

SERVING ALACHUA COUNTY
24 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK

ALACHUA COUNTY FIRE RESCUE

Operational Performance Audit
Executive Summary

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgment	3
Scope of Work	4
Strengths	6
Staffing and Vacancies	8
Key Recommendations	10
Conclusion	12

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Mauldin & Jenkins (M&J) commends the leadership of Alachua County and Alachua County Fire Rescue (ACFR) for commencing this Operational Performance Audit, as the process has been in-depth and brought to light the numerous positive accomplishments of ACFR as well as opportunities for enhancement.



Alachua County Fire Rescue is a value-driven organization dedicated to responsive, respectful and courteous customer service.

M&J would like to thank ACFR departmental leadership for setting a positive tone at the top for this Operational Performance Audit.

The Department graciously made staff at all levels available to the M&J assessment team, provided countless data points and pieces of information, and toured the assessment team through numerous locations, from stations to the warehouse to the headquarters and more.

ACFR leadership was consistently engaged throughout the process and helped facilitate a smooth assessment for the M&J Team.

This Operational Performance Audit assessed the current state of ACFR's operations and performance between January 11, 2023 and June 1, 2023. M&J recognized that certain elements of service delivery have changed since the culmination of the assessment period, such

as the addition of fire protection service delivery in Micanopy.

To provide context for this Operational Performance Audit, ACFR manages a \$40 million annual budget. The Department's mission and vision statements reflect that ACFR is a diverse group of public servants dedicated to providing emergency and non-emergency services through excellent customer service to the residents and visitors of Alachua County. ACFR consists of five sections:

- Finance and Accounting,
- Revenue and Collections,
- Fire Rescue Operations,
- Emergency Management, and
- 911 Services and Addressing.

COMMITTED TO A
"WHATEVER IT TAKES" MENTALITY
IN PROVIDING THE SERVICES
COUNTY RESIDENTS NEED.

Alachua County Fire Rescue employs approximately 300 personnel. ACFR serves approximately 270,000 residents and visitors in an area covering 962 square miles.

SCOPE OF WORK

Alachua County engaged Mauldin & Jenkins, in partnership with Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI), to perform an objective Operational Performance Audit of the Alachua County Fire Rescue Department.



The Operational Performance Audit focused on operational efficiency and effectiveness, recommendations for reduced risk and liability, and actionable plans to enhance operations and management where noted.

The Operational Performance Audit also identified areas in which the Department is a leader in the community and in the fire rescue industry.

The Operational Performance Audit conducted a review of 10 service areas' compliance, staffing and personnel management including diversity and recruitments, as well as management and administration.

The ten service areas included:

- Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
- Fire Protection
- Fire Prevention
- Training Bureau and Health & Safety
- Facilities
- Equipment/Vehicles
- Information and Technology Office
- Central Supply and Inventory Management Office
- Emergency Management
- Enhanced 911/ Communications



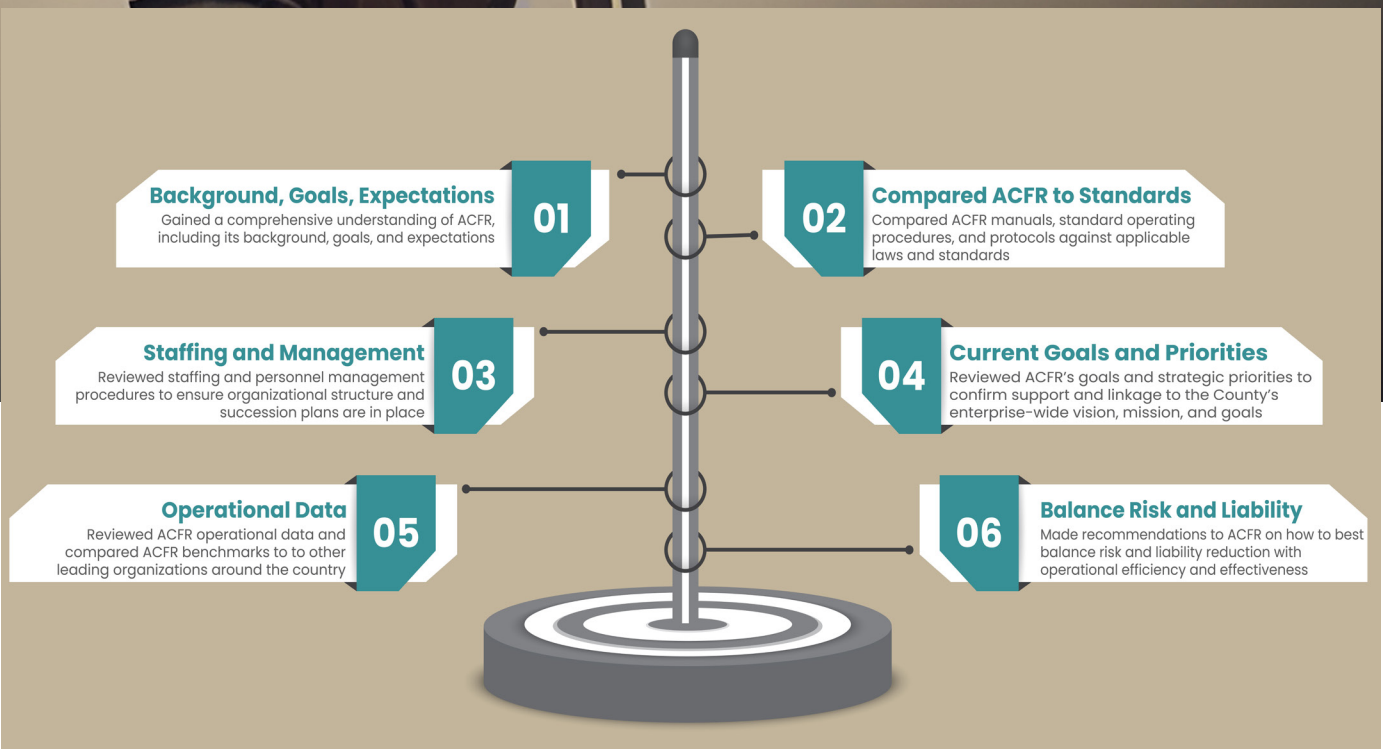
Assessed the current state from
January 11, 2023 to June 1, 2023

6

OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE AUDIT OBJECTIVES



The Operational Performance Audit Objectives are as follows:



STRENGTHS

The following key strengths are representative of ACFR's leading practices identified through the Operational Performance Audit:

1. Staff are dedicated to serving the Alachua County community and providing a high degree of care to the County's residents and visitors. Staff at all levels are passionate about ACFR's work and mission, and staff support each other through both formal peer support services and informal ad hoc interactions.
2. ACFR is an industry leader in providing emergency medical services to the community, with top-quality resources and initiatives such as ambulance accreditation, hydraulic stretcher lifts in every rescue unit, and partnerships with local medical facilities, resulting in a high level of patient care.





**DEDICATED
STAFF**



**EMS INDUSTRY
LEADER**



**CAREER
OPPORTUNITIES**



3. ACFR provides staff with continuous opportunities for learning and advancement, with emphasis on paramedic licensure, technical rescue certification, and promotional opportunities. The Department recently combined field personnel's two possible promotional paths into a single ladder for promotion – thereby providing a clear process and pathway for promotion, more opportunities for cross-training, and a wider understanding of operations for field personnel.
4. ACFR maintains strong relationships with numerous community partners, ranging from local medical facilities and fire departments to the firefighter union and other Alachua County departments. These relationships allow ACFR to perform at a high level and ensure consistent care is delivered throughout the County.
5. ACFR makes effective use of many of the Department's software platforms and advanced technologies. The transparency and flexibility of Telestaff helps to ensure that staff have the opportunity to pick up overtime if desired and minimizes the amount of mandatory overtime that has to be assigned. The unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) program, operated by the ACFR IT Office, provides the Department and the County with a number of abilities that could not reasonably be provided without UAS technology.
6. Changes to hiring and staffing practices have improved recruitment and minimize the amount of mandated overtime assigned to field personnel. Removing the requirement that all new hires be dual certified as both a firefighter and an EMT/paramedic has widened the universe of candidates, and the introduction of Kelly Days is aimed at preventing burnout and overworking among personnel.



**Clear processes and
pathways for promotion.**

Opportunities for cross-training
and an increased understanding
of operations



**ACFR MAINTAINS STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH
NUMEROUS COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

STAFFING AND VACANCIES

Observations are based on staffing data received from ACFR as of December 31, 2022.



STAFF VACANCIES

ACFR had 57 vacant positions, 55 of which were in the Fire Rescue Operations Section.



FIREFIGHTERS

Nearly half of the budgeted Firefighter positions were either vacant or occupied by trainee-status employees.



WORKLOAD

Key roles performed by fewer staff in ACFR than in comparative departments, ranging from District Chiefs to training personnel to IT staff

INTERNAL & EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECT STAFFING, RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

Many issues addressed in this report can be attributed, at least partially, to staffing levels during the assessment period.

{24/7}

365 DAYS A YEAR



FACTORS AFFECTING ACFR'S STAFFING AND VACANCIES

External factors ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to industry trends have contributed to staffing vacancies.

As a whole, the fire rescue industry has experienced ongoing staffing shortages. Other fire and rescue organizations have shifted recruiting or are shifting staffing models to maintain service delivery standards.

ACFR has introduced Kelly Days, focused recruiting efforts on local high schools, eliminated dual-certificate requirements for new hires, and actively explored other leading practices to address staffing levels.



**GOING
FURTHER**

As vacancies decrease, ACFR should be better prepared to address the root causes of issues identified during the Operational performance Audit.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In the course of fieldwork, the M&J Team identified several themes and trends that were represented in one or more of the Department's key services. Some recommendations require resolution at a more localized level, while others reflect issues or opportunities that may exist at the enterprise level, requiring more holistic solutions. The following key recommendations are a few of the more than 90 recommendations provided for all in-scope services.

1 OVERALL ACFR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ACFR leadership should regularly review the resources allocated to each service offered by the Department (EMS, fire protection, fire prevention, training, etc.) and ensure the resources allocated are meeting the needs of the personnel conducting those services. New systems and resources should meet the needs of all services and not hinder one service while providing benefit to another.
- The current span of control and square mileage within the Department's two incident response districts has resulted in District Chiefs' response times averaging higher than the industry standard of 8 minutes. ACFR should consider establishing a third district and third 24-hour District Chief position (recognizing this will require three new

full-time employees) to ensure field leadership can continue to meet the needs of the Department and the County.

- ACFR should develop a succession planning process for each position above the Lieutenant rank.
- ACFR should utilize industry resources to develop and organize its policies and procedures, provide processes for instruction, and regular review of all policies and procedures.

2 EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

- ACFR has implemented a volunteer-based Community Health Team (CHT) operating under a limited scope without funding. ACFR and County leadership should evaluate how the CHT is currently being utilized and determine how the Department wants to use

the CHT to address changing needs in the community.

- ACFR leadership should perform an annual cost-benefit analysis of community paramedicine programs (including Tele911, the CHT, and other alternatives to traditional EMS response) to regularly measure effectiveness and efficiency of each program.
- ACFR should consider providing critical care rescue units (peak load units, who only provide emergency medical services, not fire protection services, and therefore do not have turnout gear) with PPE, such as a protective jumpsuit, that protects staff in the event a critical care rescue unit has to serve as first responders to a vehicle accident.



3 FIRE PROTECTION

- ACFR should designate an incident safety officer where personnel are working in a situation that presents immediate danger to life or health ACFR should consider the addition of a shift incident safety officer or designating a specific member of each shift to function as the incident safety officer. Currently, on most emergency incidents, there is no designated incident safety officer.
- ACFR should conduct regularly scheduled reviews of all health and safety-related policies and practices to ensure the Department is meeting leading practices. Department leadership should ensure all policies are up-to-date and complete, and practices are meeting set policies.
- ACFR should research whether grant opportunities exist for the purchase of backup turnout gear for frontline employees. ACFR and County leadership should develop budgets that add more backup gear annually to increase ACFR's inventory over the next five to 10 years.
- ACFR should host and participate in regular interdepartmental, inter-agency training with local and regional contracted fire rescue services and local and regional non-fire rescue departments, such as law enforcement agencies.
- ACFR should work with local municipalities to streamline the architectural drawing review process and develop formal procedures for reviewing architectural drawings for compliance with the Florida Fire Prevention Code. ACFR should consider creating job aid documents which will help ensure Fire Prevention Officers conduct reviews thoroughly and in a consistent manner. Procedures and references should be digitized for ease of access and retention.
- ACFR should consider obtaining a service or tool that can create complete transcriptions of recorded interviews with witnesses and employees undergoing internal affairs investigations.
- Similar to Fire Protection, ACFR Fire Prevention should research whether grant opportunities exist for the purchase of backup turnout gear for frontline employees.

4 FIRE PREVENTION

- ACFR should implement a formal succession plan for the Fire Marshal position.

CONCLUSION

M&J strongly encourage the County and ACFR to maintain dedicated resources focused in the implementation of the recommendations contained in this Operational Performance Audit Report.

The purpose of the Mauldin & Jenkins Operational Performance Audit was to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the Fire Rescue Department within the assessment period of January 11, 2023 through June 1, 2023. M&J recognizes subsequent changes, including filling certain vacancies, will help address some of the issues raised by the Audit. M&J further recognizes the Department intends to conduct an update of its Master Plan. M&J encourages ACFR to undergo the Master Plan update, as the planning process and results will help address concerns regarding response times, station placements, and will further validate identified areas for improvement in the Operational Performance Audit Report.

Once again, Mauldin & Jenkins commends Alachua County for undertaking this important strategic initiative and encourages stakeholders to review the full report for complete context and a strategic road map to help the County and the Department prioritize and implement changes to maintain the high quality service delivery the Department provides to the Alachua County community.



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The purpose of the M&J Operational Performance Audit was to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of ACFR.



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