

THE PARTICIPATOR

WINTER 2024

MEMBER FEATURE
**NORTH DAKOTA
FIREFIGHTERS
ASSOCIATION**

THE IMPORTANCE OF A CLEAR JOB DESCRIPTION, P. 4

2023 TOP 10 LOCALGOVU COURSES, P. 12

HR COLLABORATIVE BIENNIAL CONFERENCE
APRIL 17-18 IN BISMARCK, P. 16

NDIRF SPONSORED TRAINING
SOUTHWEST CRIME CONFERENCE
BLUE TO GOLD LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING
APRIL 29-MAY 3, 2024 IN DICKINSON, P. 16

NORTH DAKOTA
NDIRF
INSURANCE
RESERVE FUND



Basic Firefighter Skills course at the 2024 State Fire School in Minot (N.D.). North Dakota Firefighters Association. Photo Credit: North Dakota Firefighters Association

Dear NDIRF Member,

We are finalizing our 2023 financial statements, and we will soon distribute our 2023 annual report in preparation for our May annual meeting.

One thing you will notice in our annual report is the NDIRF's continued financial strength which enables us to provide comprehensive liability, auto, and public assets coverages, claims services, and risk management at an affordable price for North Dakota's political subdivisions.

To illustrate this point, the NDIRF retains nearly twice the surplus amount our actuarial consultant recommends, earning the highest percentage confidence level they will provide (95%) regarding our ability to meet future financial obligations. You can rest assured the NDIRF is more than adequately funded to help protect you from covered losses.

We shared in 2022 that, like many investors, the NDIRF suffered losses in our investment portfolio. Though the losses were unrealized, meaning we did not sell investments at a loss, our Board of Directors did not declare a 2022 Conferment of Benefits.

While our 2023 investment performance greatly improved, our Board of Directors has made the decision not to declare a 2023 Conferment of Benefits.

The NDIRF maintains a significant amount of its assets in investments, and we expect to hold our investments until their value has fully recovered. By retaining our investments, we better position the NDIRF for future investment gains and, we optimistically hope, the return of conferment payments.

As you may have come to expect, the NDIRF's 2023



North Dakota Firefighters Association

operational performance remained strong and stable, resulting in an over \$7 million net income. This result guided our Board of Director's decision to not assess a 2024 general rate increase, meaning most members' rates will remain stable throughout 2024.



Chad Peterson

On behalf of the NDIRF Board of Directors and staff, thank you for your membership in the NDIRF.

Sincerely,

Chad Peterson
NDIRF Board Chair

WHAT'S INSIDE

- P. 4-5 The Importance of a Clear Job Description
- P. 5 Coverage Terms Defined: Third-Party Liability
- P. 6-11 **Member Feature: North Dakota Firefighters Association**
- P. 12-13 2023 Top 10 LocalGovU Courses
- P. 14-15 How to Support Workplace Mental Health
- Back Cover
 - HR Collaborative's 2024 Resilient HR Biennial Conference
 - NDIRF Sponsored Training: Southwest Crime Conference Blue to Gold Law Enforcement Training
 - NDIRF 2024 Annual Meeting

Cover Photo: Structural-Based Live Burn Class hosted during the 2023 NE Regional Fire School in Grand Forks (N.D.). Photo Credit: North Dakota Firefighters Association

DISCLAIMER: This publication is provided for educational purposes only and provides a general description of NDIRF or NDFT coverage. Representations of coverage provided by the NDIRF or NDFT within the context of this publication may not reference all language contained in the coverage documents provided by the NDIRF or the NDFT. Refer to the appropriate coverage documents for exact coverage, conditions, exclusions, and other relevant information. Coverage documents can be viewed and downloaded from our website at www.NDIRF.com.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A CLEAR JOB DESCRIPTION

PROVIDED BY BRIAN D. SCHMIDT

ATTORNEY AT LAW AND PARTNER AT SMITH PORSBORG SCHWEIGERT, ARMSTRONG, MOLDENHAUER & SMITH

Clear job descriptions have numerous legal and practical benefits for your political subdivision. In the event your employment decision is subject to a legal challenge, your attorney will likely request a copy of the applicable job description to bolster your defense. This is because the job description is the foundational document for the employer's expectations of the employee. This can be vitally important in defense of discrimination claims.



federal courts have held an “accommodation is ‘reasonable’ – and, therefore, required under the ADA – only if it enables the employee to perform the essential functions of the job.” *LaChance v. Duffy’s Draft House, Inc.*, 146 F.3d 832, 835 (11th Cir. 1998). In other words, the “essential functions” – as identified

in a job description – can guide both the employer and employee in determining whether or not a requested accommodation is required by the ADA. A clear job description can also be a factor in whether an employee is a “qualified individual” and subject to ADA protection. While a job description establishing the “essential functions” is important in the ADA context, there are other benefits to clear job descriptions as well.

The Americans with Disabilities (“ADA”) protects “qualified individuals” against discrimination on the basis of a disability. 42 U.S.C. § 12112(a). A “qualified individual” is defined as “an individual who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the employment position that such individual holds or desires.” 42 U.S.C. § 12111(8) (emphasis added). Every job has different “essential functions.” For example, a maintenance worker will have different “essential functions” of their job than an administrator. The ADA provides that “if an employer has prepared a written description before advertising or interviewing applicants for a job, this description shall be considered evidence of the essential functions of the job.” *Id* (emphasis added). So why is it important to identify the “essential functions” of a job?

From a practical standpoint, job descriptions can help eliminate confusion as to what is expected of an employee and serve as a solid foundation for all documentation in an employee’s performance file. This can be especially important in the defense of a discrimination claim. To establish a claim of discrimination, an employee must show – among other things – they met their “employer’s legitimate expectations.” *Carter v. Pulaski Cnty. Special School Dist.*, 956 F.3d 1055, 1058 (8th Cir. 2020). Further, an employer can prevail against a discrimination claim when they establish a legitimate non-discriminatory reason for their employment decision. *Bharadwaj v. Mid Dakota Clinic*, 954 F.3d 1130, 1134-35 (8th Cir. 2020). A clear job description can help establish the legitimate expectations

The ADA requires employers to make “reasonable accommodations” for employees. While there is no precise test as to what constitutes a “reasonable accommodation,”

of an employer. Further, it can serve as evidence to establish an employer's reasons for taking adverse action against an employee were legitimate and not based on a discriminatory motive. Put simply, it is difficult for an employee to prevail when the employer identifies clear expectations in a job description and produces documentation showing the employee failed to meet them.

Ensuring your political subdivision's job descriptions are updated and accurate helps provide clarity to both employees and supervisors. Further, a job description can be used as evidence in the defense of discrimination claims. A few hours spent creating, reviewing, or updating a job description today can avoid frustration and stress if your political subdivision is named in a future lawsuit.

COVERAGE TERMS DEFINED: THIRD-PARTY LIABILITY

When your entity purchases NDIRF liability coverage, it obtains coverage to pay sums your entity or other covered parties become legally obligated to pay as damages, subject to liability limits and other NDIRF Liability Memorandum of Coverage terms and conditions. *Review the NDIRF Liability Memorandum of Coverage for specific coverage terms and conditions.* Damages can include bodily injury, property damage, or other legal obligations. NDIRF liability coverage may also cover legal defense costs as well as any settlements or judgments awarded to the injured party.

To determine potential liability after a claim is submitted, the NDIRF claims team performs a thorough investigation into the incident's circumstances. This process considers various factors, including evidence, witness statements, and applicable laws.

Here are some key steps involved in determining potential liability:

Investigation. When an incident occurs, an NDIRF claims adjuster initiates an investigation to gather relevant information. This may include statements from involved parties, eyewitness accounts, and documentation your entity has related to the incident. This documentation includes incident reports as well as policies and procedures related to the incident type.

Coverage Review. The adjuster reviews coverage terms and conditions to determine if coverage is available and, if so, to what extent. This review enables the NDIRF to determine the scope of your entity's potential liability.

Legal Analysis. The adjuster considers relevant laws, case law, and regulations that may impact potential liability. This analysis involves assessing whether your entity violated any legal obligations or standards of care.

Expert Opinions. In some cases, the adjuster may seek expert opinions

to provide insights into the incident. For example, accident reconstruction specialists or medical professionals may be consulted to determine the cause and extent of damages.

Negotiation or Litigation. If the adjuster determines your entity is unlikely liable, the NDIRF may deny liability to the third-party claimant. If the adjuster determines your entity is likely liable, they will then determine the extent of potential liability. After these determinations are made, the adjuster may negotiate with the third-party claimant or their representative to reach a settlement. If an agreement cannot be reached, or the third-party disagrees with a liability denial, the matter may proceed to litigation where a court will ultimately decide liability and, if necessary, the sums your entity is obligated to pay.

The NDIRF has nearly 40 years of experience in navigating local government liability claims, and we always welcome your questions regarding claims your entity may encounter.

This article is not legal advice and is provided as a general overview of the third-party liability claim process. Each claim is unique, and the third-party liability claim process may differ from the process described in this article. Please review the NDIRF Liability Memorandum of Coverage to determine coverage, terms, and conditions regarding any specific occurrence that may lead to a third-party liability claim.



Firefighter Down CPR Course at 2024 State Fire School in Minot (N.D.). Photo Credit: North Dakota Firefighters Association

MEMBER FEATURE:

NORTH DAKOTA FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

BY JOANNA DRENNEN, MASCM
NDIRF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

It was an early January day when I got the opportunity to visit with North Dakota Firefighters Association (NDFFA) Training Director Rob Knuth. I sipped coffee throughout the Zoom meeting and took pages of notes during our conversation, starring the lines that would help me first outline the story and then build it out.

These starred lines, especially the ones later in the conversation, the ones shared only after rapport is built, express Knuth's pride in fire service work and supporting fire service members alongside fellow NDFFA employees who feel that same sense of pride.

According to a Gallup, strong employee engagement, the

"involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace" (How to Improve Employee Engagement in the Workplace accessed 22 Feb. 2024 from www.Gallup.com), heeds many positive workplace results. Chief among these results is a 64% reduction in workplace incidents/accidents (How to Improve Employee Engagement in the Workplace, accessed 22 Feb. 2024 from www.Gallup.com).

This correlation rings true for the NDFFA. All NDFFA employees are current or past career or volunteer firefighters, demonstrating their investment and commitment to serving those in fire service careers, and the Association's liability, auto, and public assets loss ratios are exceptionally low.

As an Association committed to training and reducing risk for fire service employees, it's not just talking the talk, it's walking the walk.

"NDFAs dedication to loss control and risk management makes them a great partner of the NDIRF," said Member Services Director Corey Olson. "Our mission is to be the source of risk services for local governments, so their partnership directly aligns with our mission."

Under Knuth's leadership, the NDFA secured federal grant and NDIRF sponsorship funding to offer basic pump operations, advanced pump operations, emergency vehicle operations course (EVOC), and advanced EVOC training courses for firefighters and emergency services (EMS) workers.

"I give credit totally to the NDIRF," Knuth said, regarding the Association's ability to continuously offer driver operator courses.

The courses review road safety and provide instruction on how to properly operate emergency response vehicles, including using lights and sirens, to minimize driving accidents.

The NDFA uses a simulator so drivers gain experience in how to safely operate vehicles during various challenging conditions, including weather, low visibility, and obstructions. The simulator is mounted within a mobile training unit, allowing the NDFA to provide training at the requesting department's facility or chosen location.

The NDFA also uses the simulator to help firefighters gain experience in engine pump operation. Many engines have mounted pumps to control hose water flow, and pump operators must be trained on how to safely manage water pressure when their department responds to a scene. Pumps may be mounted to the tops or sides of engines, and the simulator can mimic an engine's pump location so an operator's training experience coincides with the pump type their department uses.

ABOUT THE NORTH DAKOTA FIREFIGHTER'S ASSOCIATION

According to Knuth, the North Dakota Firefighter's Association (NDFA) was formed in 1884 by firefighters who lived within the Dakota Territory, five years before North Dakota's statehood. Its primary purpose at inception was to have a unified legislative voice.



*Rob Knuth
Photo Credit: North Dakota Firefighters Association*

Its early efforts are today reflected in Chapter 18 of North Dakota's Century Code (N.D.C.C.) which states the association is responsible for developing and adopting a statewide fire education and training plan; coordinating fire service training at all levels; establishing procedures to govern the certification process for firefighter training; reporting quarterly to the state fire marshal, and hosting an annual fire school (North Dakota Century Code t18c03, accessed 22 Feb. 2024 from ndlegis.gov).

However, its evolution into a training organization didn't come solely by way of legislation.

Knuth estimates from the 1960-70s, the growing popularity of firefighter rodeos, competitions that brought together various departments to see which one could nab top performances in activities such as a bucket brigade, ladder carries, and hose target practice, launched area firefighters' interest in education and training.

"A lot of it was fun and fostered comradery among departments, but it also spurred a department's desire to learn how it can get better so that it can beat neighboring departments and earn bragging rights," Knuth said.

Since that time, the NDFA's training efforts have evolved into a more organized structure, offering National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) training courses and certifications. The NFPA is the "leading global advocate for the elimination of death, injury, property, and economic loss

Continued on p. 8

due to fire, electrical, and related hazards” (accessed 26 Feb. 2024, from www.nfpa.org). The NFPA is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1896.

Knuth proudly shared the NDFA is also Pro Board accredited. The Pro Board provides “international accreditation for fire service organizations” (accessed 26 Feb. 2024, from <https://theproboard.org>).

The NDFA was first accredited in 2013 and first reaccredited in 2018. The Association will undergo its second reaccreditation in 2024.

“The Pro Board accreditation verifies NDFA provides an exclusive level of training and service to our state’s fire service,” Knuth said.

“If a firefighter is trained and certified under NDFA and, for some reason, transfers to another state that recognizes the Pro Board, the gaining department understands and knows the firefighter has met the requirements of their certification and is capable of performing tasks within their certification level,” Knuth explained.

Knuth shared the basic principles of firefighting are similar across the U.S. with the exceptions being only those due to different climates. For example, the NDFA doesn’t review hurricane glass strength and other states may not review snow load on roofs.

“Other than that, fire burns the same regardless of if you’re in New York, Montana, or North Dakota,” Knuth said.

MISSION

The mission of the North Dakota Firefighter’s Association is to, “To promote the safety and welfare of the North Dakota Firefighters Association members through uniform and established training standards” (accessed 26 Feb. 2024



Repelling demonstration at the 2024 State Fire School in Minot (N.D.). Photo Credit: North Dakota Firefighters Association

from North Dakota Firefighter’s Association - nd.gov).

Fire departments are individually responsible for establishing and enforcing training requirements for their firefighters. For example, Minot Rural Fire Department, for which Knuth serves as assistant chief, requires its firefighters to earn their Firefighter 1 certification within 18 months of joining the department. To receive the necessary training to obtain this certification, the department schedules NDFA on-site training.

“The NDFA is funded through a special fund under the North

Dakota Insurance Department, and we are considered a mobile training organization,” Knuth explained.

“We can’t ask a department to leave its response area,” he continued. “Instead, at zero cost to the requesting department, we provide training at their doorstep, which also eliminates travel and its associated costs.”

In addition to helping firefighters achieve their department’s required certification level, Knuth shared the NDFA provides on-site training for firefighters who want to obtain higher certification levels. Departments are also increasingly inviting the NDFA to provide training courses during their monthly meetings.

CERTIFICATIONS AND ACCREDITATIONS

The NDFA currently follows six national certification standards and 12 certification levels.

“All firefighters train under the guidance provided by the certification advisory committee, which has adopted National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards,” Knuth said.

According to Knuth, the most popular certifications NDFA awards are Firefighter 1 and Firefighter 2.

As an example, the Firefighter One certification reviews basic firefighter skills, including how to quickly put on personal protective gear, including the self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), how to properly climb and work off a ladder, how to properly deploy a hose, and how to secure building utilities.

“If you have to do a rescue or entry into a window, there are certain ways you should position the ladder, work off the ladder, and get on and off the ladder to prevent injuries to the person you’re trying to access and yourself,” Knuth said.

To help minimize reaction time, regarding hose operation, the NDFA instructs firefighters how to pull off the engine’s hose most effectively.

“The last thing you want is a jumbled mess of spaghetti at the base of your engine during an incident when every second counts,” Knuth said.

For securing building utilities, Knuth shared it’s important firefighters know the location and charge status of a building or structure’s electrical system so they can safely contain the fire.

“Electricity and water don’t go very well together,” Knuth said. “There are proper steps we need to follow.”

Firefighters are trained in 55 skills throughout their Firefighter 1 certification training. For their exam, the NDFA randomly selects several skills to test firefighters’ knowledge. The instructor provides firefighters with various scenarios and asks them to explain what the necessary response in accordance with the NFPA standards would be.

ABOUT ROB KNUTH

Knuth served 21 years in the U.S. military, a career that led him across the country and around the world for five 6-12 month-long overseas deployments. He was last stationed in 2000 in Minot, N.D., and he retired in 2006 from the military.

In the months leading up to his military retirement, Knuth thought about what he would miss, acknowledging the comradery and people he worked with were at the top of

the list.

Putting to work his bachelor’s degree in workforce education and training from Southern Illinois University (Carbondale, Ill), Knuth began his post-military career as the 5th Logistics Readiness Squadron’s Vehicle Maintenance Training Lead. For three years, he set up lesson plans and implemented training for new recruits.

It was during this time a coworker shared with Knuth that he served on the Surrey Volunteer Fire Department (Surrey, N.D.), and he talked Knuth into attending a couple of meetings.

“After that, I joined the Surrey Fire Department,” Knuth said. “I trained at Minot Rural Fire Department, and after I received my certification, I stayed with Minot Rural.”

Today, he serves as Minot Rural’s Assistant Chief, which is a volunteer firefighting position.

His ties with North Dakota fire service only strengthened when he joined in 2010 the North Dakota Firefighter’s Association (NDFA) as its Training Coordinator. The newly created position within the association gave Knuth the opportunity to expand its training efforts by forging training partnerships and seeking further accreditation.

Knuth was promoted in 2017 to NDFA Training Director, the position he holds today. He oversees the association’s operations, including office management, grant writing, funding, training requests, certification testing requests, and legislative issues. The association’s employees also include its Office Manager Julie Geltel, Training Coordinator Jonathan Hildremyr, Certification Coordinator Chris Demello Rice, and Part-Time Administrative Assistant Lydia Citta.

When asked what he enjoys most about his role, without hesitation Knuth shared the people he works with and when he gets the chance to lead training courses.

“Each one of our employees is a current or former volunteer or career firefighter,” Knuth said.



Forcible Entry course at the 2014 State Fire School in Minot (N.D.). Photo Credit: North Dakota Firefighters Association

"We get to do the things we love to do," he added. "It's stressful and heartbreaking at times, but each of us has a love for this profession, and we want to pass that on to the next generation."

CAREER AND VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

The North Dakota Firefighter Association (NDFFA) serves all North Dakota career and volunteer firefighters.

North Dakota's four career firefighting departments are Grand Forks Fire Department, Fargo Fire Department, Bismarck Fire Department, and Minot Fire Department.

The state also has nine combination fire departments, which have at least one full-time firefighter. If the full-time firefighters at combination departments need assistance responding to a scene, they rely on their volunteer firefighters. North Dakota also has over 360 fire departments comprised fully of volunteer firefighters which, Knuth shared, most often serve rural communities.

As Knuth earlier shared, he is Minot Rural Fire Department's Assistant Chief, which is a volunteer position. Minot Rural has five full-time employees which includes four firefighters/inspectors.

"Regardless of your firefighting employment status, NDFFA is going to teach you the best way to provide you the skills to

make sure when the tones go off, and you're on a job, that you're going to come home that evening to your family," Knuth said.

Knuth shared the difference between a career and volunteer firefighter is the amount of training and preparation career firefighters perform given they fulfill fire service duties full-time.

Many volunteer firefighters, especially those who serve on volunteer firefighter-only departments, do it to serve their community as "a way to help their neighbors," he said.

"Fire is fire," Knuth said. "It doesn't care if you're a career or volunteer firefighter, so we have to treat ourselves no different than a career firefighter," he continued, sharing insight from his personal volunteer firefighting experience.

STATE FIRE SCHOOL CELEBRATES 70 YEARS

One of the North Dakota Firefighter's Association's (NDFFA) most well-known avenues to educate North Dakota's career and volunteer firefighters is its State Fire School. The event attracts up to 900 attendees each year and offers a catalog of more than 50 courses led by over 100 instructors, many of which are career and volunteer firefighters from across the state.

"We're really proud we've made it 70 years," Knuth said. "We've had multiple other states ask to attend our conference to see how we run the state fire school because they want to understand how we can bring together so many firefighters for training.

"I keep telling them it has taken us 70 years to get to this point, so just know that changing your state's activity level isn't going to happen overnight," he continued.

The NDFFA also holds an annual convention the first Friday every June. The convention serves as the official business meeting of the association at which bylaws or constitution changes are voted.

A HELPING HAND

Knuth considers all North Dakota Firefighters Association (NDFFA) training as loss mitigation efforts.

“Any training we do is intended to mitigate firefighter injury and to deliver our service at the level people expect,” he said. “We look at it as we need to train them to do their jobs as safely as possible.”

One training example he provided was extricating a person from a vehicle. During this training, the Association uses information provided by the North Dakota Highway Patrol (NDHP) so attendees learn how to best position their vehicle to create a safe working area and protect themselves from oncoming traffic, where to position an additional person to communicate with incoming traffic, and how to use lights, signs, cones, etc. to direct traffic.

In addition to training, departments also develop Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG) so firefighters understand factors to consider when they respond to a specific scene.

Knuth acknowledges though every scene is going to be different, SOGs can help to serve as guidelines to maximize performance and minimize the possibility of damage, injury, or worse. He also said departments openly share their SOGs with other departments.

“One thing in the fire service that’s unlike other jobs is that people are proud of the work they do, but they’re not going to withhold it,” Knuth said. “We [the fire service] are very free with information, and many departments will step up to share information if someone asks for help.”

“Fire departments offer to help other departments with bylaws, SOGs, and policies,” he continued.

SOGs and policies also help departments adhere to local and national standards, including those enforced by the NDFPA, National Firefighters Protection Association, and the Pro Board. Knuth acknowledges standards are in place because a past disaster occurred, and it is important for departments to learn from their and others’ past disasters to prevent a repeat disaster.

“We’ll ask them about their disaster prevention strategy and what we can do to help strengthen their strategy,” Knuth said. “We offer to bring in training, which we’ll put on for free at their facility, or connect them to a fellow department

for help review policies, procedures, or SOGs.”

INSPECTOR GADGET

In addition to helping each other, fire departments offer fire safety inspections for commercial/industrial and residential property owners. Knuth estimates building code inspections can comprise 10-30% of a firefighter’s job.

“We help property owners determine ways they can enhance work environment safety, but also if there is an incident, we want to know what we’re responding to,” Knuth said. “For example, we want to know where hazardous materials are stored, if you have a sprinkler system, where your alarm panel is, where your building utility shut-offs are located so that if by chance were responding to a 2 a.m. fire, we can pull up the pre-incident plan to know where the closest water supply is, where to shut off the gas and electric, and any other factors we may need to consider.”

The North Dakota Fire Marshal has regional deputies, and property owners can request Marshal assistance. According to Knuth, the Marshal’s assistance is helpful in communities served by volunteer-only fire departments.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Like many industries, North Dakota’s fire service is focused on recruitment and retention of career and volunteer firefighters.

“I feel we are on track to be able to sustain the fire service in our state,” Knuth said.

“We have made great strides through legislative action to improve the financial status of fire departments in the state and, over the past five years, we’ve seen a huge increase in new firefighters coming in and being active in the training and operations of their departments,” he continued.

Knuth gets the opportunity to meet with new firefighters at training events, whether hosted at the requesting department’s facility or an NDFPA-organized event, and shared he enjoys learning about them and their interests – especially the one they both share.

“I love seeing their growing love for the fire service,” he said.



2023 TOP 10 LOCALGOVU COURSES

BY COREY OLSON, CIC
NDRIF MEMBER SERVICES DIRECTOR

Giving your political subdivision's employees opportunities to grow their professional knowledge and further hone their skills "can significantly enhance employee buy-in. In fact, studies indicate that 94% of employees are more likely to stay with an organization that offers professional development pathways" (Goodbread, J., Five Strategies for Driving Employee Engagement, www.Forbes.com, accessed 3 Jan. 2024).

Whether you have an existing internal training program or you're looking for a place to start, the NDRIF's online training platform LocalGovU can help! LocalGovU gives you access to thousands of online local government training courses for every department within your political subdivision – from HR and professional development to road maintenance and equipment safety, and even POST certified law enforcement courses.

Any of your political subdivision's employees can access these courses at no cost through your entity's NDRIF membership. Registration takes only a few minutes, and you can even set up a curriculum specific to your employees' needs, complete with automated email reminders. Think "set it and forget it!"

Join the North Dakota political subdivisions today who are already using LocalGovU to provide their employees with self-paced, online training courses that feature the latest information and industry trends.

To demonstrate the variety of courses LocalGovU offers, check out the top 10 courses NDRIF members completed in 2023:

**Course summaries provided by LocalGovU (www.ndirf.localgovu.com, accessed Jan. 3, 2024).*

WORKPLACE BULLYING

When we think of bullying, we immediately associate it with the school yard, certainly not something we face as an adult. Unfortunately, bullying in the workplace occurs more often than you think. In fact, there are various forms of bullying, from overt forms to those which are quite passive. Workplace bullying may have significant consequences for those involved, for yourself as an employee as well as your employer. A thorough understanding of workplace bullying will help promote awareness and ultimately prevention.

DEFENSIVE DRIVING BASICS

This course will dive into the basics of defensive driving, including its definition, purpose, and importance, as well as the factors that play an important role from the driver's perspective. We will also discuss the equipment and judgment necessary

for driving safely, as well as review the types of impairment that should be avoided to increase driver safety.

ADVANCED DEFENSIVE DRIVING TECHNIQUES

This course concentrates primarily on advanced defensive driving techniques. You will be given instruction on how to drive defensively in adverse conditions including heavy rain, snow, and ice. We will further discuss how to share the roadways with other motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians.

ANTI-HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Harassment in the workplace is a serious issue that requires a thorough understanding to promote awareness and ultimately prevention. Improper behavior in the workplace may have significant consequences for those involved, for yourself as an employee, and your employer. Recognizing the various types of harassment will help you to identify potential warning signs and take the necessary steps to report harassment.

ETHICAL BEHAVIOR FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In this course, we will define ethical behavior, provide examples of work situations where a thorough understanding of workplace ethics may be applied, and ways in which you can determine if your decisions and behavior are meeting the appropriate standards.

DE-ESCALATION AND MINIMIZING USE OF FORCE

In this course, students will learn to

identify techniques for de-escalation, plan for minimizing use of force, explain the importance of training officers for these encounters and, lastly, apply these strategies to de-escalate volatile situations. Students will be better equipped mentally to make the critical decisions under stress necessary to de-escalate crisis situations and to minimize the force used when use of force becomes necessary.

SUCCESSFUL CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

There is a strong correlation between customer satisfaction and the success of a business or department. Welcoming customers means working to create satisfied customers from the inside-out. When local government creates satisfied customers, we create empowered and informed citizens. In this course, learners will discover how to interact as co-workers and service providers. We will also cover understanding the customer goal and how to create goals that will lead to successful customer interactions.

FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT (FMLA)

In previous eras, people often became caught in an "either/or" situation because employers were not always cooperative when individuals needed time for personal matters. Employees ran the risk of losing their jobs and benefits if they made the choice of putting their family first. Fortunately, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) entitles eligible employees to take the time they need to handle life events. We will go over the FMLA in detail to help you understand the basic

provisions and how the FMLA can benefit you.

CHILDREN AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

The abuse, disappearance, or loss of a child is hard, not only for the family but also on the officer involved in the case. This one-hour training block will touch on tools and resources available to law enforcement in the event of a child related crime as well as the importance of helping officers involved in a case where the death of a child has occurred.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Improper behavior in the workplace may have significant consequences both for yourself and your employer. If you are a victim of sexual harassment, this may create a hostile work environment which takes a toll on your career, your personal life, and your health. Recognizing what sexual harassment is, both the subtle cues as well as the overt advances, will help you to identify potential warning signs and take the necessary steps to report sexual harassment.

Contact Member Services Director Corey Olson at Corey.Olson@ndirf.com or (701) 751-9107 or visit www.NDIRF.com>Member Benefits>Online Training to start your entity's training today with LocalGovU!



HOW TO SUPPORT WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

BY JOANNA DRENNEN, MASCM
HR COLLABORATIVE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Workplace stress is a common phenomenon that can have a significant impact on an individual's well-being and productivity. According to the American Psychological Association's Work in American Survey: Workplaces as Engines of Psychological Health & Wellbeing, "77% of U.S. workers reported stress at work in [November 2023], with 57% reporting negative health effects as a result" (US Workplace Stress at All Time High, Survey Says, www.InsuranceJournal.com, accessed 3 Jan. 2024).

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recognizes workplace stress can "make it more difficult for workers to get their tasks done; threaten their productivity, happiness, and well-being; and lead to burnout (www.OSHA.gov, accessed 3

Jan. 2024). Your entity can support its employees' mental health by finding "ways to alleviate or remove stressors in the workplace to the greatest extent possible, build coping and resiliency supports, and ensure that people who need help know where to turn" (www.OSHA.gov, accessed 3 Jan. 2024).

On its website, OSHA also shares examples of employers' approaches to help reduce workplace stress and highlight mental health supports within the workplace, including:

The following six examples were originally published on www.OSHA.gov, accessed 4 Jan. 2024.

Promote self-care, mindfulness, and general mental well-being. Organizations are implementing strategies to educate workers about

self-care and mindfulness activities to help them cope with stress. Employers and supervisors are encouraged to engage their workers to determine what strategies may be most supportive in their workplace. Examples include:

- Providing access to mobile apps that aim to build emotional resilience and improve sleep habits.
- Offering "Mindful Moment" meditation sessions for workers multiple times a week or full web-based meditation or yoga classes.
- Identifying internal staff who can lead self-care activities for the entire company (e.g., weekly, virtual, guided meditation sessions).
- Implementing structured wellness challenges centered on self-care activities to encourage employees

to engage in wellness activities.

- Hosting virtual yoga classes or virtual workouts.
- Supporting mental health awareness campaigns.
- Providing information on Employee Assistance Programs.

Support an attitude of gratitude. It is important to make a concerted effort to be positive, identify and praise workers' achievements, and encourage staff to look for the good that still exists around them. For example, consider launching an "attitude of gratitude" challenge that focuses on the positive, or an employee recognition program to highlight workers (via social media, articles, and live Webcasts) who have taken action to support each other or their broader communities. Keeping it simple, creating a virtual gratitude board for workers to share what they are grateful for can be beneficial.

Promote a culture of safety and health in the workplace. To promote compliance, top leadership and managers within the company should lead by example and consistently reinforce safety practices and look for opportunities to get workers involved. Employers can alleviate concerns by ensuring that workers are supplied with necessary protective gear and implementing other protective measures that will keep them safe and healthy, at no cost to workers.

Educate workers about the organization's existing safety precautions and ask for their feedback. The absence of information can cause worries to fester. To prevent

this, employers should communicate with their workers regularly in a language they understand to explain what protection measures they have implemented to protect them. More importantly, employers should then ask their workers for feedback on those measures to determine if more can be done to make them feel safe, such as implementing new procedures or helping to enforce protective measures among co-workers and customers. OSHA has created a sample list of questions that employers can use to gauge their workers' perception of existing protective measures. With this feedback in hand, employers can either implement additional protective measures to reduce workers' concerns, or at least explain why a certain course of action has been taken.

Regularly provide safety and health training that includes a focus on mental health and ask for worker feedback. Education and training are important tools for informing workers and managers about workplace hazards and controls so they can work more safely and be more productive. Employers should ensure mental health and workplace stress are included in trainings. Trainings should always be done in the language the workers understand. Employers should underscore their business model succeeds when workers stay healthy and finish the day and go home safely. Workers feel trusted when employers ask them for ideas or improvements and follow-up on suggestions. When possible, provide them time during work hours, if necessary, to research

solutions.

Protect workers from workplace violence. Conflict is stressful, both when it occurs and when workers anticipate that it might. Employers must find ways to help de-escalate and prepare for these stressful situations, such as having workers approach non-complying customers in teams of two; training them on threat recognition, conflict resolution, and nonviolent responses; and providing backup support in the form of managers, security, or law enforcement. See OSHA's workplace violence webpage for additional resource here: www.OSHA.gov/workplace-violence.

An additional idea is to highlight your entity's employee assistance program (EAP) available through your health insurance provider or other organization. Regular EAP communication helps to ensure the program's availability is top-of-mind for your entity's employees and that information about the program is easy to access. For example, one North Dakota government entity makes its EAP provider information highly accessible by placing business card-sized materials throughout its buildings, allowing employees to discreetly pick one up if they're interested in obtaining EAP services.

If you're interested in learning more about how to support workplace mental health at your entity, visit www.OSHA.gov/workplace-stress.



NORTH DAKOTA
INSURANCE
RESERVE FUND
PO BOX 2258
BISMARCK ND 58502

PRESORTED
STANDARD
US POSTAGE PAID
BISMARCK ND
PERMIT NO 419



NDIRF BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Aaron Birst, Bismarck Matt Gardner, Bismarck Darcie Huwe, Wahpeton Tyler Jacobson, Valley City
Burdell Johnson, Tuttle Sonya Larson, Steele Scott Ouradnik, Amidon Chad Peterson, Fargo Chris West, Grafton



HR COLLABORATIVE BIENNIAL CONFERENCE APRIL 17-18, 2024, IN BISMARCK

The HR Collaborative's 2024 Resilient HR conference is happening April 17-18, 2024, at the Bismarck Hotel and Conference Center (Bismarck, N.D.). This conference supports local government employees who perform human resource-related functions within their entities, including HR professionals, supervisors, and those interested in employee management and growth. All local government employees are welcome to attend.

If your entity is an NDIRF member, your employee rate schedule for conference registrations submitted on or before March 31, 2024, is: first registration is FREE (\$199 value!); second and third registrations are 50% off (\$99/person); all subsequent registrations are 25% off (\$149/person). All registrations submitted after March 31, 2024, will be charged \$199. If your entity is not an NDIRF member, the general registration cost is \$249.

REGISTER NOW! www.NDIRF.com>HR Collaborative>2024 Conference Registration

UPCOMING EVENTS

2024 Resilient HR

April 17-18 \\
Bismarck
NDIRF.com

NDIRF Sponsored Training

SW Crime Conference Blue to Gold Law Enforcement Training
April 29-May 3 \\
Dickinson
NDIRF.com

Annual Meeting

May 9, 2024 \\
Bismarck, ND
NDIRF.com