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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 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.</td>
<td>• IAFC internal struggles</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Publication and communications of relevant and timely information to our members. Ribbon Reports</td>
<td>• Too many projects, need focus. We head down too many rabbit trails.</td>
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<td>• Board members have a fairly common vision and mission relative to the VCOS. Have a strong heart for the cause.</td>
<td>• No clear section direction.</td>
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<td>• Board has an extensive network to use for cause of the section.</td>
<td>• Succession planning (chair, vice-chair, treasurer, education coordinator, symposium coordination), one election, retirements, etc. away from turn-over.</td>
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<td>• Stable section funding source.</td>
<td>• Turnover of IAFC staff dedicated solely to VCOS.</td>
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<td>• Great annual symposium.</td>
<td>• IAFC staff costs limits VCOS use of staff for projects.</td>
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<td>• Talented section membership waiting for the request to help.</td>
<td>• Lack of complete knowledge of the true needs of our members and their agencies.</td>
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<td>• VCOS reputation of having money, energy, and skills to do almost anything and everything. Financial stability.</td>
<td>• Lack of influence in the NFPA standard development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Educational topics</td>
<td>• Election candidate vetting provides little opportunity for candidate forum and vetting.</td>
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<td>• A seat at the table for standard-making process</td>
<td>• New board member orientation and on-boarding.</td>
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<td>• Diverse (strong) membership of volunteer and combination departments represented.</td>
<td>• VCOS board member diversity.</td>
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<td>• Active participation with IAFC Government Relations</td>
<td>• Lack of representation on VCOS board from all division of the IAFC</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Lack of developed international relationships.</td>
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<td>• VCOS not seen as an “organization”, always under parent organization control, direction, etc., hindering some progress in national volunteer and combination issues.</td>
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<td>• Diversity of partners.</td>
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<td>• Marketing and branding of the VCOS and its programs.</td>
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<td>• National involvement/outreach across the nation; can be viewed as an east coast organization</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Can be hard to break through “club” to be more involved in Section projects.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Strategic plans never have followed through.</td>
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</table>
| • Freshness of educational programs  
| • Aging Ribbon Reports.  
| • One or two people doing majority of work – burnout potential. Education coordinator example: drafting report updates, program updates, teaching, representing at educational events, etc. – not enough time).  
<p>| • Social media freshness |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Strong foundation of a section</td>
<td>• IAFC organizational struggles (budget, leadership, staffing levels)</td>
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<td>• Expansion of partnerships/sponsors.</td>
<td>• IAFC dues structure creates barrier to singular VCOS membership.</td>
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<td>• Provide post pandemic leadership model (new normal)</td>
<td>• VWS programs taking over VCOS educational focus.</td>
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<td>• Better marketing of VCOS programs</td>
<td>• Loss of membership due to competing fire service organizations (NVFC, other IAFC sections, etc.)</td>
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<td>• More influence toward NFPA 1720 to develop realistic volunteer and combination department standards.</td>
<td>• Election turn-over. Could lose three active board members at once and create a continuity issue</td>
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<td>• Develop relationships and opportunities with international partners with successful volunteer structures (Netherlands, Ireland, Germany, etc.)</td>
<td>• Time commitments of board members</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Increase section membership numbers</td>
<td>• Pandemics (loss of members/revenue due to budget cutbacks)</td>
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<td>• More involvement of mid-level chief officers and company officers (captains, lieutenants who may be next chiefs)</td>
<td>• Leading from the front takes bold action. Bold action may result in resistance and lack of support from parent association.</td>
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<td>• VCOS Executive Director (paid)</td>
<td>• Losing value and relationship with our members.</td>
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<td>• More collaboration with iDELP and iWomen to create a more diverse input to board and section direction, “get outside the insider group.”</td>
<td>• Loss of Pierce funds. Established relationship beyond current members (succession)</td>
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<td>• Expand various conference presentations by VCOS representation (NVFC, FRI, FDIC, National Mayors and Managers, etc.)</td>
<td>• Continuous refresh of speakers at SITS</td>
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<td>• Additional education to present real leadership models, hard discussions about volunteer staffing, organization transition, and operational realities.</td>
<td>• Retention education focus</td>
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<td>• Increase presence as the voice of the vol/comb fire and emergency services</td>
<td>• Board engagement to members.</td>
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<td>• Expand other related association relationships.</td>
<td>• SITS roundtable forum for board to listen</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Advocacy at the national government level</td>
<td>• Encourage and identify process to promote diversity in candidates for the section board.</td>
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“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 AFC 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.)