

Wildland
Firefighter



Apprenticeship Program

**Regional/State Coordinator
&
Unit Apprentice Manager
Guide**

April 1, 2016

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Introduction

I. Intent

The intent of this document is to outline the duties and responsibilities of the Regional/State Coordinator and Unit Apprentice Manager and how these positions work within multiple agencies and multi-layered organizations. Specifically, this guide was created to offer insights about the Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Program for the new Regional/State Coordinator and Unit Apprentice Manager. The intent is to outline duties and responsibilities and review the required knowledge and skills that support the success of these positions.

II. Scope

The scope of this guide is intended to be national in nature in our efforts to standardize processes between agencies, regions and units. However it is understood that not all agencies, regions and units are the same and not all employ and develop firefighter Apprentices identically. This document pulls together pieces of these standardized processes while at the same time acknowledging that processes may vary. For further information about the Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Program, go to: www.wfap.net. It is strongly recommended that everyone, including Apprentices and Supervisors, thoroughly review all sections of the website and take time to read all program documents.

III. Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Program – A History

The Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Program began in 1990 to train employees of the Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region (R5). The program was registered with the Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training Standards within the U.S. Department of Labor and the State of California Division of Apprenticeship Standards. The first academy had 111 students from across California and took place in a hotel in Sacramento, California. The program was originally overseen by the National Fire Fighters Joint Apprenticeship and Training Program and was administered by a contractor. The Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs began to participate in the program shortly after the first academy. During the 1990's there was one Basic and one Advanced academy each year with approximately 100 students in each.

In 1998, the program was officially registered as a National Apprenticeship Program with the US Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Training. At that time the National Interagency Joint Apprenticeship Committee (NIJAC) was created and consisted of members from the DOI Bureau of Land Management, the USDA Forest Service and the National Federation of Federal Employees. Management of the program was delegated to Forest Service Region 5 and a position was created for a permanent Program Coordinator. After the implementation of the National Fire Plan in 2000, the program grew considerably – from 150 new apprentices a year to over 500. In 2002, new Apprenticeship Standards were signed and the program became the first Federal multi-agency Joint Apprenticeship program, comprised of the USDA Forest Service, the DOI Bureau of Land Management, the DOI National Park Service and the National Federation of Federal Employees. In 2002 the WFAP academies moved from Fort Hunter Liggett to their current home at McClellan, California. Since that time the standards have been revised three times, in 2006, 2010 and 2016.

Organization

I. Organization Description and Explanation

The Program's interagency organization structure designed to support Firefighter Apprentices is extensive (Appendix A). A strong commitment to the Program is required to meet objectives outlined by all agencies. Agency Administrators, Fire Directors, mid-level Fire Managers and leadership from labor organizations are involved and committed to the success of this program. The National Interagency Joint Apprenticeship Committee (NIJAC) has the responsibility to provide direction and oversight to the program.

In Appendix A, NIJAC is where the program breaks into agency-specific managers who make up the Agency Joint Apprenticeship Committee (AJAC). The AJAC is an agency-specific committee with equal representation from management and labor. The AJAC is made up of the Agency Coordinators who work in partnership with the WFAP Program Manager and NIJAC ensuring all agencies are involved and committed to the program and providing support with the delivery of the academies. Meetings are held as needed to conduct committee business. The National Apprenticeship Program Manager monitors and documents the Firefighter Apprentice progress as it relates to instructional classes while at the Academy and reports deficiencies to Regional or State Coordinators, and in some situations to the Unit Apprentice Managers.

Regional or State Coordinators are the primary point of contact for the Unit Apprentice Manager. These Coordinators work with the Agency Coordinator to develop and coordinate recruitment and advertisement for the units. They serve as the information liaison between the Units and the Agency Coordinator.

The Unit Apprentice Managers are central to making the WFAP a success. The position requires the incumbent to have thorough knowledge of the program and the capability to work with and understand each level of the WFAP. The working relationship between the Unit Apprentice Manager, Supervisor and Firefighter Apprentice is the most important aspect of this program. The commitment of these three individuals is critical for a successful outcome. All three are responsible for a large amount of planning in advance of attending the academy. All three will manage and document the completion of administrative requirements associated with the WFAP throughout the term of Apprenticeship.

Unit Apprentice Managers must remember that not all Firefighter Apprentices begin this program with the same level of agency knowledge. This also applies to Supervisors, as many have never supervised a Firefighter Apprentice. Unit Apprentice Managers must understand this and be diligent in supporting those needing additional Program and professional guidance.

Although not identified on the organization chart shown in Appendix A, each of the participating agencies associated with the WFAP have Agency Administrators. Local unit Agency Administrators retain all administrative and supervisory decision authority of assigned employees, including Firefighter Apprentices.

A substantial organization is needed to manage the delivery of the Basic and Advanced Academies. This organization is available in Appendix B of this document. The positions shown in Appendix B are filled mostly with short term details. The Program Manager, National Coordinators, Administrative staff and Operations Specialists are full time positions.

Regional/State Coordinator

I. Responsibilities and Duties

As identified on the organization chart (Appendix A), the Regional/State Coordinator is the connector position between the Unit Apprentice Manager, NIJAC and the Academy Program Managers.

Examples of the responsibilities and duties of the Regional/State Coordinator include:

- Provide support and guidance for the new Unit Apprentice Manager.
- Work with their Region/State units to promote the WFAP and identify available vacancies.
- Work with their units to develop and coordinate recruitment and advertisement for their Region/State units. It is important to understand that although clearly related, the process of WFAP program recruitment and signing of the individual Apprenticeship Agreement with the employee is a separate administrative process from that of employment and hiring. Each participating Agency will utilize its own administrative hiring process.
- Serve as the information conduit between their Region/State units and their Agency National Coordinator.
- Review and submit new Apprentice Agreement packages to the National Program Manager to be registered with the Department of Labor (DOL) in a timely manner to meet the 45 day submission requirement.
- Approves/Disapproves apprentice requests to defer academy attendance.
- Serve as the conduit to the AJAC for extension requests.
- For US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Apprentices, maintain an Apprentice record that may contain all data, written records of progress evaluations, work process hours reporting form, corrective and final actions pertaining to the Apprenticeship or other documentation to stay informed of how the apprentice is progressing through the program.
- When possible interact with the apprentices to hear issues and concerns and forward to NIJAC or appropriate entity when appropriate.
- Receive academy slot needs from Unit Apprentice Managers and report needs to Program Manager.
- Responsible for collecting and reporting annual lost time accident data to WFAP for reporting to Department of Labor.
- Notify the National Apprentice Coordinator of any termination and include all appropriate information for such termination (i.e. copy of the personnel action of termination).
- Receive Certificate of Completion request from home unit Agency Administrator and determine if requirements for certification are met. Forward completed packages to the Agency National Coordinator.
- If the region is a small program, the Regional Coordinator may perform some of the duties of the Unit Apprentice Manager and have closer contact with the Apprentice. See Unit Apprentice Manager responsibilities and duties for direction.
- Certifying Official for Apprentice VA Benefits, processing registration packages and reporting hours worked.

II. Knowledge and Skills that Support the Regional/State Coordinator

A. Knowledge

The successful Regional/State Coordinator must work to obtain significant organizational and program knowledge. This knowledge will allow the Regional/State Coordinator to oversee and direct the Unit Apprentice Manager on issues or changes within the program. They need to

understand the program completely in order to train new supervisors and/or Unit Managers (depending on the size of the program).

The Regional/State Coordinator is the go-to person when questions come up and will be required to maintain familiarity with the website to guide Unit Apprentice Managers through its content. Always watch for updates from the WFAP and disseminate this information. Be familiar with issues that arise within your region/state and report back to NIJAC or to the Academy Coordinator.

It is common to be the point of contact for applicants into the program. Be knowledgeable of agency hiring processes as there may be involvement with outreach and recruitment of new Apprentices. Conversion practices need to be very timely. If timelines are not met consequences may result in the termination of an apprentice due to conversion deadlines not being met.

Regional /State Coordinators should be prepared to give presentations at forest/district fire management meetings to promote the program within your area. In some areas around the country, the Apprenticeship Program is still in its infancy. It is the Regional/State Coordinator's responsibility to have an excellent understanding of the program in order to share it with others.

B. Skills

The following skills will help the Regional/State Coordinator be successful:

- Public speaking and the ability to give presentations about the WFAP.
- Communication skills, especially the ability to communicate with all levels of employees or peers.
- Knowledge of Agency policies.
- Working with the forest/districts in coming up with the overall big picture of the WFAP in your region/state as directed by fire directors.
- Understanding employment processes and student employment authority as it applies to the Apprenticeship Program.
- Involvement with training and workforce development programs within your region/state.
- Ability to solve problems and get answers out to the field.

Unit Apprentice Manager

I. Responsibilities and Duties

The primary role of the Unit Apprentice Manager is to track and maintain the administrative requirements for Firefighter Apprentices as they move toward program completion. Additionally, Unit Apprentice Managers provide co-lateral support and mentorship to the Firefighter Apprentice, working in coordination with the Supervisor.

Additional responsibilities for the Unit Apprentice Manager include:

- A thorough understanding and high level of knowledge of all WFAP requirements. To obtain this high level of program knowledge the Unit Apprentice Manager should read information provided at the WFAP website. The WFAP website is the central location to find program requirements and expectations, and is the single best location for the new Unit Apprentice Manager to read and understand program responsibilities.
- Maintain a positive working relationship with the Regional/State Coordinator and collaborate with peers on other units.
- The Unit Apprentice Manager and the Supervisor have the shared responsibility for coordinating on-the-job learning opportunities, local classroom training and related instruction.

The responsibilities referenced above should be viewed as the foundational framework for performing the unique and varied duties of a Unit Apprentice Manager. It is highly likely that no other individual on the unit will have the in-depth knowledge of the Program as the Unit Apprentice Manager. The Unit Apprentice Manager is the subject-matter-expert for the unit on the Apprenticeship Program and provides an important part of the development of a new employee. Below are some duties required of the Unit Apprentice Manager. The list is not all-encompassing, however significant duties are identified. A summary of these duties include:

- Work with the Forest Fire Management Officer and the Unit Level Agency Administrator to identify available vacancies and placement opportunities.
- Work to promote utilization of the Wildland Fire Apprenticeship Program on their unit.
- Review applicant's documentation of previous experience in Work Processes and Related Instruction (courses) to determine if credit can be granted for previous experience; this may be completed with the Unit's Human Resource Specialist and must be in compliance with the National Standards. Maintain a copy of this documentation in the Apprentice's official record.
- Ensure that each selected applicant is provided an opportunity to read and review the National Standards, the Operations Plan and the Apprenticeship Agreement **prior to signing the Apprenticeship Agreement.**
- Ensure that the Apprenticeship Agreement package is submitted in a timely manner to meet the DOL 45 calendar day requirement for submission.
- Maintain the Apprentice's official apprenticeship record and all data, written records of progress evaluations, work process hours reporting form, corrective and final actions pertaining to the Apprenticeship.
- Notify the sponsor Agency's Regional/State Apprenticeship Coordinator regarding Status changes (i.e. cancellations, suspensions, terminations, resignations) and the causes.
- Ensure that a thorough "New Employee / Program Orientation" is conducted for all Firefighter Apprentices.
- Ensure that Firefighter Apprentices complete the program with a diverse work experience history.

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- Review for accuracy and submit work process hours reporting forms to the Regional/State Coordinator within timeline established for that area/agency. Work process hours are on a 1 hour to 1 hour basis. The same hour cannot be used in two different categories at the same time.
- Ensure that the Firefighter Apprentice is receiving appropriate field mentorship.
- Ensure that administrative requirements for the unit's Firefighter Apprentices are being addressed, completed and reported.
- Serve as liaison within multiple organizational levels including: National/Regional Apprenticeship Coordinators, Agency Administrators, local Fire Staff and Supervisors.
- Ensure Firefighter Apprentices have all uniform components and field equipment prior to academy attendance.
- Assist as needed with apprentice Reasonable Accommodation requests prior to academy attendance to ensure the request is submitted to the Program Manager 60 days prior to attendance.
- Report lost time injury or fatality reports to National/Regional Coordinators or their designee.
- Evaluate the apprentice's records to determine if the requirements for certification have been met.
- Recommend to the home unit Agency Administrator that Certificate of Completion be awarded to the Apprentice.
- Take the appropriate and timely steps, as required by their agency policy and the hiring authority used, to place the apprentice in the GS-5 Senior Firefighter position, when they receive the Certificate of Completion.
- Serve as conduit to Certifying Official for Apprentice VA Benefits registration and hours reporting.

II. Knowledge

The successful Unit Apprentice Manager must work to obtain significant organizational and program knowledge. This knowledge will allow the Unit Apprentice Manager be a problem solver. The complexities of the Unit Apprentice Manager duties will vary. Some units may only have a few Firefighter Apprentices, while other Unit Apprentice Managers may have several dozen.

Managing this program requires a comprehensive understanding and background knowledge of your agency's human resources policies and practices, as you may become involved in human resources issues. Although a Unit Apprentice Manager does not make final decisions on human resource related matters, they must be made aware of Supervisor and/or Agency Administrator decisions that affect the Firefighter Apprentice. Often, Unit Apprentice Managers may work on or be aware of transfers relating to hardship, job performance, or conduct both on and off the unit. Unit Apprentice Managers may need to function as a subject matter expert and provide staff assistance to the Supervisor and/or Agency Administrator. Knowledge of human resource policies and practices, including familiarity with the unit collective bargaining agreement, will improve the Unit Apprentice Manager's ability to offer the best advice for any given situation if needed.

Agency hiring practices, including timelines, is something the Unit Apprentice Manager will want to be aware of. It is common for a Unit Apprentice Manager to be the point of contact for applicants. Knowledge of your agency's hiring processes will help you have a successful outreach for your vacant Firefighter Apprentice positions. Unit Apprentice Managers should be prepared to visit field stations and meet with potential candidates if requested, most of whom are temporary firefighters. Other outreach actions a Unit Apprentice Manager may become involved in are: local job fairs, presentations at schools, colleges and other educational institutions as determined by each unit's policies and procedures.

III. Skills

The following skills will help the Unit Apprentice Manager be successful:

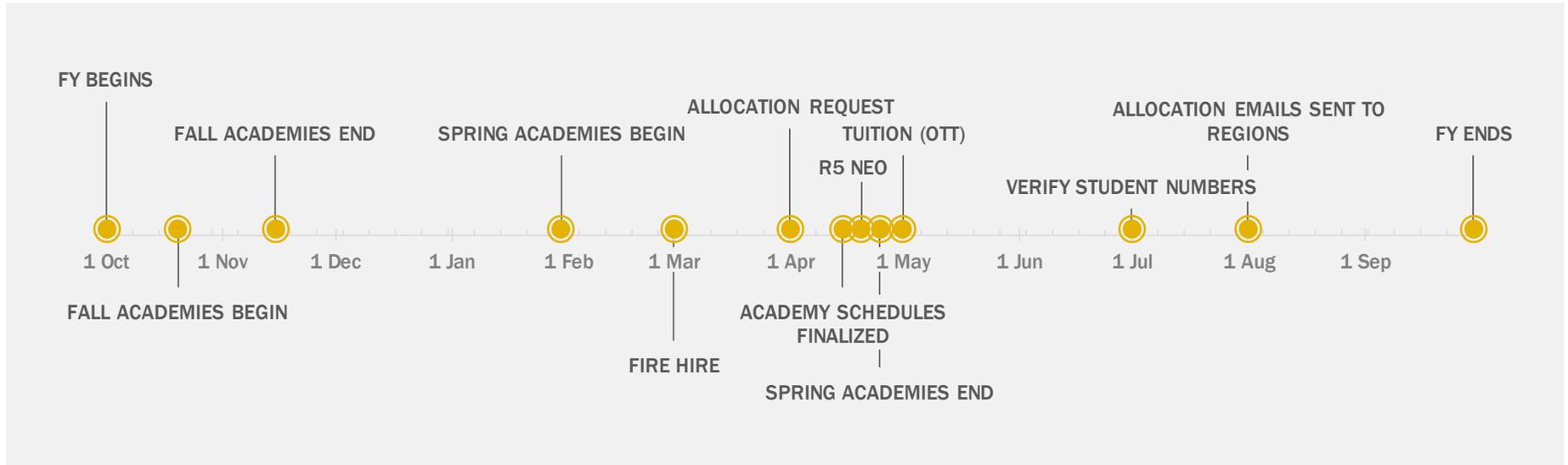
- Public speaking and the ability to perform as an instructor.
- Communication skills – especially the ability to effectively communicate at levels many ranks below your own.
- A basic understanding of agency personnel rules and regulations.
- Understand and have the ability to explain the hiring processes specific to the Unit, Region or Agency.
- Maintain knowledge and understanding of employment processes as it applies to the Apprenticeship Program.
- Work in team situations with members from any level shown in Figure 1.
- Understand your role in the Local Unit's organizational structure.
- Knowledge of fire program management's administrative requirements.
- Knowledge of Local/Regional and National training and workforce development priorities and requirements

Working in Partnership with the Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Program

I. Timeline of Events

Below is a timeline of events that affect the workload of the Regional/State Coordinator and Unit Apprentice Managers. The dynamics of this program require a strong, supportive and positive working relationship between all levels identified in this guide. Each level is dependent on information flow and understanding the importance of open and thorough communications.

Timeline of Events



Appendix A – Apprenticeship Program Organization Chart



Appendix B – WFAP Academy Organization Chart

Reference WFAP Operations Plan, Figure 1 for Academy Organization Chart.

Appendix C – WFAP Online References

Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Program (WFAP)

<http://www.wfap.net/>

WFAP Staff, Regional Coordinators and Unit Apprentice Manager Directory

<http://www.wfap.net/staff.html>

WFAP Standards and Operations Plan

<http://www.wfap.net/apprentice.html>

Department of Labor Agreement

<http://www.wfap.net/manager.html>

Veterans Benefits Program Information

<http://www.wfap.net/vets.html>

Frequently Asked Questions

<http://www.wfap.net/faq.html>