

**INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS  
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS**



**Wellness-Fitness Initiative Task Force Meeting  
December 12-13, 2022**

# Wellness Fitness Initiative

***Finding Best Practices***

***Leading to a Roadmap for a Comprehensive WFI***

# WFI Team

**Fire Chief Nathan Trauernicht** | IAFC Policy Research Institute Board

**Richard Miller** | IAFC Staff WFI Project

**David Frost** | PhD, RKin, CSCS Director, Master of Professional Kinesiology, Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education University of Toronto

**Sara Jahnke** | PhD Principal Investigator at NDRI-USA, Inc.

**Kerry Kuehl** | MD DrPH MS Professor of Medicine Chief Health Promotion & Sports Medicine Medical Director Portland Fire & Rescue / Oregon Health & Science University

**Grady Valencis** | Health and Safety Operational Services International Association of Fire Fighters



# Finding WFI Best Practices Leading to a Roadmap for a comprehensive WFI

History of the IAFF/IAFC Fire Service Joint Labor Management Wellness Fitness Initiative (WFI) is nearing 26 years of collaboration between fire department management and union leaders with an overall goal of improving the health of fire fighters.

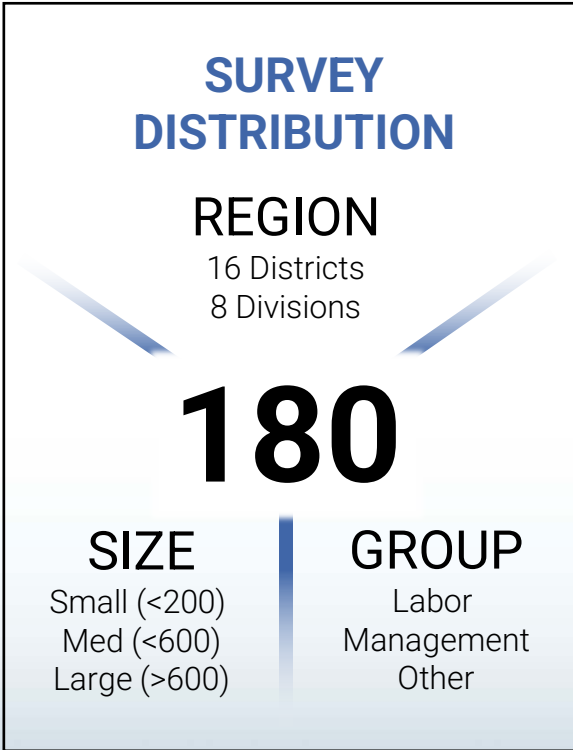




## **Dr. David Frost | PhD, RKin, CSCS**

Director, Master of Professional Kinesiology,  
Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education University of Toronto

# A STUDY PROCESS



# OVERALL OBSTACLES

What factors were the predominant obstacles within the entire sample?

# 7 MOD/MAJ OBSTACLES

On average, 7 of 44 factors identified, independent of group, size, or region

Culture (57%)

**DEPARTMENT**

Member Engagement (58%)

**MEMBERS**

Implementation Challenges (52%)

Program Execution (51%)

**SYSTEMS**

Data Collection (53%)

Access to Funding (57%)

**NON-MODIFIABLE**

Perceived Costs (63%)



# OVERALL FACILITATORS

What factors were the predominant facilitators within the entire sample?

# 33 MOD/MAJ FACILITATORS

On average, 33 of 44 factors identified, independent of group, size, or region

Labor-management relations (64%)

Member Enthusiasm (72%)

Union Involvement (71%)

Management Involvement (73%)

People of Influence (83%)

Champions (72%)

**DEPARTMENT**

**MEMBERS**

**LEADERSHIP**

**SYSTEMS**

# OBSTACLES / FACILITATORS

What factors were major obstacles and facilitators within the entire sample?

# 5 MOD/MAJ FACTORS

5 factors identified as obstacle and facilitator, independent of group, size, or region

Culture (57% and 61%)

Member Engagement (58% and 52%)

Program Execution (51% and 59%)

Data Collection (53% and 52%)

Access to Funding (57% and 57%)

**DEPARTMENT**

**MEMBERS**

**SYSTEMS**

**NON-MODIFIABLE**

# OBSTACLES + FACILITATORS

What factors were most influential within the entire sample?

# INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

Factors identified as most influential (obstacle + facilitator) by entire sample

Culture  
Labor-Management Relationship

**DEPARTMENT**

Member Engagement  
Member Enthusiasm  
Member Perceived Value

**MEMBERS**

People of Influence  
Program Execution

**SYSTEMS**

Access to Funding

**NON-MODIFIABLE**

# OFI RECOMMENDATIONS

What factors are both highly influential and modifiable?

# LEADERSHIP

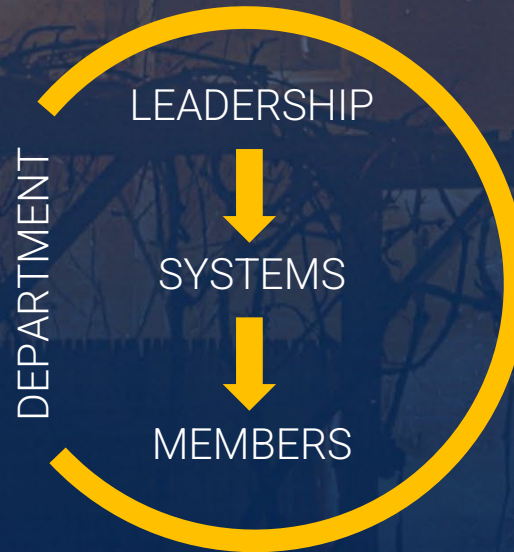
MANAGEMENT's involvement in, commitment to, and/or support of...

UNION EXECUTIVE's involvement in, commitment to, and/or support of...

# MEMBERSHIP

Members' WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE in any department led initiatives

Members' ENTHUSIASM towards wellness and fitness



# SYSTEMS

Involvement of CHAMPIONS to support and overcome resistance

Creation and execution of an IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

# DEPARTMENT

Way of thinking, ways things are done, values (CULTURE)

RELATIONSHIP between labor and management





# Dr. Sara Jahnke | PhD

Principal Investigator and Director of the Center for Fire, Rescue & EMS Health Research, NDRI-USA, Inc.



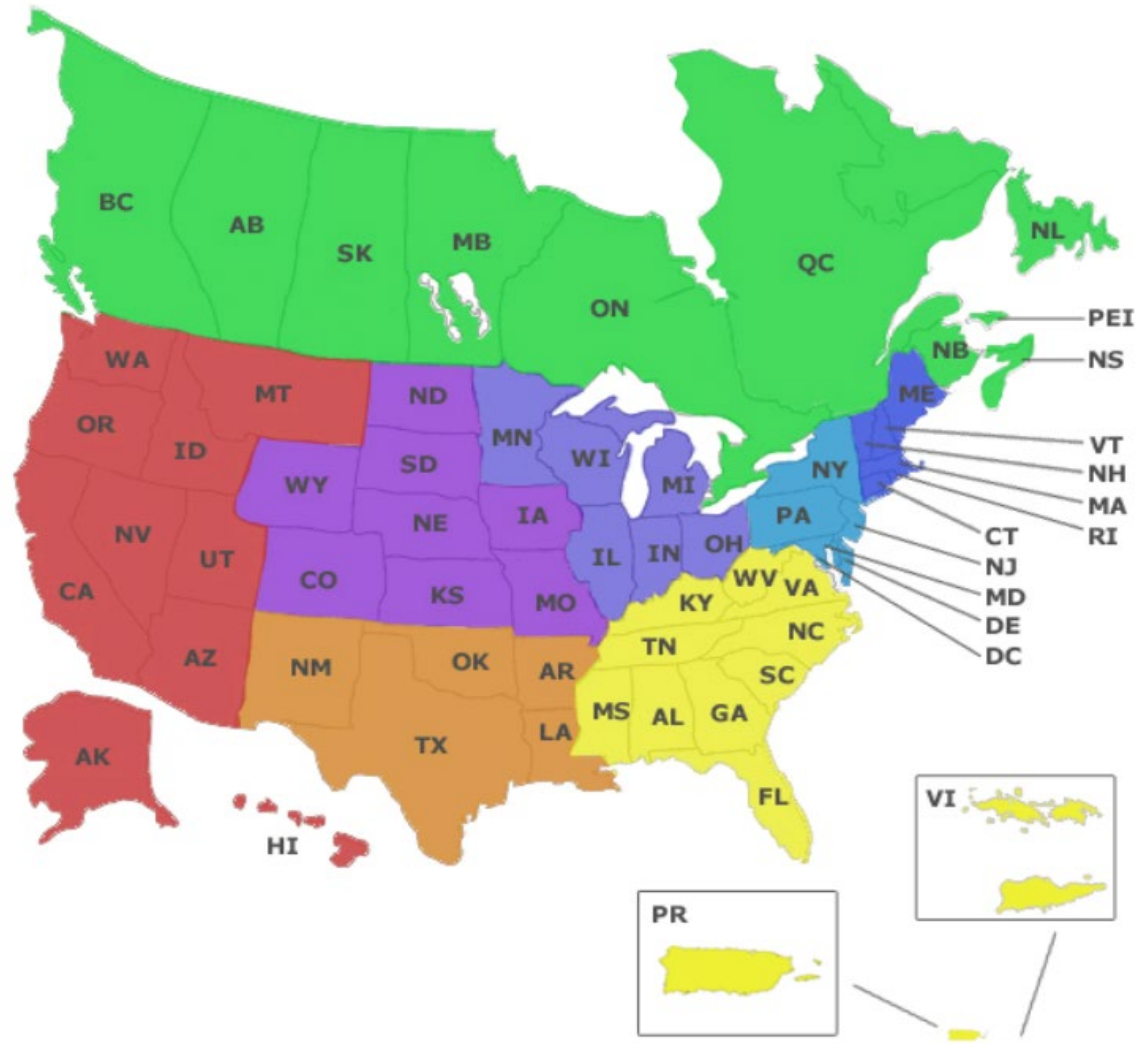
- Discuss project findings
- Current and future resources and suggestions
- Science to the Station: A Health & Wellness Alliance



# Interviews

- Department leaders participated in phone/Zoom interviews
- Included Labor and Management
- Included Health & Wellness personnel
- Focus group format
- Goal: identify best practices and areas for improvement in developing and maintaining wellness/fitness programs

# Interviews



## Completed 28 interviews

- 10 large departments (>600)
- 9 medium departments (200-600)
- 9 small departments (<200)

## IAFC Divisions

- Canadian: 3
- Eastern: 2
- Great Lakes: 2
- Missouri Valley: 1
- New England: 1
- Southeastern: 6
- Southwestern: 4
- Western: 9

# Best Practices

- Strong labor/management relationship
- Embrace a health and wellness champion
- Promote a culture of health and wellness (overall culture change)
- Top-down AND bottom-up (it takes everyone)
- Lessen the stigma surrounding mental health & peer support
- Ensure you have relevant occupational clinicians/resources



# Opportunities for Improvement

- Understaffing, burnout
- Morale and trust
- Strained labor/management relationships
- Space (many depts don't have enough space for gyms)
- Resistance to annual requirements (physical, medical)



# Unique Solutions

- Strong community relationships
  - I.e.: reduced membership fees at local gyms, behavioral health providers, etc.
- Build in things that increase morale
  - I.e.: daily workouts, modest competition (softball), games, etc.
- Engage young firefighters as change agents (they're the future)
- Try new things
  - I.e.: yoga, personal trainer, etc.



# Unique Solutions

- Collaborate with other public safety entities (lessens cost)
- Collaborate with local universities (students can offer a lot for LESS)
- Find occupationally relevant providers





# Join the Science Alliance



**CODE: FRI2022**

<https://science-alliance.org/>





# Dr. Kerry Kuehl | MD DrPH MS

Professor of Medicine Chief Health Promotion & Sports Medicine Medical Director  
Portland Fire & Rescue / Oregon Health & Science University

- Qualitative Interview Methods and Details
- Themes Developed
- Positive Case Study Highlights on Overcoming WFI Challenges
  - Unique strategies from departments overcoming obstacles
  - Finding extraordinary efforts

# At all departments the major themes were both **obstacles** and **facilitators**

- Culture: **57%** and **61%**
- Member Engagement: **58%** and **52%**
- Program Execution: **51%** and **59%**
- Data Collection: **53%** and **52%**
- Access to Funding: **57%** and **57%**

# Case Study Quotes: Culture

- **LA County, CA:** “not fit for duty...fit for life”.
- **Hutto, TX:** “Our department was not wellness focused and our injury costs were increasing due obesity 43% of our members. We had to do something about it.”
- **Evansville, IN:** “Labor-management worked well for first time after two suicides which paved way for other wellness related issues and challenges. Creating a wellness culture begins with strong union and chief leadership working together which also motivates our members.”



# Case Study Quotes: Member Engagement

- **Lacey, WA:** “Getting FF engaged in BH. Went from a dept employee EAP/Psych Counselor (down hall from Chief) to an outside contracted Mental Health specialist, Dr. Jeff so FF have more anonymity and has increased visits dramatically requiring two new MSW staff.”
- **Indianapolis, IN:** “Increased participation when remodeled old station for wellness center (increased trust and rapport working out with other FF’s during prehab and rehab with athletic trainer and PFT’s for injuries.”
- **Tualatin Valley, OR:** “Establishing trust and rapport extremely

# Case Study Quotes: Program Execution

- **LA County, CA:** “Labor and management champions created a WFI Manual of operations customized and unique for LACFD for next generation of wellness leaders.”
- **Cedar Park, TX:** “To address increased mental stress related health issues, instituted a mental health screening assessment as part of physicals.”

# Case Study Quotes: Data Collection

- **Indianapolis, IN:** “We asked for wellness funding and said give us one year to prove it. After year 1, there was a reduction in injury medical and sick leave costs saving one million dollars. We proved wellness was cost effective and had data to prove it. We are data driven but people focused. At the end of every data number is a person....will cost you more if you don't do it. Find the Can in Can't.”
- **Phoenix, AZ:** “Track comprehensive data on injuries and medical illness. We avoided cuts with data that also influenced our cancer and blood draw screenings. We hired Nurse Case manager who follows and facilitates workers comp claims and that has been our biggest cost savings in recent years.”

# Case Study Quotes: Access To Funding

- **UC Davis, CA:** “When looking into WFI, it was overwhelming to accomplish all components because of size and lack of funding. Worked with local resources and got our firefighters access to recreation center on UC Davis campus. Regarding NFPA 1582 physicals, we could not afford Occ Doc but was able to convince one year of funding for the LIFESCAN physical which was much more cost effective and culturally competent and now it is established.”
- **Narragansett, RI:** “Started small with AFG grant for initial funding and built on that. Got involved with university for wellness research and helped get us data to focus our efforts on.”

# 10 Take Home Points

- 1. Create culture: wellness is not optional, it is essential**
- 2. Labor & management: Chief and Champion**
- 3. Start small with needs assessment**
- 4. Utilize local, regional and national resources**
- 5. Innovative PFT program**



# 10 Take Home Points cont.

6. **Mental health and stress related Issues highest priority**
7. **Gather data to document needs and outcomes**
8. **Instill trust and create champions: Invest in next generation**
9. **“Find can in can’t. If you do not do it, know one will”**
10. **IAFF and IAFC must respond with implementation of best practices for WFI 5<sup>th</sup> edition**

# Grady Valencis

Deputy Director, Health & Safety Operational Services  
at International Association of Fire Fighters



# 25 YEARS OF

WFI Implementation

**The WFI continues to be the principal, most comprehensive and inclusive resource to support fire fighter wellness and fitness**

Grounded by a framework, supported with evidence, and continually updated by the world's leading subject matter experts, the WFI offers best-practice guidelines to inform the implementation of wellness-fitness programs by any department.





## NFPA 1582

# Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments

Standard outlines an occupational medical program that will reduce risks and provide for the health, safety and effectiveness of fire fighters operating to protect civilian life and property. Informed by the WFI.

## NFPA 1583

# Standard on Health-Related Fitness Programs for Fire Department Members

Standard outlines a complete health-related fitness program designed for fire departments that is consistent with today's best practices. Reflects the guidelines outlined in the WFI.





# WFI “System”

## A. Defining Wellness

Guidelines to assess well-being (PHYS, PSYC, SOC)

## B. Pursuing Wellness

Programs to target MOVE, EAT, BREATHE, SLEEP, CONNECT

## C. Supporting Wellness

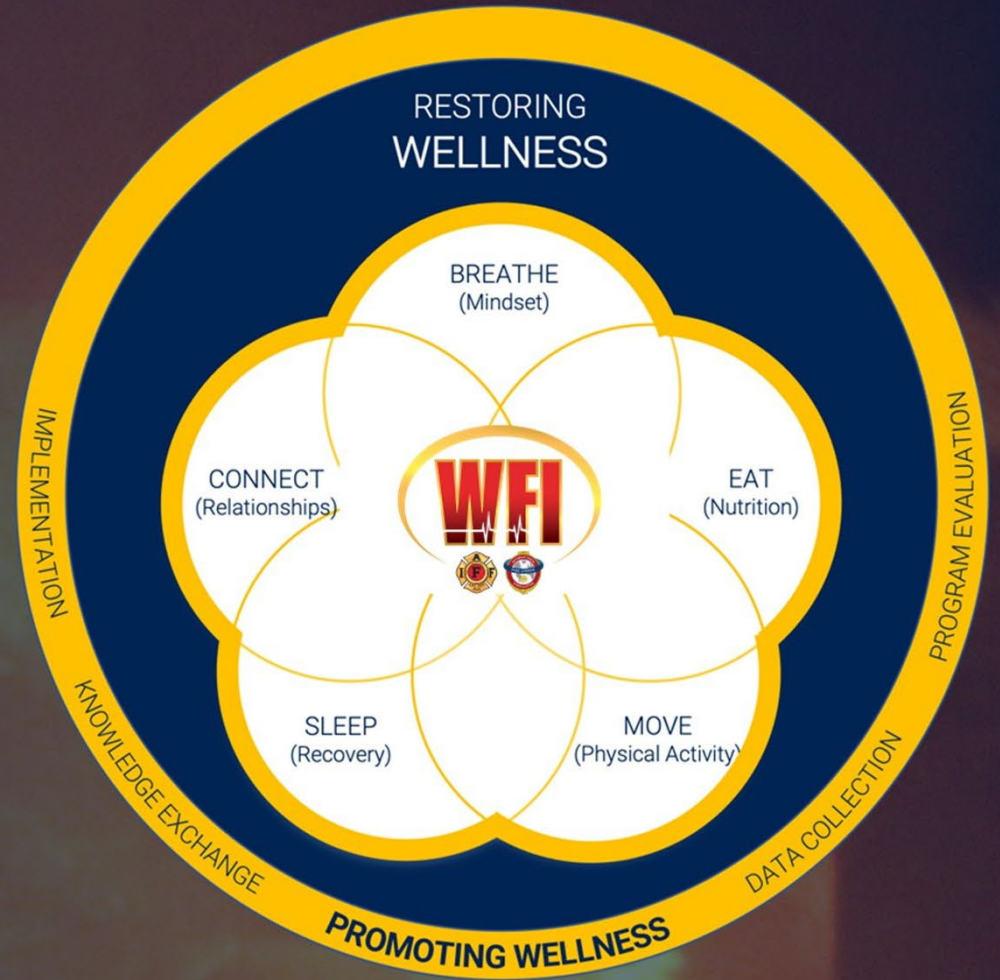
Policies to support well-being (PHYS, PSYC, SOC)

## D. Restoring Wellness

Standards to rehabilitate well-being (PHYS, PSYC, SOC)

## E. Promoting Wellness

Strategies to implement and evaluate programs



A man in a dark t-shirt is walking away from the camera on a paved path in a park. He has a young child with blonde hair sitting on his shoulders. The child is wearing a blue shirt and yellow overalls with a red and grey backpack. Two other young children, girls with braided hair, are walking alongside the man, holding his hands. The background is filled with green trees and a blurred crowd of people in the distance. The overall scene is bright and positive.

# FOR DUTY FOR LIFE

Create programs that target the capabilities, opportunities and motivation to thrive

Share resources to help establish behaviors and routines to maintain a state of well-being

# Contact

## International Fire Service Research Center and Policy Institute



<https://www.iafc.org/about-iafc/international-fire-service-research-center-and-policy-institute>



# Contact



**INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS**

<https://www.iaff.org/wellness-fitness/>



**The Fire Service  
Joint Labor  
Management**

**Wellness-Fitness  
Initiative**



<https://www.iaff.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/WFI-Manual-2022-with-AppendixA-D-WhiteBkCvr.pdf>

**FOURTH EDITION**