

**Do you have any suggestions for any incentives to recruit and/or retain volunteer emergency services personnel? [Responses Edited.]**

Employment tax breaks; real estate tax waivers; tuition-free education; stipends for service; paid leadership training classes; free or discounted permits/licenses (drivers, hunting, fishing, etc.); and vehicle registration discounts.

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A retirement plan that is not so difficult to administer seems to be a great opportunity to retain some volunteers.

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State funding for:

- More accessible training in rural areas;
- Tax incentives for volunteers, compensation for individuals to teach fire/EMS courses (many individuals who currently instruct courses provide the service for free or little cost in order to prevent charging the volunteer organizations); and
- Capital projects so members can spend less time with fundraising and grant writing and more time training and responding to emergency calls.

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Authorize localities who participate in The Local Choice Health Insurance Program an option to offer health insurance benefits to fire and EMS volunteers on the same terms as it provides regular employees. Allow localities the discretion to freeze property taxes on a volunteer's primary residence only for a period of ten years provided that the volunteer is annually certified to be an active member of a volunteer fire or EMS unit. State income tax credit for volunteer service.

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Contribution to a retirement plan on behalf of a volunteer; real estate tax relief for a volunteer's primary residence; and free vehicle registration based on a point system that awards credit for responding to calls for service, attending meetings, fundraising, and training and certification.

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State financial support for training classes and to volunteers that attend training. State recognition of volunteers who meet various training standards.

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State funding for the Virginia Volunteer Firefighters' and Rescue Squad Workers' Length of Service Award Program (VOLSAP).

**Do you have any suggestions for any incentives to recruit and/or retain volunteer emergency services personnel? [Responses Edited.]**

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State funding for the VOLSAP for Fire and Rescue members who meet minimum activity levels. Tuition waiver and/or reimbursement for active volunteers to attend community colleges for EMS related courses. State Income tax credits for active volunteers. State funds for a recruitment/retention coordinator position in each locality.

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We would like to have the ability to provide tax credits for volunteers. We would also like to see matching dollars from the Commonwealth to support the Volunteer Firefighter and Rescue Squad Workers' Pension Fund and the Virginia Volunteer Firefighters' and Rescue Squad Workers' Length of Service Award Program (VOLSAP) programs.

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I believe that a stipend program has the ability to get more EMS and Fire volunteers and will be looked at by other rural communities that can not afford full time permanent firefighters. It would be a real boost, however, if Virginia and the federal government did not tax the stipend or other benefits. (On May 23, Senators Chris Dodd (D-CT) and Gordon Smith (R-OR) introduced S. 1466, the Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act. The bill would prohibit the federal government from taxing benefits provided to volunteer fire and emergency medical services personnel by local and state units of government.)

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I recommend looking at a State Income Tax Credit for Firefighter/EMT Volunteers. Consider a \$3000 per person additional exemption for your volunteers; this would a minimal cost to the state for their service. Another incentive to consider is a Firefighter/EMT tuition credit when a volunteer is attending a State College or University similar to the federal government writing off student loans if a person serves in certain organizations or teaches in a low income area.

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We do have a number of young volunteers who join and are very dedicated to staying on even after they attend school (for weekends, summer, vacations, etc.) I would like to see a state school credit for those who will go off to school in the future or who are now attending school for our young folks. Additionally, a state tax reduction would be an incredible recruitment tool, I believe.

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**Do you have any suggestions for any incentives to recruit and/or retain volunteer emergency services personnel?** [Responses Edited.]

This is a tough question. I have really struggled with what makes people volunteer and keep volunteering in today's society. When I started volunteering about 32 years at the age of 15 I did it for a couple of reasons: because my friends ask me join, it seemed cool to ride a fire truck screaming down the road and it seemed like a good thing to do to be able to help people. I ask myself today. What incentives did it take for me to keep volunteering? Honestly, once I started getting training and running calls, I was hooked that is all it took. People volunteered because they wanted to truly help their community, their reward was simply helping people. However, today's society has the mentality of what is in it for me. I know because I have a 19 year old son and hire 20+ year old people with this attitude. Sorry for getting off track but it is really tough to understand what keeps people volunteering, everyone has that one little thing that entices them. However, I do have one suggestion that the state could implement: For students that volunteer their time at a rescue squad or fire department and attend a state college or university receive some type of tuition reimbursement, scholarship etc. This could really help recruit and retain college students at least for some period of time.

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In my discussions with volunteers and volunteer recruiters and coordinators throughout Virginia, I am hearing that volunteers are not in this to make money. They are interested only in recovering some of their expense to be a volunteer. Things like gas money, meals out during duty shifts, uniform items, personal equipment that they purchase to do their volunteer job. They just want to break even so to speak. How do you accomplish that for volunteers from many different organizations throughout the commonwealth? Some type of tax incentive on the State level would be a great start. Something that would put some cash back into the pockets of those that put forth the effort (and expense) to help make their community a safer place to live and work.