Board encourages NFA staff to continue to market the use of these funds by as many states as possible.

The NFA's **Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education (FESHE)** program connects the NFA with institutions of higher education engaged in fire and emergency services degree and certificate programs. More than 120 colleges and universities are currently active in the FESHE program. The FESHE program manager position has been vacant for over 2 years which has limited the important work able to be completed. When the position is filled, the NFA is committed to the partnership and will work with FESHE leadership to reexamine the relationship as well as review and rebuild the programs and processes in place when the position was vacated.

The **NFA State/National Weekend** program has resumed full strength after being heavily impacted by COVID-19. Some state weekends have been successfully combined, resulting in full course offerings and excellent interaction among attendees. Additionally, several national weekends will allow individuals from throughout the country to attend 2-day classes and experience the NFA campus. The Board is particularly supportive of weekends emphasizing outreach to affinity groups such as the partnership with Women in Fire to produce a Women's Weekend. These offerings underscore the commitment of NFA to serving the entirety of our diverse fire service and help to recruit future attendees and instructors from groups that historically were not well represented on campus.

Through the NFA **off-campus delivery** programs, each state receives 9 2-day classes, and each region receives 3 5/6-day classes. Classes not used may be reallocated to other states and regions. This program continues to support strong partnerships with state fire training agencies.

Leadership and Partnership Branch

The Leadership and Partnership Branch includes curricula for Executive Fire Officer (EFO), Managing Officer, Leadership and Executive Development, Community Risk Reduction, Planning and Information Management, Training Management, Fire Prevention, Public Education/Technical, and WUI. The updated **EFO Program** has been fully implemented and legacy course offerings have concluded. EFO students have provided positive feedback about the curriculum and delivery of the program. The Board supports the efficient partnership with an external institution of higher education to deliver the EFO M5104, “Applications in the Exercise of Leadership: Capstone I” course. The **Managing Officer Program** is currently undergoing a redesign. The conceptual framework will possibly be 1 in-person class and 1 virtual class in each of 2 years. However, the design work will inform the type and length of the courses. The Board looks forward to updates about the new program as it develops.

Executive Fire Officer Program – October 2023

202 Current Students	
R5201	- 12 remaining students (all registered for 10/30/23 offering)
R5202	- 27 remaining students
R5203	- 56 remaining students
M5104	- 78 Currently enrolled in CSU - 57 remaining students to be enrolled in CSU Feb. 2024
R5204	- 202 remaining students (36 students will graduate Nov 3, 2023)



- Since EFO Program start in 1987, 4632 legacy students have graduated.



Managing Officer Program

Year 1	All students completed. No remaining offerings
Year 2	71 remaining students
New Development Contracts Pending	



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Table 1 outlines the application and admission data for the EFO and Managing Officer programs.

Table 1: EFO Program and Managing Officer Program application and admission data

	EFO Program			Managing Officer Program		
	Applied	Admitted	Admit %	Applied	Admitted	Admit %
FY 2017	268	163	60.8	218	153	70.2
FY 2018	298	189	63.4	240	153	63.8
FY 2019	252	37	14.7	229	129	56.3
FY 2020	145	0	0.0	267	85	31.8
FY 2021	244	89	36.5	240	100	41.7
FY 2022	517	120	23.2	195	24	12.3
FY 2023	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1,724	598	34.7	1,389	644	46.4
Average	287.3	99.7	34.7	231.5	107.3	46.3

Note: The information provided in this chart came from the FY reports in the NETC admissions system. The numbers may be different in other documents based on the way the data is included in each line or category. Values may also vary depending upon when data was retrieved.

Response and Special Operations Branch

The NFA Response and Special Operations Branch includes curricula for Incident Management and Coordination, Emergency Medical Services, Fire and Investigative Sciences, Hazardous Materials and Response to Terrorism, and Responder Health and Safety. The board recognizes and applauds the creative partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and CAL FIRE to deliver the wildfire investigation course (FI-210) in Redding, California. The board looks forward to

learning more about this partnership and encourages the continued application of new and imaginative ways to deliver course content to students.

Training, Administration, Planning and Analysis Branch

Changes are in progress regarding the recruitment and bid evaluation of **contract instructors**. The intent is to separate the bid for course amounts from the travel cost to improve geographic diversity (e.g., cadre from California will be paid equally as cadre from Pennsylvania). USFA and NFA leadership have been intentionally **reaching out to affinity groups** such as the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters, Black Chief Officers Committee, Women in Fire, the National Association of Hispanic Firefighters, Native American Fire Chiefs Association, and the International EMS & Firefighters Pride Alliance to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion and ensure that all members of fire and EMS feel welcomed to attend and instruct at the NFA campus.

Targeted efforts to recruit, hire and onboard new instructors have been hampered due to the lack of available staff to evaluate candidates and perform interviews. Additionally, the **hiring process** for contract instructors is complicated and time intensive, disincentivizing potential instructors from joining the teaching pool. NFA has assigned a staff member to serve as the point of contact to assist interested instructors with navigating the federal contracting system. NFA staff is working to implement a quarterly contract instructor hiring process that will alleviate the challenges identified in FY 2023.

This year, the **American Council on Education (ACE)** reviewed 17 courses (15 repeat and 2 new). The ACE credentialing program provides third-party, unbiased assessment of course content and rigor. Many colleges and universities accept ACE-approved NFA courses for academic credit transfer.

Table 2 offers an overview of course deliveries and attendees.

Table 2: Course delivery student completions

	FY 2022 final		2023 preliminary		Difference		% difference	
	Offerings	Attendees	Offerings	Attendees	Offerings	Attendees	Offerings	Attendees
NFA sponsored								
Resident								
2-day	45	777	75	1,414	30	637	66.7	82
2/6-day	137	2,355	170	3,334	33	979	24.1	41.6
6-day (pilot)	5	73	13	259	8	186	160	254.8
10-day	45	841	28	562	-17	-279	-37.8	-33.2
Subtotal resident	232	4,046	286	5,569	54	1,523	23.3	37.6
Nonresident								
2-day	224	3,546	248	4,011	24	465	10.7	13.1
6/10-day	34	614	44	744	10	130	29.4	21.2
Mediated	1	29	2	87	1	58	100	200
Virtual	65	1,397	12	268	-53	-1,129	-81.5	-80.8
LMS		40,090		37,554	0	-2,536		-6.3
Subtotal nonresident	324	45,676	306	42,664	-18	-3,012	-5.6	-6.6
Total NFA sponsored	556	49,722	592	48,233	36	-1,489	6.5	-3
State sponsored								
6-day	1,055	15,699	988	13,789	-67	-1,910	-6.4	-12.2
Approved	360	5,874	317	4,534	-43	-1,340	-11.9	-22.8
Total state sponsored	1,415	21,573	1,305	18,323	-110	-3,250	-7.8	-15.1
College	513	3,224	411	1,986	-102	-1,238	-19.9	-38.4
Total NFA	2,484	74,519	2,308	68,542	-176	-5,977	-7.1	-8

Note: The information provided in this chart was from Sept. 30, 2023.

The NFA evaluates long-term training effectiveness of resident courses through surveys of students and their supervisors. During FY 2023 (Oct. 1, 2022, to Sept. 30, 2023), 565 students and 492 supervisors responded to the long-term evaluation. As with previous years' responses, students indicated that they were able to transfer the training skills and learning to their jobs, and supervisors reported improved performance. Response data are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Long-term evaluation results

Long-term evaluation reporting elements	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Students reporting they were able to apply NFA training at home	91.0%	94.3%	93.9%	88.1%	93.8%	94.9%
Students reporting NFA training improved their job performance	97.1%	96.3%	96.4%	91.8%	97.4%	94.9%
Students reporting they shared NFA training with their peers	97.9%	95.1%	97.2%	91.7%	96.2%	96.7%
Students reporting they conducted formal courses with NFA material	24.8%	23.6%	24.2%	17.0%	22.9%	21.4%
Students reporting they established new policies and procedures based on NFA training	77.1%	72.5%	70.8%	63.2%	59.7%	68.9%
Supervisors reporting improved performance from NFA training	90.9%	89.4%	92.3%	92.5%	93.6%	91.6%
Supervisors reporting improved departmental performance	91.1%	86.9%	91.4%	91.7%	93.6%	92.0%
Supervisors who say they will recommend NFA training to others	97.4%	96.4%	96.9%	96.2%	97.6%	97.5%
Supervisors reporting NFA benefits outweigh costs	94.7%	92.4%	95.2%	93.9%	95.2%	95.1%

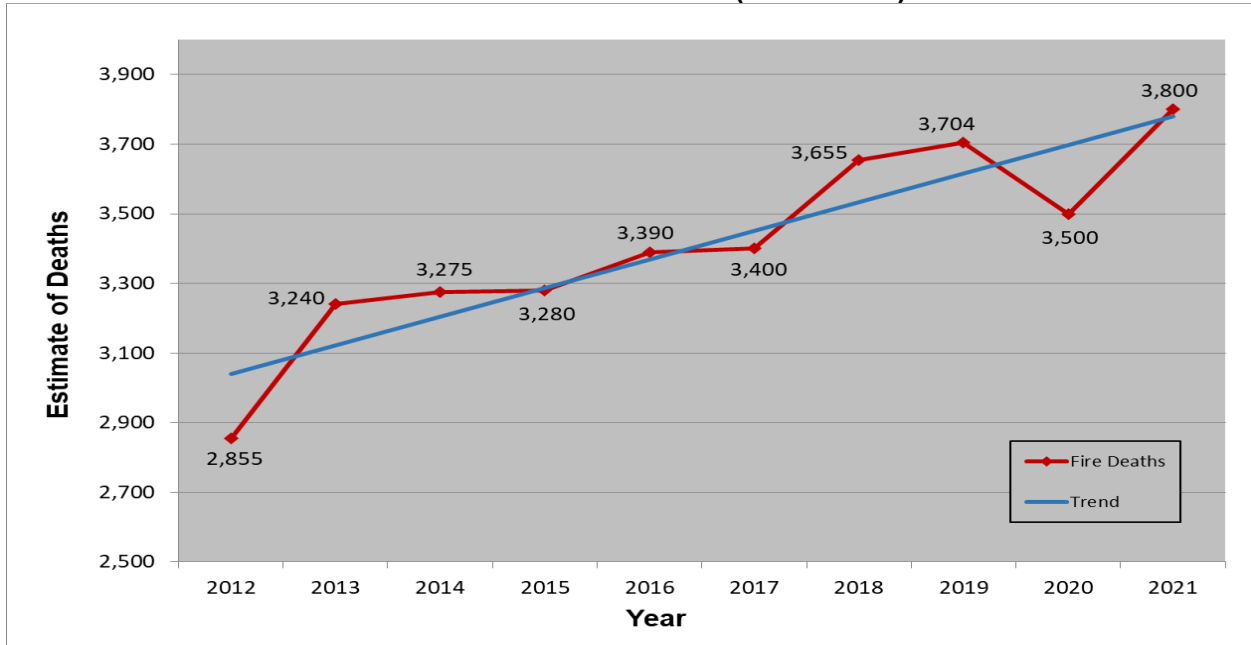
Note: Data reported was derived from NFA Long-Term Evaluation Forms sent to both students and their supervisors 4 to 6 months after the NFA training class ended.

National Fire and Emergency Medical Services Programs and National Fire Data and Research Center

While the National Fire and Emergency Medical Services Programs Division (NFEMSP) and the National Fire Data and Research Center Division (NFDRC) are not officially within the charge of the Board of Visitors, the close work between NFA and NFEMSP/NFDRC requires consideration of NFEMSP/NFDRC efforts to provide context to the NFA assessment.

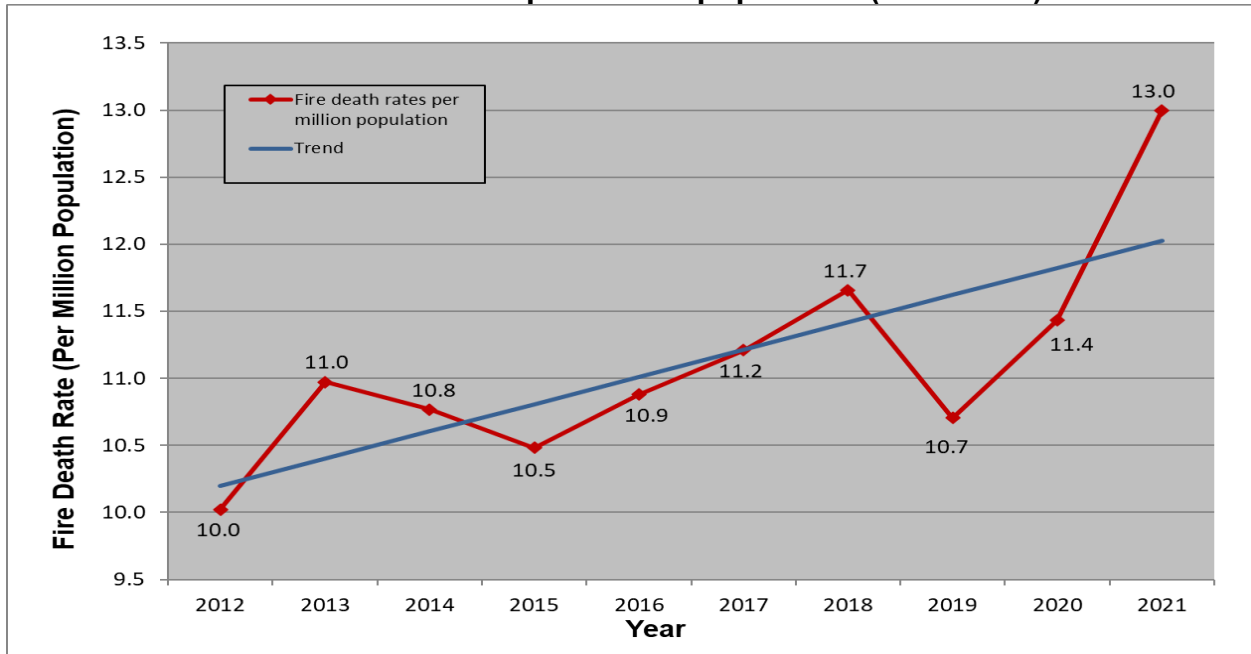
Of note, the Board is concerned with the increasing fire death rate nationally and will be interested in efforts to reverse these developing trends.

U.S. fire death estimates (2012-2021)



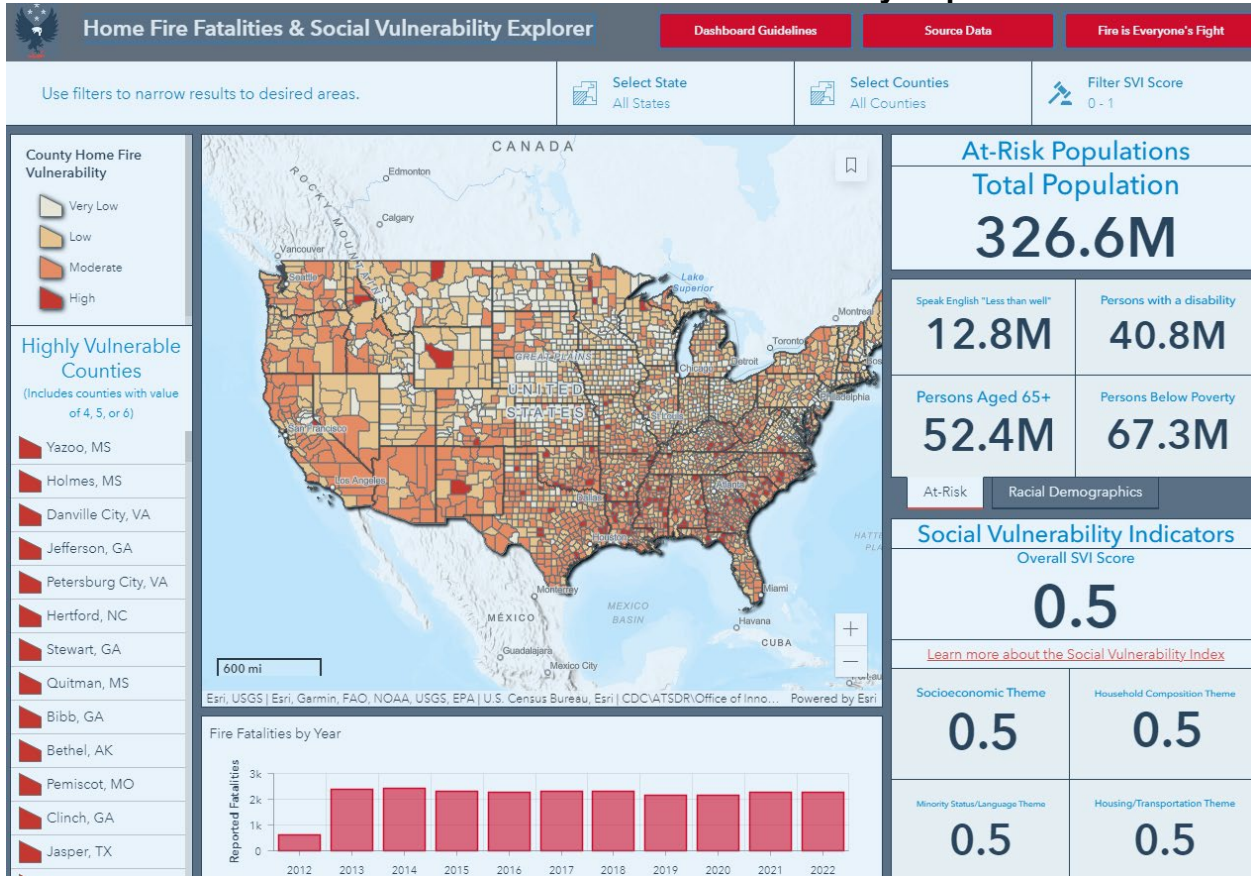
Source: National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)

U.S. fire death rates per million population (2012-2021)



Source: National Center for Health Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau

Home Fire Fatalities and Social Vulnerability Explorer



Source: USFA

The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) has historically served as a repository of fire incident data. USFA is in the process of developing a new analytical platform for incident data collection, storage and reporting called National Emergency Response Information System with an anticipated implementation period of 2024-2025. The legacy NFIRS is planned to sunset in 2025.

USFA has released noteworthy publications including “Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services,” “Study of Emergency Vehicle Warning Lighting Systems,” and “Funding Alternatives for Emergency Medical and Fire Services.”

National Emergency Training Center, Physical Plant

The size, age and scope of the NETC campus facility continue to offer both challenges and advantages. The historic nature of many of the NFA buildings adds complexity to the ongoing maintenance and repairs. 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) in managing the physical plant and numerous activities held on campus each year.

The Board of Visitors thanked Mr. Hodge and the staff for all the work that has been done. It was great that the unplanned fixes did not hurt the budget for the planned fixes. The burn range work was essential, and they appreciated the staff coming out with Mr. Hodge to show them around. The maintenance staff is well organized with prioritizing the facility's needs and keeping everything within the budget.

Dr. McIntosh stated that in the past there was mention of switching from twin beds to double beds. Did that happen? Ms. Gartrell-Kemp replied that they did get new mattresses; some are double, and some are twin. Dr. McIntosh asked if they have made any rooms accessible for service animals, because that was mentioned in the past. Ms. Gartrell-Kemp replied that she would have to ask about that, but she did see someone in Building S with a service dog. Per MOSS, there are 4 rooms in Dorm F that can support service animals. In addition, MOSS confirmed that C West was converted from twin to double mattresses.

Capital improvement and deferred maintenance projects completed during FY 2023 included the enhanced Burn Range addition, the welcome center and security upgrades, much-needed elevator upgrades, and tunnel repairs. The Board is especially pleased that both the fire alarm system with public address system and the campus-wide Wi-Fi upgrade have been completed. Both have been high-priority concerns from past Board reports.

Ongoing projects include the enhancements to multiple buildings, the Walk of Honor (funded by National Fallen Firefighters Foundation), parking lot maintenance, picnic area, bus repair and possible replacement, and additional solar installation.

Additional efforts included the unforeseen repairs of the cabin bridge and fencing and extensive plumbing projects. MOSS has demonstrated fiscal responsibility with the ability to respond to these incidents without exceeding budget. Additional projects have been identified as "shovel ready" for execution in the event additional budgetary resources become available.

The NETC campus continues to need a robust, safe and welcoming **physical fitness, health and wellness center** for use by students, instructors and staff. This has been submitted as a program decision option but has not been selected for funding from FEMA. NFA should lead the fire service by example in the arena of physical and mental wellness as it does in so many other areas. The Board emphatically advocates for this resource.

The FY 2024 budget includes a much needed \$2.5 million investment in the NETC IT infrastructure and an additional \$2.5 million for bioretention pond and lift station enhancements. The Board looks forward to future updates regarding these 2 projects.

Funding

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 USFA and NFA receive an increase in

funding to maintain their mission and the expected role they play within DHS/FEMA, as well as recruit and retain valued staff.

The NFA has established memorandums of agreement with other agencies to provide training on the NFA campus. This allows for high-quality and cost-effective training delivery, expanding the reach of NFA without draining funds from the operational budget. However, the USFA bears the full cost of NETC maintenance. The Board encourages FEMA to evaluate appropriate cost sharing between the Emergency Management Institute and NFA for ongoing NETC maintenance and improvements.

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. Any 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 at the local level where it is needed most.

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 USFA data, in calendar year 2022 there were 94 on-duty firefighter fatalities (<https://apps.usfa.fema.gov/firefighter-fatalities/>). According to the NFPA, in calendar year 2021, there were an estimated 3,800 civilian fire fatalities (<https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/US-Fire-Problem/Fire-loss-in-the-United-States>).

Observations

Student feedback

Members of the Board of Visitors visit classes and meet with NFA students during the Board's annual campus meeting. While the sample size is limited to the classes meeting on campus and the Board's available time, the information is still instructive.

Everyone enjoyed the interaction with the students and observing how they are doing in the classes. All the students seemed very appreciative of the upgrades to the facilities. The students complimented their knowledgeable instructors and had positive comments regarding the campus. There were representatives of a wide range of ranks attending courses. Some students suggested having more course offerings for the courses that are more popular, citing long waiting periods for some classes. Students were also appreciative of the admissions process having a fast turnaround for letting students know that they were eligible to take the courses. There was also mention of increasing charging stations for electric vehicles. The students primarily had positive comments with few suggestions as highlighted.

Board celebrations and concerns

The Board recognizes several **successes** that deserve recognition.

USFA staff continues to demonstrate competence, professionalism and dedication throughout the many challenges of running such a complicated institution. The Board is intensely grateful for everything these individuals do on behalf of the NFA campus and the nation's fire and EMS service.

Time, facilities and funds have been used effectively to make **enhancements to existing and future training programs**. The Board is especially enthusiastic about the current and impending upgrades to campus information technology.

Efforts to incorporate **diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging** throughout the curriculum and within the staffing, contract instructors and admission process are recognized and appreciated. All facets of the fire service should feel welcome at the NFA.

Multiple programs are realizing success through creative partnerships with external agencies. These include but are not limited to the training delivery with CAL FIRE, Women's Weekend with Women in Fire, and the launch of an improved EFO capstone course with the external higher education partner. The Board commends these innovative approaches and encourages future collaborations.

The Board also wishes to call attention to these specific **concerns**:

Multiple **vacancies** in key leadership and critical support positions are impacting program delivery including processing applications of students, interviewing and onboarding new instructors, reviewing and refining existing courses and programs, and developing new offerings. Existing staff has undertaken added duties to compensate for the lack of staff. This could result in overworked, overstressed staff and ultimately in additional vacancies and a reduction in quality of service. The Board acknowledges that hiring is a challenge in almost all sectors, including throughout the emergency services. We urge the USFA and FEMA to provide any resources available to expedite the hiring process.

In conclusion

The Board would like to thank the dedicated and passionate staff, faculty, students and administrators who all contribute to the success of the NFA and USFA. The Board applauds the USFA for 49 years of dedicated service in support of the nation's fire, EMS and emergency services in the unwavering pursuit of a safer nation.

Fiscal Year 2023 Board of Visitors

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Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department
Fairfax, Virginia

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League City Volunteer Fire Department
League City, Texas

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Fire Chief
Los Angeles Fire Department
Los Angeles, California

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Colorado Springs Fire Department
Colorado Springs, Colorado

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