

## What Are Your Stakeholders' Burning Questions about Your Agency?

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

One of the ways that you can demonstrate your agency's value, educate your stakeholders, and win the community's support is to answer proactively people's implicit "burning questions." Below are general examples of such questions, categorized by function or area. If you want to know what else is on your stakeholders' minds, ask them! Then be sure to address those topics/issues in the future as well.

### Fire Chief

- Who are you?
- Of what agency accomplishments are you most proud?
- What do we need to know about our fire and rescue department?
- What notable changes have occurred, and how will they affect me/my community?
- What recent improvements have you made to our public safety?
- Has the department received any recognition this year?
- Briefly, what were last year's highlights?
- What can we expect from the department during the year ahead?

### Administration

- What are the agency's vision, mission, and values? How do they relate to me?
- Why do we have so many chiefs? What do they all do?
- What services are provided by each bureau/division/section?

- What has the department done that we (community) can be proud of?
- Why should we support your requests for more resources?
- What impact do you have on my safety, health, and economic viability?
- Even if your department's budget is cut again, you still will be there when we need you, right?

### Financial Management

- Are you using my tax dollars wisely? How can I tell?
- How do you pay for non-personnel expenses when such a large percentage of the budget is devoted to salaries and benefits?
- What outside sources of funding have you obtained? What impact did those funds have on the safety, health, and well-being of our community?

### Fire Operations and EMS

- Will you be there when my family and I need you?
- Will you arrive quickly?
- Will you have the right people, equipment, and apparatus to help us?
- How will the new [reporting system, billing system, deployment model, or other change] I heard about affect my family, the community, and me?

### Training

- Why do firefighters spend so much time training?
- How will all that training benefit the community?
- What return am I getting on the tax dollars spent on training?
- How will I know whether the investment is worth the cost?

### Fire Prevention

- What are you doing to mitigate fire dangers?
- Why do we need fire inspectors? What value do they provide for the community?
- Why does the fire department review building plans?
- Why do you spend time doing community outreach? What good does it do?
- Don't fire fighters have better things to do than go to schools to talk with third graders?
- How will I know the benefits of your outreach efforts?

### Apparatus/Fleet Maintenance

- Why does a fire engine show up when the caller specifically asks for an ambulance?
- What is the impact on the community's safety and health if the department's vehicles are old or outdated? Can't you just patch them up so they last a few more years?

### Employees

- Are agency personnel well qualified to protect my family, my business, and me?

- If there aren't as many fires these days, why do we still have so many firefighters?
- Why do firefighters show up when I've called for emergency medical assistance?
- (If you report personnel changes:) What impact will the personnel changes have on my family and me? What impact will there be on the community's safety, health, and economic viability?
- Who are the people who keep us safe? How are they involved in the community?

Keep in mind that these and other questions will come up over and over again as your stakeholders change – e.g., as elected officials come and go, residents and businesses move in and out of the area, community leaders change, children grow into adulthood, and circumstances turn observers into activists. Answering these and other burning questions is an on-going process, not a task you complete once, or even a few times, and you're done.

No pressure, but the safety of our first responders as well as the community's safety, health, and economic viability may be at risk unless you make continuous stakeholder education a very high priority.

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