

City of Fargo

Employee Engagement Survey Comments

Fire

Date: 10/10/25

SUBMITTED BY:
CPS HR Consulting
www.cpshr.us



Table of Contents

What is one thing you would recommend to make your Department a better place to work?	2
Please share any additional feedback:	7

What is one thing you would recommend to make your Department a better place to work?

1. My department is great no complaints about my department
2. teach citizens and businesses that 911 is not the free answer to any problem
3. We have been short-staffed for years. Between FMLA, military deployments, people leaving for their jobs, etc., I am not sure if we have ever had all shifts fully staffed. I believe running short contributes to our turnover. Most employees receive overtime calls on most days of the week. I think this causes stress that is not attributed to the job.
4. Higher salary
5. More visibility and transparency from Department level leadership. There is a lot of things that happen that employees are unaware of. It would be beneficial to hear, perhaps monthly, what was achieved, worked on, scrapped etc at the department level. It's difficult to see department level progression when we never hear what's being worked on.
6. Culture is too negative these days. Most of it revolves around pay and city leadership.
7. Ensure consistent practices between shifts.
8. more staff and more readily available time off more employee support and sticking up for employees, less fielding civilian complaints and knee jerk reacting to them.
9. source out smaller tasks that could free up time for larger items.
10. Stop being so slow to change. Make a decision and move forward (Examples: Station 5 was falling down for 5 years, training grounds have been falling apart for 10, WF is going to start building a regional training grounds without FFD)
11. Allow time to work from home when necessary to support sick family or other circumstances.
12. To change the work schedule. Instead of the 9 day work cycle. Go to a 48 96 work cycle.
13. For the department itself, I would recommend having a bidding system for Station assignments based on seniority.
14. More support and proactive measures from HR to make sure we are compensated fairly amongst other departments at our same level.
15. more training and less busy work
16. Change of our schedule
17. Lessen the schedule. Hydrants can be completed by hydrants and mains. This would open up more time to train and help people appreciate and continue in the job for the reasons why they

applied in the first place. Also get rid of the arbitrary living distance requirement. This would allow to hire better candidates that are not willing to move from their established houses. We have plenty of other policy to address missing work or tardiness issues.

18. give us more money.
19. Stop trying to make the department look good on paper and focus on actually making the department good. We say we have a great health and wellness program yet our workout time has to be outside of the normal work day. Other departments have a time built into their normal work day to get a workout in.
20. Fair work assignment based on additional workload i am not being paid for.
21. Promote leaders who want to see people do well instead of managers who can only achieve objectives
22. I have no issues with my department as I feel it is sufficiently and adequately run. I enjoy the people I work with and my job duties are satisfactory. I feel I am given plenty of opportunities for growth and developing those I supervise.
23. Overall, I believe the fire department is a great place to work. It is a professional, efficient, and well-run department that I am proud to be part of. One recommendation I would make is for the department to explore a 48/96 work schedule. This is a budget-neutral option that has a strong reputation for being well-received by firefighters in many cities across the United States. Looking longer-term, I think both the city and the department should continue working toward making our pension structure more competitive with Minnesota's system over the next 15 years. This will be critical in helping us recruit and retain firefighters. I also appreciate the emphasis that has been placed on mental health in recent years. That continued focus is important, as mental health and burnout remain some of the leading challenges for firefighters.
24. Pay and benefits
25. Better recruiting and retention so we are not constantly training new employees, only to have them leave a short time later.
26. Foster a culture where fair pay and benefits are an important talking point within the admin of the department and the city as a whole.
27. We could use a little "right sizing." That is, we do everything that is asked of us without additional personnel or compensation. Over the years, I have seen many of these requests added, but very rarely, if ever, removed. So either some additional staffing or additional compensation for the extra work we take on.
28. less micromanagement
29. Start being more open and transparent with information.
30. Collective Bargaining

31. stop putting money into non city core values
32. Workload reduction. Call volumes have soared over the last decade+ and the workload has significantly increased; the vast majority of that was absorbed by the employees (compensation nowhere near kept up). We're not a small department anymore and we need to adjust accordingly. A lot of the extra work has filtered down into the suppression division which has resulted in lower quality of work and burnout. A good start would be to increase staffing in the Fire Prevention Bureau to reduce or eliminate the amount of company inspections suppression is expected to do. Contract out hydrant flushing. We can't focus on the core skills of our jobs as easily because we were always swamped with busy work. Start taking care of the people that take care of the city and positive long-term results will happen organically.
33. I think a major incentivizing piece that is missing here that other departments have, is specialized pay depending on certification/technician improvements. I believe if someone continues to increase their involvement and skill set, they should be compensated for joining the team or increasing their certifications.
34. Stronger policy enforcement
35. Department is moving forward and is awaiting changes with the new chief.
36. I feel in our department we are already doing a good job at improving the work environment. I am not aware of anything that would make our department a better place to work.
37. For the city to give us pay and benefits that actually reflect the performance of the department. We are a top fire department in the country and are treated as one of the worst and least effective constantly.
38. Increased salaries, the commission and city love to say how great we are and how many good things we do. Our motto at work is "Fargo, doing far more work for far less pay"
39. Creating more flexible use of leave, for a few hours throughout the day. Work life balance.
40. I cannot answer this as my job is very different from my current department.
41. Let me preface, as much as I try not to participate, I am not perfect in this regard myself. There seems to be a certain culture (unfortunately this culture seems prevalent across our profession) of bad-mouthing our new people, as well as one another behind backs, in general. It is extremely disappointing when you consistently hear fellow employees and even supervisors openly talk about specifically named employees' shortcomings and mistakes, often in a derogatory manner, while on the clock. I have had conversations with three separate employees that at the time of our conversations, had less than two years with the department, directly tell me the comments they received on a routine basis from their supervisor directly led them to consider resigning from the COF. I am not at all saying be soft, or to let things slide (constructive criticism and discipline are very important when needed, especially in this field), but there should be no place for putting our people down to a point where it is negatively impacting their mental health and

has them questioning working here. They already have enough to worry about with the nature of the job itself. Develop, not degrade. And, if they can't develop, let them go. Don't keep them around and make it a toxic environment for everybody else because we have to constantly hear about how terrible they are at their job.

42. Fair pay compensation.

43. The salary/work load aren't even close. We are overworked, undertrained, and underpaid. Can someone tell me why the Fire Department flushes hydrants or responds to water breaks? If only there was a specific department that managed hydrants and sewers.... Oh wait...

44. N/A

45. I enjoy my department and the work I do.

46. :)

47. Better Pay, Benefits, Retirement. Firefighter pay scale is below average and spread out over almost a decade to reach top pay. This pushes firefighters towards looking at other fire departments. Then every restructure of the pay scale bumps firefighters down steps that they need to then repeat. Effectively saving the city money but paying firefighters less over multiple years. Many other departments have less than 4 steps to reach top pay. The work/training required of us is not recognized. There are multiple certifications that are expected of us and no added pay per certification. This is a common incentive at other fire departments. Our benefits are more expensive than other fire departments and cover less effectively eating into our BASE PAY. Our retirement has NO cost-of-living adjustment once retired. There is no matching contribution on a 401k or 857 from the city. These are common benefits at other fire departments that keep pulling our employees over as lateral transfers. These are some of the reasons that FFD has never had a lateral firefighter transfer in and stay. Without fixing these basic issues our quality in new hires will continue to decline. In addition to the standard of service provided to the public.

48. I feel like as a whole our department does well with what we have and just going with what is given to us at the time.

49. make sure that the stations and trucks are in good working order

50. Pay and benefits commensurate with the standards with which we work.

51. A new mayor

52. More outside leadership development training for supervisors.

53. Fair comparable wages for the work done compared to other cities

54. Each year, there needs to be transparency. Every once in a while, a department gets a face at the top of the organizational chart. It starts pretty well as the individual is getting their feet wet, and

then the personal agendas start to creep in, and the mission tends to lose its way. This usually becomes visible after about 5 years, although not always seen by City Leaders.

- 55. Some of our supervisors are great, but others feel like they need to micromanage. I do everything I can to avoid the micromanagers because they make me feel like my contributions are not appreciated and that I am not trusted.
- 56. Be open to new ideas, give things a trial run. Pretending to listen and nothing changing is exhausting.
- 57. One thing. Attain and retain employees to minimize being short staffed and grossly overworked. Invest in tools and equipment to let us do our jobs safely, efficiently and effectively.
- 58. Additional staffing.
- 59. no comments
- 60. Get the city to give us a reasonable budget.

Please share any additional feedback:

61. Numerous budget items the citizens are against.
62. City needs to keep up with staffing, pay, and benefits.
63. Prioritize pay and benefits to be competitive. Anyone who works here does not care about opulent government buildings or special signs and projects. Invest in employees with pay and benefits. I am not in favor of feel-good surveys or how are you doing employee reviews. Do your job well respectively and I will do mine.
64. These survey results should in no way reflect on the new Fire Chief. He hasn't had the opportunity to gauge department morale, weaknesses, or strengths yet.
65. Administration needs to get back to focusing on core city services. Many departments are understaffed and we are all left overworked to keep things running. The public perception of this City stop seems to be OK, but we are at the breaking point. It's not going to take many more stressors and departments are going to struggle keeping up with expectations
66. I strongly encourage younger employees (less than 10 years on the job) within the department to keep their options open in regard to employment with other fire departments. The job is the job regardless of where you are taking the risks. You might as well be employed with a Dept./City that is willing to pay you a fair and marketable salary.
67. I am happy to be employed by my department, but embarrassed by some elected officials and the City administration for how they conduct themselves in public forums.
68. I often have regrets about working here. I should go to a department that pays better and expects less out of me, that's in a better place to live.
69. It has been incredibly frustrating to watch firefighter BASE PAY be the only thing talked about or addressed. The cost of our benefits compared to other fire departments, our retirement has NO cost-of-living adjustment once retired, there is no matching contribution on a 401k or 857 from the city, and NO certification pay, these are not factored into the pay studies the city keeps doing. The 642 local union for the Fargo Fire Department has collected these contract details from all the comparable fire departments the pay studies have been completed on. Then provided them to Chief Dirksen, Fargo HR Department, and the Finance Department multiple times to show how these lack of benefits hinder hiring, retention, and value as an employee with the city of Fargo. The Fargo Fire Department will continue to hire, train, and certify new firefighters to then have them lateral transfer out to better compensating fire departments. Our city leaders are doing a disservice to the public of Fargo until they get serious about these issues.
70. :)

71. All in all, I enjoy my job and feel I do meaningful work; but this is because of my department and its leadership, not because of city leadership except for some of the commissioners.
72. This department prioritizes busy work over training. Our firefighters have an average of 3-4 years of experience but it's a higher priority to inspect apartments or flush hydrants instead of train. It's ignorant and dangerous.
73. Please don't let this survey be a checked box. Please consider and implement adjustments based on its findings.
74. My survey responses reflect my opinions and my job, and do not accurately reflect my department. My responses display the need to change where my job fits within the City of Fargo. My department is truly admirable and a valued partner for my work, but my work does not fit within my department. Also, I don't agree with including the city Administration with the City Commission in the City Leadership section of questions. That is unfair for both parties as their work and presence differ between the two.
75. I am very proud of my department, I feel like we make the best of everything and care for each other and the citizens. I do not feel the same treatment from the City as an entirety. I feel like we are a burden to City Hall.
76. Pay... Stop wasting money on pay studies when you won't listen to them and pay us adequate wages. You want to have above average workers for below average pay... That's not how it works.
77. It would improve morale if the city gave us pay and benefits that actually reflect the performance of the department. We are a top fire department in the country and are treated as one of the worst and least effective constantly.
78. The pension should be evolving with cost of living. I think it's very easy for people to want to leave to other departments for that reason. Having a pension that is fixed once you retire isn't adequate for the state of the economy and pace of the cost of living. A good idea to help reward seniority would be to make a bidding system in which at the first of each year, based off seniority, you get to bid and voice which station you'd like to work at. Another thing the department should improve on is their media/social media presence. I think a big reason they aren't able to tap into the current generation is because of the lack of online presence. I see all across the country large departments succeeding in that avenue and it gains a lot of traction, causing a lot of people to enjoy working there, and makes others want to join.
79. The city seems to be struggling with managing money. We're spending money in areas we don't need to be, and shorting staff on pay and benefits. We don't need to give any money to Juneteenth celebrations or MLK Day. We do need to pay waste management, water treatment, police and fire. The City needs to make sure all of the cities NEEDS are met, and then if there's extra money they can do whatever they want with it.

80. I've taken many surveys since I've been employed here, and rarely have seen results. I hope this one is different, but I'm not getting my hopes up.
81. The city leaders (Administrator, Mayor, HR and Finance) blatantly have fought against the Fire Department during our campaign to get a 1/4 cent sales tax to improve our department and pay. They have fought us during the budget process of what to do with that money for 20 years. They need to remember who they work for, the tax paying citizens. We are not sorry we did something to improve our lives because we were tired of "maybe next year" and pats on the back.
82. One idea I would like to see is no utility bills for city employees that live in the city. This would provide a small monetary reward for those choosing to live where they work. It might even convince some that work here to live here.
83. I really enjoy working for the city (24 years). I think its a great place and Im proud to live and work here. I see how well departments typically work together. I see how the employees put heads together to solve problems. However, I am very tired of rude and disrespectful city commissioners. Piepkorn demonstrates lackluster emotional intelligence on the regular. Past commissioners like Gehrig have done the same. There needs to be a consequence for the way commissioners act in regards to city employees.
84. Pay and benefits
85. I'm not sure if it is because I have been with the city longer now or if it has just been the past couple of years but moral seems to have been on a steady decline for at least the last 5 years.
86. raise pay or else more people will continue to leave for other jobs.
87. I have worked here for 29 years and do think I have been supported for the most part. The problem is the growing number of people needing our assistance as well as the number of people not willing or able to do our job. We have lowered our physical test so low that I'm not sure anyone will ever fail which I believe is a crucial mistake. Lowering this standard has and will make for an unsafe work environment.
88. The people in my department (Fire) is the onlyreason I still work for the City of Fargo. I have worked for the railway and they treated you like the employee number you were given. Just like City of Fargo, you are only a number to them. At least the railway compensated you very well for being treated poorly. City of Fargo treats its employees poorly and pays them just the same.
89. I have no confidence that any of the information from this survey will ever be used to make any substantive changes. We have been through this process many times over the past decade and I've only witnessed morale continue to drop during that period. I believe the money spent on this survey and all the wage surveys HR continues to run would be better spent on improving pay or benefits for the employees. I don't believe there is the true will amongst city leadership, specifically the mayor, city administrator and HR, to improve employee retention. There has never been any evidence to the contrary.

90. I was really reluctant to do this survey because I do not believe it is anonymous. Last time we did a survey, HR compiled all the information in an excel spreadsheet that was very easy to pick out who said what, and all your answers were in a row as you scrolled over, so once you identified a person by one answer, you could look at all their answers.
91. The city commission has been disappointing since covid happened. City hasn't gotten back on track since then. They aren't consistent and make large swings in each direction.
92. I wish this survey had broken city leaders out from elected leaders. I believe we are represented by a great commissioner who is present, professional, and positive. It is hard to separate the respect I have for her from the difficulties presented by others.
93. literally no one cares if firefighters were to attend 30,000 runs. 30,000 runs would "prove we are adding value to the community" when really its irresponsible to say yes to everythign
94. It would be nice to be able to donate sick time to fellow employees that need additional time off for reasons of being sick. Currently we only can donate from our annual vacation leave bank. When we retire we get nothing for the sick time we have not used throughout our careers and we loose it. It would be a nice benefit to get a percentage of that put into an hsa or something.