



Hosting a Successful Open House

The ability to host a successful open house is vital to volunteer fire departments. Open houses give the community the opportunity to learn from and interact with department members.

WHEN SHOULD YOU HOST? Timing for fire department events is extremely important. Effective open houses are held one or two weekends a year typically in warmer seasons to attract more attendees. Some counties hold open house weekends while others allow departments to choose when they will host these events.

HOW DO YOU START PLANNING? A committee is a great way to make sure a focused group of members oversee the event and can effectively communicate event needs to the department. A budget should be created at the beginning of the fiscal year and dates should be chosen well ahead of time (usually the beginning of the year). This allows for ample time to promote the event and ensure there are enough members present. All department events should be well thought out and organized to make the most of budgets, member time and allow for the best attendee outcome.

WHAT DO YOU NEED? It is ideal to have as many department members as possible present for the open house event. This shows the community how the department operates and promotes a family atmosphere. Have some form of refreshments for guests, this can be as simple as cookies and bottles of water or burgers and hot dogs for a barbeque. Make sure the station and apparatus are clean and you have clean, spare gear ready for children and adults to try on. Setting up different stations with tools and equipment is another great way to demonstrate and educate what department members do daily. Some adults may even want to try their hand at the power tools or gear. This is a golden opportunity to recruit!

HOW CAN YOU RECRUIT? An open house is a dual-purpose event. Not only is it a great public education event, but it is an excellent recruitment opportunity, as well. Make sure you have department marketing materials and applications available for attendees. This is the time to educate interested volunteers on all opportunities available within the department, from firefighting to EMS to administrative positions. Remember that every event, every call and every day is a chance to recruit and grow your department.



For more information on conducting a successful open house, please contact Ms. Rhiannon Bogozi at rbogozi@iafc.org.





Open House Check List

Before the Event

- Consider doing a narrated simulation on your department's capabilities. Gather the necessary items to ensure success with this. A practice run is always a good idea to work out any bugs. Ensure there is enough seating around the demonstration area.
- Refreshments (if applicable).
- Ensure your social media is updated with department and event information.
- Ensure your members have the necessary uniforms available. Consider polos or t-shirts to create an approachable, yet professional appearance.
- Reach out to local media to advise them of the event.
- Develop an "elevator speech" for any members of the media who come to the event.
- Educate your members how to talk positively about your department to open house attendees. Personalize encounters by using visitor's first names or something they know about them.
- Have all your members ensure they have answers, ahead of time, to the following questions:
 - Why do you volunteer?
 - How much time does it take from you/your family?
 - Are there any benefits associated with volunteering with your organization (tax benefits, discounts, etc.)?
- If you have pamphlets or brochures, be sure to have enough printed in time for the event.
- Have signage which illustrates the [cost of your equipment](#) (a sign showing a firefighter in full PPE with the price of each piece is a good example), stats (populations served, runs per year, etc.), the amount and type of training your members completed, and the amount of time your department gives in a month or year and the amount this saves the local taxpayer.
- Thoroughly clean your station and your apparatus as well as complete any repairs to each that may reflect poorly on your department.
- Change the backgrounds/screen savers on all your computers to show your department logo.
- Consider having family members assist so they can relay their experiences to the families of potential volunteers.
- Consider using the event to deliver a fire prevention message as well. If you have dedicated personnel who handle this, be sure they are invited.

During the Event

- Have sufficient recruitment materials available and placed in a heavily trafficked area.
- Have a diverse, cross-section of your department there. Equal representation of your community's age, gender, racial and ethnic background will show everyone that your department is open to anyone willing to help the community.
- Have both operations and administrative personnel there as well to show that your department needs help not only running calls, but running itself like a business.
- Have a schedule for your members, and rotate them every few hours so they don't feel monotonous.

After the Event

- Debrief and discuss potential changes for next open house.
- Follow up with potential new members.