

# COMMUNICATION IN CRITICAL TIMES AND POSITIVE MESSAGING



**Washington State**  
**Council of Fire Fighters**

Jay Wilkins, IAFF Local 3711

Reece Williams, IAFF Local 3219

Matt Lowery, IAFF Local 3520

# 2015 Survey Results from the WSCFF

Paid public polling by a reputable source to determine the public perceptions and attitudes towards Washington State Union Firefighters

Old Info, but still relevant

## Key Highlights

Although the survey indicates the public's trust of Washington State fire fighters is high and their impact on the community is positive, the results suggest that greater outreach with the local community will increase support and improved relationships with Washington State fire fighters.

### Impressions, Perceptions and Attitudes

- The public's impressions, perceptions and views of Washington State fire fighters, EMTs and paramedics is overall very positive, although additional outreach especially with respect to educational programs provided by fire fighters as well as EMTs/Paramedics will further improve their image across the state.
- Fire fighters were identified as the most trusted community-funded professionals in Washington state, with 71% of residents having an extreme level of trust in them, followed by Doctors (43%) and Postal workers (40%).
  - Residents in Whatcom County trust fire fighters more than other Washington state residents, with 88% indicating they have the highest level of trust in them.
- Washington state residents also said that fire fighters have the most positive impact in their community, with 69% indicating they have significant impact, followed by Local Parks and Recreation at 43%.
  - Residents in Whatcom County also have a more positive view of the impact fire fighters have on their community with 88% saying they have a significant impact on their community.
- The majority (75%) of Washington state residents *Strongly Agree* that fire fighters put their lives on the line in order to protect their community, followed by 66% who *Strongly Agree* that fire fighters have a positive public image in their community and 65% who *Strongly Agree* that fire fighters are active, important and contributing members of their community.

# Key Highlights

## Community Contact, continued

- Medical emergency response (29%), community events (29%) and educational programs at schools (20%) are the most common situations where community members have contact with Washington State fire fighters.
  - One-third (36%) have had no contact with a Washington state fire fighter, EMT or Paramedic in the past two years.
- The majority of Washington state residents do not receive regular communications from their local fire fighters. 42% never receive communications and 31% receive communications once a year or less.
  - Residents in Whatcom county and the Tri-Cities receive fewer communications than other Washington state residents.
- Although communication is infrequent, the relationship between Washington state fire fighters and their community is quite strong, with 38% saying it is Excellent and 44% indicating it is Good.
  - Citizens in Whatcom county have a strong relationship with their professional fire fighters, with 51% indicating it is Excellent and 27% saying it is good.
- Washington state residents most prefer in-person contact at a public community meeting or special events as well as other type of face-to-face contact. Blogs are the least preferred method of contact, followed by civic, social, club or association meetings and Facebook, Twitter and other social media methods.



# Key Highlights

## **Impressions, Perceptions and Attitudes, continued**

- Only 22% *Strongly Agree* that the amount of tax dollars spent on fire fighters is adequate.
- 74% of Washington state residents said fire fighters, EMTs and Paramedics should be allocated the most budget dollars followed by the Police at 52%.

## **Union Membership and its Impact on Community Perceptions of Fire Fighters**

- Although only half (52%) of Washington State residents were aware that professional fire fighters belong to a union, when informed of their union affiliation, the impact on the public's trust, perceptions and image of fire fighters was minimal, with only 9% indicating that their image of fire fighters declined as a result of their union affiliation.
  - The majority (82%) said that union membership has no influence on their level of trust of professional fire fighters.

## **Community Contact**

- As the frequency of contact with the community increases, the level of trust and positive perceptions regarding fire fighters increases.
  - 79% of Washington State residents who have weekly contact with fire fighters have an extreme level of trust in them, while only 56% those who have contact once a year have an extreme level of trust.
- Almost half (48%) of Washington state residents have contact with their local fire fighters multiple times a week, with 28% having weekly contact. One-fourth (24%) have contact with local fire fighters once a year or less, with 10% having no contact.
  - Residents in Whatcom County have more contact with their local fire fighters, while those in Clark and Yakima counties have the least amount of contact.

# Key Highlights

## Community Involvement

- Residents are most aware of the fire prevention awareness and CPR classes followed by school programs, safety inspections and participation at fairs and festivals. Awareness of the burn camps for kids and efforts to raise money for burn research grants is significantly lower.
- Educational related outreach, including campaigns that teach children and adults about fire safety and burn awareness (59%), general school based activities (57%) and medical safety information (57%), are viewed as the most valuable community-focused activities provided by fire fighters, EMTs and Paramedics. Open houses were identified as the least valuable, with 39% rating them as Very Valuable.
  - Residents on the East side of the state view the various community-focused activities as more valuable than those on the West side.

# Why did we review all this polling data?

Trust

Expert Testimony

Institution

Willing to Ask

Functioning Democratic Org



# Experts in Service Delivery? You are!

No other group is advocating for us or our issues.



**NO ONE IS COMING - IT'S UP TO US**



# Brand

---

You already have one!

Is it consistent?

How do you use it?

# Communications is a never ending campaign

---

1. You need a plan & people willing to put in the work
  - a. For the everyday
  - b. For the campaign/event
  - c. For the crisis
2. You need a budget
3. You need member buy-in

# Identify Your Audiences

---

Who are the people you are trying to reach?

What do you want them to know about your group or brand?

Why does it matter?



# Identify your channels

---

What are the mediums for which you plan to deliver your messages?

There are more options than ever!





# Communications is presence

---

Attention? You need to be present before the ask. Everything is asking for your attention in 2023 and beyond.

**“An electoral campaign is the MOST expensive form of change”**

- Tom McEachin, IAFF Deputy Director, Political Action & Strategic Initiatives



# Communications is about relationships

---

1. Positive Strategy - Words Matter
2. PR/Benevolence- Your Communities
3. Emotional Connections - it's not the calls/runs as much as... it's the saves
4. Shared Experiences
5. Two Way Street

# Communications tools

---

1. IN PERSON
2. Social Media
3. Media Relationships
4. Old School Print

# Strategy?

---

Strategy comes first. Strategies take time, research, planning and cooperation to create because of their long-term vision. Strategies should not be easily changed so as to not risk straying away from your goals. Tactics, on the other hand, can easily be adjusted to correct the course of action. Tactics are how you reach your strategies. Data collection and use is a way to better inform your strategies and tactics.



# What does it all eventually lead to?

---

Depends on your metric?

What are your organization's goals?

What are your Local's goals?

Do you have a strategic plan as a Local?

We are also in the business of marketing ourselves. It's the key to success!

# Communications is utilizing the social media tools

## 1. Algorithms

- a. Video is king (Currently)
  - i. *Vertical is now top of the algorithm*
  - ii. *Horizontal is the best for media relations*

## 2. Facebook/Instagram (Meta)

- a. Still the top dog

## 3. Twitter

- a. Space for media... (Elon?)

## 4. YouTube

- a. #1 Search engine

## 5. TIK TOK

- a. Not your little sibling anymore..will it survive in the US?



# Group Activity 1 - Campaign/Ballot Measure

---

Your agency has a local levy vote coming in the next 9 months.

1. Your FD is not doing well in the relationships
2. You have permission from Fire Chief
3. This vote will:
  - a. Hire more firefighters and/or EMS personnel
  - b. Purchase Fire/EMS equipment
  - c. Taxes will increase .20/1000 dollars



# Group Activity 2- Create 2 Social Media Posts

---

## 1. On a piece of paper

- a. Create 5 reasons paper should vote yes - Positive
- b. Create a positive message and how are you using it?

## 2. In real life

- a. Create a positive message about the Education Conference





# The Oh NO! crisis

---

## Surprise crisis-

1. Get the accurate information before response
2. Take a minute to digest
3. Response should be measured, accurate and able to explain the impact
4. Close the loop

# Group activity 3-Crisis Mode

---

- Given a specific crisis and then develop a plan to present
  1. Create a communication timeline
  2. Create a communications strategy
    - a. Internal Union Membership
    - b. External public
  3. Present to the class