

# Volunteer and Combination Officers Section of the IAFC

*“Moving Forward Together”*

*A path to the future*

STRATEGIC DIRECTION  
2021



**Board of Directors Meeting**  
*April 2021*

## Executive Committee

### **Chairperson**

Chief Charles Flynn  
NE Division  
Suffield (Connecticut) Fire Department

### **Vice Chairperson**

Chief Rich Cowger  
WE Division  
Columbus (Montana) Fire Rescue

### **Secretary/Treasurer**

Chief Fred Windisch, CFO, EFO  
SW Division  
Ponderosa (Texas) Fire Department

### **International Director**

Chief Jason Catrambone  
MV Division  
Williston (North Dakota) Fire Department

## At-Large Board Members

### Chief Norvin Collins, MS, EFO

WE Division  
San Juan Island (Washington) Fire District

### Chief Jim Cook

SE Division  
Loudoun County (Virginia) Combined Fire and  
Rescue System

### Chief Kevin Hardwick

GL Division  
Glendale (Ohio) Fire Department

### Chief Ron Oettel, Jr.

EA Division  
Lititz (Pennsylvania) Fire Company #1

### Chief Edward Rush

EA Division  
Hartsdale (New York) Fire Department

### Chief Al Yancey, Jr.

GL Division  
Minooka (Illinois) Fire Protection District

### *\*Chair Emeritus*

Chief Timothy S. Wall,  
North Farms (Connecticut) Volunteer Fire  
Department

### *\*\*Secretary/Treasurer Emeritus*

Chief Fire Marshal Robert T. Bettenhausen  
(Ret.), Tinley Park (Illinois)

### Staff Liaison

Kelly Ameen

### Education Coordinator

Chief John Buckman, III, (ret)

## **Mission**

*To develop and enhance effective, professional leaders of the volunteer and combination fire service by providing tools, resources and representation to lead their organizations effectively*

## **Vision**

*To be the leading fire service organization in the United States, representing, and educating leaders of the volunteer and combination fire/rescue services*

## **VCOS**

***Developing and enhancing leaders***

## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, & THREATS (SWOT) Analysis:

The VCOS Board of Directors assembled through on-line collaboration as well as in-person on April 22 – 24, 2021, to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the Volunteer and Combination Officer Section of the IAFC. This evaluation, including input from outside stakeholders, revealed the following points related to the VCOS SWOT.

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Board members are a cohesive group and passionate about roles in shaping the future, and good SMEs.; have a concern for others and desire to help.</u></li><li>• <u>Publication and communications</u> of relevant and timely information to our members. Ribbon Reports</li><li>• <u>Board members have a fairly common vision and mission relative to the VCOS.</u> Have a strong heart for the cause.</li><li>• <u>Board has an extensive network</u> to use for cause of the section.</li><li>• <u>Stable section funding source.</u></li><li>• <u>Great annual symposium.</u></li><li>• <u>Talented section membership</u> waiting for the request to help.</li><li>• <u>VCOS reputation of having money, energy, and skills</u> to do almost anything and everything. Financial stability.</li><li>• <u>Educational topics</u></li><li>• <u>A seat at the table for standard-making process</u></li><li>• <u>Diverse (strong) membership</u> of volunteer and combination departments represented.</li><li>• <u>Active participation with IAFC Government Relations</u></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>IAFC internal struggles</u></li><li>• <u>Too many projects, need focus.</u> We head down too many rabbit trails.</li><li>• <u>No clear section direction.</u></li><li>• <u>Succession planning</u> (chair, vice-chair, treasurer, education coordinator, symposium coordination), one election, retirements, etc. away from turn-over.</li><li>• <u>Turnover of IAFC staff dedicated solely to VCOS.</u></li><li>• <u>IAFC staff costs limits VCOS use of staff for projects.</u></li><li>• <u>Lack of complete knowledge of the true needs of our members and their agencies.</u></li><li>• <u>Lack of influence in the NFPA standard development.</u></li><li>• <u>Election candidate vetting</u> provides little opportunity for candidate forum and vetting.</li><li>• <u>New board member orientation and on-boarding.</u></li><li>• <u>VCOS board member diversity.</u></li><li>• <u>Lack of representation on VCOS board from all division of the IAFC</u></li><li>• <u>Lack of developed international relationships.</u></li><li>• <u>VCOS not seen as an “organization”,</u> always under parent organization control, direction, etc., hindering some progress in national volunteer and combination issues.</li><li>• <u>Diversity of partners.</u></li><li>• <u>Marketing and branding of the VCOS and its programs.</u></li><li>• <u>National involvement/outreach across the nation;</u> can be viewed as an east coast organization</li><li>• <u>Can be hard to break through “club” to be more involved in Section projects.</u></li><li>• <u>Strategic plans never have followed through.</u></li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Freshness of educational programs</u></li><li>• <u>Aging Ribbon Reports.</u></li><li>• <u>One or two people doing majority of work – burnout potential.</u> Education coordinator example: drafting report updates, program updates, teaching, representing at educational events, etc. – not enough time).</li><li>• <u>Social media freshness</u></li></ul>
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## Opportunities

- Strong foundation of a section
- Expansion of partnerships/sponsors.
- Provide post pandemic leadership model (new normal)
- Better marketing of VCOS programs
- More influence toward NFPA 1720 to develop realistic volunteer and combination department standards.
- Develop relationships and opportunities with international partners with successful volunteer structures (Netherlands, Ireland, Germany, etc.)
- Increase section membership numbers
- More involvement of mid-level chief officers and company officers (captains, lieutenants who may be next chiefs)
- VCOS Executive Director (paid)
- More collaboration with iDELP and iWomen to create a more diverse input to board and section direction, “get outside the insider group.”
- Expand various conference presentations by VCOS representation (NVFC, FRI, FDIC, National Mayors and Managers, etc.)
- Additional education to present real leadership models, hard discussions about volunteer staffing, organization transition, and operational realities.
- Increase presence as the voice of the vol/comb fire and emergency services
- Expand other related association relationships.
- Advocacy at the national government level
- Embrace trends use the past to design the future.
- Continuous refresh of speakers at SITS
- Retention education focus
- Board engagement to members.
- SITS roundtable forum for board to listen
- Encourage and identify process to promote diversity in candidates for the section board.

## Threats

- IAFC organizational struggles (budget, leadership, staffing levels)
- IAFC dues structure creates barrier to singular VCOS membership.
- VWS programs taking over VCOS educational focus.
- Loss of membership due to competing fire service organizations (NVFC, other IAFC sections, etc.)
- Election turn-over. Could lose three active board members at once and create a continuity issue
- Time commitments of board members
- Pandemics (loss of members/revenue due to budget cutbacks)
- Leading from the front takes bold action. Bold action may result in resistance and lack of support from parent association.
- Losing value and relationship with our members.
- Loss of Pierce funds. Established relationship beyond current members (succession)

## “MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER”

After analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the VCOS, the board plotted a course forward for the next 1 – 3 years.

### Strategic Direction:

**HIGH Priority** – Addressed/accomplished within next 1 year ([Timeline: May 1, 2022](#))

(In no specific order)

- Establish a *new members task force* that is then tasked to create a new section members’ on-boarding process to be presented and launched at [November 2021 Symposium in the Sun](#)
- Establish a defined marketing strategy for the VCOS and its products (education, reports, network, etc.)
- Approve and launch renewed mission, vision, logo and brand by [November 2021 Symposium in the Sun](#) and affect changes to by-laws to reflect the same.
- Engage the communications committee to identify gaps in current membership communications, and then for that committee to present to the board a communications strategy to produce timely and relevant information to the members.
- Engage the IAFC Board through intentional communications and recommendations utilizing *monthly conference calls* between VCOS and IAFC Executive Officers, beginning [June 1, 2021](#); VCOS to provide *written recommendations* to IAFC on improved communications, and *endorsement* of IAFC board candidates who are vetted and demonstrate ability to change the culture of IAFC.

**MEDIUM Priority** – Addressed/accomplished within the next 2 - 4 years.

(In no specific order) ([Period begins May 1, 2022 – May 1, 2026](#))

- Explore opportunities for international outreach program(s) to bring more involvement into VCOS from our international peers (volunteer officers in Europe, Asia, etc.).
- Establish strategy to be more involved at national level decisions affecting vol/comb. (to be “in the room where it happens”)
- Complete a review of all current publications to refresh documents and circulation, and to identify future reports.
- Establish strategy and funding allocations for increased conference presence (NVFC conference, state fire chiefs’ conferences, FDIC, etc.).
- Conduct needs assessment for a paid VCOS Administrative Assistant/Ex. Director (title to be determined), act according to findings and or funding.

**LOW Priority** – These items are on the radar, and being considered, and possibly influenced by the status of accomplishment of the 1 – 3 years goals. These items become more fluid due to the degree of accomplishment of the 1 – 3 goals; however, shall serve as part of the VCOS vision.

- Identify Symposium in the Sun future locations, size, concept, etc. VCOS Symposium International with international partnerships established in “medium” priority goals.
- Evaluate organizational structure and stability of parent IAFC and financial sustainability of VCOS as stand-alone organization (dues, support staff, etc.).
- Conduct needs assessment of VCOS staffing (instructors and support staff)
- Assess effectiveness of educational programs to determine refresh, termination and creation of new programs.





## The Roadmap

Specific details of the **high priority goals** will be included here

- **Establish a new members task force that is then tasked to create a new section members on-boarding process to be presented and launched at November 2021 Symposium in the Sun.**

*A task force that is comprised of VCOS members who have joined within the past five years will be established to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the current new member process and then develop a plan/proposal to present to the VCOS that can be debuted at 2021 Symposium. One aspect of the “new member” process the Board has outlined is to provide a new member reception at the Symposium, and create a VIP feeling for those new members. A VCOS board member will be appointed to guide the process. The proposal must be completed by August/September 2021.*

**Estimated cost of this project: \$2,500.00 (travel, promotion, event)**

- **Establish a defined marketing strategy for the VCOS and its products (education, reports, network, etc.)**

*The established VCOS marketing committee is tasked with defining the marketing strategy for the VCOS in order to more effectively market the benefits of the section and the products (education, reports, network, etc.) that VCOS provides. The marketing committee will meet with the major VCOS sponsorship partners and their marketing teams to collaborate and provide a detailed approach to how, when, where, and what our marketing process will be.*

**Estimated cost of this project: \$5,000.00 - 10,000.00 (research and design, travel, etc.)**

- **Approve and launch renewed mission, vision, logo and brand by November 2021 Symposium in the Sun and affect changes to by-laws to reflect the same.**

*The VCOS Board will establish a renewed mission, logo and brand between April 1, 2021 and October 1, 2021 for the purpose of debuting the renewed VCOS at the November 2021 Symposium in the Sun. This is intended to be a “big deal” to present to our membership that post pandemic the VCOS is refocusing our efforts. We have conducted an internal review and included our stakeholders, and as a result are taking a laser focus on our mission and vision so that our logo and brand will represent the precision of what we are doing as a Section.*

**Estimated cost of this project: \$5,000.00 (printing, promotions, etc.)**

- **Engage the communications committee to identify gaps in current membership communications, and then for that committee to present to the board a communications strategy to produce timely and relevant information to the members.**

*The current Communications Committee of the VCOS will bring in the fire chiefs from the **Chiefs Roundtable** that was established for the April 22, 2021 VCOS Board meeting to gain input on where the gaps exist in our current communications model. The **Chiefs Roundtable of 2021** represents fire chiefs from various areas of the United States and various diversity in organizational structure. Each of these chiefs are engaged but indicate a lack of communications from VCOS. The Communications Committee, along with the **2021 Chiefs Roundtable** Chiefs will present a communications proposal that will result in timely and relevant information networks for our members, as well as outlining how to communicate the benefits of VCOS to non-members.*

**Estimated cost of this project: \$2,500.00 (travel, printing, etc.)**

- **Engage the IAFC Board through intentional communications and recommendations through *monthly conference calls* between VCOS and IAFC Executive Officers, beginning **June 1, 2021**; VCOS to provide *written recommendations* to the IAFC on improved communications, and *endorsement* of IAFC board candidates who are vetted and demonstrate the ability to change the culture of IAFC.**

*As the most active and successful section of the IAFC, the VCOS needs more intentional communications with the IAFC Board, through monthly conference calls and more focused requests through our International Director on the IAFC Board. VCOS needs to establish recommendations that can be presented to the IAFC Board on how to better communicate with the membership on important matters of the Association. VCOS needs to be intentional in vetting candidates for the IAFC board elections, to support candidates who will influence change in the culture, embrace the needs of the volunteer and combination fire service and support VCOS initiatives.*

**Estimated cost of this project: \$2,500.00 (travel, etc.)**