



**SAFE-D 26**  
Annual Conference

# Strategic Planning The Essentials

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MIKE MONTGOMERY

BRAZOS COUNTY ESD 1

San Marcos, TX  
Jan 29-31, 2026

# Instructor information

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- Over 35 years' experience in emergency response, community risk reduction, and program development
- Over 20 years as a chief officer
- Degrees in Business Administration and Fire Science
- Master Firefighter, Type III Incident Commander, Planning Section Chief, and Logistics Section Chief
- Deployed to the World Trade Center, mega-shelter ops, numerous wildfires, and TS/hurricanes Allison, Katrina, Rita, Ike, and Harvey
- Long-time instructor, serves on several committees for emergency management, training, and response
- Married, with four children and nine grandchildren

# Objectives

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## ... apply the basics of strategic planning

- Compare and contrast ESDs
- Describe the planning process
- Complete a gap analysis
- Identify strategic priorities
- Create initiatives, goals, and objectives
- Develop a capital plan and financial outlook

# Cautionary Disclaimer

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**The information presented today is for informational and educational purposes only.**

It is not intended to represent or replace policy or opinion.

It is not intended as legal or financial advice.

You are strongly advised to seek competent legal counsel, financial guidance, and jurisdictional authorization before taking any official action based on this information.

# The role of ESDs

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## Provide emergency services

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### Collect taxes

- Property taxes
- Sales tax

### Contract with others

- Emergency Services
- Communication Services
- Risk Reduction
- Admin Support
- Real property
- Facilities
- Apparatus
- Equipment

### Own and provide

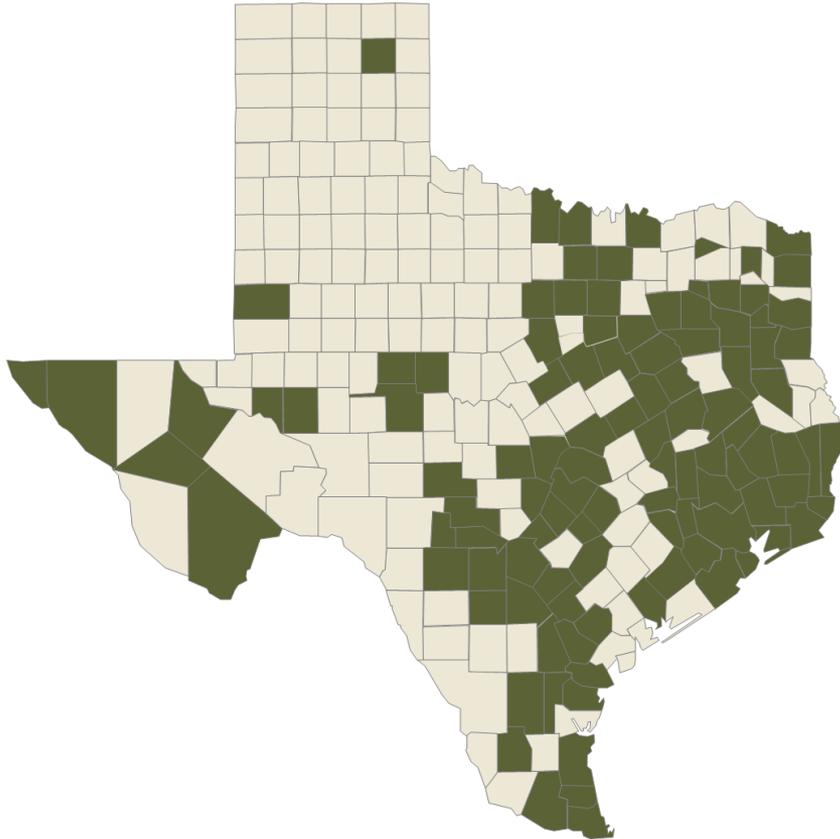
- Real property
- Facilities
- Apparatus
- Equipment

### Provide services

- Emergency Services
- Communication Services
- Risk Reduction Services
- Admin Support

Source: Article III, Section 48-e, Texas Constitution

# ESDs in Texas



**364** districts in **112** counties

**265** reported to TDEM **73%**

**117** provide fire only **44%**

**36** provide EMS only **14%**

**112** provide both fire and EMS **42%**

**211** reported population **80%**

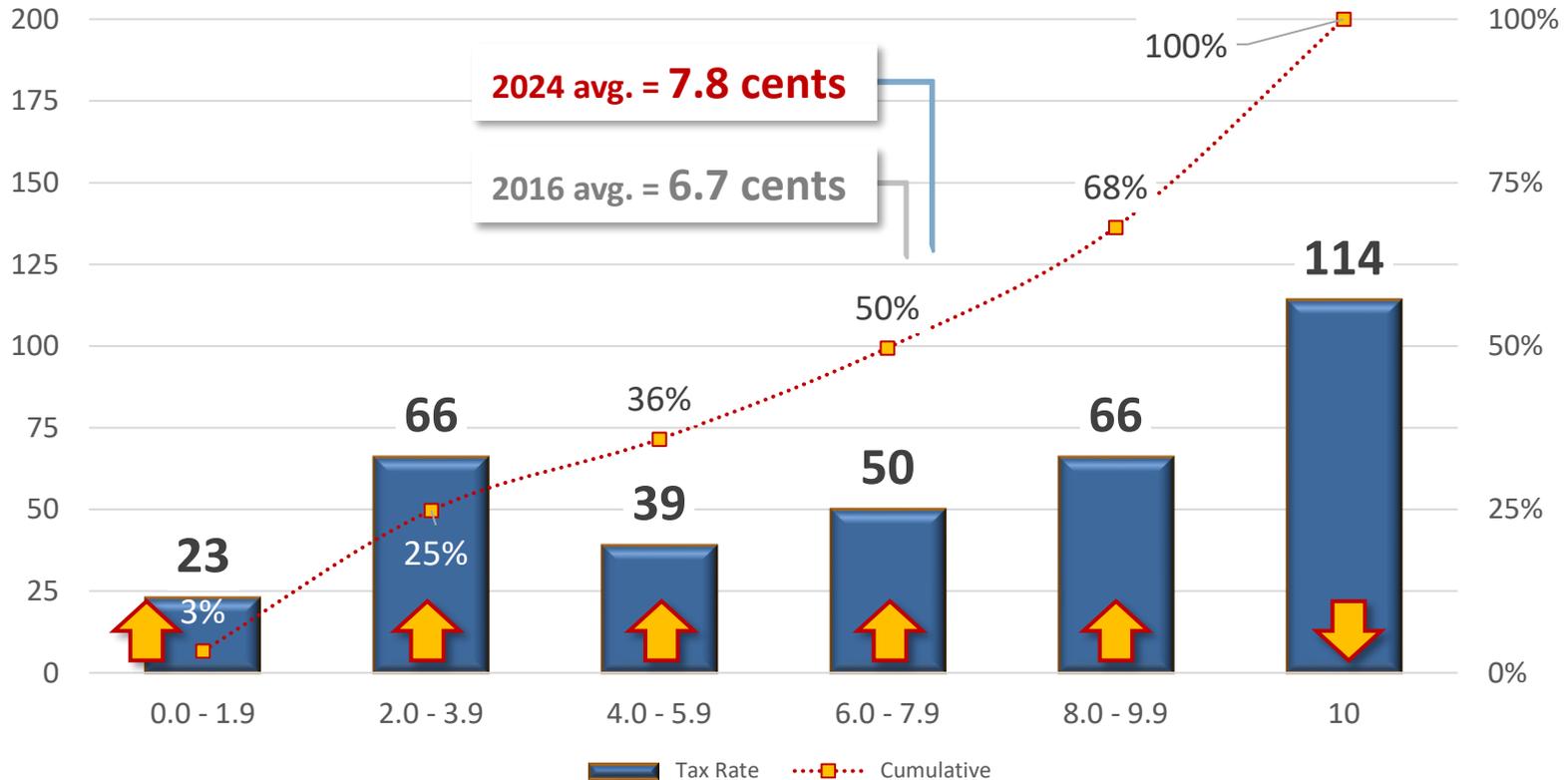
**214** reported service area **81%**

**136** collect sales tax **51%**

Source: SAFE-D and Texas Department of Emergency Management, 2025

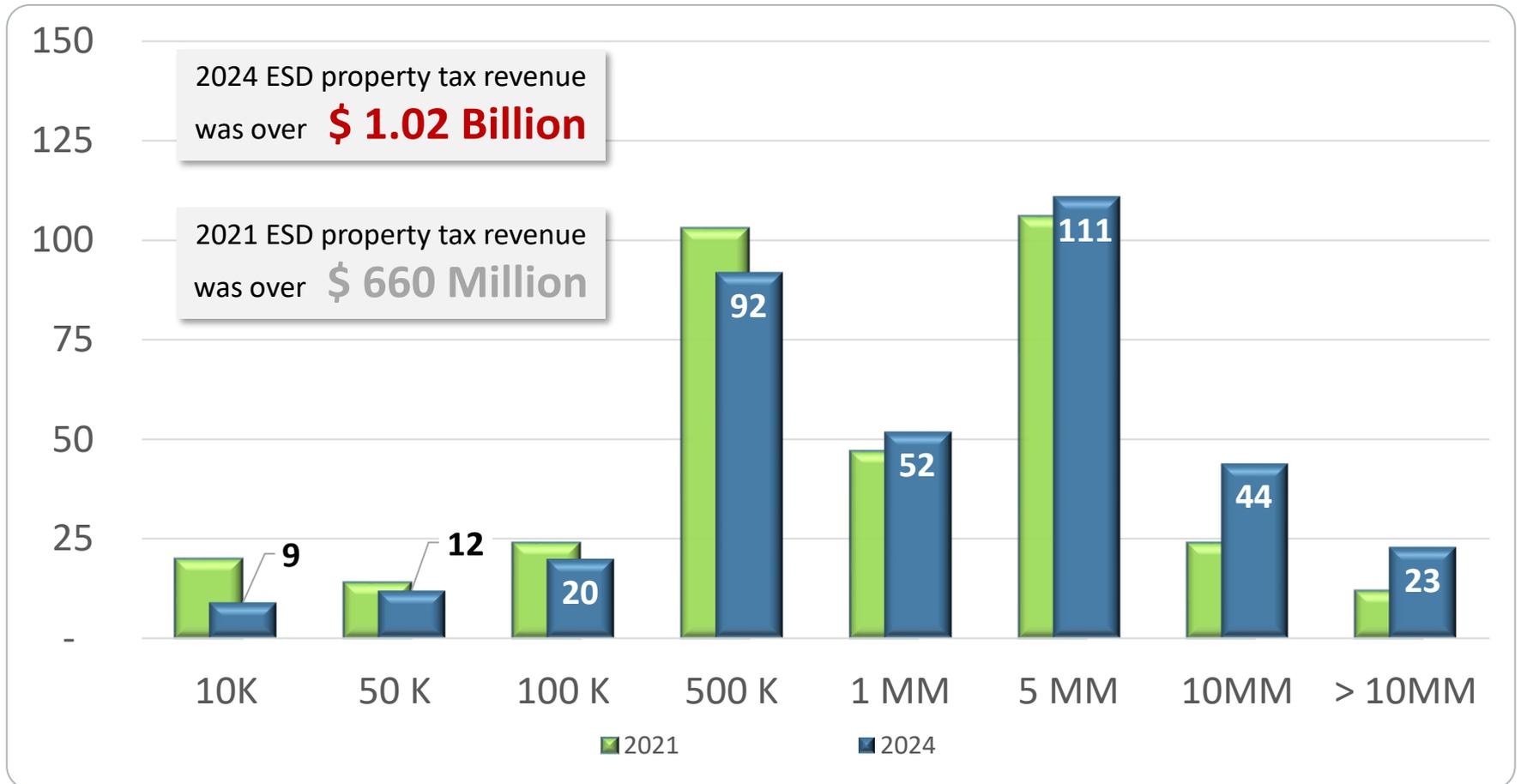
# ESD Property Tax Rates, 2024

ESD Property Tax Rate per \$100 valuation, 2024



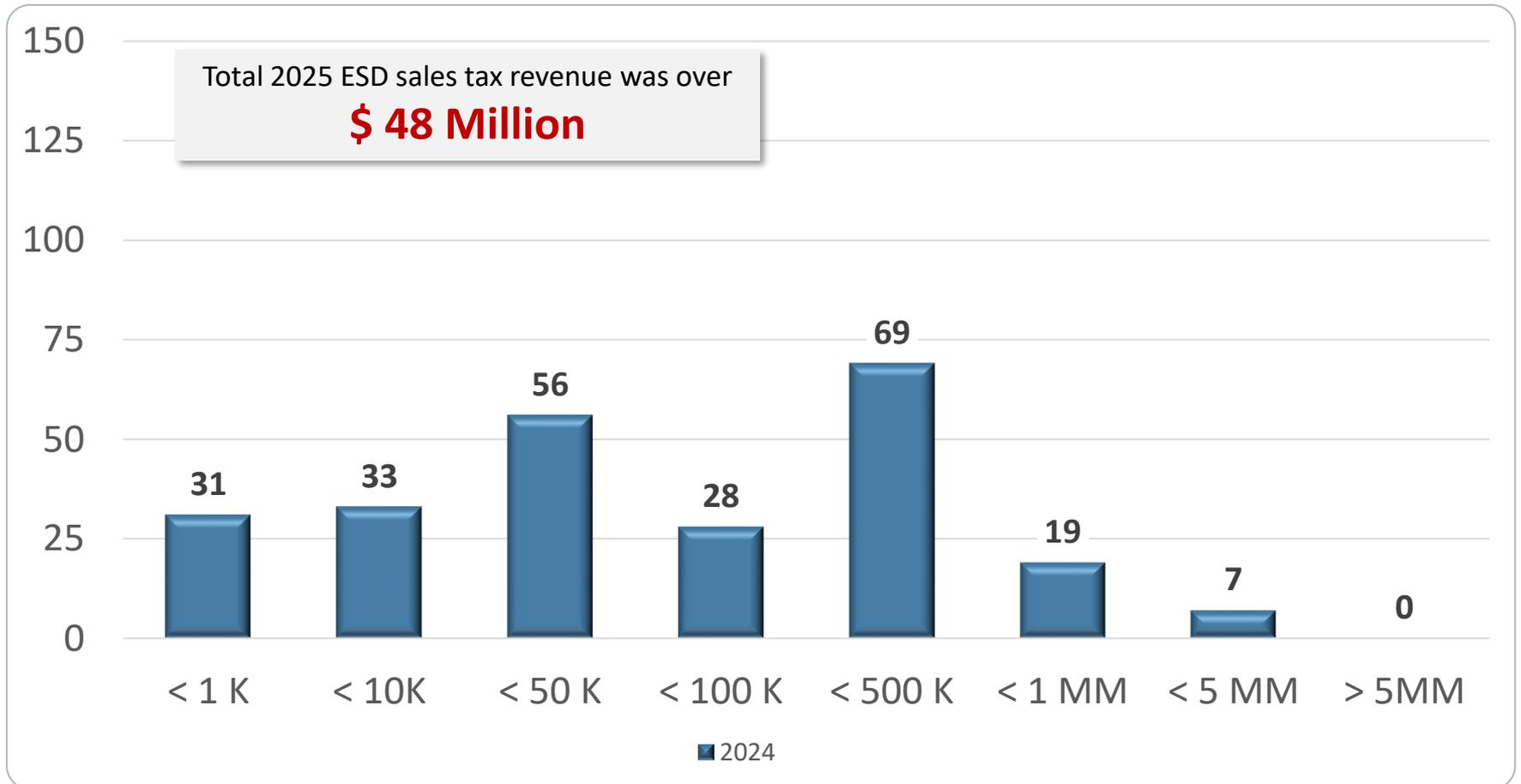
Source: Tax Rates and Levies, Texas Comptroller, 2024

# ESD Property Tax Revenue, 2024



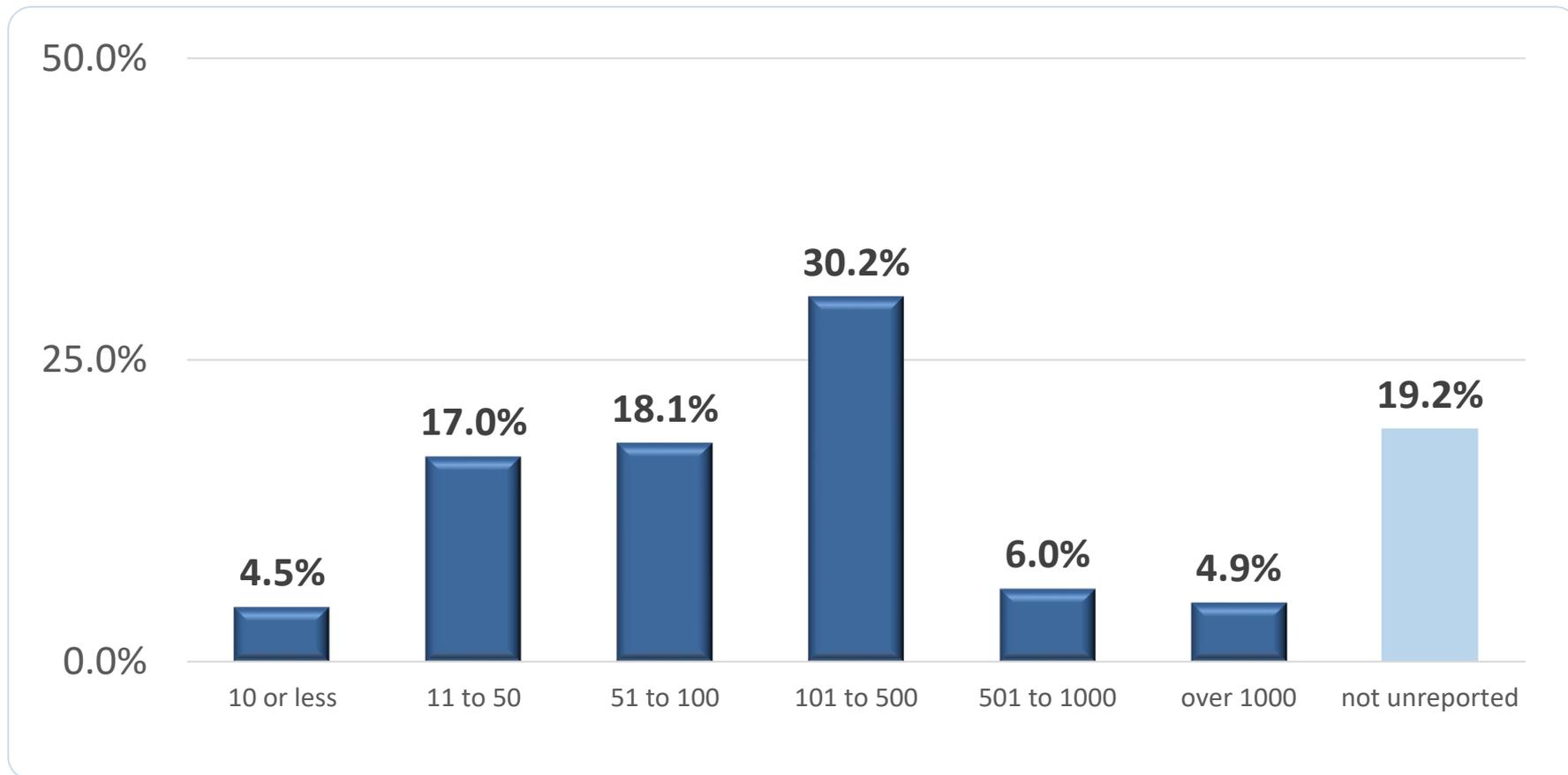
Source: Tax Rates and Levies, Texas Comptroller, and TDEM Report, 2024-25

# ESD Sales Tax Revenue, 2025



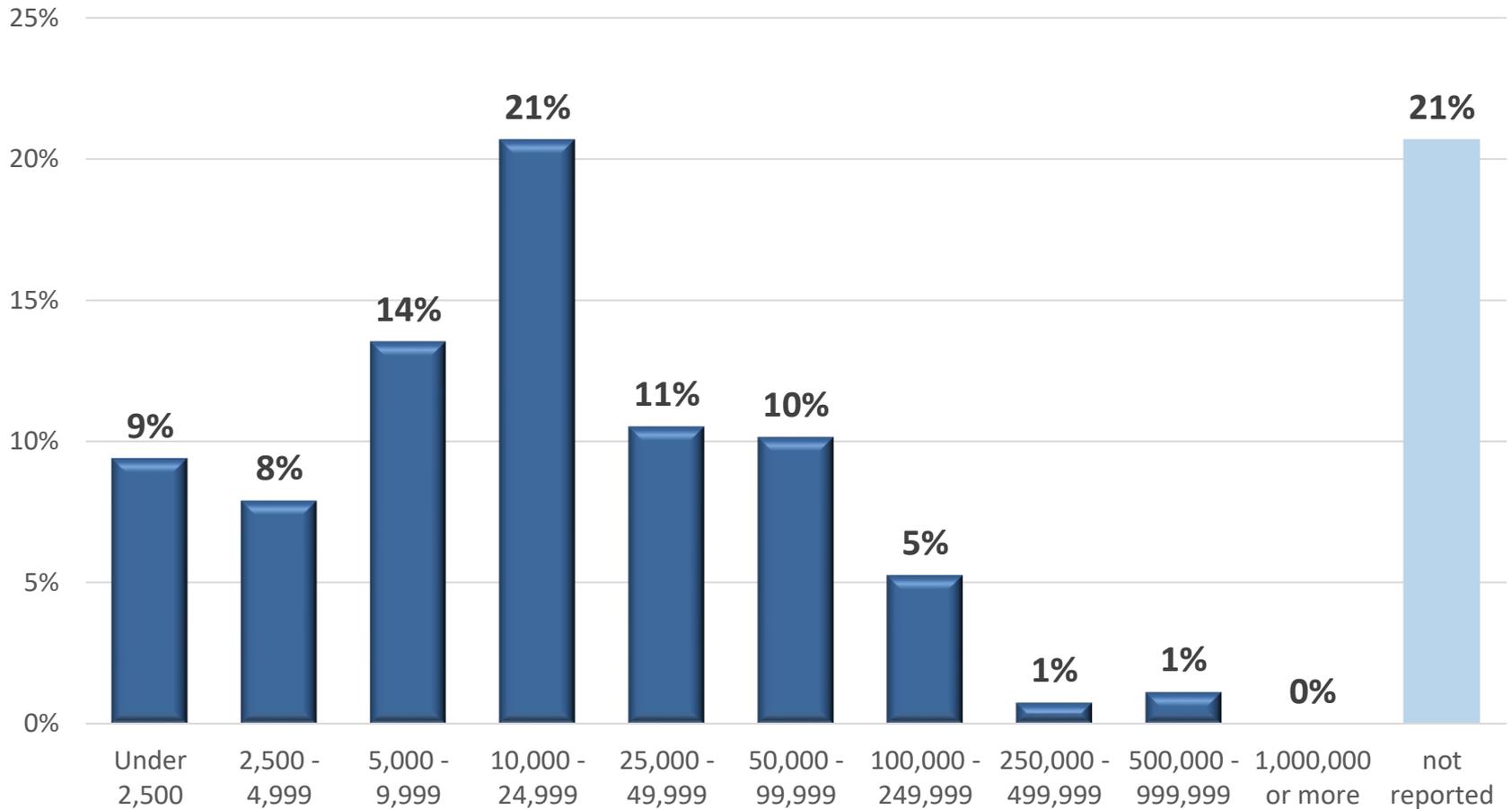
Source: Tax Rates and Levies, Texas Comptroller, 2026

# ESDs by Service Area, Square Miles



Source: SAFE-D and Texas Department of Emergency Management, 2025

# ESDs by Population

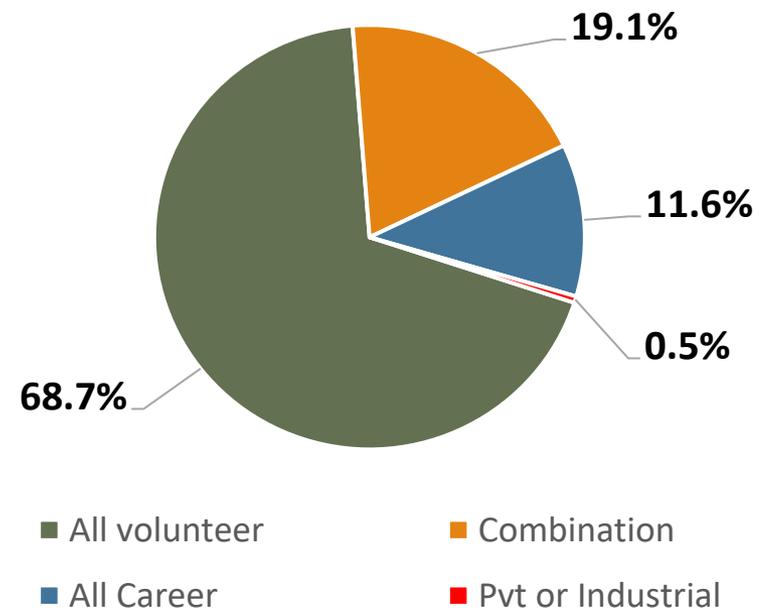


Source: SAFE-D and Texas Department of Emergency Management, 2025

# The Texas Fire Service

## 1,833 TFS-registered fire departments

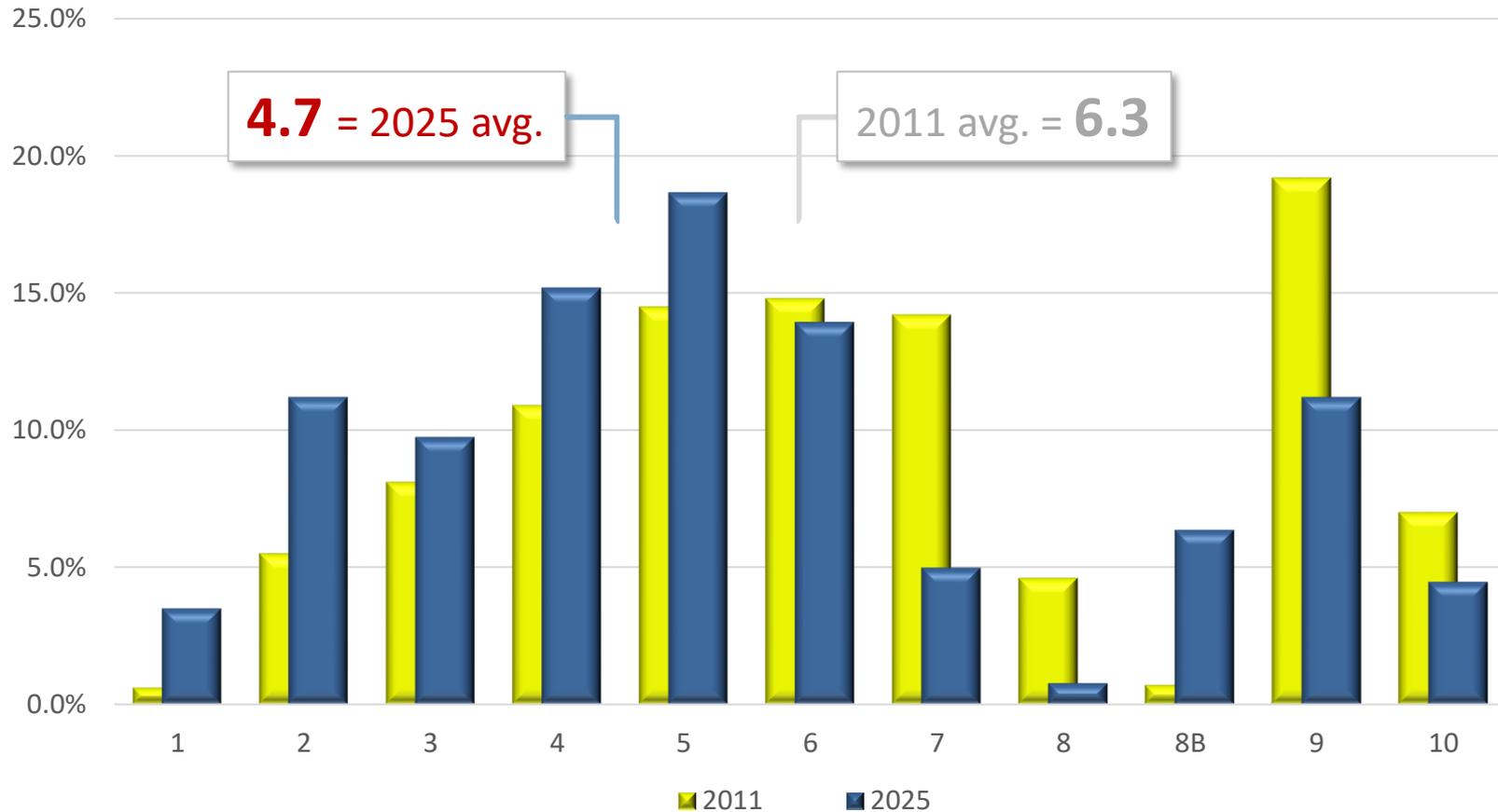
- **1,260** volunteer
- **213** career
- **351** combination
  - **186** mostly volunteer
  - **159** mostly career
  - **6** equal
- **9** Private / Industrial



Source: Texas A&M Forest Service Fire Portal, 2025

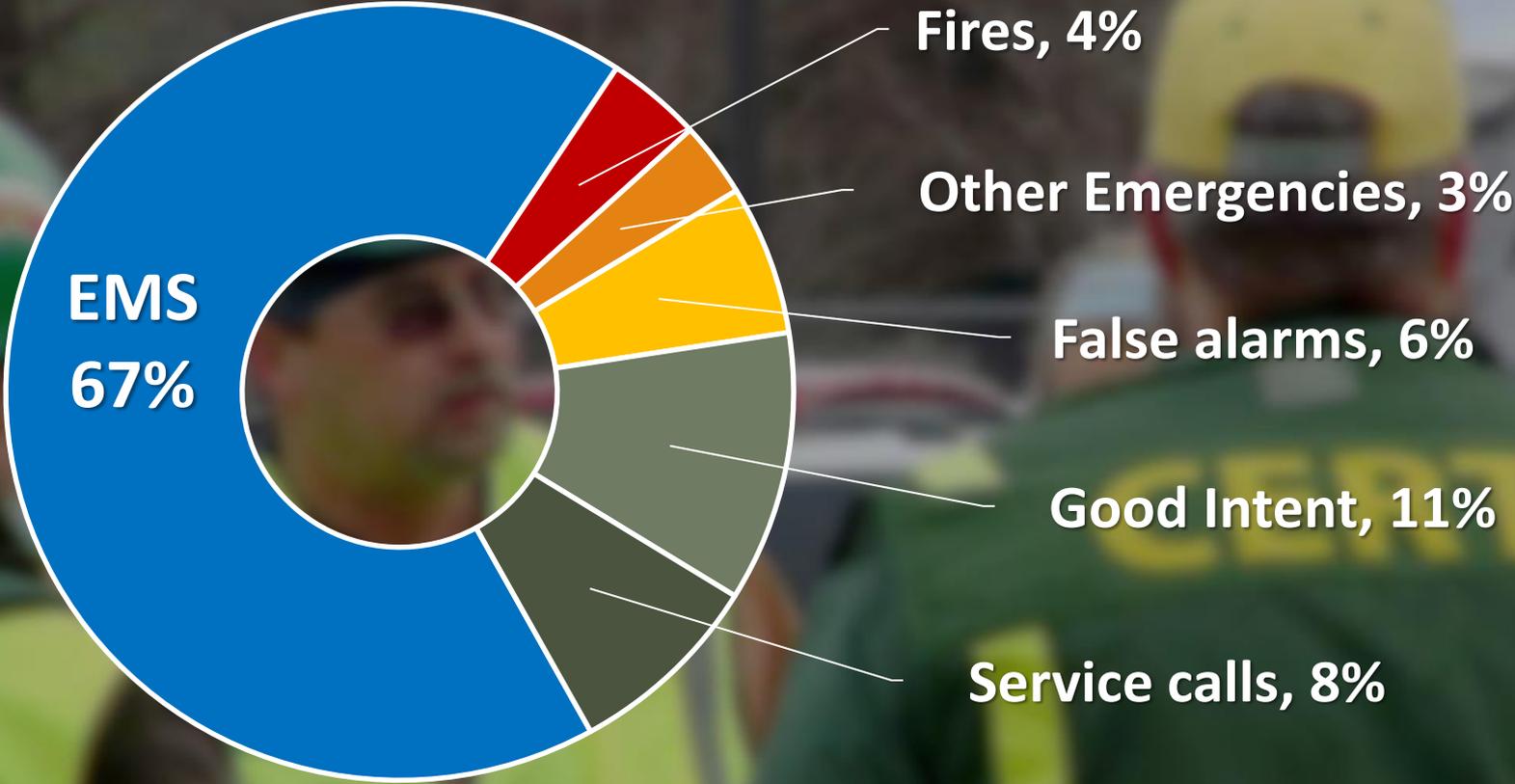
# The Texas Fire Service

## Distribution of PPC® Class Ratings



Source: ISO Verisk, "Distribution of Communities by PPC Class Number within Classification", 2011 and 2025

# The Texas Fire Service



Source: USFA State fire loss/fire department profiles, 2025 (2023 NFIRS data)

Photo Credit: Harris County Citizen Corps

# Changing role of the Fire Service

## REACTIVE



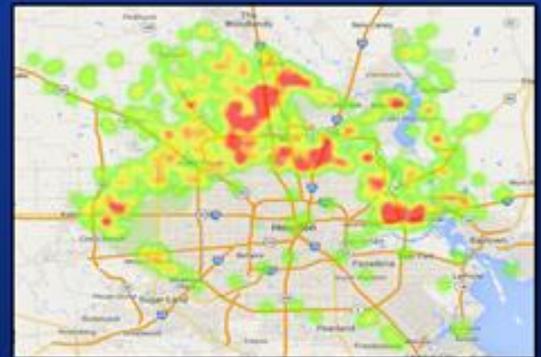
- Respond to failures
- After-action reports
- Historic Analysis

## PROACTIVE



- Respond to needs
- Output Analytics
- Tactical Planning

## PREDICTIVE



- Anticipate opportunities
- Forecast Analytics
- Strategic Planning

Source: adapted from "Event Management: Reactive, Proactive or Predictive?". Larry Dragich, 2012

# Today's emergency service reality

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- These are challenging times for ESDs
  - Social and economic issues
  - Many challenges; many opportunities
- ESDs have a crucial role
  - Municipal FDs and traditional VFDs alone are struggling
  - Rural areas aren't so rural any more ... or are they?
- ESDs must be transformational
  - More responsive to constant change
  - More proactive, more service-oriented
  - More efficient, more accountable

# As a Commissioner or Chief . . .

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**You need to have a  
Strategic Plan**

# Benefits of strategic planning

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- 1** Provides clear direction and priorities
- 2** Improves decisions and resource allocation
- 3** Supports long-term thinking and innovation
- 4** Establishes accountability
- 5** Increases transparency, and trust

# The essentials -- 4 basic questions

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## Observe

- Purpose
- Mission
- Vision
- Values

## Orient

- C-SWOT
- Needs
- Gaps
- Expectations

## Decide

- Priorities
- Initiatives
- Goals
- Objectives

## Act

- Capable
- Available
- Supportable
- Maintainable

# The essentials -- 4 basic topics

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- **Desired Level of Service**
- **Gap Analysis, including Critical Issues**
- **Initiatives, Goals, and Objectives**
- **Capital Plan and Financial Outlook**

# The essentials -- 3 basic steps

- **Define the environment**
- **Create the Plan**
- **Measure Results**





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# Define the Environment

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# Needs and Expectations

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- Issue-Based
- Organization-Based
- Community-Centered



# Define the Desired Service Level

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- **Services Provided**
- **Community & Department Profiles**
  - Needs, Expectations, and Concerns
  - Guiding Principles
- **Response Time**
  - First Arriving Unit
  - Effective Response Force
  - Incident Stabilization
- **Staffing**
  - Desired staffing
  - Desired deployment
- **Desired outcomes**





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# Create the Plan

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# Getting Started

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- **Choose a Team Leader**
- **Identify and Engage Stakeholders**
- **Recruit a Collaborative Planning Team**
- **Pick a Timeframe**
- **Go to Work**

# Collect Essential Information

- Community Profile
- Department Profile
- Capital Assets
- Financial Information

Strategic Plan Essentials: ESD Information Request

MSM Michael S. Montgomery, Jr. public safety consultants

TABLE 1. District Profile

ESD Name: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Contact name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Governing Body:  ESD Board  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Established by:  Statute  Court Order / Ordinance  Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

District Services:  District-provided  Contract Service provider(s)  Both  Other \_\_\_\_\_

There is written documentation from a unit of government that authorizes the existence of the District and defines its jurisdictional boundaries.  Yes  No

Copy of documents exist for District existence and jurisdiction.  Yes  No

Copy of map with jurisdictional boundaries exist.  Yes  No

The District has written documentation from a unit of government designating the authority of the District Board of Commissioners.  Yes  No

The District has a statement of purpose that defines the District's mission, vision, values, and expectations.  Yes  No

The District has a statement of purpose that defines the District's mission, vision, values, and expectations.  Yes  No

The District has a current organizational chart depicting the organizational components.  Yes  No

The District has written directives/policies that establish:

- An administrative office, records management system, and records officer  Yes  No
- Training requirements for ESD Board Commissioners  Yes  No
- Purchasing, investments, and facility use  Yes  No
- Open meetings and public speakers at open meetings  Yes  No
- Drug and alcohol, level of tolerance and testing  Yes  No
- Agreement for EMS / fire protection services, including monthly reporting  Yes  No
- Personnel hold applicable certification before performing emergency response duties  Yes  No

Mission Statement

Vision Statement

Core Values

Expectations

Adapted from multiple "best practices" programs, ©MSM-LLC, 2025

Page 1

# Start with a Community Profile

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- **Geographic overview**
- **Demographics**
- **At-risk Populations**
- **Hazards and vulnerabilities**
- **Response experience**
- **Community needs, expectations, and concerns**

# Add a District Profile

- Agency governance and organization
- Mission, vision, values, and expectations
- Service area size and population protected
- Services, people, stations, and apparatus
- Response Statistics
- Gap Analysis

# Gap Analysis

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Communities can use the Risk Assessment process to identify:



What do we need to prepare for?



What level of capability do we need?



What are our current capabilities?



What gaps exist between “have” and “need”?



How can we address our capability gaps?

Source: CPG 201: THIRA/SPR Guide—3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, FEMA, May 2018

# SWOT-C Analysis

- **S**trengths
- **W**eaknesses
- **O**pportunities
- **T**hreats
- **C**ritical Issues



# Critical Issues

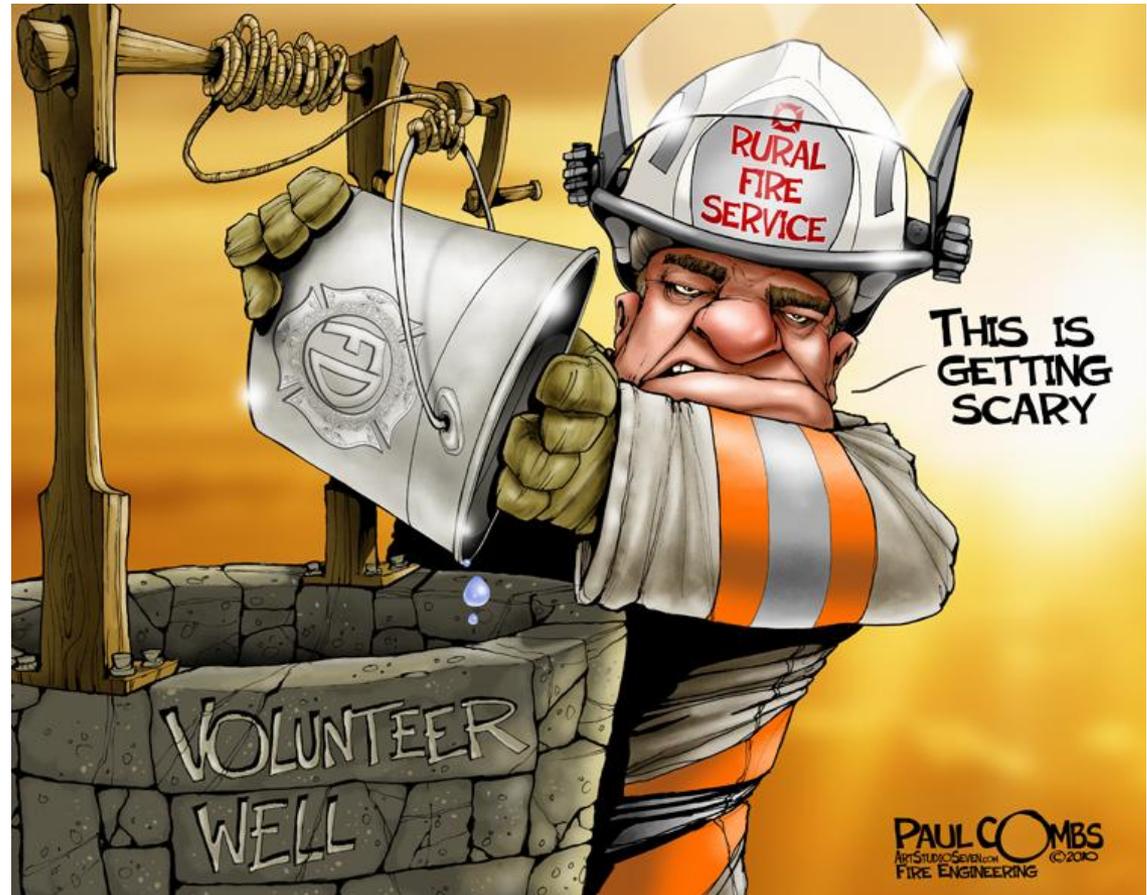
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- Factors not favorable to future success
  - When aligned with customer expectations
    - Define the problem and the solution
    - Require immediate attention
  - When not aligned
    - Create unnecessary distractions

Name it . . . claim it . . . fix it

# Critical Issues

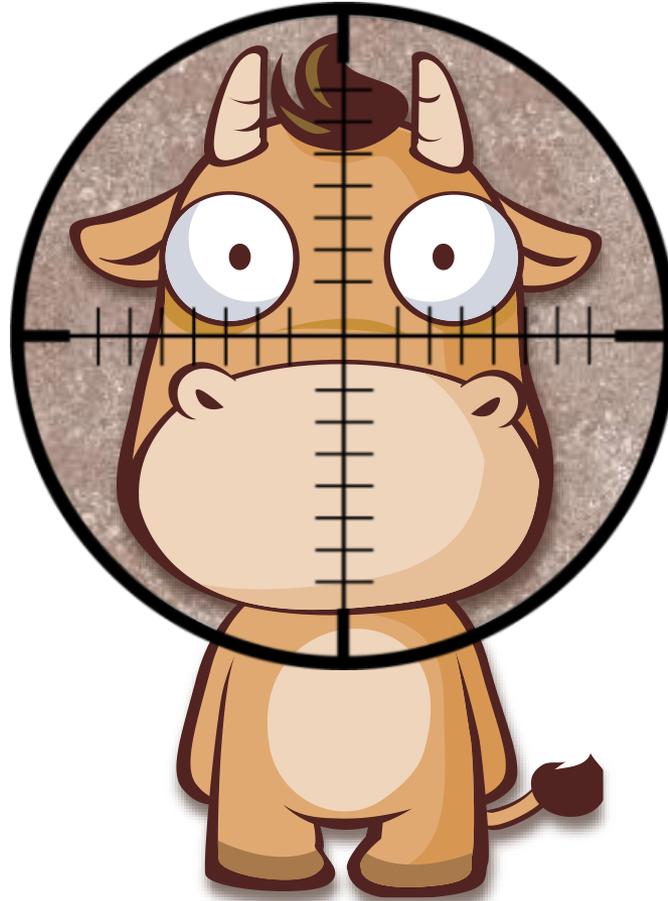
- Growth
- Staffing
- Funding
- Other stuff



Artwork from the Fire, Smoke, and Guts Portfolio ©by Paul Combs, <http://artstudioseven.com/>

# Sacred Cows

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# As a Commissioner or Chief . . .

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**You need to  
be able to identify  
“strategic priorities”**

# Think in terms of Perspectives



**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**



**COMMUNITY**



**MISSION FIRST, PEOPLE ALWAYS**



**FINANCES**



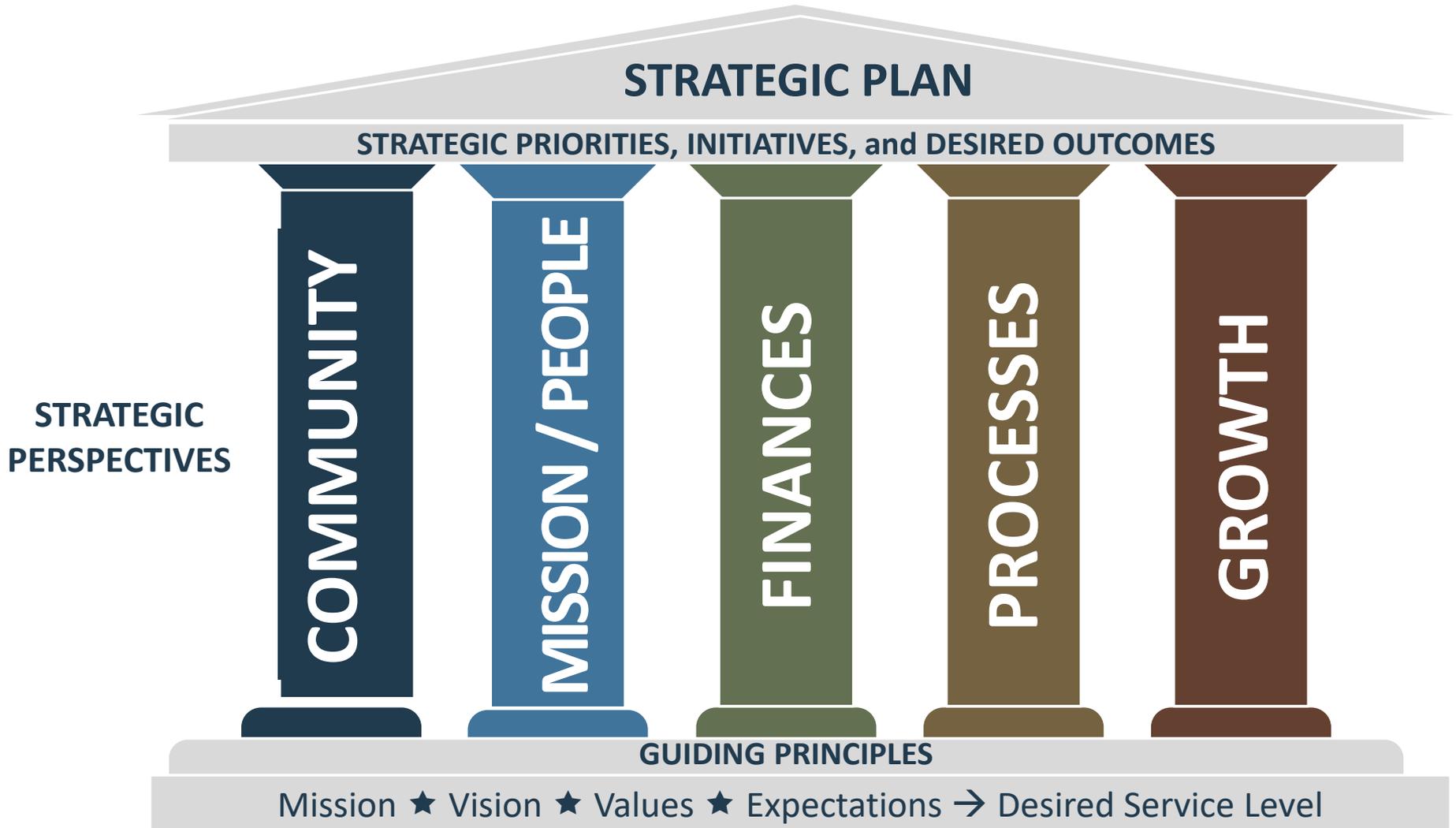
**PROCESSES**



**GROWTH**

Source: adapted from “Balanced Scorecard for Government and Nonprofit Agencies”, Paul Niven, © 2003

# Build a Strong Foundation



Source: adapted from “Balanced Scorecard for Government and Nonprofit Agencies”, Paul Niven, © 2003

# Creating the Plan

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- **Priorities** Most important areas of focus
- **Goals** Big-picture ambition
- **Strategies** Approach to reach goals
- **Objectives** Specific, measurable targets
- **Tasks** Actual activities or actions
- **Desired outcome** Specific result or end state

# Strategic Priorities



- Improve Community Outcomes
- Take Care of our People
- Attain Financial Stability and Transparency
- Excel at Internal Processes
- Build and Sustain Capacity

# Write SMART Objectives

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- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**elevant
- **T**ime-sensitive



# Timelines and Action Plans

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- Critical Task within next 90 days
  - Short-term within this budget year
  - Mid-range within two budget cycles
  - Long-range within five years or longer
  - Ongoing current and continuing
- 

**Every goal / objective needs a timeline**

# Completed Strategic Initiative

## INITIATIVE No. 1 IMPROVE COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Goal 1A – Improve/reduce response time

Desired Outcome – First arriving company on scene w/i 10 minutes, 90% of the time

Objective	Description	Performance Measure	Timeline
1A.1	Analyze city for station locations	List of potential station sites on hand	critical task
1A.2	Obtain 3-5 acres for new station	Land purchased and available for construction	intermediate term
1A.3	Design/build station	Station design completed	long term
1A.4	Begin and complete construction	Fire station completed and prepared for opening	long term
1A.5	Design/purchase apparatus	Apparatus designed, purchased, and available for service	long term
1A.6	Hire 12-15 personnel	Personnel hired and on-board	long term
1A.7	Open station	Fire station staffed and open for service	long term

# Add the Capital Plan

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- **Facilities**
- **Apparatus and Other Vehicles**
- **Tools and Equipment**
- **Safety Equipment**

# Example of a Capital Plan

	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY 28	FY 29
<b>Facilities</b>					
Station 1 remodel/addition	923,000				
Station 2 remodel		472,000			
Station 3 remodel				206,000	
Station 4 land/construction, new			450,000		600,000
<b>Total Facilities</b>	<b>923,000</b>	<b>472,000</b>	<b>450,000</b>	<b>206,000</b>	<b>600,000</b>
<b>Vehicles</b>					
Engine 1 replacement		750,000			
Brush truck 1 replacement		300,000			
Command 1 replacement		130,000			
Brush truck 2 replacement				320,000	
Engine 2 replacement				850,000	
Engine 3 replacement					875,000
<b>Total Vehicles</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,180,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,170,000</b>	<b>875,000</b>
<b>Other equipment</b>					
Turnout gear	24,000	26,000	30,000	36,000	40,000
E-rescue tools		45,000	45,000		60,000
Radios		10,199	21,095		22,108
Hose		10,000	22,000	8,090	150,000
<b>Total Other Equipment</b>	<b>24,000</b>	<b>91,199</b>	<b>118,095</b>	<b>44,090</b>	<b>272,108</b>
<b>Total CAPEX</b>	<b>947,000</b>	<b>1,743,199</b>	<b>568,095</b>	<b>1,420,090</b>	<b>1,747,108</b>

# Add the Financial Outlook

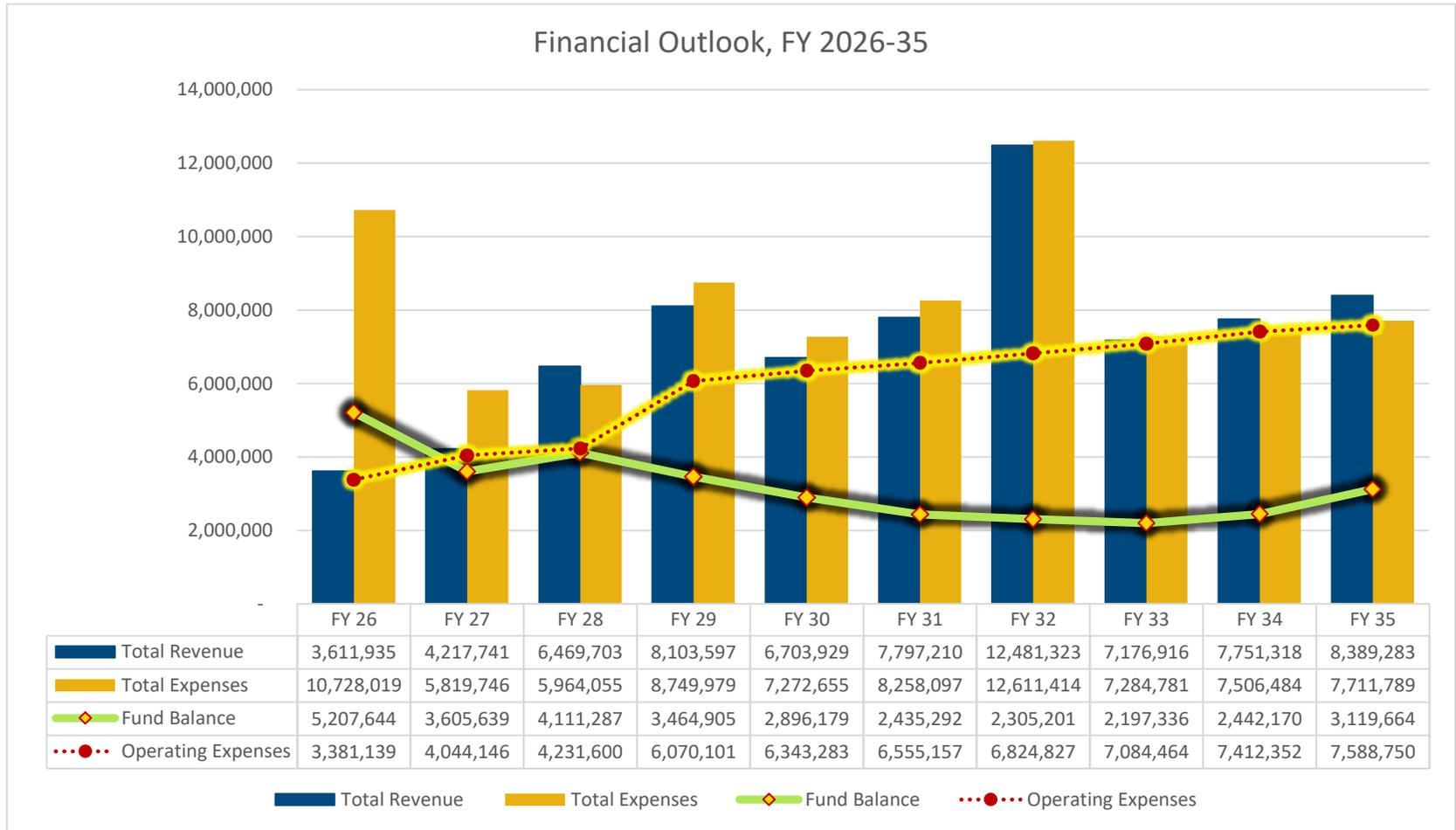
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- **Annual Operating Budget**
- **Capital Budget**
- **Cash Balance (Reserves)**

# Example of a Financial Outlook

Description	Projected					% increase 2025-29
	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	
Property Tax Revenues	4,252,244	4,618,589	5,180,292	5,499,729	6,155,460	44.8%
Other Receipts	110,680	118,076	280,492	1,021,469	1,442,792	1203.6%
<b>Total Recurring Revenues</b>	<b>4,362,924</b>	<b>4,736,665</b>	<b>5,460,784</b>	<b>6,521,198</b>	<b>7,598,252</b>	<b>74.2%</b>
Recurring Expenses	3,047,252	3,396,519	4,360,158	4,723,737	5,312,112	74.3%
Total Non-Recurring Costs	947,311	1,743,199	568,095	1,422,090	1,747,108	84.4%
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>3,994,563</b>	<b>5,139,718</b>	<b>4,928,253</b>	<b>6,145,827</b>	<b>7,059,220</b>	<b>76.7%</b>
Net Cash Flow (Deficit)	368,361	(403,053)	532,531	377,371	539,032	146.3%
Beginning Balance, Reserve	3,416,872	3,785,233	3,382,180	3,914,711	4,292,082	125.6%
Ending Balance, Reserve	<b>3,785,233</b>	<b>3,382,180</b>	<b>3,914,711</b>	<b>4,292,082</b>	<b>4,831,114</b>	<b>127.6%</b>
Reserve, % of ops expense	95%	66%	79%	70%	68%	(27)%

# Example of a Financial Outlook



# Measure the Results

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- **Identify key performance measures**
- **Link measures to goals and objectives**
- **Update at regular intervals**



# 5 Key Performance Indicators

- Resources per 1000
- Call Volume and Incident Type
- Response Times
- Fire Casualties and Fire Losses
- Financial Outlook

# Evaluating your strategic plan

- Set clear metrics
- Gather your data
- Compare reality to goals
- Listen to feedback
- Update your plan

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## When to evaluate

- Implementation
- Major milestones
- End of the strategic period



Source: Miro: "How to Measure Your Strategic Plan" Miro © 2025

Source: ESO: "2024 Fire Service Index, EMS Service Index" ESO © 2024



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# Conclusions

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# Strategic Planning for ESDs

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- Expectations are changing
- You need a strategic plan
- Pick the right plan --one size does not fit all

# Benefits of strategic planning

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- 1** Provides clear direction and priorities
- 2** Improves decisions and resource allocation
- 3** Supports long-term thinking and innovation
- 4** Establishes accountability
- 5** Increases transparency, and trust

ESD 1 Mission: To safely deliver the highest quality of emergency services through operational excellence, competence, and care with integrity, compassion, and dedication.

To create a sustainable **STAFFING PLAN** that provides competent, effective, and timely delivery of fire protection and emergency medical services within our community and the surrounding mutual aid area.

To create a sustainable **CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN** that provides safe and reliable facilities, apparatus, and equipment that are up-to-date, well-maintained, and meet the needs of our members and our community.

To create a sustainable **FINANCIAL PLAN** that meets district needs and community expectations, with solid financial stewardship and cost controls, sound accounting practices, and transparency.

-  1A. Increase crew size to 3 per shift
-  1B. Implement a competitive pay scale and comprehensive benefit package
-  1C. Establish and adopt a plan to allow for professional development
-  1D. Maintain an acceptable work/life balance
-  1E. Improve internal communications
-  1F. Develop and implement a succession plan

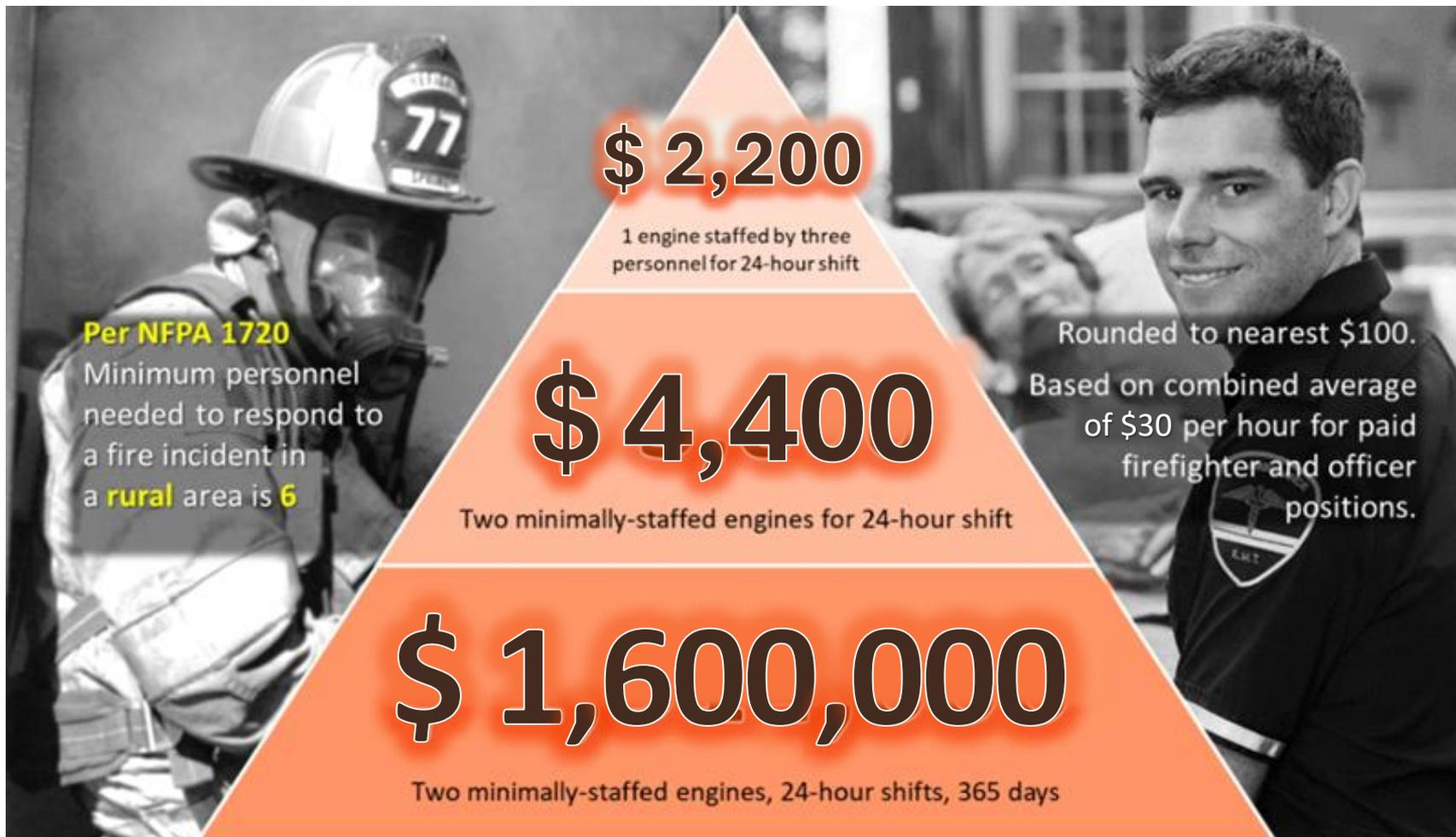
-  2A. Identify future operational / support needs for facilities, apparatus, other vehicle, PPE, tools and equipment
-  2B. Evaluate technology to determine effectiveness; and update to new technologies as appropriate
-  2C. Adopt a 10-year capital plan as part of the 2024-30 strategic plan
-  2D. Review, revise and develop policies for capital projects
-  2E. Develop capital project tracking system(s)

-  3A. Identify/quantify revenues and expenditures required to meet current and future needs
-  3B. Adopt a 5-year operations plan as part of the 2024-30 strategic plan
-  3C. Create and adopt a 10-year financial forecast that links annual budgets with long-range plans and needs
-  3D. Post financial information about tax rates, budgets, and audit results to ESD 1 website

*You can count on us*



# Remember the Value of a Volunteer





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For more information:



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