

File No.: 04-1000-20-2025-126

March 25, 2025

s.22(1)

Dear s.22(1)

Re: **Request for Access to Records under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (the "Act")**

I am responding to your request of February 19, 2025 under the ***Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*** for:

People, Culture & Equity Survey and results from Vancouver Fire Rescue Services as referenced in the FD 3 inter-hall correspondence from Deputy Chief Lemire on January 18, 2022.

All responsive records are attached.

Under Part 5 of the Act, you may ask the Information & Privacy Commissioner to review any matter related to the City's response to your FOI request by writing to: Office of the Information & Privacy Commissioner, info@oipc.bc.ca or by phoning 250-387-5629.

If you request a review, please provide the Commissioner's office with: 1) the request number (2025-126); 2) a copy of this letter; 3) a copy of your original request; and 4) detailed reasons why you are seeking the review.

Yours truly,

[Signed by Cobi Falconer]

Cobi Falconer, MAS, MLIS, CIPP/C
Director, Access to Information & Privacy

If you have any questions, please email us at foi@vancouver.ca and we will respond to you as soon as possible. You may also contact 3-1-1 (604-873-7000) if you require accommodation or do not have access to email.

Encl. (Response Package)

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VANCOUVER FIRE RESCUE SERVICES

INTER-HALL CORRESPONDENCE

Hall No: Headquarters

Date: July 27, 2023

To: All Staff

From: Karen Fry, Fire Chief

Subject: **People, Culture & Equity Survey**

In the spring of 2021, the City of Vancouver (COV) conducted their Employee Benchmark Survey. VFRS did not participate in this COV Survey, choosing instead to conduct their own VFRS-specific survey. This was in recognition of the fact that VFRS is vastly different than other city departments.

In spring of 2022, the DC of People, Culture and Equity rolled out the VFRS Survey and analyzed the data. The VFRS Survey asked a series of questions on basic demographic information as well as inquiry into employee experiences, thoughts and challenges throughout one's career. We asked quantitative and qualitative questions.

A. Quantitative Results

324 staff participated in this survey. In 2022, our parade strength was 833 staff. That is a 39% participation rate which is not ideal. Our goal will be to increase participation when we conduct a follow up survey in 2024.

Further quantitative data can be found in the slides at the end of this paper.

B. Qualitative Results

Within the qualitative data we created questions designed to respond to areas that would identify action items for VFRS strategic planning. These questions were designed to determine key areas where VFRS can improve the experience of employees, how to increase the efficacy of support employees are receiving and to offer employees an opportunity for suggestions and improvements. The goal was to identify gaps, as well as to capitalize in spaces where members are experiencing success.

Three key areas the survey focused on were:

- **What is missing in VFRS & where are needs NOT being met?**
- **Where is VFRS leadership successful or building success?**
- **Where is VFRS leadership failing?**

The responses to these three questions are summarized on the following pages.

What is missing in VFRS? Where are your needs not being met?

The following major themes emerged repeatedly in the responses and are listed by frequency in descending order. Note that singular comments or those that appeared very infrequently are not included in these themes.

1. Quality and availability of training

Respondents identified a range of issues relating to the quality and availability of training within VFRS. They indicated support for more training on fundamental skills, no-fail duties, RIT awareness, suppression, specialties, live fire, EMS and leadership is required. The respondents suggested that training should be high quality and proactive, and include in-person learning and follow-up at the hall level.

2. Open communication, listening and transparency

Respondents emphasized the importance of open communication. This includes listening to and understanding the needs of members, providing clear direction, doing regular visits to halls, and being transparent about decision-making. Respondents want to a dialogue to be able to collaborate with leadership. Respondents also commented on the importance of appreciating the work of staff, reporting out after safety incidents (e.g. after-action reports), and communicating between units as part of regular work processes.

3. Lack of resourcing for facilities, equipment and staffing

Respondents commented on the need for improved facilities, saying that many halls are old and facilities are over-subscribed. For example, some halls lack adequate shower facilities, and some have poor heating and air conditioning. They also expressed a desire for updated uniforms and personal equipment. Respondents also expressed a need for more staff resources, both in terms of firefighters and support staff. They would like to see more advocacy to the City of Vancouver for resources.

4. Needs are being met

Respondents stated that their needs are currently being met.

5. Medical benefits and health supports

Respondents expressed a need for better medical benefits, noting that the current benefits are not adequate to meet their health needs. Respondents also want better physical and mental health supports, including dedicated time for exercise, cancer screenings and nasal rinsing facilities, and greater access to sick time.

6. Accountability for staff member behaviour

Respondents identified a need for more support in navigating conflicts between staff, harassment, and other human resources issues. In particular, there is a need for greater accountability when staff members exhibit negative behaviour, instead of ignoring the issue.

Where is VFRS leadership successful or building success?

The following major themes emerged repeatedly in the responses and are listed by frequency in descending order. Note that singular comments or those that appeared very infrequently are not included in these themes.

1. Career development, training, and Officer Development Program

Respondents appreciated the training and career development opportunities available in VFRS. Respondents repeatedly identified the Officer Development Program in particular as a success (FO1, FO2, and FO3). They feel the quality of the training is preparing firefighters well, and is improving the standards of VFRS' work. Some respondents also appreciated the mentorship opportunities within VFRS. The opportunity to take a series of trainings over time allows members to advance and be a part of succession planning.

2. Open communication, listening and transparency

Respondents noted that VFRS leadership has been willing to have open, transparent conversations with members. They appreciated that leadership is listening to members more, and hope it will continue. Activities such as hall visits and "Chief Chats" help with open communication.

3. Feeling of general support

Respondents expressed that they generally felt supported by leadership, especially at the hall level. This includes improvements in listening to and advocacy for frontline needs. CISM was mentioned as being supportive.

4. Relationship between union and management

Respondents stated that the relationship between Local 18 and management is in positive place, noting that the most recent contract negotiation went smoothly. Members felt that leadership is working well with the union.

5. Growth plan and recruitment

Respondents indicated support for VFRS' growth plan, and recognized recent recruitment efforts. Some respondents felt that VFRS is gaining greater access to funding and resources.

6. Hiring and promotion based on ability

Respondents appreciated that recent promotions have been based on ability, especially in regard to leadership skills, and not just seniority. They feel that the right people have been given advancement, and that these people care about their staff.

Where is VFRS leadership failing?

The following major themes emerged repeatedly in the responses and are listed by frequency in descending order. Note that singular comments or those that appeared very infrequently are not included in these themes.

1. Communication with staff

The issue most frequently mentioned by respondents by far is that of communication with staff. There is a sense of disconnect from leadership. Respondents want leadership to better listen to their concerns and collaborating with them to address the concerns. This communication can take the form in-person visits, Captain's meetings, and recognition for staff. Respondents believe there is not transparency in communication and that decisions are being made without understanding the outcomes or effects.

2. Accountability and follow-through on actions

Related to better communication, respondents also want to see that their ideas and feedback are acted upon. Multiple people expressed that there is a lack of accountability or follow-through on actions and projects. Respondents also indicated that there is a gap in succession planning.

3. Addressing the right issues

Respondents felt that leadership was addressing the wrong issues. They stated that they would like more of a focus on the basics, core needs such as upgrading facilities (fire-hall conditions, outdated equipment) and systems (computers, software), increasing staffing and mental health and wellness (access to services, extended health benefits) instead of less important issues.

Examples of issues seen as less important include:

- Focusing on hiring quotas, political hires, affirmative action hires and diversity hiring rather than qualified candidates
- Resources spent on diversity and equity programs dilute VFRS
- 'outside' people becoming Chiefs and too many Chiefs
- Worrying about vaccine status

4. Quality and availability of training

Respondents wanted more opportunities for training, and also want higher-quality training. Various suggestions were offered: some felt that the training offered is not relevant, while another felt that dedicated space outside of duty is needed to avoid interruptions, and another felt that continuing education is not well supported.

5. Hiring and promotions process

Respondents expressed concerns with the hiring process. They felt that recent hires and promotions in leadership positions were unqualified, and that those at the entry level are less committed. Some respondents disliked having people who are not firefighters on hiring panels and in leadership positions.

C. General Sentiment

Some similar responses mentioned throughout the survey, and while often the responses weren't directly related, some key themes were evident.

- Cost of living and transportation impacts ability to attract and retain quality staff
- A feeling by some that VFRS hires based on quotas, agendas, hiring to fill a box, and not for skill/ability
- Support exists from and between crews but not from VFRS management or the City
- Focus on issues that are core firefighting
- Training and development needs; specialties, officer development, RIT, EMR
- VFRS provides a paycheck that is always on time
- Call volume, not enough support staff, under-resourced leads to burn out, expected to do more with less
- Laziness in halls, jobs not done 100% anymore, people don't want to be at work
- Inconsistent, out-of touch leadership
- Support for DTES and opioid crisis

D. Next Steps

This feedback is valuable and has already guided our decision making. I am very pleased that we have made strides in many of the identified areas and many action plans have already been executed on or are in progress.

Some examples of this progress include working with our employees to improve the ODP, re-instituting captains meetings, additional health supports in the most recently ratified contract, a new freely bargained Collective Agreement, ongoing hiring and support of the On-Duty AC positions, creation of 4 dedicated and funded ISO positions and relief positions, hiring of a new DC of People, further implementation of our growth plan by adding both FF and support positions and new Fire-halls continue to be built and approved. We have also been actively working alongside our ERG's, Recruitment and communities in the City on outreach and cultural learning. This is work we all should be proud of.

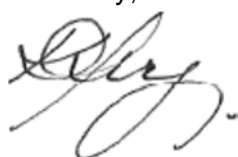
That said, we have much more work to do. The leadership team will be working with our Union partners, ERG's, HR and our staff to further assess this information with a view to putting solid action plans in place in order to improve customer and employee experience.

We will be providing additional feedback opportunities, continued employee engagement and ongoing assessment of benchmarks and timelines.

The intent is to conduct another VFRS specific survey in 2024 and measure against this baseline. Further direction will be included in the 2024-2026 Strategic Plan.

I want to take a moment to thank all that took the time to fill out this survey or provide comment in other forums; your efforts will make a difference in our workplace.

Sincerely,



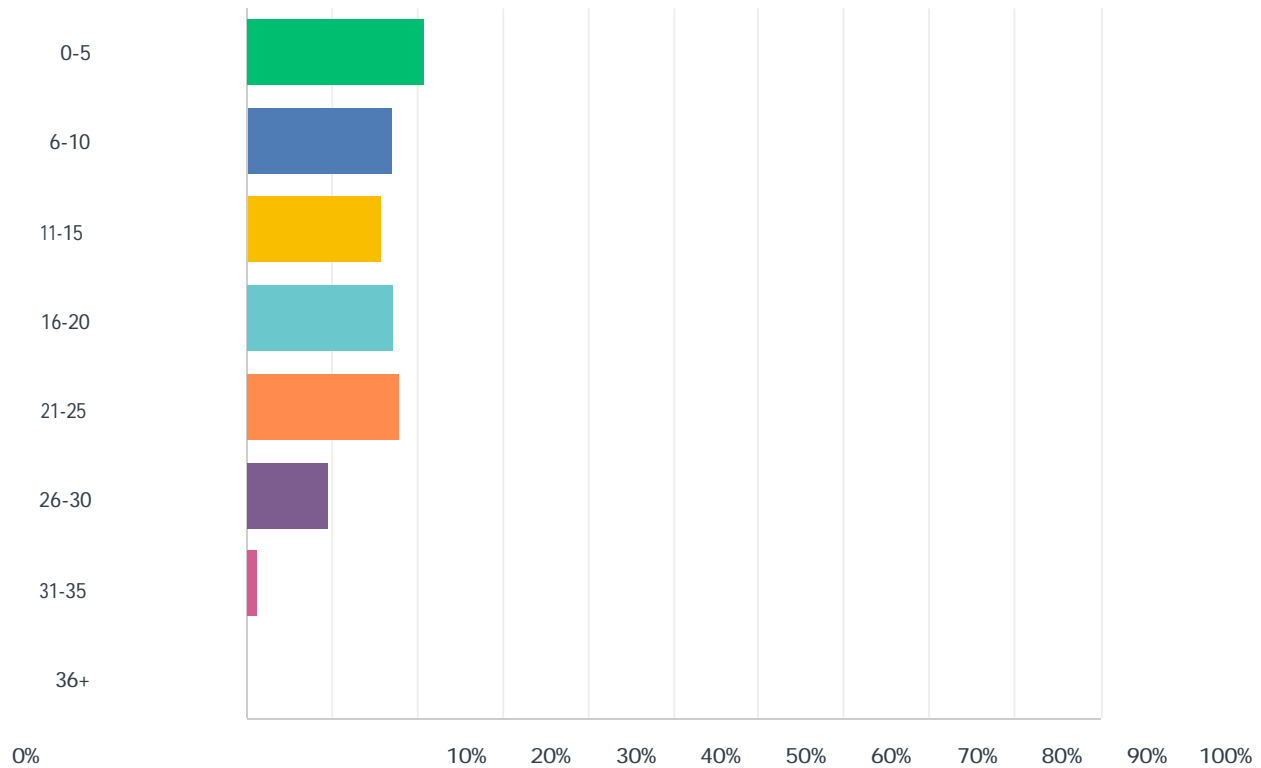
Karen Fry
Fire Chief

VFRS Equity Benchmark Survey

Q1 How many years have you been working with VFRS?

Answered: 324

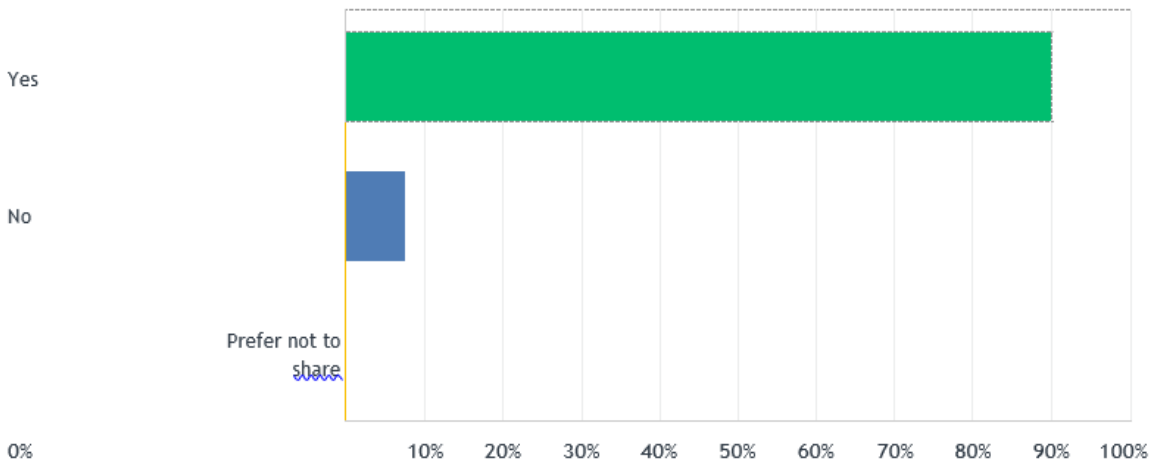
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-5	20.99%	68
6-10	16.98%	55
11-15	15.74%	51
16-20	17.28%	56
21-25	17.90%	58
26-30	9.57%	31
31-35	1.23%	4
36+	0.31%	1
Total		324

Q8 Were you born in Canada?

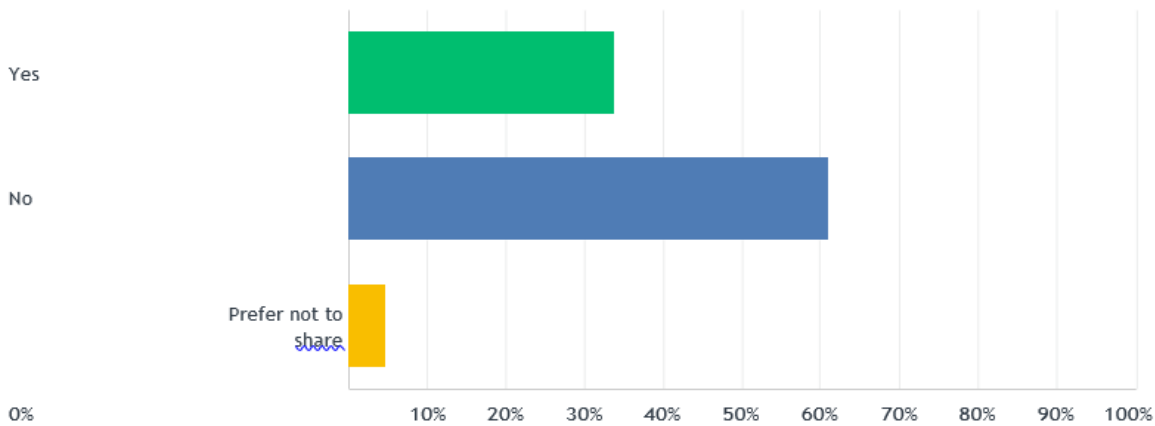
Answered: 263 Skipped: 61



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Yes		90.49%	238
No		7.60%	20
Prefer not to share		1.90%	5
TOTAL			263

Q9 Do you have one or more parents born outside Canada?

Answered: 263 Skipped: 61



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Yes		33.84%	89
No		61.22%	161
Prefer not to share		4.94%	13
TOTAL			263

Q10. Please describe your caregiving responsibilities outside of work? (e.g. childcare? Elder care? Spouse/partner care?)

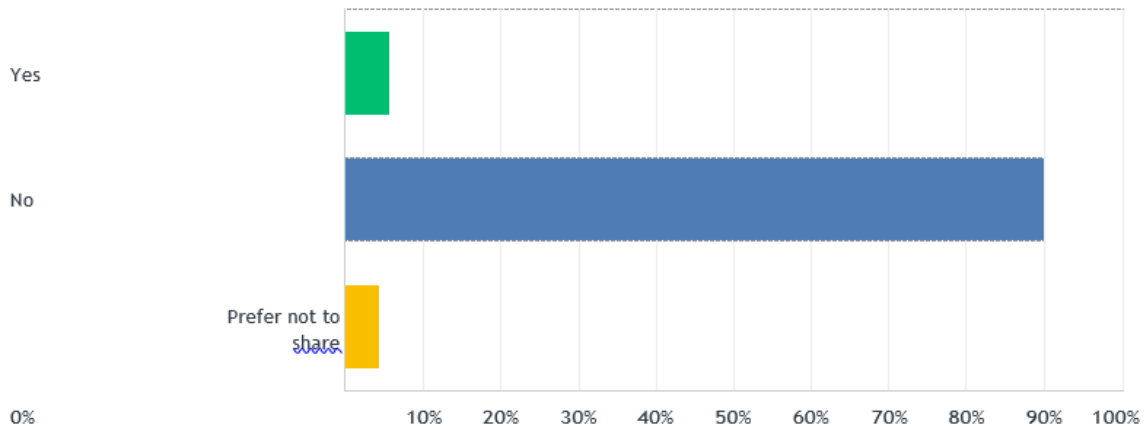
Answered: 239 Skipped: 85

Responses indicated childcare, eldercare/parental care as the largest additional caregiver responsibilities. Secondary level of responses indicated care for person with disabilities, spousal/partner support, and sibling care. Tertiary and outlier responses included pet care, no additional persons, friends and N/A.

Q11 Are you a person who identifies as having a disability/ies?

Answered: 263

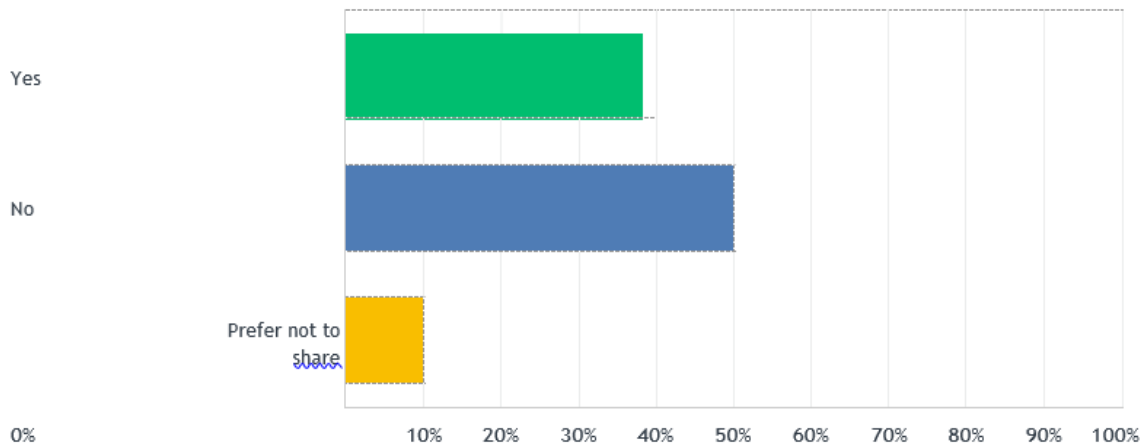
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ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Yes		5.70%	15
No		89.73%	236
Prefer not to share		4.56%	12
TOTAL			263

Q12. Are you a person who has or is experiencing any emotional or mental health concerns? Homewood Health is the provider of the City's EFAP - a confidential, professional service offered to employees and their families to help support them in resolving a wide range of problems that may impact their work performance, wellness and behavior. <https://homeweb.ca/>

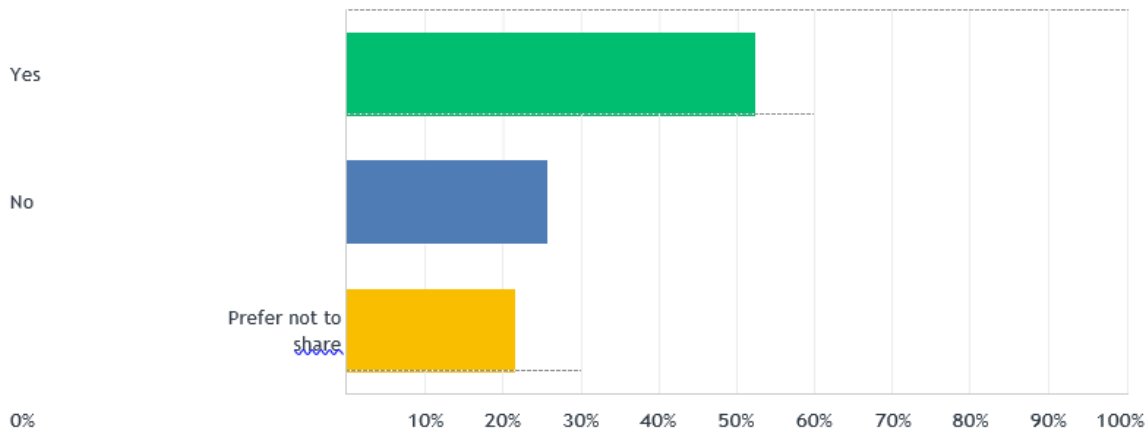
Answered: 261 Skipped: 63



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Yes		38.31%	100
No		50.96%	133
Prefer not to share		10.73%	28
TOTAL			261

Q13 If you answered yes to the above question, do you feel you can access appropriate support?

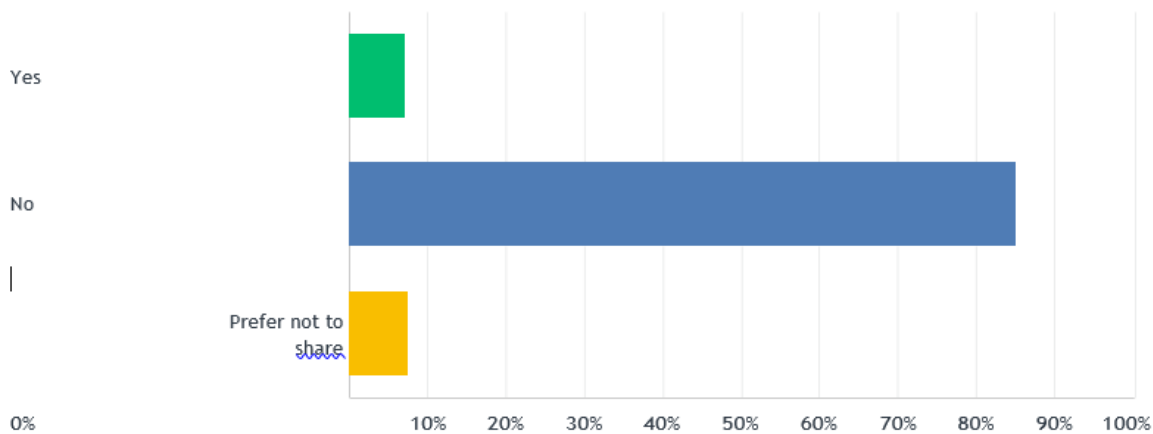
Answered: 202 Skipped: 122



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Yes		52.48%	106
No		25.74%	52
Prefer not to share		21.78%	44
TOTAL			202

Q14. Are you a person who has or is experiencing substance abuse or addictions issues? Homewood Health is the provider of the City's EFAP - a confidential, professional service offered to employees and their families to help support them in resolving a wide range of problems that may impact their work performance, wellness and behavior. <https://homeweb.ca/>

Answered: 260 Skipped: 64



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Yes		7.31%	19
No		85.00%	221
Prefer not to share		7.69%	20
TOTAL			260

Q17. Please rate the following questions:

0= I don't know or have no experience with this

1= Disagree

2= Sometimes, but not always/inconsistent

3= Agree

Answered: 227 Skipped: 97

	I don't know or I have no experience	Disagree	Sometimes or Inconsistent	Agree
VFRS works with members to create opportunities for success (leadership, promotional, training, and specialization)	3.10%	13.27%	45.58%	38.05%
My workplace is free from discrimination, bullying and/or harassment	2.21%	18.14%	37.17%	42.92%
I have a respectful chain of communication, where I can discuss my performance, development and any issues I am experiencing at work	1.33%	9.29%	23.01%	66.37%
My place of work offers facilities and infrastructure that are safe, appropriate and provide what I require to be successful in my role with VFRS	3.54%	13.72%	32.74%	50.44%
VFRS provides systems and supports that reflect my needs, and that are easily accessible	5.31%	17.26%	41.59%	35.84
The policies, processes and systems in place are appropriate and reasonable; they are justifiable and equitable	5.31%	19.03%	41.59%	34.07%
I have access to mentorship and/or support when I need it	1.33%	9.73%	30.53%	58.85%
I understand how and why decisions are being made	6.19%	34.07%	40.71%	19.47%
I have a valuable voice and opinion within my team	2.22%	16.44%	36.44%	46.67%

VFRS People, Culture & Equity Benchmark Survey

Question No.	Question
1	How many years have you been working with VFRS?
2	Are you an Indigenous Person? For this purpose, Indigenous people refer to those whose ancestors have lived on Turtle Island (Also referred to as North America) since time immemorial
3	What is your gender identity? Please select one
4	What best describes your sexual orientation(please select all that you feel apply)
5	Please share a few brief statements that best describe your own racial and cultural identity
6	What is your ancestry, or ethnic/cultural origin?(This question is asking about your ancestry, ethnic, cultural origins. Remember, this may be different from your birthplace, country of origin or primary language and may not refer to a specific geographic location. You may specify multiple ancestries.) Please share whatever you feel is applicable to you.
7	What religion or spiritual tradition do you observe or identify as being part of?
8	Were you born in Canada?
9	Do you have one or more parents born outside Canada?
10	Please describe your caregiving responsibilities outside of work?(E.g. childcare? Elder care? Spouse/partner care?)
11	Are you a person who identifies as having a disability/ies?
12	Are you a person who has or is experiencing any emotional or mental health concerns?Homewood Health is the provider of the City's EFAP - a confidential, professional service offered to employees and their families to help support them in resolving a wide range of problems that may impact their work performance, wellness and behavior. https://homeweb.ca/
13	If you answered yes to the above question, do you feel you can access appropriate support?
14	Are you a person who has or is experiencing substance abuse or addictions issues?Homewood Health is the provider of the City's EFAP - a confidential, professional service offered to employees and their families to help support them in resolving a wide range of problems that may impact their work performance, wellness and behavior. https://homeweb.ca/
15	How would you describe yourself in a few sentences? Your values, your hobbies, your family, your skills? What about who you are is most important to you?
16	What are some examples of when you have experienced/seen or participated in:
17	Please rate the following questions (0= I don't know, am unsure or have no experience with this; 1= Disagree; 2= Sometimes, but not always – inconsistent or only in some areas; 3= Agree)
	1. VFRS works with members to create opportunities for success (leadership, promotional, training, and specialization)
	2. My workplace is free from discrimination, bullying and/or harassment
	3. I have a respectful chain of communication, where I can discuss my performance, development and any issues I am experiencing at work
	4. My place of work offers facilities and infrastructure that are safe, appropriate and provide what I require to be successful in my role with VFRS
	5. VFRS provides systems and supports that reflect my needs, and that are easily accessible
	6. The policies, processes and systems in place are appropriate and reasonable; they are justifiable and equitable
	7. I have access to mentorship and/or support when I need it
	8. I understand how and why decisions are being made
	9. I have a valuable voice and opinion within my team
18	How does VFRS support you? What systems, processes do you feel are most beneficial?
19	What is missing in VFRS? Where are your needs not being met, consistently?
20	What are the key factors that contribute to your success at VFRS?
21	What are the key items that impact you negatively?
22	What issues do you see at VFRS and how do you think they should be handled?
23	If you were Fire Chief, what is the number #1 change you would make? What is the number #1 thing you would keep?
24	Where is VFRS leadership successful or building success?
25	Where is VFRS leadership failing?

- 26 Where are you struggling and what do you need?
- 27 How can VFRS better support you?
- 28 Are there any holidays, celebrations or days/events of significance that you would like VFRS to acknowledge?
- 29 How does cost of living/transportation affect your decision to continue to be a part of VFRS?
- 30 What other factors impact your decision to be continue to be a part of VFRS?
- 31 Please share anything that you feel is important to you and why?