



# AGENCY STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

FY2024-2026

## VISION STATEMENT

We, the Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP), will strive to expand our services to meet the growing needs of Virginia's fire service, ensuring that Virginia's communities remain safe from fire and reducing community risk.

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) will be a nationally recognized leader in providing the highest level of fire services professional development and statewide risk reduction efforts.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The agency has worked diligently to support Virginia's fire service since the implementation of the FY24-FY26 Strategic Plan. The focus on improving services to stakeholders, increasing training opportunities for the fire service, providing research and analysis of issues affecting the fire service including funding and recruitment shortfalls, and promoting fire prevention and safety in the commonwealth continues to move in a positive direction. VDFP's Training and Operations Branch continues to roll out computer-based testing, which is expected to positively impact the training environment by giving same day test results and performance metrics. The Administration Branch continues to provide excellent customer service and recently made changes to three grant programs, including Aid to Localities (as required by law), the Firefighter PPE Grant, and the Fire Incident Reporting Grant. Finally, the State Fire Marshal's Office continues to expand its services through the development of its Special Operations section.

Located below are key updates related to the agency's goals and objectives, as well as a snapshot of data collected by VDFP. The agency has also identified key risks to address as it works towards completing the goals and objectives noted. These risks include staffing, internal technology, emerging technology, and funding for the State Fire Marshal.

# KEY RISK FACTORS

The agency, through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis completed by each major section of the agency, determined the following areas were key risk factors agency wide. This does not reflect specific risks identified in each section of the agency.

1.

## **Staffing**

The agency remains concerned about limited staffing and the inability to scale operations, implement new initiatives, and improve user support. The agency's small size, coupled with budgetary constraints, limits the lateral movement of personnel and recruitment of qualified individuals. The agency must address these issues and work to increase retention to continue to provide adequate services to stakeholders. Through the realignment of business practices and changes sought through the General Assembly, VDFP hopes to address some of the issues related to staffing. Burnout among employees is attributed to understaffing in critical areas, including the State Fire Marshal's Office and Agency Administration. The agency's adjunct workforce, which it heavily relies on to provide training, is also aging with limited succession planning.

2.

## **Internal Technology**

The agency's use of technology, specifically related to servers and outdated systems, was identified as a key risk factor. VDFP's reliance on internal servers, as well as the continued use of the Fire Service Training Records System (FSTRS) at the request of stakeholders, will need to be addressed. Additionally, the agency's information security program and policies related to information technology must be addressed. The current reliance on internal servers and utilizing outdated systems creates vulnerabilities related to system outages and data loss. The agency must invest in modernization of systems to enhance user experience and ensure security standards are met.

3.

## **Emerging Technology**

Rapidly evolving technology related to building construction, as well as the increasing prevalence of energy storage systems are creating new fire risks for the public and the fire service. VDFP does not have the staff or funds available, to strategically plan for these emerging technologies and their impact on the fire service. The agency should seek future funding to address these emerging issues and become more proactive in addressing fire service needs.

4.

## **State Fire Marshal's Office Funding**

The State Fire Marshal's Office, funded at 81% from the General Assembly, contends with budgetary issues each year related to its operations. The office is expected to make up the difference through fee collection as outlined in the Statewide Fire Prevention Code. These fees have not increased in several years. When coupled with rising costs to conduct business, this creates a budget deficit year after year. The agency must work to address these funding shortfalls to ensure an effective delivery of services.

# WORKFORCE

TRAINING STATISTICS	
Authorized Maximum Employment Level	93
Appointed Officials	3
Full-Time Employees	89
Adjunct Instructors	399
Wage Employees	11

## VDFP By the Numbers

- In FY25, the Agency successfully distributed \$45.7 million dollars in Aid-to-Localities (ATL) grant funding. For FY26, the Agency will distribute \$49.8 million dollars in Aid-to-Localities (ATL) grant funding. (Localities have one fiscal year to collect their ATL grant funding.)
- In 2024, the Agency offered 2,175 training sessions. As a result, the Agency issued 7,403 nationally accredited training certificates. A complete listing of the VDFP training programs issued in 2024 can be found in the table:

STAFFING	
VDFP Funded Training	453
Locality Funded Training	687
Partially Funded Training	1,035
Total ProBoard Registered Certificates Issued	7,403

- In calendar year 2024, the State Fire Marshal's Office completed 5,172 inspections and oversaw 179 fireworks/pyrotechnics shows.
- In calendar year 2024, the agency captured 1,035,736 of Virginia's emergency incidents in the voluntary Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System (VFIRS), a component of the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). From this voluntary reporting, the agency found that there were 26,419 fire incidents, an estimated \$549,590,178 in property loss, 258 civilian injuries from fires, and 57 fire deaths in the commonwealth.

# GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

<b>GOAL #1: EFFICIENTLY DISTRIBUTE GRANT AND ENTITLEMENT FUNDING.</b>	
Summary:	Through a variety of entitlement and grant funding opportunities, VDFP is committed to enhancing financial assistance to communities and other organizations.
Objective(s):	Manage resources efficiently and effectively to ensure at least 90% of grant funding and entitlement payments are processed and issued within each fiscal year.
Strategies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess the grant staffing levels to ensure there is adequate personnel to manage the workload experienced by the department.</li> <li>• Maintain maximum fiscal staff capable of processing the required monthly and quarterly payments.</li> <li>• Monitor and report on funding payments quarterly.</li> </ul>
Measures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of Aid-To-Localities Entitlement funds disbursed.</li> <li>• Percentage of grant disbursements awarded</li> <li>• Number of grant applications received and processed</li> <li>• Number of payment vouchers issued</li> <li>• Number of open grant programs</li> </ul>

<b>GOAL #2: INCREASE CAPABILITIES OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL</b>	
Summary:	The agency plans to increase the capabilities of the State Fire Marshal in several areas including enforcing hazardous materials incidents with the Department of Environmental Quality, assisting Virginia State Police with arson investigation, and expanding the availability of deputy state fire marshals to inspect commercial facilities in counties the office is responsible for.
Objective(s):	Expand the capabilities of the State Fire Marshal to better promote fire safety and fire prevention while enforcing the Statewide Fire Prevention Code and other relevant code sections. The goal will also alleviate staffing issues and provide greater opportunity for staff of the State Fire Marshal's Office.
Strategies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote training opportunities for staff to become proficient in arson investigation and hazardous materials investigation.</li> <li>• Increase funds to hire additional deputy state fire marshals to alleviate staffing concerns and expand the inspection of commercial facilities.</li> <li>• Provide additional deputy state fire marshals to Special Operations for enforcement of blasting, fireworks, and other duties.</li> <li>• Address funding deficiencies through the Board of Housing and Community Development.</li> </ul>
Measures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of deputy fire marshals trained in NFPA 1033 fire investigator.</li> <li>• Number of arson investigations conducted in cooperation with Virginia State Police or hazardous materials in cooperation with Department of Environmental Quality.</li> <li>• Number of deputy fire marshals in the Special Operations section.</li> <li>• Number of commercial facilities inspected compared to previous calendar years.</li> </ul>

### GOAL #3: INTEGRATE COMPUTER-BASED TESTING (CBT)

Summary:	To enhance statewide training integrity, performance analytics, and process efficiency, the agency will fully integrate computer-based testing across all delivery, grading, training of a skilled proctoring cadre, and auditing workflows to ensure accuracy, transparency, and continuous improvement in student outcomes.
Objective(s):	The agency will develop a computer-based testing program that can be utilized by students, regardless of course, across the Commonwealth of Virginia. The program will provide more timely results and analytics for use by the agency and its instructors to address deficiencies in training.
Strategies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop internal policies on the use of computer-based testing and the implementation of the program.</li> <li>• Maintain and update all tests based on accreditation cycles.</li> <li>• Provide metrics to course instructors on training deficiencies in students to produce better outcomes.</li> <li>• Establish training to ensure support proctoring cadre are meeting the compliance goals and expectations</li> <li>• Partner with localities to provide regional test sites that meet or exceed technical requirements for test delivery</li> <li>• Establish an internal audit process to evaluate test item validity, system accuracy, and policy compliance.</li> </ul>
Measures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of instructors trained and certified in CBT administration annually.</li> <li>• Percentage of testing workflows automated (test delivery, grading, results reporting).</li> <li>• Number of audits conducted on CBT data accuracy, security, and compliance.</li> <li>• Number of courses converted to or updated in CBT.</li> </ul>



## GOAL #4: STREAMLINE BUSINESS PRACTICES IN TRAINING AND OPERATIONS

Summary:	<p>The Training and Operations Branch will continue its focus on improving statewide consistency by integrating automation and centralized administrative functions that support all areas of the branch. Historically, regional and divisional variations created uneven processes and service levels. The next phase will prioritize the automation of both administrative and testing workflows, ensuring greater efficiency, data accuracy, and consistency across the Commonwealth. This shift will promote data-driven decision-making, reduce redundancy, and strengthen the agency's capacity to manage training and certification operations in a unified, transparent manner.</p>
Objective(s):	<p>Establish a centralized administrative function within the Training and Operations Branch to standardize and automate key operational and testing processes. This initiative will enhance efficiency, reduce procedural variance, and improve turnaround times for all services managed within the branch. By reallocating former regional administrative roles into a cohesive, branch-level support unit, the agency will create a more efficient structure capable of delivering consistent, data-informed service statewide.</p>
Strategies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automate core administrative and testing processes within the Training and Operations Branch to improve efficiency, accuracy, and visibility across all functions.</li> <li>• Reallocate administrative staff from regional divisions into a centralized branch-level support unit to ensure consistent business practices, work load balance, and improved service delivery.</li> <li>• Implement workflow automation tools to reduce manual data entry, streamline approvals, and enhance real-time reporting.</li> <li>• Develop standard operating procedures for all automated and centralized processes to ensure uniformity, accountability, and scalability.</li> <li>• Establish cross-functional communication protocols to maintain coordination as processes become more centralized.</li> <li>• Use data analytics and dashboards to monitor process efficiency, turnaround times, and system performance, providing leadership with measurable insights for continuous improvement.</li> <li>• Conduct regular evaluations of automated processes and centralized administrative functions to identify opportunities for refinement, additional efficiencies, and quality assurance.</li> </ul>
Measures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in processing time for administrative and testing workflows resulting from automation.</li> <li>• Regular audits of branch operations to ensure compliance with standardized business procedures and consistency across all functions.</li> <li>• Periodic stakeholder feedback collected from instructors, students, and regional staff to assess satisfaction with the centralized administrative model and overall service delivery.</li> </ul>

**GOAL #5: DEVELOP STATEWIDE FIRE TRAINING CAPABILITIES**

<p>Summary:</p>	<p>Virginia remains one of the few states without a dedicated, state-operated fire training academy. The Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) will continue expanding its presence and capabilities statewide through strengthened partnerships, increased legislative engagement, and coordinated planning efforts to enhance advanced training opportunities for the fire service.</p>
<p>Objective(s):</p>	<p>Collaborate with partner localities, other state agencies, the Virginia Fire Services Board, and legislators to advance the development of comprehensive fire training opportunities across Virginia. This includes expanding stakeholder outreach and legislative engagement to build sustained support for long-term facility development and investment.</p>
<p>Strategies:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to develop a multi-year holistic master plan for expanding fire training capabilities and facility use across the state.</li> <li>• Initial project focus on funding and construction for a statewide Water Rescue training facility.</li> <li>• Conduct coordinated outreach with the Virginia Fire Services Board, local and regional partners, and industry stakeholders to promote awareness and partnership in the center's development.</li> <li>• Engage legislators and executive branch leadership to advocate for sustained funding and capital support for facility improvements.</li> <li>• Determine the cost, design, and potential funding mechanisms for construction of key training infrastructure, such as live fire structures, water rescue and rope training props, and on-site lodging to support statewide participation.</li> </ul>
<p>Measures:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion and publication of a comprehensive site development plan for expanded fire training capabilities.</li> <li>• Legislative and stakeholder engagement efforts documented through outreach meetings, endorsements, or collaborative initiatives supporting the project.</li> <li>• Approval or advancement of capital funding for major facility construction projects, including live fire training structures and specialized training props.</li> </ul>

## GOAL #6: INCREASE COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION INITIATIVES

<b>Summary:</b>	Community risk reduction initiatives include community risk assessments, programming such as smoke alarm distribution, fire/life safety educator courses, assisting with Virginia Fire Services Board studies, and advising stakeholders utilizing a data driven approach to improve risk reduction efforts throughout Virginia.
<b>Objective(s):</b>	The agency will provide qualified staff to identify and coordinate community risk reduction initiatives with the goal of creating safer communities.
<b>Strategies:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formalize the role of the Community Risk Reduction Coordinator within the Department of Fire Programs.</li> <li>Establish relationships with other entities, such as the Department of Forestry and the Department of Health's Office of EMS, to holistically address community risks.</li> <li>Promote community risk assessments either as a component of Virginia Fire Services Board Fire and EMS Studies or by the agency.</li> <li>Develop and implement CRR initiatives such as smoke alarm distribution and fire/life safety education programs.</li> <li>Support the development and utilization of data driven processes.</li> </ul>
<b>Measures:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The number of community risk assessments conducted in cooperation with the VDFP Community Risk Reduction Coordinator.</li> <li>Number of stakeholders utilizing CRR initiatives.</li> <li>The overall rate of fires and other emergency incidents as reported through reporting systems such as the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) or the new National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS) when compared to similar states.</li> </ul>

## GOAL #7: REVISE AND UPDATE VDFP GRANT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

<b>Summary:</b>	The Department of Fire Programs, with approval from the Virginia Fire Services Board, administers five grant programs through the Fire Programs Fund. These programs fall under individual policies that outline requirements for grant recipients and for the board. These documents require regular revision and changes.
<b>Objective(s):</b>	VDFP, in conjunction with the Virginia Fire Services Board, will update grant policies to meet the needs of stakeholders and the agency. Additionally, the agency will work with other state partners to remove unnecessary regulatory language and draft policies in line with precedent set by other grant programs in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
<b>Strategies:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VDFP will work with the Department of Planning and Budget and the Office of Regulatory Management to remove policies that do not fall within the scope of regulatory documents.</li> <li>VDFP will annually review policies and make recommendations to the Virginia Fire Services Board for changes.</li> </ul>
<b>Measures:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total length of policies in each grant program.</li> <li>Number of regulatory documents posted on Virginia Town Hall</li> <li>Stakeholder feedback on the policies and their usefulness related to the grant programs.</li> </ul>

