

# EVALUATING THE FIRE CHIEF



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**HUMAN RESOURCE  
STRATEGIES**

# The Rave Review



Was it helpful?

What was the focus?

Did the review help the Fire Chief?

Did the review help the Board?

Did the review help the District?

# Why Evaluate?



- **What is the purpose?**
  - Discuss performance
  - Meet contractual requirements
  - Celebrate accomplishments
  - Clarify Board's expectations
  - Drive improvement
  - Establish goals
  - Improve Board and Fire Chief communications
  - Provide means for meeting needed improvements
  - Possible termination/severance

# Monitoring Performance



- **Strategic plan**
  - 5 year (long term)
  - Current year (short term)
- **Capital improvement plan**
- **Setting annual goals**
- **Looking at growth/development expectations**
- **Discussing continuing education requirements**

# Statutory Obligations



- Fire Board has duty to:
  - Appoint or hire the Fire Chief
  - Determine compensation and benefits
- Fiduciary duty -- owed by both the Board and the Fire Chief

# Board Responsibility



- **Fire Board has responsibility for**
  - Vision/goal setting
  - Fire Chief contract
  - Fire Chief compensation/benefits
  - Job description
  - Setting goals/expectations
  - Establishing a performance management process

# The Evaluation Process Should Be...



- A positive, objective process
- Structured communication between the Board and the Fire Chief
- An information tool to guide change
- A method for promoting goals, values, progress
- Performed in a supportive atmosphere

# Timing Considerations



- Formal evaluation
- Informal updates/discussions
- Notification requirements for renewal/non-renewal of contract
- Budget cycle



# Alignment Considerations



- With calendar deadlines
- With District goals/objectives
  - From strategic plan
- With Fire Chief contract
- With District policies
- With Board/Fire Chief working agreement

# Identifying the Board's Preferred Process



- Frequency
- Informal verbal conversation
- Formal written evaluation
- Combination
- Self-evaluation by Fire Chief submitted to Board
- 360 Evaluation by rank and file
  - Approach with caution!
  - Who is involved: Board, Fire Chief, Staff, Union

# The Evaluation Process



- **Compliance with the Brown Act (open meeting law)**
  - Personnel Exemption allows for FC performance to be discussed in a closed session
  - Closed/executive session vs. Public Session -- FC choice
  - Provide 24 hour written notice to FC
- **Individual Board members vs. Board as a whole?**
- **Compiling a written evaluation by the Board**
- **Administering the evaluation**

# Evaluation Instrument



- Consider a collaborative effort between Board and Fire Chief in developing the evaluation form
- Review with new Fire Chief
- Rating system defined
- Allow for written comments, not just ratings
- Performance standards
  - Set and used year to year
  - Aligned with job description
- Goals
  - Focus areas for Fire Chief
  - Set annually

# Typical Performance Standards



- Leadership / Personal Initiative
- Board / Fire Chief Relations
- Communications
- Customer Service / Community Relations
- Management Effectiveness
- Administrative/Fiscal Management
- Human Resource Management
- Technical Expertise

# Goals



- Set annually
- Review at annual performance evaluation
- Typically 3-5 major goals for the year
- SMART goals
  - Specific
  - Measurable
  - Attainable
  - Realistic
  - Timebound

# 360 Evaluation



- Fire Board driven, or
- Fire Chief driven (for self-reflection)
- Who will be surveyed?
- Questions to be asked?
- Random?
- Anonymous?

# Self-Evaluation



- Prior to Board conducting an evaluation, Fire Chief should provide self reflection on performance standards and goals
- Can be presented to Board before or during the evaluation meeting
- Helps Board understand what has been accomplished
- Makes Board aware of obstacles that may have prevented accomplishment of goals



# Well Executed Evaluation



- No surprises to Board or Fire Chief
- Celebrates accomplishments
- Reflects consideration of entire period being reviewed
- Promotes opportunity for growth with follow up and review
- Assures timely, fair, thorough review
- Ratings are supported by comments

# Evaluation Pitfalls



- Focus on “latest” event -- “Recency Error”
- Failure to review the Board’s responsibility in attainment or non-attainment of Fire Chief’s goals
- Used to discuss District issues that should occur in open session
- Focus on emotion of the moment
- Fire Board not speaking as one voice
- Failure to follow policy
- Not putting agreements in writing

# Summary



- Evaluation process should be designed to review and continually improve performance
- Instrument and associated use/timing should be fair, meaningful, and appropriate
- Focus on continued development
- Meet any contractual obligations