

CITY OF NANAIMO

BUSINESS CASE - Nanaimo Fire Rescue: Manager, Vancouver Island Emergency Response Academy (VIERA)

CURRENT OVERVIEW

Nanaimo Fire Rescue (NFR) operates VIERA to reduce the cost of required training for Nanaimo Firefighters and to offset the cost of the NFR operating budget. From 2018-2020, VIERA offset the cost of NFR operations by \$118,447, \$207,663, and \$209,941, respectively. All management of VIERA has been the responsibility of the NFR Assistant Chief (AC) of Education and Training with the assistance of external management consulting services, an Administrative Assistant, and Fire Clerk who provide administrative support, customer service, and student registration. Management consulting services were \$93,188 in 2020, however wage costs for the AC of Education and Training, Administrative Assistant, and Fire Clerk positions are not charged to VIERA and are not reflected in the figures above. In addition, as part of the FireComm transition, one member was reassigned as a Fire Training Technician to split time between VIERA and Fire Training resulting in an annual wage increase including benefits of \$57,390 to VIERA commencing in 2021.

As part of the VIERA management duties, the Assistant Chief of Education and Training is responsible for maintaining, updating, and safeguarding the industry accreditation as granted to the academy by the Pro Board. The Pro Board is an agency that accredits international public sector organizations whom certify emergency service responders with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Professional Qualifications. VIERA is one of 75 Pro Board accredited academies in the world, and 1 of 3 in British Columbia. It is accredited to deliver 14 programs that meet the NFPA standards, 2 programs that meet the Provincial Emergency Medical Assistants Licensing Board (EMALB) requirements, as well as 4 other programs used by the fire service. However, VIERA is currently only delivering 10 of the 20 programs it is accredited to offer due to a lack of organizational capacity. Please see the Appendix for examples of course deliver opportunities.

Additional VIERA responsibilities for the Assistant Chief include:

- Planning and managing annual academy schedule of courses
- Marketing and selling VIERA programs to meet annual revenue projections
- Maintaining and updating curriculum for catalogue of courses
- Resourcing fire and medical course equipment
- Preparing and administering the VIERA budget
- Recruiting, scheduling, and managing subject-matter instructors and evaluators
- Liaising with and supporting fire department clients using VIERA training programs
- Executing quotes and agreements for fire departments requesting VIERA programs

As well as managing VIERA, the Assistant Chief of Education and Training is responsible for the development, implementation, and coordination of the NFR Firefighter, Fire Officer, Inspector, and Investigator training programs. This is to ensure that statutory requirements of the Workers' Compensation Act are met and that all staff have the knowledge, skills, and attributes required to meet the job performance requirements for all calls for service.

The City's training program is currently run by 1.5 staff members, the AC of Education and Training, and a Fire Training Technician who dedicates half their time to NFR training. This is low in comparison to other similar sized departments let alone the workload for the AC of Education and Training to additionally run VIERA.



Responsibilities for the Assistant Chief unrelated to VIERA include:

- Evaluating training needs and creating participatory planning, setting goals and objectives
- Being a spokesperson for the training program
- Managing the Training Centre and other training physical resources
- Preparing and overseeing the annual operating budget for the training program
- Maintaining storage and security of the Fire Department training records system
- Conducting quarterly performance evaluations
- Evaluating the training program effectiveness
- Coordinating, training, and managing internal specialty instructors

Committed to the tag line “serving the people who serve”, VIERA is becoming known as a provider dedicated to customer service. In recent years, the demand for VIERA programs has increased. For example, VIERA programming has been used by 122 departments in 2021 to date increasing from 65 departments in 2018. Volunteer fire departments are subject to high turnover rates requiring them to have a training provider that can continually train and certify volunteers. In addition, higher demand is being experienced as VIERA has transitioned to delivering more programs online. This decreases the cost for fire departments by eliminating travel expenses and allows VIERA to increase the class size. For example, where approximately 12-16 were permitted in one face-to-face offering of the NFPA 1021 Fire Officer 1 program, the new online format allows for an unlimited number of students to enroll in one course. In January 2021, 67 students registered for and completed the program.

BUSINESS ISSUE

The increase in business from VIERA, combined with the requirements of the NFR training division, has created a workload that exceeds existing capacity.

Impact on VIERA:

- Inability to provide adequate management oversight for the 175 NFPA 1001 Firefighter Evaluators in the 85 fire departments. The Pro Board provides strict guidelines that must be followed by

evaluators and ongoing communication and accountability is required to ensure the standard of evaluations is upheld.

- Inability to provide timely updates, as required, to the curriculum to stay current.
- Inability to recruit and adequately develop and manage VIERA Instructors for each discipline. The increased demand for programs has led to an increased need for instructors. In order to uphold VIERA's reputation for quality programs, instructor management is necessary to create a strong team that can represent the programs.
- Inability to respond in a timely way to increase in email and phone communication from fire department and requests for information.
- Inability to act on new opportunities the market presents. Fire departments that use a training provider for one program often want to stay with that provider for other required programs and VIERA has had to limit the course offerings available by declining requests for courses.
- Inability to provide appropriate testing statistical analysis required by the Pro Board. This is required to be conducted on exams delivered by VIERA.

Impact on NFR training division:

- Inability to provide timely updates, as required, to the curriculum to stay current.
- Inability to provide adequate management oversight during training sessions.
- Inability to adequately support development of department instructors in each discipline.
- Inability to develop additional program needs as required, for example, cold water rescue and officer mentorship.
- Inability to adequately manage training tracking and accountability.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

The addition of a new VIERA Manager position is anticipated to:

Increase VIERA's capacity to:

- Manage oversight of VIERA Evaluators
- Manage updates to course curricula as required
- Recruit, develop and manage VIERA Instructors
- Meet the current needs of fire department clients
- Capitalize on revenue-generating opportunities
- Provide appropriate statistical analysis of exams

Furthermore, it will allow the AC of Education and Training to focus on:

- Timely updates to the required NFR curricula
- Providing adequate management oversight during NFR training sessions
- Supporting development of NFR department instructors
- Developing new program needs.
- Ensuring the NFR training program receives the focus required to oversee required staff training
- Managing NFR training tracking and accountability

OPTIONS:

OPTION #1 – Add a VIERA Manager

Create a permanent full-time VIERA Manager reporting to Deputy Chief – Administration in Fire Rescue Department and increase course offerings.

Benefits:

- Ability to support current and additional fire department clients
- Ability to manage VIERA evaluators and instructors
- Ability to offset cost of NFR operations through new programming
- Ability for the Assistant Chief of Education and Training to focus on NFR staff development requirements

Weaknesses:

- Expanded course offerings commits NFR to resourcing themselves as a training provider which is over and above core services.

Financial Analysis:

- The position is anticipated to be a level 6 with an annual salary of \$119,500 plus benefits. 2022 budget impact including benefits is estimated at \$138,200 assuming a February 1st start date.
- One-time costs upon the creation of the position are projected at \$2,500 for the purchase of a desk phone, computer, and cell phone. The department has a workstation available for the position.
- The anticipated impact to 2022 is net revenues of \$102,350 which includes savings of \$66,000 in management consulting services currently used to assist in managing VIERA.

OPTION #2 – Status Quo for 2022 and Reduce VIERA Courses 2023.

Stop delivering face-to-face VIERA classes and reduce the number of NFPA 1001 Firefighter departments.

Benefits:

- Provides capacity to manage the VIERA and NFR Training Program workload

Weaknesses:

- Reduced revenue dependent on the level of reduction to course offerings.
- Limited ability for fire departments to attain a catalogue of courses from one training provider making VIERA a less desirable provider therefore potential for reduced revenue to offset NFR operating costs.
- Poor image reflected on NFR from reducing Firefighter departments who have invested in training evaluators and have purchased training materials under the VIERA program.
- Lack of capacity to grow the current VIERA programs in response to client needs.

Financial Analysis:

- In 2023, it is anticipated that net revenues will decrease from \$111,900 to \$53,200 reducing the offset to NFR operations by \$58,700. Reductions in revenue would be countered by savings in management consulting services, instructors, and course materials and supplies.

RECOMMENDATION

Option #1 is recommended

APPENDIX

Below is a summary of revenue opportunities for which VIERA currently lacks capacity:

- Live Fire
 - OPPORTUNITY: Every certified fire fighter must do a live fire training program. We have the opportunity to deliver a \$585 program to many Island fire departments; however, we do not have the instructional capacity at this time.
- Apparatus Driver
 - OPPORTUNITY: The Ministry of Transportation requires every person who drives a vehicle in emergency response situations to be certified. Fire departments are looking at how to meet this \$850 course requirement, and we have had to tell them we are not delivering it at this time due to lack of capacity.
- Pump Operator
 - OPPORTUNITY: Fire fighters who manage the pumping of water from the engine to the scene are certified using this program and fire departments for academies to help meet this \$850 course requirement, and we have had to tell them we are not delivering it at this time due to lack of capacity.
- Rope Rescuer I and II
 - OPPORTUNITY: The main training providers that deliver this program are not accredited academies. Fire Departments call requesting this program because they are looking for training from an accredited academy. We have had to tell them we are not delivering it at this time.
- Confined Space Rescuer I and II
 - OPPORTUNITY: The main training providers that deliver this program are not accredited academies. Fire Departments call requesting this program because they are looking for training from an accredited academy. We have had to tell them we are not delivering it at this time.
- Fire Inspector
 - OPPORTUNITY: The Fire Prevention Officers Association of British Columbia was delivering this program as VIERA's delegated authority until this year. In 2020, they certified 104 students at \$1000 each for an online program requiring very little overhead costs.
- Fire Investigator
 - OPPORTUNITY: The Fire Prevention Officers Association of British Columbia was delivering this program as VIERA's delegated authority until this year. This is a \$1500 online program requiring very little overhead costs.
- BC Training Standards Playbook Program
 - OPPORTUNITY: The Office of the Fire Commissioner is about to issue newly updated training standards to support fire departments in BC. All fire departments will be required to meet these competencies and smaller municipalities will be looking for an academy to deliver the training. We could develop a program to meet this requirement.
- Fire Officer III
 - OPPORTUNITY: Career departments have been inquiring about the creation of this program as demand goes up for chief officer training due to the increasing responsibilities

- experienced by chief officers in municipal fire departments. Having just redeveloped Fire Officer I and II, we could develop a program to meet this need.
- Incident Command System for BC Ferries
 - OPPORTUNITY: VIERA has been approached to develop a program for BC ferries employees to provide our \$105 online training program to approximately 1500 employees. This is a unique opportunity that would require management capacity.