

MANITOBA FIRE SERVICE



Junior Firefighter Program Model Handbook



The Junior Firefighter Program Handbook is based on the National Volunteer Fire Council's National Junior Firefighter Program. The OFC has received permission to use and promote the resources available from the NVFC. More information is available on their website www.nvfc.org/juniors



The content of this handbook is for informational purposes only. It is not a substitute for any laws or regulations, nor is it a certification program. This handbook should be used at the fire department's discretion.

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ABOUT THE JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER PROGRAM

The Junior Firefighter Program supports fire and emergency service departments by fostering relationships and engaging youth in learning about, and ultimately becoming, members of the emergency services. It is key to attract people into the emergency services while they are young so that they form a lifelong connection, whether as a first responder or as a community supporter. Junior firefighter programs give our province's youth the chance to learn about local fire, rescue, and emergency medical services response organizations in a safe, controlled, educational, and fun way while providing departments with an excellent recruitment mechanism.

Reaching out to people when they are young has long-range effects, and encouraging youth to take part in the emergency services is extremely beneficial to local communities and departments. Benefits of junior firefighter programs include:

- ▶ ***Allowing youth to gain insight and interest in becoming long-term members of the emergency services***
- ▶ ***Increasing awareness among youth about volunteering and supporting the fire and emergency services***
- ▶ ***Providing departments with additional help in accomplishing non-firefighting or non-emergency tasks***
- ▶ ***Instilling valuable life skills, such as teamwork, responsibility and cooperation in our youth***
- ▶ ***Leadership development for Manitoba's youth, who are tomorrow's leaders***
- ▶ ***Educating parents and mentors on the importance of encouraging volunteerism***

The contents of this guide and other resources from the Junior Firefighter Program are intended to help departments support youth involvement in the fire and emergency services. The program does not advocate youth participating in operational/emergency response activities. However, the Junior Firefighter Program serves as an umbrella to local programs across the province, and it is up to the individual department to determine the activities their youth can participate in and the associated liability with these activities. Departments should consider consulting with their municipal officials, and/or legal advisor regarding specific participation or liability regulations within their jurisdiction and the MAFC.

Visit www.firecomm.gov.mb.ca for more information. For additional assistance, contact the OFC at 1-888-253-1488 or firecomm@gov.mb.ca



INTRODUCTION

Starting a youth program may seem like a daunting task, requiring a large amount of time and dedication from your department/organization's time-constrained leadership and members. But starting a program does not have to be a burden. In fact, the program can become a source of volunteers to help you achieve non-operational tasks today and provide trained, effective new recruits in the future.

The goal of the Junior Firefighter Program Handbook is to provide a turn-key tool to help you build a solid foundation for your program. Throughout this guide, you'll also find information on additional resources you can utilize to jumpstart the involvement of youth in your organization, train your junior firefighters, and maintain your program throughout the years.

STARTING A JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER PROGRAM

- ▶ **STEP ONE**
Get Departmental Support
- ▶ **STEP TWO**
Assess Liability
- ▶ **STEP THREE**
Determine the Appropriate Age Range
- ▶ **STEP FOUR**
Establish What Youth Members Can and Cannot Do
- ▶ **STEP FIVE**
Set the Minimum Requirements for Youth Participants
- ▶ **STEP SIX**
Formalize the Program's Operating Guidelines and Other Documents
- ▶ **STEP SEVEN**
Find Funding
- ▶ **STEP EIGHT**
Recruit Youth Participants



STEP 1 – GET DEPARTMENTAL SUPPORT

Implementing a youth program can be a significant asset to your department. The program can be a valuable recruitment tool – helping you find a new stream of volunteers and community supporters that will be the backbone of your department for years to come. Whether you are a Chief trying to determine what resources and personnel you need to start a program or a department member seeking approval to start a program, one thing is certain: support from your organization’s leaders and members is crucial. Without solid program leadership and interest from department members, the program cannot be successful. Ensure you have full buy-in from your Chief, officers, and members before formally launching your program.

You will need to make the case as to why it is important for your department to get youth involved and the positive impact it will have on your department and the community. A junior program is a great tool for recruiting potential future members and leaders of your organization. These young volunteers can also help the department with nonoperational tasks such as fundraising, events, and fire prevention education while bringing a new perspective and fresh ideas to the table. Establishing a youth program will help your department form stronger bonds within your community and teach participants critical skills such as leadership, teamwork, and responsibility. In addition, junior programs provide youth with invaluable experience and education in the fire and emergency services, and members of these programs often become lifelong supporters of their department.

Consider showing the monetary value of the nonoperational support your junior firefighters will provide, or the value of the time saved for your operational personnel. The [NVFC Foundation’s Cost Savings Calculators](#) help demonstrate this value.

You may have to alleviate concerns within your department about having youth present at your facility and events. A successful program has solid leadership that promotes safety first and ensures that there is no negative impact on the overall operation of your organization/department or its primary mission to protect and serve the community

You will also need members of your department to help lead or serve as advisors to the program. To ensure adequate safety and supervision of the youth members, successful programs should have at least one adult advisor for every 6-7 youth participants (this may vary depending on age of youth members). You may need to limit program participation based on the number of department members who will commit to serving as advisors. It is important the advisors be familiar with the intricacies of working with teens and be prepared to serve as mentors.

You will also need several additional members who are interested in participating in the program as mentors, educators, and in support roles. If your organization encompasses both fire and EMS, you should ensure there are members within both services who are willing and able to assist with the program.

To protect your junior firefighters as well as your department, screen all adults who will be working with your junior firefighters. Volunteers sometimes receive a discount or no charge for Criminal Record and Child Abuse Registry Checks.



STEP 2 – ASSESS LIABILITY

It is important to research the liability laws and regulations within your jurisdiction prior to starting a junior firefighter program. It is in your best interest to consult with your insurance provider as well as with legal counsel before you start a program or change any existing requirements.

The program does not advocate youth participating in operational/emergency response activities. However, the decision for youth activities is ultimately up to the individual department. Departments should check with their current insurance provider regarding requirements for youth who are present on their organization's property and/or participants in organization activities or events, regardless of how they are involved. Departments should consider consulting with their municipal officials, and/or legal council regarding specific participation or liability regulations within their jurisdiction.

Typically, a signed waiver of liability that includes a full disclosure of risks will help protect you from liability should someone be injured. The parent or legal guardian of the youth participant must sign this form along with the youth participant. Language for consent forms and liability waivers will vary for each department depending on local, and insurance requirements.

STEP 3 – DETERMINE THE APPROPRIATE AGE RANGE

The program recommends a minimum age requirement of at least 11th grade or 16 years old, going up to the age your department requires for full operational membership (usually 18). However, it is up to your department to determine the age range for your program. Age ranges for programs across Canada include everything between 8-18 years old. You should work with your organization/department leaders to determine what this range will be.

The age range should be based on factors including the makeup of your community and provincial age requirements, such as child labor laws, that may impact your program. If you choose to allow participants below age 16, you can help ensure adequate supervision by limiting the number of youth in the program based on the number of adult coordinators or managers of the program. Employment Standards provides information on the requirements for young employees in the Province of Manitoba. A Fact Sheet is available on their website http://www.gov.mb.ca/labour/standards/doc_young-workers_factsheet.html

The program recommends establishing a partnership with your local high school, as students can gain valuable skills development and experience while earning high school credits. Students may have the opportunity to earn up to 2.0 high school credits through on-the-job work experience. We recommend contacting your local high school administrator to introduce your Junior Firefighter Program as a work experience option for their students.



STEP 4 – ESTABLISH WHAT YOUTH MEMBERS CAN & CAN'T DO

While departments may have individual requirements and special programs, depending on age and experience, we recommend only non-operational participation by youth members. The final decision lies with your own organization's requirements, provincial labour laws, and other factors. Before finalizing your organization's program, you should meet with your leadership, insurance carrier, and municipal officials to review which activities your participants will and will not be doing.

Consider the following when developing your activity list:

- ▶ *The program does not advocate youth engaging in fireground/scene operations other than providing support or auxiliary work, such as supplying refreshments, well outside of the "hot zone" or operational area.*
- ▶ *Youth participants should be supervised at all times and should not act without a supervisor's direction. An adult advisor of your organization's program should always provide direction to youth participants and be ready and able to answer questions.*
- ▶ *The program encourages training youth in the core areas of interest (fire, rescue, or EMS). Classroom-based learning is appropriate for most program participants. For example, classes on CPR/AED, communications, fire safety and prevention, and general fire, rescue, and EMS education are all courses that can be taught to youth without putting them in situations where they may be injured. Depending on the age and abilities of participants, some programs also offer simulated, hands-on training in a non-emergency situation, such as staging EMS skills training with mock victims or practicing skills such as working with ladders or advancing the hoseline in a safe, controlled, non-fire environment. The [NVFC's Core Competencies for the Junior Fire Service](#) provides step-by-step training examples.*
- ▶ *Assess what needs the department has that juniors can potentially fill, such as organizing Fire Prevention Week activities, conducting fire safety programs in schools, and helping with fundraising events. Consider activities that are mutually beneficial – helping the department/community and alleviating burdens placed on personnel while building skills for the juniors like communication, teamwork, organization, and community service.*
- ▶ *Create leadership opportunities for youth to keep them engaged and help them grow. Many high-performing junior firefighter programs are run by junior captains (with oversight from adult advisors). This helps youth be invested in the group's success – and can help relieve the time burden on adult leaders.*
- ▶ *Focusing on health and safety for junior firefighters creates a healthier fire service in the future. Firefighters face increased risk of cancer, heart disease, and vehicle crashes. Activities and trainings should emphasize both health and safety to instill these in the youth now so they practice them later as full-fledged responders.*



STEP 5 – SET THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Some things to consider when setting the requirements for youth participation are grades, parental permission and involvement, and hours of participation. Have policies in place for what happens if the minimum requirements are not met, including disciplinary actions that will be taken from warnings to dismissal from the program.

- ▶ **Application:** *Develop a program application that includes the following guidelines and asks for birth date and other demographic/experience information needed to participate in your program.*
- ▶ **Grades:** *It is recommended that participants provide documentation proving the attainment of at least a “C” or passing average in their school coursework. Organizations may want to align this minimum with school-sponsored extracurricular activity requirements and should monitor grades on a quarterly or bi-annual basis at a minimum. Parents may ask organizations to limit participation at higher averages, and their word should always be the last in these cases.*
- ▶ **Parental/Guardian Permission and Involvement:** *Full permission from the parent or legal guardian should always be obtained for participants who are under 18 years of age through a written/signed release. Parents should be presented with an accurate overview of your program, what it entails, and what their children will learn. The more proactive you are with parents, the better. Encourage parents/guardians to attend department functions, host special monthly or quarterly social nights for parents, and host other special functions for the youth and their parents so the parent is confident in the department’s dedication to the program and its members. Consider additional ways to get the parents/guardians involved, such as through an auxiliary or support program for those who may be interested in joining the department in a non-emergency capacity. Some parents might even be interested in joining the department as an emergency responder.*
- ▶ **Hours of Participation:** *Consider whether you want to require your program’s members to participate in a certain number of activities or for a certain number of hours each month in order to remain an active member. Take into consideration your local, and school requirements for when your youth members are allowed to participate. For instance, many schools will not allow their students to leave during the school day to participate in junior firefighter activities, but others will. There may also be certain laws or regulations concerning how late at night youth members are allowed to participate in program activities. See [Employment Standards Fact Sheet](#). Consider selecting certain week nights and/or a weekend afternoon so that juniors build the time into their schedule.*



STEP 6 – FORMALIZE THE PROGRAM’S SOGs AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

Once you have determined the age range, activity list, and minimum requirements for youth participants, formalize the Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) for your program, which should encompass all of these items. Safety and safe practices should be of highest priority in all SOGs. Make sure all potential youth participants and their parent/guardian receive a copy of these guidelines and are clear on their content. The content of your program’s SOGs and other documents (such as program applications, consent forms and liability releases) should be customized based on the needs and requirements of your department/organization, community and the [requirements for young employees](#).

STEP 7 – FIND FUNDING

An important piece of establishing a new junior firefighter program is determining where funding will come from to launch and maintain your program. Program costs could include recruitment/outreach materials and advertising, providing t-shirts, printing guides, purchasing materials for training drills, traveling to regional trainings, or providing gear for youth. Many departments don’t have a line item in the budget for anything beyond the basics for their junior firefighter program (if that!), but don’t let this deter you from implementing your program.

Many programs charge nominal dues from their junior firefighters to help run the program and ensure youth commitment to the program. Fundraisers are another excellent method for securing funding for your program since youth can organize and staff these events. Programs raise funds through pancake breakfasts and spaghetti dinners; car washes; holiday wreath/tree sales; boot drives; and more.

Reaching out into the community can provide the sponsorship and support you need to make your program beneficial for your department, and exciting and fulfilling for your junior firefighters. With creativity and the support of local organizations, you can make your program a success and reach your financial goals.

STEP 8 – RECRUIT YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

You’ve done the hard work of building your program – now ask youth to come join! Once you have established the framework for your junior firefighter program, it is time to recruit youth members. For this, you can look to the community, schools, department members, and the local media.

Create a specific name and mission statement for your program that can be used for outreach purposes. Use something that is catchy and quickly relays what the program is about. Do not underestimate the excitement your community members have about the fire, rescue, and emergency medical services.



- ▶ **Community:** *There are many ways to connect with your community in order to recruit youth members. Some ideas include the following:*
 - *Outreach to and form partnerships with existing youth organizations, such as 4H, athletic teams, school service organizations, schools, religious communities, and other groups.*
 - *Ask schools to host a fire prevention and safety event with your department and include promotion of your youth program.*
 - *Some schools have a community service program that requires students to volunteer within the community. If this is the case in your community's schools, make sure your program is listed as an option.*
 - *Schools may also be interested in working with your department to provide a fire service vocational program in conjunction with the Manitoba Emergency Services College.*
 - *Ask to have a table or to present at school events, church functions, or other youth-oriented events. If you already have youth members, bring them along (in the program's uniform, if possible) to create a positive impression of your youth program. Peers are the best recruiters for any program.*

- ▶ **Department Members:** *Your department's members can also be great recruiters. Remember to reach out to those within your organization when recruiting youth members and utilize their connections within your community.*
 - *Existing adult members may have children who are interested in getting involved in the organization in a more formal manner. These youth (and their friends) may also be an excellent source of word-of-mouth marketing.*
 - *Current members of your youth organization are also a great marketing resource. Consider creating internal rewards and recognition for youth who recruit new members to your program.*

- ▶ **Local Media:** *There are many ways to utilize the local media to help recruit junior firefighters.*
 - *Submit press releases to local media outlets including newspapers and television and radio stations announcing the launch of your program and how local youth can join. Submit subsequent press releases with program news and updates to continue promoting your program over time.*
 - *Ask your local newspaper or television news program to feature a profile of a junior firefighter each month or quarter. This offers another means of promoting your program and its participants.*
 - *Mention your youth program in all of the department's fundraising, news, fire prevention, and recruitment materials, and on the department web site and social media pages. - Create social media pages for your junior firefighter program (juniors can help manage the pages, following the department's SOGs regarding social media) to promote the program and events in your community and beyond.*



CONCLUSION

Congratulations on taking the first step to creating a successful youth program in your department! By following the steps in this Handbook, you will be ready to launch a sustainable junior firefighter program.

The next, continuous step is to maintain and grow your program. You can refer back to several of the sections in this guide (along with their corresponding resources) as you seek new recruits each year, adapt activities and training to meet your capacity and members' needs, and seek ongoing funding.

Perhaps the most important factor is keeping your youth engaged by making this a safe, fun, and educational environment. Please continue to monitor provincial regulations regarding youth programs and make adjustments as needed.

The Manitoba Fire Service's Junior Firefighter Program provides many additional resources and tools to help you maintain and grow your new program at www.firecomm.gov.mb.ca. The staff are also available to help with questions or connect new programs with established programs for idea sharing. Best of luck on your new program.