

2024-2026

La Crosse Fire Department Strategic Plan



La Crosse Fire Department
1400 La Crosse Street
La Crosse, WI 54601



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Letter from the Chief

Greetings,

The La Crosse Fire Department (LCFD) is a professional all hazards organization that serves the City of La Crosse and Town of Medary, and is a partner to many regional agencies. The LCFD has a rich history of nearly 130 years of service with an emphasis on satisfying community needs and the advancement of professional service delivery. The mission has continually changed and evolved with time, as technological advances, demographic shifts, and fiscal challenges influence how our agency serves the community. The strategic planning process and its final product, this strategic plan document, reflect the importance of using our available resources to identify what goals and objectives need advancement, so that we can continue providing the high level of service that our communities expect and deserve.

Our department's mission statement and core values become just words without the dedicated commitment to processes of continuous improvement. The strategic plan identifies pathways, framed as strategic objectives and initiatives, through which we will solve issues, formulate and improve organized procedures, and leverage the talent of this organization to thrive and to serve. Most of the work for the 2024-2026 strategic plan was completed by a team of individuals who work for the La Crosse Fire Department, representing all ranks and roles. In addition to our members' work, an outside consultant and a volunteer group of external stake holders provided excellent observations and process guidance. The challenges identified and the solutions that the strategic planning team constructed represent the department's commitment to continued excellence.

As you read and reflect on the content of the document, it is my hope that you will see the operational challenges and the capacity of our agency to solve them. The strategic plan for the LCFD is a roadmap for the future, moving forward from a foundation of where we have been and currently are. More important than the work that it represents, are the people who will rise to the challenge of meeting the strategic goals and objectives within the plan. Thank you for taking the time and interest to understand the process of building a better future for those we serve: the citizens and those who visit the greater La Crosse area.

Sincerely,



Jeff Schott, Fire Chief

Executive Summary

The La Crosse Fire Department (LCFD) serves the City of La Crosse and surrounding communities, providing comprehensive emergency response and community risk management services. The department was first founded nearly 130 years ago and continues a tradition of achieving high standards of readiness, training, operational performance, and continuous improvement. This 2024-2026 Strategic Plan was created through a systematic and structured approach, to establish attainable goals and paths for their attainment, in the spirit of providing excellence in all aspects of service to the community and to our response partners.

Situation Summary

The LCFD has an authorized staff of 114 individuals, organized into three primary divisions:

Community Risk Management delivers community education, fire and building safety code compliance, and fire investigations.

Operations is responsible for all hazards response and continuous preparation for emergency services delivered directly to the community.

Training and Professional Standards oversees and ensures all members are current in certifications and have structured training opportunities to maintain all aspects of necessary knowledge and skills. The division also monitors health and safety requirements under guidance from national, state and local standards.

The greatest strategic risks facing the LCFD are future financial resource restrictions that would not enable it to continue providing its current range and coverage of services. Other key risks include potential challenges recruiting adequate numbers of qualified employees. The strategic initiatives formulated by committee work and stakeholders address the practical capacity of the agency to achieve its strategic objectives. The goals are realistic, measurable, and ultimately attainable based on the judgement of departmental leadership and the strategic planning team.

Strategic Initiatives

The following five initiatives are the basis for the goals and objectives that define the plan. The SLOT analysis also contributed to the semi formal assessment of the department's performance and needs.

1. Community Risk Management and Outreach
2. Emergency Response and Operational Capacity
3. Employee Wellness
4. Leadership and Organizational Development
5. Infrastructure and Technology

Each of these initiatives is described in detail in the full strategic plan that follows this Executive Summary.

Introduction

Department leadership engaged personnel across the agency, while also soliciting feedback from multiple external focus groups, to lead a combined strategic planning process. This document is the result of those efforts **The strategic initiatives at the heart of this plan are based on an internal assessment of the strategic status of the LCFD as defined in the various avenues of input.** The highlighted areas below are the guiding principles and focus of the final strategic plan.



Excellence in Service Delivery. This includes LCFD’s readiness and capacity with respect to all aspects of service delivery, to include community risk management, public education efforts, emergency medical service and pre-hospital care, fire suppression, and technical rescue response.

Stewardship of Public Resources. Investments are to be aligned with real benefits to the community, and made in ways that manage costs and benefits, both short and long-term. The LCFD will seek cost-saving collaboration with other La Crosse City departments as well.

Fairness. This includes advancing principles of justice and equity with respect to all stakeholders. Fairness also requires appropriate transparency and accountability in leadership at all levels of the department.

Health and Safety. The Strategic Plan recognizes firefighter safety and wellness as critical values and aims to protect our ultimate asset, our personnel.

Feasible and focused three-year goals and objectives. LCFD recognizes that its departmental priorities must be considered within the broader context of call city departments working with the resources made available to them. Fiscal and human resource challenges create a difficult future landscape to accomplish certain elements of the strategic objectives.

Departmental engagement in the strategic plan and process at all levels (including union leadership and internal subject matter experts). The Fire Chief is ultimately responsible and accountable for the content of this plan, and for leading its implementation. At the same time, effective implementation requires cooperation from multiple stakeholders and, in some instances, from every member of the department. Therefore, the plan itself is informed by broad departmental input.

La Crosse Fire Department Mission and Core Values

As part of this strategic planning process, the current mission statement and core values were evaluated for merit and clarity in the context of the current strategic planning and assessment of agency fitness.

The Strategic Planning Committee reviewed both the Mission Statement and Core Values with guidance from Ethical Leaders is Action Facilitator Chad Weinstein. There was universal agreement that the current Mission Statement and Core Values continue to reflect the true spirit and mission of the department. They shall remain as stated in the 2019 Strategic plan.

Mission Statement

We promote safety, reduce risks, and respond to calls for fire suppression, all-hazard rescue, and emergency medical services.

We earn the community's trust through preparedness, professionalism, and dedication to service.

Core Values

- **Respect** reflects our belief that all persons have equal value and deserve our due attention.
- **Integrity** leads us to honor our commitments and to do what is right.
- **Service** drives us to put the needs of the community first.
- **Excellence** encompasses our professionalism and dedication to continuous improvement of knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Strategic Situation Summary

The La Crosse Fire Department is an all-hazards response organization that provides service to a diverse demographic and its associated infrastructure. Heavy industry, manufacturing, large health care institutions, a technical college, two major universities, and two railroads are laid out in the varied topography of the driftless region of Wisconsin. This topography includes the Mississippi River and other lakes and waterways, bluffs, forestland, and wetlands. Housing is equally diverse, from large historic homes to modern multi-unit housing. The La Crosse Fire Department is equipped and prepared to respond to emergencies in each of these settings and circumstances.

The Fire Department has responded to over 7,000 calls for service in each of the last three years. In addition to emergency response, the department has a Fire Prevention and Building Safety Division that has expanded to address city-wide emergency management, building inspection, fire investigation, and community risk management goals.

The agency has been temporarily operating out of five fire stations until the new station on the north side of La Crosse is complete. The department will then return to operations from four stations. The current arrangement and resources are listed below.

- Station 1: Engine 1, Rescue 1, Hazmat 1, and Boat 1, Reserve Engine
- Station 2: Quint 2, Rescue 2, and Battalion 1.
- Station 3: Quint 3 and Rescue 3, USAR 1, Hazmat 2
- Station 4: Engine 4
- Station 10: Quint 10, Reserve/Tender Engine 10, Boat 2, Boat 3
- Department Administration, Emergency and Community Risk Management, Fire Investigators, and Building Inspection personnel work out of offices at newly opened Station 2.
- The department also manages a Training Site with live burn training facility, classroom, and technical rescue and hazmat training props.



The department provides Emergency Medical Service response department-wide at the Basic Life Support (BLS) EMT-Basic level. Starting in the fourth quarter of 2018, the department engaged in a pilot program to provide Advanced Life Support (ALS) Paramedic level first response service in partnership with Gundersen Health System and Tri-State. That relationship evolved in 2022 to include leased employee arrangement that allows LCFD Paramedics to operate a Tri-State owned ambulance from Station 1. In 2023, that unit responded to just over 1,000 calls for service.

The agency provides specialized technical rescue and emergency services to include:

- **Hazardous Materials (HazMat)** response as a local and State sponsored Type Two Team asset.
- **Urban Search and Rescue (USAR)**, including High- and low-angle rope rescue, confined space rescue, trench and below-grade collapse rescue, and structural collapse rescue.
- **Water and Ice Rescue**, to include water-based search and recovery.
- **Tactical Emergency Medical Services (TEMS)**, delivered in partnership with the La Crosse Police Department and SWAT.



The department is a recognized regional leader in many of these disciplines and has earned a reputation for excellence in all manner of emergency response. This exceptional range of services encompassed in the specialty disciplines requires additional training and funding beyond the adopted operational budget. The State of Wisconsin provides necessary funding to support both the Hazmat and USAR response teams and capabilities.

The department's strengths and limitations are inter-related as the SLOT Analysis shows. The continuous training demands and requirements of emergency services can at times restrict the execution of administrative duties and internal projects. Communication of training priorities can suffer when resource dependent training opportunities are limited. Serving and supporting specialty team services for a regional population of more than 120,000 people strain an operational budget designated for just over 52,000 people.

(SLOT) Strength, Limitations, Opportunities, Threats Analysis

A Core mission of the Strategic Planning Committee is to conduct an analysis of the agency through the acronym (SLOT). The SLOT analysis will consider the department's internal strengths, internal limitations, external opportunities, and external threats, relative to pursuing its mission:

We promote safety, reduce risks, and respond to calls for fire suppression, all-hazards rescue, and emergency medical services.

We earn the community's trust through preparedness, professionalism, and dedication to service.

The SLOT analysis consists of concise descriptions based on information from internal and external stakeholders. The most recent information from the internal survey, external stakeholder meetings, and the consensus of the Strategic Planning Committee discussions is the basis for the following SLOT analysis.



Strengths

- Services
 - The EMS program is excellent and improving.
 - Full range of all-hazard response capabilities, which includes regional leadership in many of these areas.
 - Fire suppression and rescue capabilities are sound.
- People
 - A youthful workforce displays positive energy and an eagerness to learn.
 - Competence is a priority, displayed through job performance and training.
 - There is a solid groundwork for meeting retention and leadership development objectives.
- Attitudes Imbedded in Culture
 - Passion for service and vocational excellence.
 - Commitment to diversity and inclusivity, with some progress made in recruitment consistent with that commitment.
 - Desire to build a welcoming culture, though there is room for improvement in realizing this commitment.

- Workforce wellness and fitness are deep strengths.
 - There is strong buy-in for improved safety practices and mandatory on-duty exercise.
 - Air consumption test results indicate improved fitness.
 - The peer support program is strong.
- Facilities and Equipment
 - Two new stations with remodeling of others.
 - The fleet is updated and meets modern fire service requirements.
 - The equipment is appropriate and well-maintained.



- Community Relationships and Reputation
 - Data and experiences show that LCFD is highly regarded and appreciated as a contributor to safety and quality of life.
 - Investments in community-facing activities and events, from needle pickups to staffing races and festivals, pay dividends in public opinion. This can contribute to political support, as well.
- Professional Reputation
 - Regional leadership in technical rescue fields.
 - Commitment to wellness, which can contribute to recruiting.
 - Opportunities for promotion and to expand skills also contribute to recruiting.

Limitations

- Dependency on Partnerships for Outcomes
 - Fire department culture and mission often reflect a tempo and sense of urgency that is not shared by other city departments. LCFD is sometimes dependent on those departments for input to deliver services.
 - LCFD EMS Service outcomes are dependent on an outside agency for transportation and continuing pre-hospital care after LCFD is involved.
- Communication and Process Development
 - Need to improve multiple communication practices and administrative processes to drive greater efficiency and effectiveness, and to promote employee engagement and continued faith in the department and leadership.

- Culture Development
 - Need improved leadership development and support for promotion and succession.
 - Need to improve culture of performance, including support for those not seeking promotion, encouraging senior firefighters to continue pursuing mastery in their roles.
 - There is an opportunity to focus particular attention to the developmental needs of firefighters in their first five years.
- No room for advancement in CRM roles.
 - This is, in part, a work in progress as new positions will be created.

Opportunities

- Growth in the following relationships with the following response partners and service groups:
 - Health Systems (GHS, MCHS)
 - Higher Education Institutions (UWL, WTC, Viterbo)
 - Viaro Health
 - Firefighters Charitable Foundation
 - Homeless Outreach Team (HOT)
 - La Crosse Police Department
 - IAFF
- Availability of technology, for example for pre-planning and communications. There are many excellent platforms and products available for us.
- Availability of grants to support aspects of operations and growth.



Threats

- Political climate, especially with respect to funding.
 - There is a high per-capita cost for fire/EMS, without transport or other revenue.
 - Recruiting and retention challenges driven by a societal culture that does not encourage public service or the level of commitment required by the firefighting profession.
- Jurisdictional frictions – county/city and mutual aid partners.
- Strategic relationships with some external stakeholders are influenced by historical events and lingering attitudes and beliefs.
- Workforce – availability of good workers and demand for FF jobs.
- Recent economic factors including high inflation and low unemployment have increased salaries and wages for public safety workers. This will directly impact future wage and benefits allowances and inevitably strain appropriated budget perimeters.

Strategic Planning Goals and Objectives

The foregoing analysis established the opportunities for improvement. This section outlines how LCFD will pursue those opportunities, through the pursuit of five Strategic Goals:

1. Enhance Community-wide Risk Reduction and Outreach.
2. Improve Emergency Response and Operational Capacity.
3. Continue to Invest and Improve Mental, Physical, and Behavioral Support for Employees.
4. Improve Leadership and Organizational Development to Enhance Employee Performance and Job Satisfaction.
5. Improve Infrastructure and technology to suit the needs and challenges of department sustainability to provide expectations for service delivery, retention, and efficiency.

We see the **pursuit of each of these strategic goals** as **strategic initiatives**, further organized by subordinate **objectives** and more specific **tasks**. Each objective has an assigned owner and a target for completion (milestone and date). Where appropriate, tasks have also been assigned owners and targets. In all cases, we have chosen to be realistic and transparent in the creation of this plan. Some objectives do not lend themselves to date-specific targets, and some tasks are entirely dependent on funding or other outside factors. In these cases, we have tried to indicate that, both clearly and concisely.

La Crosse Fire Department personnel are very busy, responding to the needs of the community and assuring continuous readiness for emergency response. LCFD remains committed to continuous improvement guided by a thoughtful strategic plan. At the same time, it is important to note that this plan was created by a wide cross-section of the department as an “additional duty,” for which each member volunteered. LCFD does not have staff dedicated to the administration of the strategic plan as a primary duty, nor would such an assignment reflect the best allocation of scarce staff resources. Therefore, the implementation of this strategic plan will likely take longer, and be less evenly completed, than envisioned, despite the best efforts of the strategic planning team to be realistic in this planning. The open-ended nature of some aspects of this plan, and the likelihood of delays in implementation, do not reflect a lack of commitment on the part of LCFD leadership, but the realities facing the department now, and for the foreseeable future.

Goal #1: Enhance community-wide risk reduction and outreach.

Among the best ways that LCFD can protect the community is by empowering community members to protect themselves and prevent emergencies. The adage, “the best fire is the one that never happened,” also applies to medical emergencies and other exigent but preventable circumstances requiring immediate response. LCFD has long been committed to community risk reduction through a variety of means. This first initiative reflects a commitment to continuous improvement in this area, in partnership with many community stakeholders. It also reflects an ongoing commitment to develop the capabilities and refine the organizational structure of the LCFD Community Risk Management Division.

Objective 1.01 Establish a functioning and effective alternative 911 response program for high utilizers and identified at-risk demographic populations by January 2026. This will be achieved through the creation and implementation of a LCFD community EMS program that enhances safety and quality of life for those served, and reduces overall calls for emergency service.

Owners: Division Chief, CRM and EMS Coordinator.

Target: Community EMS program to be fully operational by Dec. 2026.

Tasks:

1.01.01 Perform needs assessment and identify programs/alternative response methods to meet the needs of the La Crosse community through EMS data analysis.

Target: Work conducted May-September, 2024, with a report identifying a course of action due December 2024.

1.01.02 Create functional timeline for acquisition of resources and trained personnel to formulate response plan.

Target: to be determined. Note that current EMD protocols and conventional dispatching through EDC are critical to plan.

1.01.03 Identify and assess partnerships with external stakeholders for collaborative resource sharing and funding.

Target: work conducted May-December 2024, with a plan outline complete April 2025.

1.01.04 Recruit and Identify internal candidates for a community EMS response program.

Target: Work conducted June – December 2025, with a firm roster established, based on needs identified in 1.01.01 March 2026.

1.01.05 Ensure all state and local credentials are established and followed. Includes coordination with local medical direction.

Target: Complete by December 2025

1.01.06 Create localized protocols for the response and treatment of patients served by the program.

Target: Complete by December 2025

Objective 1.02: Overhaul departmental data collection and management.

Owner: Division Chief, CRM
Target: Complete by January 2025.

Tasks:

1.02.01 Define roles and responsibilities of data collection team and determine role that leads team.

Target: Work underway May-June 2024.

1.02.02 Create standardized methods for report writing, data collection, and analysis (CRA data capture)

Target: Work underway June-December 2024, completion June 2025.

1.02.03 Create and implement station dashboards to communicate data updates and department messaging.

Target: Dashboards rolling out January 2025 – April 2025.

Objective 1.03: Find and implement methods of fostering better relationships and collaboration between CRM and emergency response staff. Ongoing throughout length of plan.

Owners: Fire Chief, Battalion Chiefs, and Division Chief CRM
Targets: CRM study complete 12/31/25. Joint training and meetings start in 2025.

Tasks:

1.03.01 Study organizational structure with respect to CRM and Operations; adjust organizational structure and/or roles and job descriptions as necessary.

Target: Identification and change complete February 2025.

1.03.02 Create opportunities for joint training and regular meetings to increase knowledge sharing and collective cohesion on universal goals.

Objective 1.04: Create better customer service and foster better citizen relationships in code enforcement and compliance for building safety and inspection.

Owners: Division Chief CRM and Chief Building Inspector
Target: Training completed by January 1, 2025

Tasks:

1.04.01 Provide customer service training for all new and current employees with a focus of handling difficult service delivery encounters.

1.04.02 Amend or alter current policies and procedures for issuance of corrective orders and citations.

1.04.03 Collaborate with other city departments to streamline the process of updating owner information for all inspectable properties within the jurisdictional boundaries.

Goal #2: Improve Emergency Response and Operational Capacity.

The majority of the department's resources remain dedicated to emergency response, as is appropriate for a fire department. As noted in the situation and SLOT analyses above, LCFD provides an exceedingly wide range of emergency response services, professionally and efficiently. This initiative assures that the department continues to hone and improve its emergency response capabilities.

As is the norm in the modern fire service, LCFD works in concert with other agencies for emergency medical response, and for all-hazard response outside of the City of La Crosse. Therefore, the relationships and capacity to work with these agencies are critical factors in LCFD's emergency response. These relationships and the interoperability with those agencies will be significant areas of strategic effort in the next 3-5 years. Other areas for development include training for wildland firefighting and continuing efforts to seek funding from sources beyond the municipal budget.

Objective 2.01: Engage in joint training initiatives with regional response partners specifically in the areas of Dive Rescue and non-hydrant districts.

Owners: Division Chief Training, special teams leaders

Target: Joint trainings underway by July 1, 2025.

Tasks:

2.01.01 Solicit and organize annual training with neighboring agencies with specific objectives and timelines.

Target: First joint training complete by September 2024.

2.01.02 Establish regular and commonly agreed upon meeting intervals and agendas for the county fire training officer committee.

Target: Schedule of meetings established by July 2024.

Objective 2.02: Find opportunities to help firefighters obtain technical certifications to meet DSPS requirements and diversify skill levels.

Owner: Division Chief, Training

Target: Opportunities identified and being pursued by firefighters by January 2025.

Tasks:

2.02.01 Continue to pursue AFG funding to support DSPS required training for driver operators and officers.

Target: Grant application is submitted and pending.

2.02.02 Increase specialty team membership by integrating more time in the probationary training academy to foster interest among new firefighters.

Target: Academy curriculum now includes introduction to specialty units. Ongoing follow-up with newer firefighters to continue to cultivate interest.

2.02.03 Explore ways to offset extensive overtime costs associated with training requirements. Work with Finance Department to adjust labor-related budgeting.

Target: 2025 Budget process reflects improved understanding between Fire and Finance Departments.

Objective 2.03: Continue to pursue strategic partnerships with Gundersen Health System to increase levels of service delivery and potential revenue sharing.

Owner: Fire Chief

Target: No end date established for this objective.

Task:

2.03.01 Establish a comprehensive service agreement that reflects a partnership with GHS to govern EMS services delivered by GHS and LCFD.

Target: Contract proposed by LCFD by September 2024. Executed December 2024.

Objective 2.04: Revisit effectiveness of auto and mutual aid agreements in the context of La Crosse County.

Owner: Fire Chief

Target: Review completed by July 1, 2024.

Tasks:

2.04.01 Research and explore the opportunities for closest unit dispatching and impact on current aid agreements with neighboring departments.

Target: Signed Memorandum of Understanding with one adjacent agency by January 2025.

2.04.02 Engage neighboring departments and external stakeholders to review municipal boundaries to find advantages for future auto aid agreements for working incidents.

Target: Expanded auto aid agreements by December 2025.

Objective 2.05: Improve wild land and urban interface firefighting skills and tactics.

Owners: Assistant Chief, Division Chief Training

Target: Efforts launched by January 1, 2026.

Tasks:

2.05.01 Use existing DNR Wildland educational offerings and outreach to training for line and command staff to receive certifications and gain knowledge.

Target: LCFD personnel trained to level available through DNR. Current and ongoing.

2.05.02 Advance pre-planning for potentially high-risk wild land areas including the marsh lands and non-hydrant areas.

Target: all pre-plans complete by August 2024.

Objective 2.06: Continue to find alternative fundings sources and potential revenue streams to augment the recent funding cuts to the department.

Owner: Fire Chief

Target: Immediate action with no end date to completion.

Tasks:

2.06.01 Search for state and federal grant dollars to augment both training requirements and response for Emergency Medical Services. (State of Wisconsin Act 12 Innovation Grant and Federal Assistance to Firefighters Grant)

Target: Continued tracking and pursuit of grant opportunities (ongoing)

2.06.02 Engage local political representation to further initiate additional funding for Wisconsin Emergency Management Specialty Teams. (Hazmat and Urban Search and Rescue Teams)

Target: Conversations with Mayor are underway and will lead to additional engagement with elected officials.

Goal #3 Continue to invest and improve mental, physical, and behavioral support for employees.

People are the most important assets of the LCFD; emergency response in particular places significant stresses on people. Fortunately, the firefighting profession has advanced in its capacity to care for the overall wellness of emergency responders. This initiative assures that LCFD increasingly implements best practices with respect to supporting the fitness and wellness of its employees.

As the title of this goal implies, wellness and fitness include physical, mental, and behavioral health. To a great extent, individuals must take responsibility for all aspects of their own wellness. At the same time, LCFD must provide the resources, education, and other supports to assure that the department is doing its part to support individuals' commitments and efforts. This initiative seeks to engage the right service providers and services to support employees for physical and mental/behavioral health, as well as enhancing support for the department's successful peer support network.

Objective 3.01: Develop relationships with local mental health care providers that can bring services and educational opportunities to employees. This could include a specific person or persons that recognize specialized needs of first responders.

Owners: Fire Chief with leadership delegated to a committee.

Target: Ongoing goal through length of plan.

Tasks:

3.01.01 Establish voluntary opportunities for an individual mental health check ins performed by a licensed mental health professional.

Target: Partnership with provider in place and program underway by January 2026

3.01.02 Explore funding opportunities for the Peer Support Team to provide initial and ongoing training for team members.

Target: Budget line proposed in 2025 budget.

Objective 3.02: Implement annual or semiannual department mental health training.

Owners: Fire Chief, delegated to committee

Target: At least annual training completed in 2024

Task:

3.02.01 Create curriculum and objective educational goals for a robust department wide mental health training.

Objective 3.03 Continue to invest and improve support for employee fitness and physical wellness.

Owners: Fitness Committee and Fire Chief

Target: Many efforts are ongoing. Substantive program in place by July 1, 2025.

Tasks:

3.03.01 Establish the funding and job scope of a non-sworn athletic trainer to oversee and advise on physical fitness programming and athletic treatments. May be a part of a broader health and wellness service contract.

Target: Budget proposal made for 2025. If approved, trainer hired by April 2025. If not, review and attempt for 2026.

3.03.02 Provide annual physical examinations efficiently. New provider will be required.

Target: Annual agreement in place until multi-year agreement can be established.

Goal #4 Improve leadership and organizational development to enhance employee performance and job satisfaction.

The LCFD has long sustained a commitment to excellent leadership, which includes effective communication at all levels of the organization. Internal stakeholders have noted both strengths and improvements; they have also noted areas where additional improvement is necessary. This initiative will engage leaders at all levels and in all areas of the LCFD to improve communication, build leadership capacity, and improve processes that support performance and staff engagement.

Specific efforts will be dedicated to improving organizational communication up and down the chain of command, and the clarification and documentation of expectations for promotion to each rank and role in the department. The Community Risk Management Division will be a particular area of focus, implementing two positions that provide for professional and career development among the building officials. This has long been identified as an opportunity for improvement.

Objective 4.01 Define and implement more effective communication strategies between management and staff by October 1st, 2024.

Owners: Battalion Chiefs and Division Chiefs

Target: Improved processes in place by October 2024

Tasks:

4.01.01 Conduct a needs assessment to determine where communication tools, processes, and practices should be improved and define measurable criteria for improvement. This assessment should include input from all interested employees, at all levels. The outcome will be a prioritized plan for improving internal communication.

Target: assessment complete by July 1, 2024.

4.01.02 Implement improvements in day-to-day information sharing tools and processes. This is execution of relevant aspects of the plan defined in 4.01.01.

Target: Complete by October 1, 2024

4.01.03 Develop a structured feedback process for employees to share needs and opportunities for improvements (e.g., electronic suggestion boxes or surveys).

Target: Complete by October 1, 2024

4.01.04 Develop a structured procedure and planned employee recognition and promotional events. Employee recognition should include nomination processes and committees to determine awards, in different categories that include all bureaus.

Target: Implemented February 1, 2025.

Objective 4.02: Improve leadership educational opportunities and outline clear pathways for promotional advancement in both CRM and suppression employees.

Owners: Division Chiefs

Target: Complete by February 28, 2025

Tasks:

4.02.01 Write and implement task books to define expectations and track preparation/training for all levels of advancement. Included categories would be Engineer, Lieutenant, Captain, Chief Officer, and specialty team certifications. Establish that task book completion is a requirement for promotion.

4.02.02 Develop and coordinate the structured delivery of academies, training, and outside educational opportunities to exercise the task book expectations for the respective positions mentioned in 4.02.01. Establish informal mentorship opportunities to support those preparing for promotion.

4.02.03 Develop career advancement and professional development opportunities in the CRM Safety Bureau. Create a new mid-level manager position and an Inspector Three level with certification.

4.02.04 Identify and compile improved educational resources for CRM professionals, aligned with continued certification and professional development. Engage all employees in considering these opportunities for their growth. This is not focused on promotion, but on developing knowledge and skills.

Goal #5 Improve infrastructure and technology to suit the needs and challenges of department sustainability to provide expectations for service delivery, retention, and efficiency.

The final goal of this strategic plan seeks additional efficiency and incremental increases in capability through technological enhancements. The Department has already made considerable investments in two new stations, with remodeling efforts of others underway. Those efforts will continue at Station 3 and at the training tower. LCFD will also improve its information technology, through better implementation and integration of existing software tools.

Objective 5.01: Remodel or revise station three to meet satisfactory response and gender equitable spaces.

Owner: Fire Chief
Target: Remodeling complete by July 1st, 2026.

Tasks:

5.01.01 Obtain current needs assessment of existing Station Three to assist with renovation plans.

Target: Needs assessment complete December 2024.

5.01.02 Seek contractors that can design appropriate renovation plans to meet the needs assessment and obtain cost estimates.

Target: Completion June 2025, based on funding allocation.

5.01.03 Secure funding for renovation through via the Capital Improvement process and map out timeline for project start and contingency response operations planning.

Target: June 2025

Objective 5.02 Identify improvements needed at the training tower to increase safety, replace existing props, and replace search maze.

Owner: Division Chief, Training
Target: Complete by November 30, 2024

Tasks:

5.02.01 Update current list of needs and accessible funding to begin planning for improvements.

5.02.02 Seek capital funding to augment already allocated funds to complete improvements.

5.02.03 Establish timeline and project priority completion dates with acquired funding.

Objective 5.03: Strengthen fleet and facilities programs and management capabilities.

Owners: Fire Chief and Facilities Maintenance
Target: Complete by January 1, 2025.

Tasks:

5.03.01 Investigate improved methods for maintenance requests and vehicle service records.

5.03.02 Secure funding and buyout current fleet of leased vehicles to save money and offer flexibility for fleet use.

5.03.03 Formalize standard procedures to ensure preventive maintenance is completed within recommended intervals.

5.03.04 Create standardized procedures, templates, or contacts for solving mechanical issues encountered when maintenance personnel are unavailable.

Objective 5.04: Maximize ImageTrend and Energov capabilities for improved data analysis and efficiency.

Owners: Division Chief, CRM and Accreditation Team

Target: Rollout complete by June 2025

Tasks:

5.04.01 Assess the areas of preplanning, staffing, inspections, and incident reporting to assure that the capabilities listed in the objective are performing to meet agency needs.

Target: Assessment is complete.

5.04.02 Implement changes through software configuration, and additional software development if necessary. Use independent contractors for configuration and/or development.

Target: Completion of software configuration December 2024. Gaps in development identified February 2025. Contractors engaged based on budget availability April 2025.

5.04.03 Roll out upgraded system with phased user training.

Goals and Objectives Conclusion

The goals and objectives stated are the creation of the Strategic Planning Committee and LCFD administration, based on direct external stake holder input and internal stakeholder department surveys. Without the efforts of all who participated, the future initiatives – the plans to achieve the above strategic goals - would not exist and, and the department would have not formal means of organizing its efforts to improve in service to the community. LCFD Leadership accepts responsibility for implementing the above initiatives in pursuit of their respective goals.

Following the completion and acceptance of the document through Strategic Planning Committee review, La Crosse City Council formal approval, and accreditation formal assessment, the tangible work will begin and continue throughout the time of the plan. Specific staff will be designated and empowered to accomplish the objectives within in goal.

Measuring the results of each goal and respective objectives will be quantified in an annual strategic planning meeting, and regular reports and monthly administrative staff meetings.

Some of the set timelines are purposely broad, as some of the goals are dependent on exploring data and financial opportunities to accomplish specific objectives. In reference to the last strategic plan, it was noted the 2019 Strategic Plan was quite detailed and contained a quantitative commitment that in some cases superseded the intended quality result of the original initiative. The current format was constructed to target a broad goal with narrowed objectives, followed by specific task requirements. It was the hope of the committee and the Fire Chief that the updated format could better suit the needs of the departments structure and workflow processes.



Appendix: Strategic Planning Process Overview

The strategic plan was undertaken by the La Crosse Fire Department and led by a Strategic Planning Working Committee of volunteer participants representing all facets of the department, and a reasonable cross-section of the employee base (long- and shorter-tenured employees, different disciplines and ranks, etc.).

Strategic Planning Working Committee Members:

- Grace Babb, Community Risk Program Specialist and LTE
- Aaron Bolstad, Division Chief of Training
- Renee Christensen, Lieutenant of Community Risk Management
- David Duchrow, Captain
- Brandon Gritt, Captain of Training/Local 127 President
- Jon Kochie, Captain
- Mike Larson, Engineer
- Adam Markert, Captain
- Steven McCauley, Firefighter/Assistant Mechanic
- Molly McCormick, Community Risk Educator
- Dominick Mellick, Engineer
- Jeff Murphy, Assistant Fire Chief
- Blane Neher, Battalion Chief
- David Reinhart, Chief Building Inspector
- Craig Scheel, Engineer
- Jeff Schott, Fire Chief
- Erin Statz, Engineer
- Mike Suntken, Building Inspector
- Lance Tryggestad, Battalion Chief
- Bee Xiong, Division Chief of Community Risk Management
- Isaac Zurawski, Accreditation Manager/Lieutenant

The Committee met in facilitated sessions first to frame, and then to develop and refine the strategic plan through multiple versions. In between working sessions, individuals with relevant expertise and/or interests worked to confirm elements of the strategic situation assessment and SLOT analysis, and to propose and articulate objectives and tasks to meet the strategic goals that form the heart of the plan.

Key inputs to the strategic plan included:

- Critical assessment of progress and learning from the most recent strategic plan.
- Multiple focus groups comprised of external stakeholders.
- Individual interviews with department leaders.
- An online questionnaire answered by nearly all department members.
- Two working sessions with the above-described working committee.
- Ad hoc revision.
- Review of CPSE accreditation process expectations.

Chief officers participated in the planning process yet encouraged all participants to speak up. The facilitator was likewise instructed to ensure that all voices were heard and brought exercises that elicited input from all participants. Finally, all those accountable as owners of objectives or tasks, confirmed their commitment and capacity to accomplish what has been assigned to them, within the normal constraints facing the department overall.

Other Contributors:

The Center for Public Safety Excellence and the Commission on Fire Accreditation International provided training and professional standards that guided this process.

Chad Weinstein of Ethical Leaders in Action, Inc. facilitated internal and external working sessions, organized the SLOT analysis, constructed the basic outline of the objectives, and worked with department leaders to draft this plan document.