MISSOULA RURAL FIRE DISTRICT

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2027-2032

STRATEGIC PLAN









Facilitated by

CPSE Center for Public Safety Excellence

The Center for Public Safety Excellence® (CPSE®) acknowledges and thanks the community and Missoula Rural Fire District (MRFD) stakeholders for their participation and input into this community-driven strategic planning process. The CPSE also recognizes Interim Fire Chief Kirk Paulsen and all who participated for their commitment to this process.

This community-driven strategic plan was developed in September 2026, beginning with a meeting facilitated by representatives from the CPSE for community members, as named below. The community stakeholders' feedback considered by agency stakeholders in developing this strategic plan can be found in Appendix A.

Community Stakeholders

Stacie Anderson	Dan Corti	Mike Heisey	Ella Langer	Ryan Prather
Adriane Beck	Melody Cunningham	Kevin Heisler	Tyler Munoz	Lonnie Rash
Dan Burger	Anthony DiBrito	Jessica Hogan	Dale Olinger	Don Whalen
Patrick Cawley	Rita Hagler			

The agency stakeholder work sessions, conducted over three days, involved a group representing a broad cross-section of the MRFD, as named below.

Agency Stakeholders

Taylor Blakely	Emma Christman	Jason Dufner	Nick Houppert	Phil Mediate
Michael Bowman	Ben Crocker	Ben Farquhar	Max Kottwitz	Kirk Paulsen
Andy Brown	Brad Davis	Pete Giardino	Brian LaForest	Jason Prinzing
Meagan Bunnell	Jared DeMers	Cory Horsens	Ron Lubke	Jakub Sporna



Agency Stakeholder Work Session Participants

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Message from the Fire Chief



It is my privilege to present the Missoula Rural Fire District's five-year Community-Driven Strategic Plan.

This plan was developed through an intentional, community-driven process facilitated by the Center for Public Safety Excellence. It brought together community members, elected officials, agency members, and other stakeholders to examine where we are today, where we need to go, and—most importantly—what our community expects from its fire district. Their perspectives challenged us to look beyond the status quo and identify opportunities to become more effective, efficient, and responsive.

The result is a plan that provides a clear direction for the next five years while recognizing that strategic planning is not about predicting the future. It is about preparing for it.

Our organization has experienced tremendous growth and change throughout its history. We have evolved from an all-volunteer fire company into one of Montana's largest combination fire districts, providing fire suppression, emergency medical services, prevention, community risk reduction, and other critical services across a diverse and growing community. In March 2026, MRFD achieved Accredited Status through the Commission on Fire Accreditation International. This important accomplishment reflects the professionalism and dedication of our members and our commitment to continuous improvement.

Yet accreditation and past accomplishments are not endpoints. They are foundations upon which we must continue to build.

This strategic plan identifies five areas that will guide our efforts over the next five years:

- **Improving the health and wellness of our members**, recognizing that caring for our people is essential to sustaining a healthy and effective organization.
- **Improving organizational culture** through honesty, transparency, and competency.
- **Improving operational readiness** so we can continue to provide the highest level of service when our community needs us most.
- **Expanding community engagement and risk reduction**, moving beyond simply responding to emergencies and working proactively to prevent them.
- **Strengthening relationships with external agencies** through collaboration and innovation to maximize the resources available to our community.

These goals are ambitious, but they are also achievable. They reflect what we heard from our community and what our members identified as important to the future of MRFD.

A strategic plan, however, is only as valuable as our commitment to implementing it. The real work begins now. Over the next five years, we will translate these goals into measurable objectives, actions, and outcomes. We will evaluate our progress, listen to our community, and remain willing to adjust our approach when circumstances change.

That willingness to adapt is particularly important in the fire and emergency services. The risks facing our community continue to evolve. Population growth, changing demographics, emerging hazards, increasing demands for emergency medical services, behavioral and physical health challenges, and the complexity of modern emergency response require us to continually assess how we deliver service. We cannot simply rely on how we have always done things. We must be willing to learn, innovate, and improve.

I sincerely thank the community members and stakeholders who contributed their time, experience, and perspectives throughout this process. I also want to recognize the men and women of the Missoula Rural Fire District whose dedication makes it possible for us to fulfill our mission every day. Their professionalism, commitment, and willingness to embrace change are what will ultimately turn this plan from a document into meaningful results.

As we begin this next chapter, our direction is clear: we will continue to build on our strong foundation while preparing MRFD for the future.

The work begins now, and I am confident that together we will make MRFD an even stronger, healthier, more resilient, and more responsive organization for the next five years and for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Kirk Paulsen

Kirk Paulsen
Interim Fire Chief

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Introduction

The community serviced by the Missoula Rural Fire District (MRFD) receives high levels of professionalism and efficiency from the agency's proactive approach to risk reduction and emergency mitigation. As such, the MRFD contracted with the Center for Public Safety Excellence® (CPSE®) to facilitate a community-driven strategic plan. The process utilized by CPSE aligns with the Commission on Fire Accreditation International® (CFAI®) fire and emergency services accreditation model, but also considers all parameters prescribed by the authority having jurisdiction.

CPSE's approach to community-driven strategic planning gathers feedback and input from community and agency stakeholders while focusing on future change beyond the status quo. Beliefs, concepts, current processes, and values were among the many pieces considered and questioned to bring this planning document to reality. The MRFD exhibited a commitment to the implementation and execution of this plan to become more efficient and effective in alignment with its community.

Process

Understanding what the customer desires is vital to the success of any organization. In this case, the customer is the community that the Missoula Rural Fire District serves. This applies even if the service organization is a governmental entity. Community-driven strategic planning ensures the community remains a focus of the organization's direction, and community feedback is at the heart of all deliberations and development of this strategic plan.

The process of community-driven strategic planning and the plan itself represents the embrace of transition away from how an organization has always done things, seeking to find efficacies and outcomes based on change. The community-driven strategic plan provides a management roadmap built on a shared vision and structured for measurable results. With the involvement of a diverse group of agency stakeholders, the Missoula Rural Fire District's community-driven strategic plan encompasses various experiences, perceptions, and perspectives that can also work to build more internal organizational symbiosis. For the desired, measurable results to be realized, the process and the strategic plan must focus on substance, not form. Only then can MRFD truly benefit from the process and realize its ultimate vision.

Community Stakeholder Findings

- ✓ Identify, from the community perspective, things the agency should and should not change.
- ✓ Identify the community's expectations for the agency, concerns about or for the agency, and aspects the community views as strengths or positives.
- ✓ Define the programs provided to the community.
- ✓ Establish the community's prioritized view of the programs and services provided by the agency.



Community Stakeholder Work Session

Agency Stakeholder Work

- ✓ Identify the agency's strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results.
- ✓ Revisit the mission statement, giving careful attention to the services and programs currently provided and which logically can be provided in the future.
- ✓ Revisit the values of the agency's membership.
- ✓ Revisit the agency's current vision, considering the consensus built from the strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and desired results.
- ✓ Identify the agency's challenges, service gaps, and causal effects through a thematic sifting process.
- ✓ Determine, by consensus, strategic initiatives for outcome-based organizational improvement.
- ✓ Develop strategic goals, SMART objectives with relative timelines, and comprehensive critical task concepts focusing on outcomes.

Agency Background

The Missoula Rural Fire District was created in 1961 under Montana Code Annotated (MCA) Title 7, Chapter 33, Part 21. The district adopted the name "Missoula Rural Fire District." The district is governed by an elected five-member board of trustees. The board is the policy-making body of the fire district; however, it delegates the executive and administrative functions to the fire chief.



MRFD's history truly began 23 years prior, in 1938. In that year, a group of men from the Orchard Homes community worked and formed a volunteer fire department. They started raising funds, and in 1940, the group was able to purchase a truck chassis for $200. They mounted a pump and two cattle stock tanks on the chassis for a water supply and purchased some used fire hose for $100. The engine/tender was housed in a garage at a local floral company. The Orchard Homes Fire Company, as the agency grew to be called, responded to multiple fires and other emergencies, including a massive fire in the grandstands at the Missoula County fairgrounds in August of 1941. After battling a large blaze at the Swainberg Lumber Company in the winter of 1943, the firefighters returned their apparatus to the station and built a fire in the wood stove to thaw and dry their equipment and gear. Sometime in the night, the garage caught fire, destroying it and the pumper inside. The charred truck was sold for scrap for $143, and the hose that was not damaged in the fire was sold for $80. The fire brought an end to the Orchard Homes Fire Company.

In 1959, in response to an attempt by the City of Missoula to annex the Orchard Homes area, members of the community again worked to build their fire department. Residents concerned about the prospect of paying higher taxes and the loss of rural character circulated petitions to protest the annexation. At the same time, community members proposed the creation of a rural fire district to protect the increasing residential area in the rural sections of the Missoula Valley. Several members of the Orchard Homes neighborhood went door to door to gather enough signatures. Their efforts were successful, and on February 28, 1961, the Missoula County Commissioners appointed the first five-member Board of Trustees, and MRFD was officially established. Soon after its creation, the MRFD Board of Trustees collected enough revenue to order two fire apparatus. Before the delivery of the new engines, the department was called to an overheated refrigeration compressor at a local grocery store. The sole firefighter on duty responded to the call in his personal vehicle. He was able to extinguish the fire with a couple of gallons of milk he removed from the cooler. Engine No.1, a 1961 International, arrived at MRFD and was put into service shortly after the milk fire. The district rented a building at 2135 South Third Street West to house the new apparatus. In 1962, MRFD took delivery of Engine No.2, a 1962 GMC tanker with a pump and a 1,000-gallon water tank. With the new apparatus and having paid personnel on staff, MRFD quickly outgrew its rented quarters. In October 1963, MRFD opened the current Station #1 at 2521 South Avenue West. The cost of construction was $39,000. This station was initially staffed with a paid firefighter whose role was to

respond in the engine to the scene of a fire. Volunteers would then arrive on the scene in their personal vehicles to extinguish the blaze.



In 1968, MRFD built and occupied a second fire station located on the Missoula County Airport grounds. This station provided aircraft rescue and firefighting (ARFF) services to the airport and provided fire/rescue response to the surrounding residences and businesses. The arrangement lasted until 1977, when the Missoula County Airport Authority (MCAA) was formed. Rather than continue to contract with MRFD for ARFF services, the MCAA elected to create public safety officer positions to fill that need. As a result, MRFD moved off airport property and constructed the present-day Station #2 at 6550 US Highway 10 West in 1988. In 1968, MRFD rented a building in the Rattlesnake Canyon for Station #3 on the corner of Lolo and Gilbert Streets. Staffing for that station was reduced in 1992 when most of the Rattlesnake area was annexed into the City of Missoula. In 1992, Missoula City and MRFD signed a joint contract to provide fire and emergency medical services (EMS) to the residents of the Rattlesnake. The building was rented and furnished by MRFD and was staffed on a 24-hour basis with a city firefighter. The agreement between the city and MRFD concerning fire protection in the Rattlesnake was terminated in December 1993. Residents and volunteer firefighters staffed the station until its closure on June 30, 1995. With most of the area annexed into the City of Missoula and the resultant decline in tax revenue, it was no longer cost-effective to keep the station open.

The Bonner/Milltown/Turah area joined the fire district in 1971, and Station #4 was opened in March. The building originally was an old combination store and gas station. Over the years, it was extensively remodeled to house 24-hour-per-day career and resident firefighters. When the community had a thriving lumber mill, it enjoyed a very active group of volunteer firefighters that augmented the paid staff. The old Station #4 has been sold and has been relocated approximately one mile west of its current location. The new Station #4 is located at 8511 Bonner Mill Road.

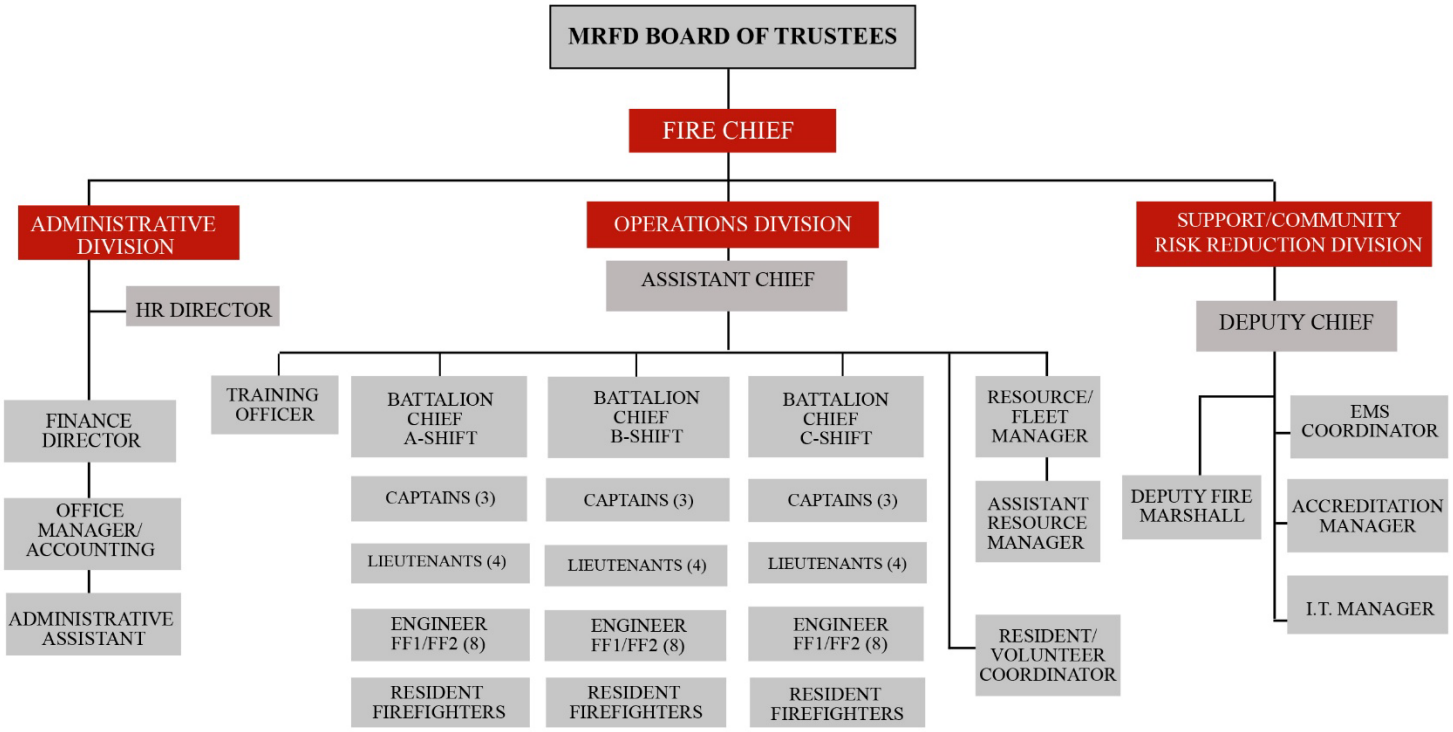
The community of Lolo had a volunteer fire company dating back to the mid-1940s. Financial problems and lack of modern equipment encouraged the residents to petition to join the Missoula Rural Fire District in 1973. Station #5 was constructed at its present site near the Lolo Community Center that same year. Station #6 was built at 8455 Mullan Road in 1982. The station was positioned to provide emergency services to the El Mar Estates neighborhood, the Mullan Road corridor, and the communities on the north end of Big Flat Road.

The early 1990s were a difficult time for the fire district. Financial troubles, coupled with the passage of a constitutional initiative that hampered the ability of local governments to raise taxes, caused the district to eliminate several full-time firefighter positions. The district's taxpayers passed a levy a few years later that enabled those positions to be restored.

In 2014 and again in 2019, MRFD received the "Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response" (SAFER) grant. Voters of the district again supported permissive tax levies that will fund these positions after the grant funding expires.

What started as an all-volunteer agency has transformed into one of the largest combination fire districts in Montana. MRFD currently employs 51 career firefighter/EMS providers. Additionally, the district maintains a force of up to 12 "resident" (intern) firefighters. MRFD is overseen by a chief staff consisting of one Fire Chief, an Assistant Fire Chief, and a Deputy Fire Chief. The Operations staff is supported by a full-time training officer, EMS coordinator, resource manager, assistant resource manager, resident-volunteer coordinator, and accreditation manager. The Community Risk Reduction Division consists of one deputy fire marshal. The organization is also supported by a finance director, HR director, office manager/accounting assistant, and an administrative assistant. Overseeing the entire operation is the Fire Chief, who reports directly to the elected Board of Trustees. The district continually strives to make improvements and is positioned to continue its mission well into the future. MRFD received Accredited Status through CFAI in March 2026.

MRFD Organizational Chart



Mission

The mission provides an internal aspect of the existence of an organization and, to a degree, an empowering consideration for all MRFD members. The purpose of the mission is to answer the questions:

Who are we? Why do we exist? What do we do? Why do we do it? For whom?

A workgroup met to revisit the existing mission and, after ensuring it answered the questions, the following mission statement was created/discussed and accepted by the entire group:

We are dedicated professionals committed to protecting our community through emergency preparedness, proactive risk reduction, and professional response, delivered with integrity and compassion.

Values

Values embraced by all members of an organization are extremely important, as they recognize the features that make up the personality and culture of the organization. A workgroup met to revisit the existing values, and the entire group formally agreed they suit the agency, without amendment.



The mission and values are the foundation of this agency. Thus, every effort will be made to keep these current and meaningful to guide the individuals who make up the Missoula Rural Fire District to accomplish their goals, objectives, and day-to-day tasks.

Vision

An organizational vision exists to keep all members focused on the successful future of the Missoula Rural Fire District and to guide quality change and improvement in alignment with the community. In support of the community-driven strategic planning process, CPSE facilitated the revision of the MRFD's vision for the future. The agency will support the reality of this vision through successful plan implementation and goal achievement.

Empowered leaders building today
for the community of tomorrow.





Agency Stakeholder Work Sessions

Goals

Community feedback and the SOAR process led to the determination of strategic initiatives representing the high-level issues the agency stakeholders developed into goals. MRFD must now make these goals a focus of efforts that will direct the agency to its desired future. Goals with complete objectives, tasks, timelines, and assignments are included in the separate **Management and Implementation Guide**.



Improve overall health and wellness of all the members of the organization by identifying and implementing behavioral and physical health best practices to optimize overall well-being throughout their career and into retirement.



Improve organizational culture through honesty, transparency, and competency to better serve the community.



Improve operational readiness through modification and enrichment of existing standards, programs, and systems to optimize service delivery.



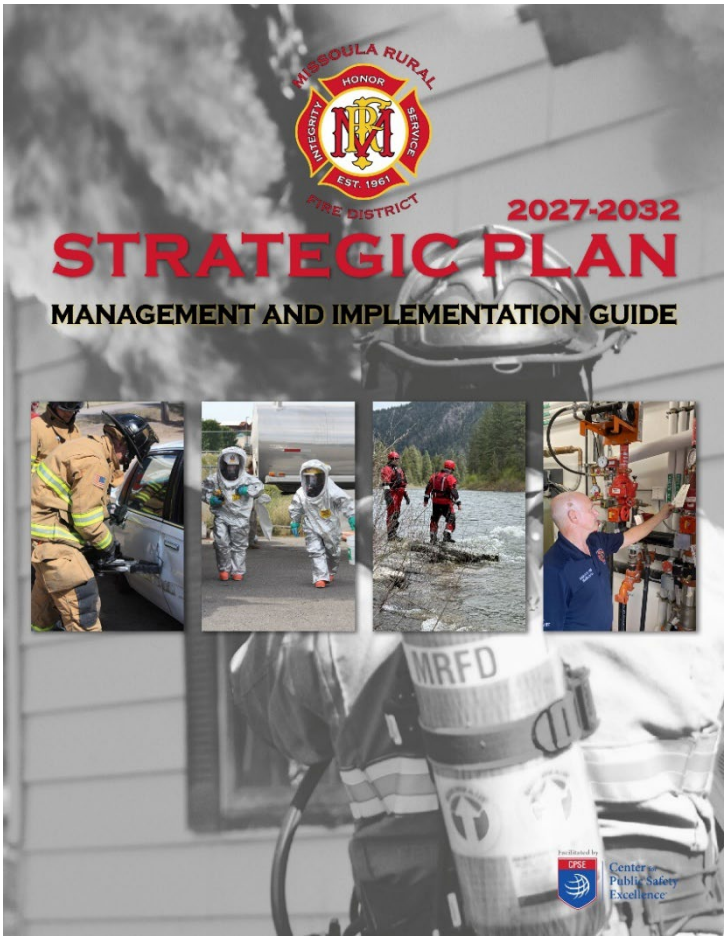
Expand and enhance our community engagement through proactive programs focusing on reducing community risk.



Improve external agency relationships through innovation and collaboration to maximize efficiency.

Conclusion

Working with community and department members from all levels, this strategic plan was developed…but the work is truly just beginning. Agency stakeholders must now execute and integrate the plan to ensure the community's expectations and the Missoula Rural Fire District's vision remains congruent. The accompanying **Management and Implementation Guide** will assist the MRFD in the mechanics of integration. The guide is not intended to be all-inclusive; rather, it provides flexibility to ensure future success.



It must be remembered that during this journey of regeneration through change and improvement, recalculation may need to occur to find the success desired. This strategic plan is a roadmap to help the Missoula Rural Fire District navigate that process. The ability to pivot to meet the current environment, as implementation occurs, provides a greater likelihood that the desired outcomes and efficacies will be realized as envisioned.

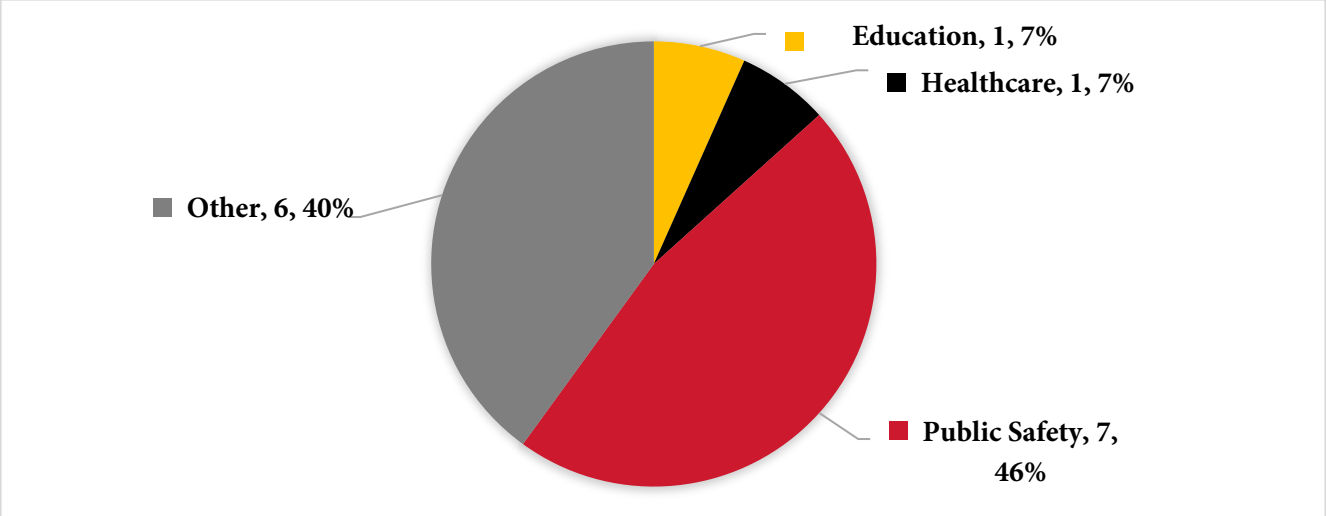
> "…we will chase perfection, and we will chase it relentlessly, knowing all the while we can never attain it. But along the way, we shall catch excellence."
>
> Vince Lombardi

Appendices

A. Community Stakeholder Findings

The Missoula Rural Fire District demonstrates a commitment to its community via a focus on community input and satisfaction. A community stakeholder session was held to gather feedback from the respondents on the agency and its various services delivered. The information gathered from the community stakeholder feedback provided understanding to the agency stakeholders of any misalignment with its organizational foundation and performance or values-based expectations or concerns, from which new improvement strategies and processes may be created.

Community stakeholders were identified by the agency to ensure broad representation. The breakdown of groups represented is presented here:



Respondents were asked to list, in priority order, up to three subjects relative to expectations, concerns, and strengths or positives for the MRFD. Expectations and concerns were then analyzed for themes and weighted. The numbers in the parentheses are the cumulative weighted value that correlate with the themes identified. While the themes are listed in prioritized, weighted order, all responses were important in the planning process. Strengths or positives are listed verbatim and may be repeated based on different respondents.

The specific data and findings from the community stakeholder respondents are provided to follow.

Community Expectations of the Missoula Rural Fire District (in priority order)

1. Show up in a reasonable amount of time based on the location you choose to live and work. Fast response to a fire. Response time. Rapid response. Realistic response times, en route 2-5 minutes max, on scene ideally 10-15 minutes. Respond in a timely manner, understanding geographic distance and constraints. Availability/response times. Timely response to fire, EMS, and other emergencies. (40)
2. They can perform their duties as expected. To be a well-trained, professional department that continues to adapt and innovate. Well-trained firefighters to keep themselves and the public safe. Training. Maintain a level of

professionalism and training that is the example for other departments in the county and state. The continued development of all employees. Education-mitigation plans, community outreach. (25)

3. ALS response for all medical calls. Provide advanced life support to the community. Medical response, quick, available, and staffed with qualified providers. Mass casualty response, be it a school or theater, or a game, these threats lurk. (18)
4. They are able to locate our addresses (posted or not). Availability in emergency situations. Coordinated efforts upon arrival, no hesitation, constant planning and evaluations. Arrive with the right resource to the call. Proactive approaches to situations, goes along with education staffing for growing communities. (13)
5. Full staffing and well-trained. Provide adequate 24/7, 365 staffing to current and expected call volume within the district in support of mutual aid needs. (8)
6. Have the right tools and machinery for any situation. Equipment. Utilize the resources that belong to MRFD in the most appropriate manner. (5)
7. Transparency and listening to community concerns at board meetings or other interactions. (5)
8. Education regarding fuels mitigation and homeowner agency to help in this regard. Public education and support of risk reduction for public safety. (4)
9. Structure protection during wildland fire events. Investment in local risk reduction efforts in wildfire threats. (4)
10. Be mentally and physically prepared to assess the situation, make a plan, and effectively perform the plan. (3)
11. They are able to respond to any call safely. (3)
12. Coordinate well with other agencies to provide timely, community-wide response, to have seamless community care so there aren't gaps in care between groups. (3)
13. The continued effort to improve physical structures of the department. (3)
14. Automatic vehicle location response implementation. (3)
15. Utilization of mutual aid partners to lessen response times, get any citizens help as fast as possible. Maintain/enhance mutual aid within county. (2)
16. Be seen in our schools with prevention training. (1)
17. Good demeanor/professional skills. (1)

Areas of Community Concern about the Missoula Rural Fire District (verbatim, in priority order)

1. The ability to keep up with the demands that continued community growth is bringing. Pay and available stations to serve the growing community. Adequate facilities and equipment to handle the growth we're experiencing. Adequate funding to be able to handle ongoing growth and responsibilities. Uncertainty of city annexation impact on district in the future. Availability/response times-growing community=more requirements. The service area could grow more rapidly than the department can serve. The strain of population growth and development on their staff and infrastructure. (27)
2. Having the funds and training to complete the job efficiently. How to fund the needed expansion (buildings, equipment, and staffing). As the city continues to grow toward and into MRFD district boundaries, MRFD must learn to adapt to changes in revenue while also evaluating their services should diminish and where they should shift.

Loss of sufficient funding to obtain goals. How state tax law will impact district in the future. Reductions of revenue from annexations. Concerned about the cost to the department to alleviate issues. (21)

3. Adequate staffing. Adequate amount of staffing. Ability for timely backfill given developing incidents. Ability to maintain staffing and capital replacement in current funding model. Staffing and funding prevent investment in pre-emptive efforts. (19)
4. The perception of high rates of turnover and conflicts between board and department leadership. Seems to be friction with the administration/board/firefighters. Current leadership challenges/board challenges. Rebuilding of morale in light of difficulty in past leadership. (12)
5. The safety of the people risking their lives to help others. The safety and burnout of all firefighters and emergency personnel. (8)
6. Ability to construct new or remodel existing stations due to funding constraints. Aging facilities. (8)
7. Collaborative interdepartmental fire houses that promote support and advancement while still providing public safety to the very best of their ability. Silos of work/information due to extra effort or coordination with stakeholders. (6)
8. Department tapped out at fires or slightly more intense rescue. (5)
9. Ability to retain workforce in light of the high cost of living in Missoula. (3)
10. Infrequent high-risk calls not trained or regularly (could include outside agencies). (1)

Positive Community Comments about the Missoula Rural Fire District (verbatim, in no order)

- MRFD is an excellent community partner, not only as a fire service but as a collaborator for all hazard events.
- MRFD and MFD have demonstrated a willingness to work together beyond district boundaries for the betterment of the community and the public-please keep it up!
- The most important strength is the character of each employee.
- Maintenance of current equipment.
- Remarkably dedicated and professional staff.
- Accreditation- valuable and forward-thinking.
- Process of continuous improvement.
- Great people doing great things- for the right reason.
- Adaptable and willing to change to new technology and response training.
- Open and willing to work with other response agencies to better serve the region.
- Prompt- in our small community, the current response times can be minimal.
- Communication- persons responding are able to communicate and educate well.
- Always gives excellent attention to service-area schools, from walkthroughs to inspections to emergency response!
- Fast service to community as witnessed firsthand as a resident.
- The culture of the staff appears to be intentionally developed and sustained. The people are awesome, humble, and skilled. Keep this up!!
- Training/expertise.
- Obvious passion for a safe Missoula.

- Interest in mitigation work.
- They are always very professional.
- They have a very good workforce, from administration to the firefighters.
- Always keep up with changing technology.
- Highly respected, with high regard for current leadership amongst community partners.
- Demonstrated commitment to community and providing the highest level of service.
- It's encouraging to see the MRFD interact and coordinate with the MCPW Building Department regarding new builds and changes or use, along with plan reviews and inspections of MCPW new projects.
- Every fire department employee that I know truly wants to help others.
- They train hard mentally and physically to be ready for any situation.
- Responsiveness to the public
- Professionalism.
- Willingness to educate and assist homeowners trying to make their surroundings safer.
- Great working relationship with other departments.
- Collaborative, team approach
- Approaching tough code situations with a curious mindset.
- Well-trained
- Dedicated.
- Constant teamwork and efforts to help.
- Willing to learn and teach to further those around them.
- Community engagement.

Other Community Comments about the Missoula Rural Fire District (verbatim, in no particular order)

- Thank you for looking outside of the area to understand what can be successful or not, i.e. forward-thinking strategic plan.
- As long as the leadership is able to recognize and act appropriately to the complicated situations, positive results will increase.
- From Lolo School and as a resident, I'm very impressed with the MRFD in the Lolo service area.
- Overall, a great department that is always looking forward.

Things the Community Feels the Missoula Rural Fire District Should Change

(verbatim, in no particular order)

- Location of station #1.
- The actual physical structures.
- Increase the number of firefighters.
- Provide three-person staffing.
- How it (the agency) interacts with wildfire mitigation cooperators.
- Training, if anything, brings in more training.
- Commitment to high-quality public safety.

- Strategic station locations (as affordable).
- May be more of a federal issue, but increase grants for homeowner education and fuels mitigation.
- Have one more Deputy Fire Marshall to help with inspections.
- More knowledge of total capabilities.

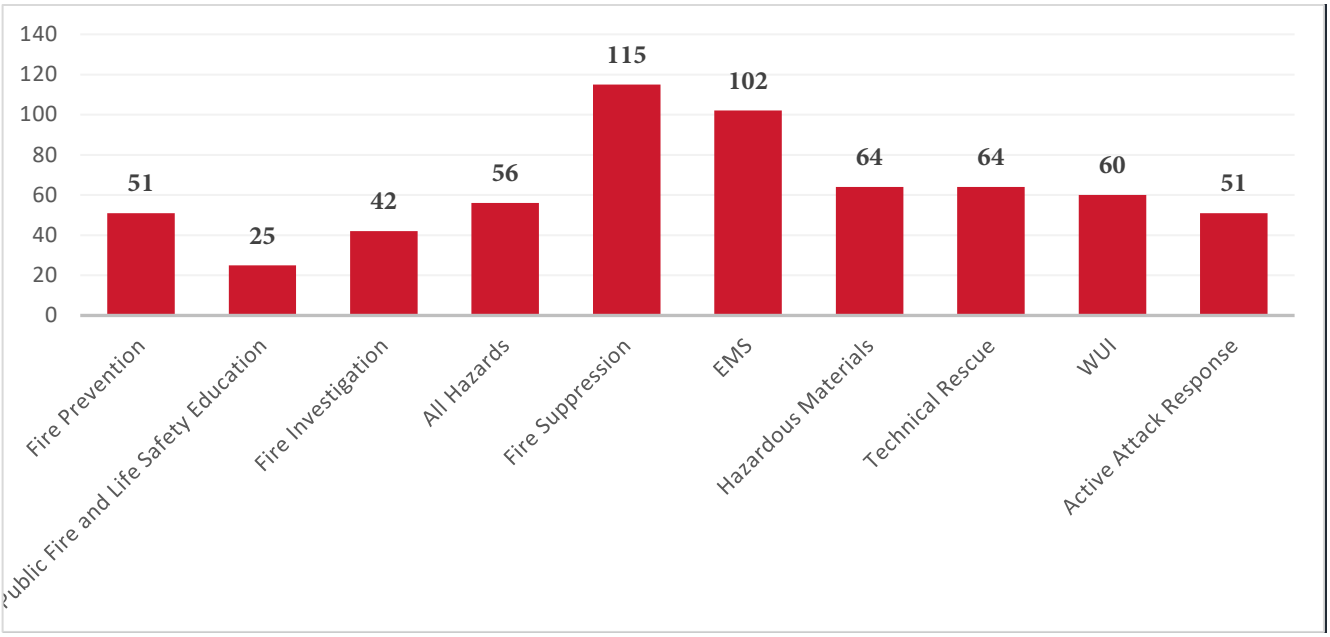
Things the Community Feels the Missoula Rural Fire District Should NOT Change

(verbatim, in no particular order)

- Level of service.
- The caliber of hired individuals.
- Encouraging paramedic training.
- Finding solutions to work with other agencies to provide quick and appropriate responses.
- Thinking ahead. Keep it up and dig deep. Plan for the unknown, "future proof".
- Its response framework.
- Public outreach and interagency communication.
- Effort put out to help others.
- Community focus and engagement.
- Community involvement like today and their accreditation.
- Overall staff interactions. Always kind and helpful.

Community-Prioritized Programs

Understanding how the community prioritizes the agency's programs and services allows the Missoula Rural Fire District to ensure its focus on resource allocation aligns. With that, prioritization feedback was garnered with an instrument that compared the prioritization of the programs and services offered by the MRFD. The results were as follows:



B. Agency Stakeholder Work

A group of agency stakeholders representing the various segments of the MRFD attended a three-day work session to review the community feedback, develop or revise the agency's mission and values, and establish a quality focus on the way forward in developing this community-driven strategic plan. Additionally, the process included an environmental scan in the form of strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results (SOAR) analysis to better understand the current situational aspects impacting the agency.

SOAR

The agency's internal stakeholders utilized a strategic environmental analytic method known as SOAR, where members consider the organization's current **s**trengths, **o**pportunities, future **a**spirations, and strategic **r**esults to formulate a path for continuous improvement. The SOAR process was conducted for reflection, focus, and alignment with the organization's set of values, its vision, and its mission. This appreciative inquiry process provided environmental scanning for strategic direction, associated plans through the application of innovative ideas, and a positive strategic framework that brings clarity to the agency's vision for leadership in day-to-day functions.

Strengths	
Adaptability to changing dynamics.	We do a lot with the resources we have.
Cordial, strong interagency/interpersonal relationships.	Workforce committed to the community and organization.
Accountability to standards.	People take pride in public trust and the job we do.
Equipment up to date industry standard with multiple uses; standardization of equipment	Community engagement (car seats, school program coats for kids, Stop the Bleed, etc.).
Well-trained workforce. Ability to send SMEs to train the trainees.	Familiarity with areas of district target hazards -rope rescue, massive buildings.
Operate safely despite our limitations.	Strong family culture.
Top-to-bottom leadership.	Strong work/life balance.
Ability to survive as a relevant agency despite opposing forces.	Organizational structure developed to allow for future growth.
Resiliency through challenges/adverse times.	We prioritize mental and physical health.
Humble, quality people.	Favorable reputation with community.
Adaptation to changing community environment.	1 of 2 accredited agencies in the state of Montana.
Commitment to continuous improvement.	

Opportunities

Identify regional training and reduce overlap.	Annual physicals to meet NFPA 1582
Efficiency of current organizational structure /operations and assigned duties.	Continue with momentum toward consolidation with other agencies.
Potential for additional revenue with/through EMS and wildland.	Find funding mechanisms to up staffing levels to four-person engine companies.
Cooperative purchasing of equipment.	Capitalize on our energy and build momentum.
Work with legislation to allow for regional fire authorities	Redistribution of internal responsibilities.
Create a capital improvement plan to accommodate staffing and living conditions.	Community engagement (citizen academy, station events, education about our needs, etc.)
Succession planning to bring operational staff up to administration.	Define processes to achieve on every engine, every day.
Plan for future revenue sources.	Work towards a paramedic on every engine every day.
Evaluate existing programs and plan for future needs.	Collaboration of facilities and resources (training fleet, etc.)

Aspirations

Have a dedicated Wildland Division response force.	Improve 911 communications center capabilities.
Lean staff and increase firefighter positions.	Leverage technology to meet future aspirations.
Lean programs to prioritize resources for primary divisions.	Improve wildfire preparedness planning for the community.
Provide paramedic-level EMS service for every shift at each station.	Continue to provide the best service we can with the resources we have.
Destination fire department/employer.	Most innovative fire department in the northwest.
Regional fire authority	Create a subcommittee for citizen advisory to the Board.
Maintaining a level of consistent transparency and accountability.	Consolidation/collaboration with other agencies for a more efficient service.
Station locations that best serve the community.	Plan for future growth/needs.
Development of air operations division.	Modern facilities to continue serving in the future.
Improve interagency communications to cover dead zones.	Planning/ preparedness for EMS transport.
Increase community programs that include proactive public education and fire prevention.	Work to increase engine staffing to three-person minimum (career) and strive for NFPA 1710 compliance.

Improve ability to communicate with community on changes and adaptions.

Results

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
- Number of subjects-to-SME ratio - Increased operational efficiency. - Successful succession planning and implementation. - Increased interoperability - Improved community assessment - Increased use of district wildland resources - Increase in wildland revenue. - Improved service delivery and increased safety - Increased stakeholder participation - Reduction of administration costs with increased availability of funding for operational response - Increase public trust/buy-in - Increased funding/staffing - Increase recruitment/ retention. - Improved relationship with the community served. - Increased efficiency/productivity - Decreased burnout - Improved balance in workload - Increased understanding that adequate staffing is the most important part of service delivery	- Established a well-structured organization for generations. - Established, engaged and educated community that would yield more favorable financial support. - Better service delivery and timely response times - More efficient emergency response, more closely meeting NFPA standards. - More comfortable and efficient working environment - Reduction in duplication of services allowing for more specialization in all deliverables.	- Build upon the established workforce foundation. - Maintain accredited status. - Continue strong community relationships. - Reinforced health, well-being, and pride in our organization for our employees - Attract the best candidates. - Providing wages and benefits to enable employees to live in the community - Infrastructure that allows for a safe workplace for the foreseeable future - Adaptable as the community changes - Engine staffing would allow for more efficient and timely service delivery. - More informed community - Equal assigned duties amongst ranks - Annual physicals would meet NFPA 1582 - Cost savings to the taxpayer - Achieving the goals set in the strategic plan. - Paramedic on every engine - Less unnecessary redundancy amongst collaborators

Challenges and Service Gaps

After sifting through data and feedback provided by the community stakeholders, and the internal environmental scan conducted, the agency stakeholders, by consensus and group effort, determined that the following challenges and service gaps exist within the Missoula Rural Fire District. Each challenge or gap listed is accompanied by the causal effects determined by the two groups. They are then linked to the strategic initiative identified by the agency stakeholders.

Group 1	Group 2	*Initiative Link*
Health and Wellness ○ 1582 physical ○ Behavioral health ○ Cancer prevention	Improve Health and Wellness ○ Work-life balance. ○ Redistribution of internal responsibilities ○ Annual physicals meeting NFPA 1582 ○ Mental health resiliency ○ Physical fitness standards ○ Occupational illness prevention	***Health and wellness***
Organizational Culture ○ Recruitment and retention ○ Pay and benefits ○ Schedules ○ Internal communication and feedback process ○ Create a culture of transparency, ownership, and accountability. ○ Employee development ○ Succession planning ○ Workload analysis	n/a	***Organizational Culture***
Service delivery ○ Staffing ○ Station locations and conditions ○ Mutual aid ○ Training	Operational Readiness ○ Adequate staffing ○ Infrastructure improvements ○ Training ○ Mutual aid agreements/relationships ○ Resource management	***Operational Readiness***
Community Engagement ○ Program awareness ○ Fuels mitigation ○ Homeowner education ○ Trained PIO	Community Engagement ○ Transparency, information sharing ○ Funding ○ Community risk reduction ○ Legislative changes (local/state)	***Community Engagement***
External Agency relationships ○ Communication center ○ Interoperability ○ Group purchasing ○ Explore consolidation/collaborations ○ Administrative collaboration	n/a	***External Agency Relationships***

Strategic Initiatives

Based on all previously captured information and determining critical issues and service gaps, the following strategic initiatives were identified as the foundation for developing goals and objectives.

Health and Wellness

Organizational Culture

Operational readiness

Community Engagement

External Agency Relationships

Final goals with complete objectives, tasks, timelines, and assignments are included in the separate **Management and Implementation Guide**.



2027-2032 STRATEGIC PLAN