

Cape Coral Fire Department FY2019 Annual Report / Division B Category 1B / Annual Report / Entry

Research/Situation Analysis – In May 2018, the Cape Coral City Manager appointed a new fire chief. When he took the position, he had a list of goals for the Department, including “Creating a Culture of Professionalism” to be supported with strategies including creating a new mission and vision statement, new strategic plan, increasing data-driven decision-making, formalizing a code of ethics and improving organizational communication. Cape Coral has an estimated population of 200,000. While the Cape Coral Fire Department (CCFD) ran 20,000+ calls in FY2019, that accounts for only 10 percent of the population who have interactions with the CCFD through emergency response. We needed to find ways for the other 90 percent to learn the value of the CCFD to the community. Currently, some communication methods used to reach our external audiences include traditional media, social media, education programs, special events and community presentations. Primary research, including informal surveys of adult Cape Coral residents at community events and City leadership during meetings with the Fire Chief, were conducted. Research revealed that the community was unaware of the programs and services we offer and that City leaders were not aware of our accomplishments, nor were they aware of the developments and needs we required to be a greater value in the community. In January 2020, a survey requesting feedback on the CCFD’s overall performance was sent to all employees. Internal communications were rated between poor and neutral by 62 percent of respondents, indicating this is an area of needed improvement. The CCFD also conducted a strategic planning process in February 2019 using an outside consulting firm. The firm worked with a group of 16 internal and external stakeholders to complete a strategic visioning process. One of the three key themes emerging from that process was, “How do we better market our services and demonstrate our value to our community?” Two strategic objectives were developed to address this theme: 1) Promote A Positive Agency Reputation within the Community and 2) Provide Value Beyond the 911 Call. Secondary research of fire department annual report best practices was also conducted. Research revealed that a visually appealing, data-rich, easy to follow annual report that provides a high-level overview and that can be used as a reference document was the best method for our strategic communication. In addition, during research on annual reports, we discovered that the last known CCFD annual report was from 1978.

Planning – Cape Coral taxpayers, CCFD employees, and City of Cape Coral leaders were identified as the target audiences. While these audiences are diverse, transparency is key for each. The annual report was produced with the following goals in mind. 1) Improve organizational communication. 2) Increase awareness of CCFD programs and services. 3) Increase visibility of the CCFD. To accomplish those goals, these objectives were developed: 1) Create an engaging and comprehensive annual report to be distributed beginning February 2020. 2) Within one month of publication, distribute 60 percent of printed annual reports. 3) Provide an online copy through Facebook that receives a reach of 15 percent within one week of posting. 4) Increase internal audience support of Department mission/vision/values as evidenced by direct positive feedback of report. 5) Increase understanding and positive opinion of the CCFD amongst City leadership as evidenced by direct positive feedback from at least two top level City leaders. A strategy was to use the annual report to increase understanding of the CCFD’s mission/vision/values as well as the programs and services offered by improving communication with target audiences. Tactics included utilizing existing data for inclusion in the annual report and photographs taken throughout the year as documentation.

Implementation – At the end of 2018, the Fire Chief sent an email to his command staff stating his intent of producing an annual report for FY2019. The first strategic planning meeting took place the beginning of July 2019 with the CCFD Fire Chief, Deputy Chief, Battalion Chief of Administration (BC of Admin), Public Affairs Specialist (PAS), and Grant Coordinator to identify objectives, content, and message and to discuss design themes and develop a timeline. Storyboarding

then took place over the next two months. A meeting with command staff regarding what data was required from each division was held in September 2019. Data was received and compiled by the Grant Coordinator in October 2019. Research and selection of a printing company was also completed by the BC of Admin during this time. Between November 2019 and mid-January 2020, the PAS wrote copy, selected images, vetted data, did graphic design and met regularly with the Chief to ensure his vision for the report was being fulfilled. Additional staff members assisted in reviewing and proofing the report prior to printing. The annual report was printed at the beginning of February and was revealed at the CCFD's annual Ceremony of Recognition (Ceremony) on February 12, 2020. The plan was effective and creative. The report was a successful visual storytelling vehicle that reached all target audiences who are inundated with emails, have others read them (councilmembers), or are notorious for not reading them (firefighters). Most in the community don't think about the fire department until they need us. The clear, data-supported content of the report (safer buildings with inspections, a safer community through education, helping those in need to make the community a better place) conveyed the value of the CCFD to taxpayers and City leaders even if they have not had cause to directly use our services. The annual report also educated employees on the often-underestimated value of the community programs and special events we attend. As previously noted, we interact with 20,000+ people through emergency response. With our programs and events, we reach an additional 20,000+ people, which allows us to double the contact we have with community members each year.

Evaluation – While the CCFD will continue to strive to improve upon our goals, they were successfully met within scope of this project. 1) As the first since 1978, inherently, the annual report improved organizational communication. 2) All programs and services provided were presented clearly and supported with data, therefore increasing awareness. 3) The visibility of the CCFD was also increased through readers sharing the report with others, both printed (it is even noted on the back to “Read. Share. Recycle.”) and online. All objectives were met or exceeded. 1) A 34-page glossy paper magazine-type document that was visually appealing and comprehensive in content was created and distributed at the Ceremony, which met the deadline. 2) As of the first week in March, 90 percent of annual reports were distributed, which exceeded the objective of 60 percent. More prints will be ordered. 3) The online copy had a reach of 25 percent within the first four days of the posting on Facebook, exceeding the objective of a 15 percent reach within a week. 4) Starting at the Ceremony and continuing as the report made its way through the Department, favorable comments were made and positive feedback was received from internal audiences. Half of the shares on Facebook have been from employees. An increase in internal audience support due to the annual report was successfully demonstrated. 5) The objective to increase City leadership understanding and positive opinion was also met. The Mayor referenced the report during his speech at the Ceremony, noting his pride in the CCFD's accomplishments and what we are doing for the community. The City Manager (CM) and City Councilmembers relayed their positive feedback to the Fire Chief during meetings. The Assistant CM and the City's Public Information Specialist also gave positive feedback; the Assistant CM thought it must have been expensive because of the production and quality.

Budget – The production of the annual report did not have a separate budget due to its inclusion with regular duties. Graphic design, copywriting, project management, creative development, etc. was done by the PAS as part of regular duties. The total value of staff time was \$4,622 (160 hours). The cost to print the annual report was \$632 and was paid for from the Public Relations account for Administration. The City budgets in a 3-year cycle, so the funds for this account were budgeted before it was known an annual report would be printed. No additional money was needed for this project. The ROI for the annual report was very high. For very little money, the CCFD received positive sentiment and an overall greater understanding by our target audiences of the value the Department provides the Cape Coral community.