

**LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE
MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY SERVICES'
*INNOVATIONS IN FIRE SERVICES PILOT PROGRAM***

Produced for the British Columbia Ministry of Community Services

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This report captures the lessons learned from the *Innovations in Fire Services Pilot Program* (the “Innovations Program”), a grant-based program designed by the Ministry of Community Services (the “Ministry”) in conjunction with the Office of the Fire Commissioner (the “OFC”) to build the capacity of regional districts to deliver more effective and efficient regional fire support services in BC, and to thereby enhance public safety.

While the concept of regional service delivery varies significantly across jurisdictions, in BC regional service delivery refers to various forms of cooperative, collaborative and integrated service delivery between different local governments, primarily regional districts. As the only Canadian province with a regional district system, BC is ideally suited to use regional districts for the effective and efficient delivery of local services.

Although the delivery of *fire suppression* services in BC faces no significant challenges, a review of the *Fire Services Act* in 2002 revealed that many aspects of the Province’s *fire support* services, especially in the areas of training, communication, administration and safety assessments, face a number of capacity-related issues. The review revealed that little was being done to coordinate the fire service (which consists of over 400 independent fire departments) at the regional district level, in part because, historically, BC’s fire service has developed independently and outside of the regional district system.

In response to the fire service’s various capacity-related issues, and in the spirit of developing solutions that meet local needs, the Ministry developed and implemented the Innovations Program.

Objectives & Methodology

The basis for this study is a set of 22 qualitative, face-to-face interviews undertaken (during the months of June to August 2006 inclusive) with individuals from six regional districts (RDs) who participated in the Innovations Program. The purpose of the interviews (and ultimately the purpose of the research study) was to collect feedback from the regional districts involved, in an effort to harness the learning from the Innovations Program. The study was expected to yield valuable information that would enhance the Ministry’s knowledge of regional fire support service delivery and provide a preliminary understanding of the benefits, challenges and opportunities in relation to the regional delivery of fire support services in BC.

Lessons Learned

Generally, the findings indicate that the Innovations Program has been successful to date. The regional fire support initiatives (ranging from regional training to regional safety assessments to regional communications) undertaken by each of the six RDs reviewed in this study are all realizing a number of benefits and are paving the way for other regional fire support services in BC. Overall, this study has provided valuable insights in relation to a number of areas, including the following:

Regional Characteristics / Geography

This study reveals that certain regional characteristics naturally lend themselves to certain forms of regional fire support services. For example, geographically compact and densely populated RDs can typically offer region-wide fire services more easily than geographically large RDs with sparsely populated areas, because they are usually better able to take on services by contracting them out to a specialized fire department. Geographically large and dispersed regional districts, on the other hand, are more likely to require centralized, sub-regional, or multi-regional service delivery through partnerships.

Common Support Issues

Regional districts face a wide variety of fire service issues, many in relation to a lack of economies of scale in fire support services. Although the existence and extent of these issues depend on a variety of factors, including geography, the local fire service and the local political environment, the ultimate concern for all regional districts is the level of public (including firefighter) safety. This study also reveals that some RDs have already “solved” some of the same fire service delivery issues that other regional districts are currently facing. Finally, this study demonstrates that a formal, regulated, and enforced regional fire safety inspection service remains a politically sensitive issue in many RDs.

Prerequisites Required for Regional Delivery of Fire Support Services

A number of factors were found to be predictors of success in the development of regional fire support services, including an understanding of the organizational history of all fire departments located within an RD’s boundaries, a basic level of cooperation and some experience in collaborative regional activities, a basic fire suppression service in rural areas, accessible fire departments, and a willing and supportive political environment. This study also reveals that regional districts have the best organizational capacity to develop and deliver regional fire support services, and that those regional districts that have prior experience with, and an existing appetite for, regional activities are more likely to undertake future regional activities.

Impetus and Need for Change

This study reveals that both regional districts and the fire service are becoming more aware of the need for, and importance of, regional fire support services. RDs, in particular, are realizing that they have an important role to play in the delivery of regional fire support services. Generally, the attitudes and the isolated culture of the fire service are slowly beginning to change as fire service capacity related issues become more recognized and accepted.

Types of Regional Fire Support Services

This study reveals important information about three key types of fire support services. First, this study reveals that *regional fire safety assessments* are a more practical and effective approach for both regional districts looking to provide their unincorporated areas with some type of a fire inspection service and in regional districts where regulated fire safety inspection schemes remain a contentious issue. This is partly because safety assessments lead to higher levels of compliance than regulated and enforced fire safety inspection schemes. Second, *regional training* initiatives can result in cost savings, build

cooperation and communication between fire departments, and can better equip fire departments to respond to emergencies collaboratively. This study reveals that many RD fire departments and volunteer firefighters simply require a basic, entry-level fire training curriculum, rather than a full comprehensive and complex curriculum (as would be required for career firefighters in metro areas). Third, the study reveals that the current Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner (LAFC) system is largely inefficient and ineffective to meet the needs of the fire service, and, as a result, a *regional fire prevention manager* model would be more effective, efficient and practical for the OFC, regional districts and the fire service.

Preliminary Benefits of Delivering Fire Support Services Regionally

This study reveals that the delivery of regionalized fire support services, through economies of scale, can result in a more efficient and effective fire service. The regional districts reviewed in the study are already realizing a number of specific benefits as a result of their regional fire support services, including the following: cost savings, consistency in operations, training and other standards, increased sharing/pooling of resources, a reduced number of service gaps, improved coordination among fire departments, strengthened communities, and, overall, enhanced public safety. These benefits demonstrate that regional service delivery efforts, no matter how small, can often result in benefits far greater than their initial investment.

Preliminary Challenges of Delivering Fire Support Services Regionally

A number of different challenges were faced by the six RDs in the development and implementation of their various regional fire support services, including the following: *resistance to change* (particularly opposition from fire personnel concerned about losing independence and control); *lack of resources* (such as sufficient time, money and human resources); *technology* (such as a lack of internet access in rural areas); and *political support* (including a lack of willingness from some regional boards). This study also demonstrates that the existing legislative framework does not appear to be an impediment or a barrier in the development of effective regional fire support services, but that development of a *regional fire prevention manager* model would likely require some legislative changes.

Keys to Success

The successful development and implementation of the various fire support services in the six RDs reviewed in this study can be attributed to a number of factors, including the following: the development of *partnerships and relationships* (regional collaborative approaches to fire service delivery require proper relationships with stakeholders and participants); *effective and ongoing communication* (with those involved in, and affected by, a regional fire service); *leadership and experience* (project champions, experienced consultants and effective leaders are necessary to succeed when undertaking any regionalized fire support service); *political support* (regional fire support services are much more likely to be successful when there is political and administrative support for such services); and *sufficient resources* (regional districts must commit sufficient resources, including time, money and personnel, for the effective development and delivery of a regional fire support service). This study also reveals that regional fire support services are

more likely to be successful if they are undertaken slowly, meet the local needs of the fire service, build upon existing services and utilize existing resources, and are initiated at the request of fire departments and firefighters themselves.

Opportunities for Further Delivery of Regional Fire Support Services

This study demonstrates that there is a significant potential (and appetite) for more efficient and effective fire services in BC through the development and delivery of further regional fire support services in a number of areas. The findings indicate that once RDs begin taking on the delivery of regional fire support services, they are more likely to take on further such initiatives, because the successful delivery of regional fire support services increases the capacity and desire for more such services in a region (especially as benefits become more apparent and as stakeholders become more involved in the development and delivery of regional fire support services). This study also suggests that many RDs can learn from the regional fire support services undertaken by the six regional districts under the Innovations Program. Also, many of the regional fire support services developed under the Innovations Program are transferable to other RDs, as are the development processes used in each RD.

Success of the Innovations Program

Overall, the experimental, bottom-up, collaborative approach taken by the Ministry has resulted in many benefits and is paving the way for future regional fire support services in BC. This study reveals that experimental and collaborative approaches are much more likely to work in the fire service in comparison to imposed solutions.

Finally, this study concludes that the Innovations Program has been successful to date because it has enabled regional districts to develop creative solutions to unique local problems and because it has helped many individuals change their attitudes and opinions about the fire service and about the delivery of regional fire support services.

Summary of Recommendations

Based on the lessons learned and the study results, the researcher developed the following recommendations to further increase the efficiency and effectiveness of BC's fire service:

Strategic Direction & Approach

1. Encourage more regional districts to develop regional fire support services because there is an appetite, willingness and need for such services in BC
2. Build on the momentum created by the Innovations Program to develop more regional fire support services

Areas of Focus

3. Future regional fire support services should focus on providing accessible, affordable and practical firefighter training
4. The OFC should review the effectiveness and efficiency of the current LAFC system
5. Efforts should be made to encourage, develop and implement *regional fire prevention manager* models in regional districts

6. Efforts should be made to develop and implement regional safety assessment approaches, as opposed to formal, regulated, fire safety inspections schemes, in those areas that do not currently receive any type of fire inspection service
7. Regional districts should continue efforts to meet a number of prerequisites, including the development of basic levels of cooperation and other regional activities, so that they are eventually better able to offer more sophisticated regional fire support services

Opportunities for Regional Fire Support Services

8. The advantages and benefits of regionalized fire support services should be specifically highlighted to regional district boards and to fire chiefs to build further support around the concept of delivering regional fire support services
9. Horizontal collaboration should be encouraged between regional districts and fire departments as much as possible
10. Encourage and apply a regional service delivery approach to other services facing similar service gaps as the fire service
11. Where possible, the delivery of fire and emergency services, such as emergency planning, should be done together on a regional basis

Legislation and Regional Fire Support Services

12. Continue to encourage regional districts to collaborate and develop regional fire support services through non-legislative approaches. Imposing legislative requirements for the development of regional fire support services should be discouraged as much as possible
13. Any future legislative changes should encourage (not inhibit) regional districts to develop regional fire support services

Funding, Support and Resources

14. Provide regional districts with a reliable, long-term source of funding to encourage the development of regional fire support services
15. The Ministry and the OFC should provide support to regional districts that are interested in developing regional fire support services
16. The Ministry and the OFC should maintain relationships with, and provide continued support to, regional districts that participated in the Innovations Program

Communicating Success of Innovations Program

17. Present information about the Innovations Program in an industry or local government newsletter so that others can learn about the activities undertaken through this program
18. Provide opportunities for Innovations Program participants to meet with one another and with other non-program participants to discuss and share their experiences and knowledge about regional fire support services (which may encourage those who did not partake in the program to consider developing such services)

19. Encourage regional districts to directly communicate with one another, rather than through the OFC or through the Ministry, to encourage horizontal collaboration and facilitate the sharing of ideas
20. Develop an internet website that provides the fire service with a forum for discussion and access to key information about the delivery of regional fire support services (such as best practices)
21. Share the results of this study with regional districts and other fire service stakeholders

Continuing the Learning

22. Once all nine regional districts have fully implemented and operated their regional fire support services for at least a year, they should each provide a final evaluation report to the Ministry.

Next Steps

The preceding recommendations should be viewed as first steps in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of fire support services in BC. Although further research is necessary to determine which regional fire support services are sustainable in the long-run, this study has demonstrated that the key area of focus for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of fire support services in BC should be at the *regional* level through regional districts. The study has also revealed that there is significant further potential in developing regionalized fire support services in BC. Therefore, future efforts to strengthen fire support services should focus on building the capacity of regional district to develop and deliver regional fire support services.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

British Columbia is diverse in its geography and in the ways that local governments have adapted to the variety of circumstances across the province. The delivery of services at the right scale and in an effective manner, in such a context, can therefore be challenging, as is evident in the fire service in BC. BC's fire service faces a number of service gaps and capacity-related issues throughout the province. Over 400 independent fire departments exist in BC and this has created some difficulty in the effective delivery of fire support services.

In response to the service gaps and service delivery issues of fire support services, the Ministry of Community Services (the "Ministry"), in conjunction with the Office of the Fire Commissioner (the "OFC"), developed the *Innovations in Fire Services Pilot Program* (the "Innovations Program") in the spring of 2004. The program aimed to build service delivery capacity at the regional level in an effort to fill some of the fire service gaps in BC (outside the heavily populated and concentrated metro regions of Vancouver and Victoria). The program was not aimed at fire *suppression* services, but only at fire *support* services (such as training, communications, administration, safety assessments¹, and *regional fire prevention manager*² models).

In May 2006, the Ministry hired the author/researcher to carry out a study to collect feedback and harness the learning from the Innovations Program. The results of the study were expected to enhance the Ministry's knowledge of, and inform other stakeholders about, the regional delivery of fire support services in BC. The study was expected to yield information about the preliminary benefits, challenges and opportunities in relation to delivering fire support services regionally.

In the summer of 2006, the researcher undertook a review of the Innovations Program through face-to-face interviews with 22 individuals from six of the regional districts which participated in the program. The interviews focused on capturing the thoughts of individuals regarding the development and implementation of their pilot projects under the Innovations Program.

This report begins with a discussion of the concept of regional service delivery and proceeds to describe the regional district system in BC, followed by an overview of both the BC fire service and the Innovations Program. The report then describes the research methodology and advises reader of the key limitations of the study. The main body of the report discusses the key findings from the interviews as well as the major lessons learned. The report then states key recommendations that have arisen from the study results. Finally, the report provides some concluding remarks and suggests possible next steps for the regional delivery of fire support services in BC.

¹ *Safety assessments* are similar to fire inspections but are non-regulatory and are based on voluntary compliance rather than enforcement through penalties and fines.

² A *regional fire prevention manager* model is envisioned by the Ministry as a system under which, instead of LAFCs appointed by the Fire Commissioner, regional districts are able to develop a centralized position (that has no direct link to the Fire Commissioner) to carry out LAFc-type duties.

2.0 BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The Innovations Program undertaken by the Ministry and the OFC in 2004, was designed to build service delivery capacity at the regional level in an effort to fill some of the fire service gaps in BC (outside of the major metro areas of Vancouver and Victoria). The sections below provide relevant background as to how and why the Innovations Program came about. First, an overview of regional service delivery is provided. Then, BC's regional district system is discussed, followed by an overview of BC's fire service system and its challenges. Finally, the details of the Innovations Program are discussed.

2.1 Regional Service Delivery

Regional service delivery is the delivery of a service in conjunction with one or more local governments, either at a sub-regional, regional or multi-regional level. Regional service delivery means different things in different jurisdictions. For example, in the fire services sphere, it could be classified as a simple mutual aid agreement³ in one jurisdiction, while in another, it could be characterized by the formation of fire authorities which deliver fire services regionally.⁴

Regional service delivery efforts can take place at different levels and involve various types of regions; they can also vary by organization (top-down or bottom-up initiatives), scope of collaboration (which services and how many), and intensity of cooperation (informal and unstructured to fully integrated and intensive consolidation).⁵ In BC, regional service delivery is a concept that refers to various forms of cooperative, collaborative and integrated service delivery between different local governments, primarily regional districts.⁶

Although regional service delivery can range from simple information sharing to fully integrated and consolidated services between local governments, it is widely accepted that traditional consolidation approaches to service delivery are ineffective.⁷ Research suggests that "larger government structures (resulting from amalgamations) do not result in increased efficiencies, do not always provide services equally, do not correlate to economic growth, nor automatically solve regional problems".⁸

Beyond simple information, research suggests that the delivery of services at a regional level through regional *cooperation* (as opposed to consolidation) allows for alternative

³ Mutual aid can be defined as reciprocal assistance by departments or organizations, under a prearranged plan or contract, that each will assist the other when needed for emergency management, fire rescue, hazmat, emergency, or other disaster response services.

⁴ Public Safety Consultants, "Chapter 16 - Strategic Alliances," in *Olympia Fire Department: 2004-2014, Fire and Emergency Medical Services Master Plan, 2004 & 2005*.

⁵ Govert Gijsbers and Rudolf Contant. "Regionalization of Agricultural Research: Selected Issues," *International Service for National Agricultural Research Briefing Paper 28*, <<http://www.isnar.cgiar.org/publications/briefing/Bp28.htm>> (11 November 2006).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Susan McFarlane. "Building Better Cities: Regional Cooperation in Western Canada," *Canada West Foundation*, October 2001.

⁸ Ibid., 5.

service provision arrangements which can help ease fiscal pressures, and which can result in a number of other benefits,⁹ including

...streamlining service delivery and reducing system fragmentation, improving service integration and coordination, reducing levels of duplication and overlap, creating more flexible services that are more responsive to local needs, increasing the number of community-based services, and enhancing public participation.¹⁰

The concept of jurisdictions providing services beyond their own boundaries and in collaboration with other governments is not new. Even as far back as 1957, in a study conducted by the International City Management Association (ICMA), it was discovered that over 60 percent of cities in the United States, at that time, provided service beyond their boundaries.¹¹

Today, regional service delivery has risen in popularity and is currently being utilized, or considered, particularly in the realm of fire services, in many cities, states, and countries, including the State of Maine, Finland and the United Kingdom (Appendix 1 provides information on each of these, as well as other examples of regional fire services in various jurisdictions). This growing trend and need for regional services was also highlighted in a report produced by the ICMA Future Vision Consortium, in which it was stated that “increasingly, local governments face problems that cannot be addressed by single jurisdictions...Managing in the future will involve more regional problem solving”.¹² Further, another study examining service delivery across Canada noted an increased trend towards services being made available on a regional basis, particularly in rural areas.¹³

In BC, regional services are primarily undertaken through regional districts. The next section describes BC’s regional district system in more detail and explains how regional districts are suited for the regional delivery of services.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Evan Jones and Susan McFarlane, “Regional Approaches to Services in the West: Health, Social Services and Education,” *Canada West Foundation*, February 2002, 1.

¹¹ Donald C. King, “Joint Power Agreement, A Regional Delivery Option for Fire Rescue Service in Broward County, Florida,” *Strategic Management of Change*, November 1998.

¹² Ibid., 5.

¹³ Greg Halseth and Laura Ryser. “Trends in service delivery: Examples from rural and small town Canada, 1998 to 2005,” *Journal of Rural and Community Development* (2006), 69-90.

2.2 BC's Regional Dimension

This section provides an overview of BC's local government system, mainly the province's regional district system. Regional districts were the primary focus of the Innovation Program funding and this section sets the context as to how and why they are suited to deliver regional services, including regional fire support services. The latter part of this section also provides insight as to how the Ministry of Community Services deals with local governments in BC.

2.2.1 Overview of BC's Local Government System

The BC provincial government is responsible for establishing and maintaining the legislative framework within which its local government system exists.^{14,15} This framework is set out in two pieces of legislation, the *Community Charter*, which establishes the legal framework for core municipal powers, and the *Local Government Act*, which establishes the legal framework for regional districts and contains other important local government powers, such as elections, and planning and land use.¹⁶

BC's local government system consists primarily of three types of local governments: municipalities, regional districts and improvement districts.¹⁷ Municipalities are general purpose local governments that are incorporated and governed by a locally elected council. Regional districts act as regional governments for regions and as local governments for rural/non-incorporated areas. They are governed by a board of directors, which are composed of representatives from the municipalities and the electoral areas (non-municipal areas) within the regional district boundary. Improvement districts are special purpose local governments that are incorporated to provide specific authorized services (such as water), and are governed by an elected board of trustees.

In Canada, of the three main types of local government, regional districts are the only type that is exclusive to BC, with a total of 27 in existence today. Created in 1965, regional districts have become an integral component of the province's local government landscape covering virtually every geographic area of the province. Although they were developed over 40 years ago, regional districts remain misunderstood by many. As a result, for the purposes of better understanding regional service delivery, it is important to provide a brief outline of the history, purpose and role of regional districts within BC's local government system.

¹⁴ Under the s. 92 of the *Constitution Act*, each province is responsible for establishing and maintaining its own local government system.

¹⁵ In BC, the Ministry of Community Services is responsible for establishing and maintaining the legislative framework for local governments.

¹⁶ The Ministry of Community Services, "Local Government Legislation," *Local Government Department*, <http://www.cserv.gov.bc.ca/LGD/policy_research/legislation.htm#annual>.

¹⁷ There are also other forms of special purpose local governments, such as the Islands Trust and the Greater Vancouver Water, Sewer and Drainage District; Ministry of Municipal Affairs, "Managing Changes to Local Government Structures in British Columbia: A Review and Program Guide," *Local Government Structure Branch*, October 2000.

2.2.2 History, Purpose, and Foundation of Regional Districts

In 1965, BC faced the following gaps and challenges in relation to its local government system and the delivery of services:

- absence of a general purpose government for rural areas (rapid expansion throughout the province was fueling the need for accessible, efficient and politically accountable services for rural communities);
- no means of managing urban fringe issues (a number of gaps existed with regards to managing issues beyond the boundaries of municipalities, such as lack of planning, lack of access to basic services, and “free rider” issues);
- limited ability to pursue economies of scale (there was no efficient and effective channel to facilitate municipalities and rural areas to come together to achieve the benefits of regional service delivery);
- restricted municipal borrowing power (municipalities were undertaking their own capital borrowing, and as a result of their low credit ratings and limited individual buying power, they were receiving poor rates and experiencing high costs of financing capital projects); and
- difficulty financing hospitals (serious inequities existed among municipalities and improvement districts that had to raise their own funds to finance hospitals located within their jurisdictions).¹⁸

In response to these issues and challenges, the provincial government enacted legislation that created regional districts. Regional districts were established to fulfill three primary purposes: 1) to act as regional governments to regions (by providing key regional services to, and undertaking activities on behalf of, their member jurisdictions); 2) to provide a political and administrative framework for joint service delivery; and 3) to act as local governments for rural/unincorporated areas.¹⁹

From their inception, regional districts have been considered a unique aspect of BC’s local government system. Their foundation rests upon the following six principles²⁰ which, when combined, result in a system of local government that is appropriate, innovative, and, to a large extent, effective for BC:

- 1) *Federal/confederal*: regional districts have both federal and confederal features.²¹ Residents in rural areas who vote for their regional district directors and receive their services directly from the regional district, experience the federal nature of regional districts, whereas residents of municipalities, who do not vote directly for

¹⁸ Ministry of Community Services and the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, “Regional District Tool Kit,” 2005, < <http://www.civicnet.bc.ca/siteengine/activepage.asp?PageID=285>>.

¹⁹ Ministry of Community Services, “A Primer on Regional Districts in British Columbia,” 2005, <http://www.cserv.gov.bc.ca/lgd/pol_research/MAR/content.html>.

²⁰ summarized from “A Primer on Regional Districts”.

²¹ *Federal* refers to two or more levels of government in which citizens interact directly with each level in terms of voting and receiving services; in a *confederation*, citizens deal only with the lower level government (i.e. provincial) and the lower level government deals with the higher level government (e.g. national).

regional board members, experience the regional district system's confederal nature.

- 2) *Voluntary*: aside from a few mandated services (including general administration and solid waste management planning), regional districts establish and provide only the services that their members/residents agree that they should provide. The range of services provided by regional districts is extensive and includes areas such as recreation, regional parks, airports and regional growth strategies.
- 3) *Consensual*: regional districts rely on "borrowed power", in the sense that they can only do what their members/residents agree they should do. Unlike municipalities, regional districts provide services by gaining agreement and by developing partnerships with their member jurisdictions (within the prescribed legislative framework).
- 4) *Flexible*: regional districts are very flexible because they can decide what services they will provide and at what scale. Each regional district provides a different selection of services that are appropriate to its jurisdiction's needs and circumstances. For example, the Central Coast Regional District provides local services such as fire protection and water supply, while the Greater Vancouver Regional District provides regional services like sewage disposal and air quality management.
- 5) *Fiscal equivalence*²²: legislation requires regional districts to closely match the benefits and costs of the services they provide. Each service provided by the regional district must have a cost recovery mechanism in place, such as taxes, or charges and fees. Each service must also be separately accounted for in the budget and accounts of the regional district. Regional districts can choose, within the prescribed legislative framework, the type of cost recovery mechanism that best suits their needs.
- 6) *Soft Boundaries*: regional districts can choose the geographic boundaries for the services they provide in a way that maximizes fiscal equivalence. In a "soft boundary" system, a boundary for a service is based on the natural scope of the service delivery. As a result, regional districts can offer different services that each extend to a different geographic boundary, and sometimes, even beyond the boundary of a regional district.

Overall, BC's regional district system, based on the above six principles, "compares very favourably with local government systems elsewhere in North America" because of its

²² Fiscal equivalence is the concept of getting what you pay for; it exists when "citizens who benefit from the expenditure are those who make or influence the decision and pay its costs". Robert L. Bish, "Local Government Amalgamations: Discredited Nineteenth-Century Ideals Alive in the Twenty-First," *C.D. Howe Institute Commentary* 150 (March 2001).

ability to provide for inexpensive rural government, its framework for inter-municipal cooperation and its capacity to adapt to different areas of the province.²³

2.2.3 Regional Districts & Regional Service Delivery

Delivering local government services at the right level and at the right scale can be challenging. The diversity of local government services means that it is almost impossible for any single organization to be an efficient producer of all of the services its citizens want and need.²⁴ Service delivery is also complicated by the fact that different services within the same functional area possess different characteristics. For example, “within the police protection function, patrol activities possess few economies of scale, while crime laboratories, dispatching and information systems are...more efficiently performed for a larger population over a larger area”.²⁵

An ideal system, therefore, is one in which different local government functions and services are provided efficiently over different geographic scales by different organizations.²⁶ In BC, regional districts are one of the essential organizations that can help provide efficient and effective local government services, because they are able to deliver local services regionally.

According to Bish, regional districts can help facilitate cooperation among member municipalities to provide services for a sub-area or the regional district that includes more than a single municipality or electoral area...these arrangements are the major way the local government system in British Columbia deals with problems and services over a variety of geographic scales.²⁷

The ability of regional districts to bring together various local governments for the purposes of collaborative service delivery is important, however, in the opinion of the Ministry of Community Services (the provincial branch of government responsible of local government in BC), a variety of challenges and barriers have prevented some regional districts from realizing their full collaborative potential and from fully embracing the concept of thinking and acting “regionally”. For example, in some regional districts, issues at the regional level are more focused on matters of municipal concern. In such cases, the interests of municipalities tend to dominate the local agenda while regional issues receive less attention. In other cases, regional districts simply do not have the incentives to want to cooperate and collaborate regionally. As a result of these types of challenges and barriers, some regional districts have a much harder time recognizing the broader needs of their communities, and from pursuing collaborative and cooperative regional activities.

²³ Robert L. Bish, “Regional District Review-1999: Issues and Interjurisdictional Comparisons,” *University of Victoria Local Government Institute*, (September 1999).

²⁴ Robert L. Bish, “Local Government Amalgamations”, 11.

²⁵ Robert L. Bish and Eric G. Clemens. *Local Government in British Columbia*, 3rd ed. (Richmond: Union of British Columbia Municipalities, 1999), 74.

²⁶ Robert L. Bish, “Regional District Review”.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

Many jurisdictions outside of BC face similar challenges in searching for the means to manage issues at a regional scale. Provinces that have a history of regional governments, such as Ontario and Quebec, continue to search for the right scale of local governments to deliver effective and accessible services. In fact, both Ontario and Quebec are putting energy into initiatives to facilitate a governance union between key sectors. Even jurisdictions that have previously been known to focus on consolidation, such as Alberta and Manitoba, are recognizing that they have a gap in the effective delivery of regional services and are beginning to take tentative steps towards the development of regional coordination.²⁸

Although regional service delivery issues are prevalent across Canada, in BC the Ministry of Community Services has attempted to take a bottom-up approach to address the gaps in regional service delivery (as the Innovations Program will demonstrate later in this report).

2.2.4 Local Governments and the Ministry Philosophy

Understanding the Ministry's philosophy is important in the context of regional service delivery. In dealing with local governments, including regional districts, the Ministry advocates and practices a philosophy that is based on facilitation, trust, and mutual cooperation.²⁹ The Ministry recognizes that BC is a province with great diversity, both in terms of its geography and its people, and that it is a province in which different areas require different services, with different methods of service delivery.³⁰ Instead of a "one-size-fits-all" approach to local government issues, such as service delivery, the Ministry places great emphasis on encouraging local governments to take the initiative in finding their own local solutions, rather than imposing or forcing remedies that may or may not be effective.³¹

While the Ministry aims to practice this philosophy whenever possible (such as in the approach taken under the Innovations Program) the existing tensions within the regional district system demonstrate that some local governments continue to face challenges in the effective delivery of services within their jurisdictions (perhaps due to a lack of adequate incentives or the differences in the priorities of local governments and the Province).

The next section highlights the fire service in BC, which has been struggling with a number of issues stemming from the divisions of responsibilities among providers of fire services. These issues have been further exacerbated from the tensions in the regional district system.

²⁸ Ministry of Community Services, "Survey of Regional Governance Institutions in Canada - The State of the Art," (internal document).

²⁹ David Cashback, "Regional District Governance in British Columbia: A Case Study in Aggregation," *Institute on Governance*, (June 2001).

³⁰ Ministry of Community Services, "Managing Changes to Local Government Structures".

³¹ Robert L. Bish and Eric G. Clemens, "Local Governments in BC".

2.3 The BC Fire Service

This section provides an overview of BC's fire service, including a discussion of its key issues.

2.3.1 Legislative Framework

In Canada, the *Constitution Act* delegates the responsibility for fire safety to the provincial governments.³² In BC, the fire service is loosely defined and governed by the *Fire Services Act* (the "Act"). The Act contains provisions relating to the investigation, prevention and suppression of fires, as well as provisions regarding the roles and duties of the Fire Commissioner and Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner. The fire service is also regulated by the *BC Fire Code*.³³ The *BC Fire Code* "ensures that building use and occupancy are consistent with the building design and construction requirements and that the required life and fire safety systems are being maintained. The *Fire Code* applies consistently throughout the province, including [to] regional districts".³⁴

2.3.2 Key Participants and Their Roles/Responsibilities

BC's fire safety and prevention framework involves a number of participants, including: (a) the Office of the Fire Commissioner; (b) Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner; (c) local governments; (d) fire departments and firefighters; and (e) other organizations and associations.

(a) Office of the Fire Commissioner

In BC, the Office of the Fire Commissioner (the "OFC")³⁵ is the provincial body responsible for administering and enforcing the *Act*. The OFC is the senior provincial fire prevention authority that is responsible for the following services: training Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner ("LAFCS"), collecting fire loss statistics, fire investigations and inspection of fire hazards, responding to major fire emergencies, providing advice to local governments on the delivery of fire protection services, and public fire safety education.³⁶ The OFC is not responsible for firefighter training, fire department operations and administration, or for fire suppression and its related activities (these activities are the responsibility of individual fire departments and largely unregulated under the *Act*).³⁷

(b) Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner (LAFCS)

³² Within BC, fire safety responsibilities can be divided into *fire prevention* activities, which can be defined as "anything that will prevent a fire or reduce the spread of fire and potential fire loss", and *fire suppression* activities, which can be defined as "the act of extinguishing or controlling a fire after it has started"; Office of the Fire Commissioner, "Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner: Orientation Course," Unit 1, 4.

³³ The BC Fire Code is based on the National Fire Code of Canada; the latest BC Fire Code came into effect on December 15, 2006.

³⁴ Kim Thorau, "Policy Paper-Developing A New Legislative Framework for Fire Services in British Columbia," *Perrin Thorau and Associates Ltd.* (March 2003), 4. (Internal Ministry document).

³⁵ The Office of the Fire Commissioner was created in 1921 and was then known as the Office of the Fire Marshal

³⁶ Office of the Fire Commissioner Staff, Personal Interview, October 2006.

³⁷ Arson investigation is also largely unregulated; in some cases, it is carried out by police departments through informal arrangements

Under the *Act*, the Fire Commissioner appoints local assistants. Under the *Act*, LAFCs are responsible for investigating fires, reporting fires, conducting fire safety inspections, and issuing orders to remedy fire hazards. Although some LAFCs are local government employees, LAFCs act under provincial authority and are accountable only to the Fire Commissioner, not to local governments, when carrying out their duties. There are approximately 1200 LAFCs in BC.

(c) Local Governments

BC's fire service is managed locally by municipalities, regional districts and improvement districts across the province. Each local government finances its own local fire service, largely through property taxes.

In BC, there is no statutory obligation for local governments (including regional districts and municipalities) to provide for a fire suppression service within their communities (although many do offer at least a basic fire suppression service to protect the safety of their citizens).³⁸ Activities related to firefighter training, fire department operations and administration and fire prevention/public education are also largely unregulated under the *Act*. Some local governments take an active role in these activities, while others leave the responsibility for these activities to each individual fire department.

In addition, under the *Act*, only municipalities are required to provide for a system of fire safety inspections of hotels and public buildings located within their boundaries. This means that there is no legal obligation for all other local governments, including regional districts, to undertake fire safety inspections of hotels and buildings located within their jurisdictions (i.e. outside of municipal boundaries).

(d) Fire Departments/Firefighters

The BC fire service consists of about 400 largely independent fire departments (approximately 350 of which are volunteer departments and 50 of which are paid/career departments), and an estimated 14,000 firefighters (about 75% of which are volunteer and 25% of which are paid/career).³⁹ Appendix 3 provides a graphical representation of the wide distribution of BC's 532 fire halls.⁴⁰

Fire departments in incorporated areas are under the jurisdiction of their managing municipality, whereas fire departments in unincorporated areas are managed by RDs or improvement districts (Table 1 below summarizes some of the key differences between fire departments located under various local government jurisdictions). This means that, the nature and scope of the fire suppression activities varies from large municipalities with paid professional fire departments to smaller municipalities

³⁸ In some cases, the decision to offer a fire suppression service (or develop a fire department), may be spurred by property owners themselves, who are seeking better rates on their fire insurance. In BC, fire insurance premiums are tied to the level of fire protection a property receives. Insurance rates will vary depending on which of the following three grading classifications a property falls into: fully protected, partially protected, and unprotected. (Personal communications with OFC Staff).

³⁹ OFC Staff, personal communications

⁴⁰ There are more fire halls (532) than fire departments (400), because a fire department can have more than one fire hall.

with a paid fire chief managing a volunteer fire department or a strictly volunteer fire department with no relationship to the local government council.⁴¹

Table 1 demonstrates that fire departments can vary greatly from one another. For instance, municipal fire departments in metropolitan areas are typically large and well-funded (because they are supported by a larger tax base), while “community” fire departments (the most rural type of fire departments) are usually formed by a small independent group of individuals who form a society to pay for a fire service to be provided within their rural area. Community fire departments, which make up approximately 5% of all fire departments within the province, typically have little or no interaction with local governments, because they are neither administered nor funded by a regional district, a municipality or an improvement district.

(e) Organizations & Associations

BC’s fire safety and prevention framework also includes a number of other components and partners that work together to minimize the loss of life and property due to fire. This framework includes a number of organizations and associations that represent fire chiefs, firefighters, insurers, local governments and other key players in the province’s fire safety framework. See Appendix 2 for further detail regarding these components and partners.

Table 1: Differences in Fire Departments (FDs)⁴²

<i>% of FDs in the province</i>	10%	15%	60%	10%	5%
<i>Located in</i>	large urban areas	smaller cities & towns	within a RD’s boundary	a fire protection district	rural areas
<i>Revenue source</i>	large, stable municipal tax base	smaller municipal tax base	from property taxes as outlined in each RD service bylaw	small tax base	an association or a society
<i>Staffed by</i>	career, with support in some cases, from paid-on-call firefighters	some career chiefs; mostly paid-on-call firefighters	largely volunteer, with some paid-on-call fire chiefs & firefighters	mostly volunteer firefighters	volunteer firefighters
<i>Interaction with local governments</i>	extensive	moderate	varies; some FDs have extensive interaction with their RD, others have minimal	none, all are independent	none, all are independent
<i>Interaction with other emergency services</i>	extensive	as required	as required	as required	limited, as required

⁴¹ Kim Thorau, “Policy Paper,” 4

⁴² Personal communications, OFC Staff

2.3.3 Regional Districts & Fire Departments

In many regional districts, there is a real void and a real lack of capacity in providing fire support services to not only those fire departments managed by regional districts themselves (i.e. those located in electoral areas), but also to those fire departments located in improvement districts and in municipalities.

The most abundant and underdeveloped in terms of capacity are those fire departments that are located within the boundaries of a *regional district* (because when regional districts were created in 1965, they inherited existing, independent fire departments that were at one time created by improvement districts). Over the years, as improvement districts dissolved, fire departments from these improvement districts became the responsibility of regional districts. As a result, today, regional district fire departments are those that are located in the electoral and unincorporated areas of the province, outside of municipal boundaries and outside the boundaries of an improvement district.⁴³ Regional district fire departments are funded by the RD⁴⁴ through service bylaws that establish a service area (and define which properties fall within that service area), and that set out the maximum amount to be charged for the fire service (from property taxes), in a given year.⁴⁵

Although fire departments in electoral areas are funded by their respective regional districts, the amount of communication, coordination and collaboration between these fire departments and their managing regional district varies greatly from one RD to the next. In some cases, regional districts are heavily involved in the operations of their fire departments, however, in other cases, the RD plays no real role beyond providing its fire departments with funding.

Most fire departments located in *improvement districts* also have little or no interaction with regional districts, even though every improvement district (except one), is located within the boundaries of a regional district. There is little desire for fire departments located within an improvement district to interact with their umbrella regional district, because unlike regional district (i.e. electoral area) fire departments, fire departments in improvement districts are not funded by the regional district. Property taxes used to fund fire protection services in improvement areas are collected directly by the Provincial Surveyor of Taxes and do not require the regional district to play any role.⁴⁶ As a result, regional districts typically provide little or no fire support services to their improvement district fire departments.

Many *municipal* fire departments also receive few fire support services from their regional district, even though all municipal fire departments are located within the boundaries of a regional district. Since many municipal fire departments are well

⁴³ Approximately 50 fire departments remain under the responsibility of improvement districts.

⁴⁴ Regional districts tax specific properties for specific services like fire protection

⁴⁵ Where a regional district provides services to properties within a municipal boundary, the municipality levies and collects taxes on the regional district's behalf and then remits the money to the regional district.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, "Improvement District Conversion Guide," (February 2004).

supported by their managing municipality, they usually believe that they have little need to contract out fire support services to the regional district.

2.3.4 Fragmentation of the Fire Service

Many of the province's 400 fire departments were historically developed by improvement districts, independently and outside of the regional district system. As a result, today's fire service is highly fragmented, meaning that in many cases there is a lack of collaboration, coordination and communication, not only between fire departments, but between fire departments and local governments, particularly regional districts. Even though the local government system has changed dramatically over the years, with the introduction of regional districts, most fire departments continue to operate as independent entities, due to a combination of the following factors:

- *Legislation:* the *Act* does not encourage fire departments to interact or collaborate with one another.⁴⁷ In fact, the *Act* does not specifically recognize the role of regional districts within the fire service (as the *Act* has not been substantially rewritten to reference them). It should be noted, however, that the *Act* does not *prevent* fire departments from collaborating or working together either;
- *Tensions in Regional District System:* regional districts have not only had difficulty thinking "regionally"⁴⁸, but some are still unaware of their roles as flexible organizations that can bring together various member jurisdictions to deliver important services at a regional level. Without regional districts facilitating cooperation at the regional level, it is even more difficult to expect fire departments to think beyond their own boundaries;
- *L AFC System:* the L AFC system has contributed to a culture of isolation in the fire service. Over 1,200 L AFCs are spread throughout the province, each of whom report directly to the Fire Commissioner. Although most L AFCs are employed directly by local governments and work for a fire department, they operate under provincial authority. The L AFC system does not motivate fire departments to work together, because each L AFC is trained by the OFC and reports independently to the Fire Commissioner. The L AFC system fails to take into account the province's local government system, as L AFCs do not report to, or communicate with, regional districts or municipalities; and
- *Geography:* most fire departments, particularly those in electoral areas, are located in remote rural locations (as demonstrated in Appendix 3), making it difficult for them to communicate and collaborate with one another and with local governments. Since most have only known how to operate independently, the majority of fire departments continue to do so in the same manner in which they have always operated.

⁴⁷ Fire departments do interact on matter of mutual aid, but beyond this, there is typically little collaboration in some fire departments, in the realm of fire support services

⁴⁸ Thinking regionally refers to both recognizing the broader needs of a community and collaborating with the regional district's participants.

2.3.5 Fire Service Challenges

Although the fire service functions well on a day-to-day basis (i.e. fire suppression activities) due to the dedication of firefighters, the fragmentation of the service has resulted in a number of interrelated issues and challenges, which, over the years and through a review of the *Fire Services Act* in 2002, have been determined by the Ministry⁴⁹ to be largely capacity-related challenges with regard to fire *support* services. The following provides a flavour of some of the fire support service challenges that exist, in varying degrees, across the province: 1) inadequate funding for fire support services; 2) firefighter training; 3) administration burdens; 4) duplication of services; 5) a lack of fire safety inspections; and 6) the LAFC system.

1) *Inadequate funding for fire support services*: many rural fire departments are funded by a small tax base. As a result, these types of fire departments usually have little or no resources to commit to activities beyond fire suppression (such as firefighter training and fire prevention/public education).

2) *Training for career and volunteer firefighters*: each fire department is responsible for training its own firefighters to a minimum level set out by the National Fire Protection Association, the NFPA 1001. However, in many fire departments, training is not always practical or readily available. In some cases, training is not tailored to the specific needs of each fire department (because training needs vary greatly depending on where fire departments are located). For example, in some rural regional districts, volunteer firefighters require training in fighting forest interface fires rather than in fighting fires in multi-level buildings (as career firefighters in larger metropolitan areas typically require). Training is also inaccessible by some fire departments. For example, the Justice Institute of BC (JIBC), the primary provider of fire training in the province, only has campuses in five metro areas. But since numerous departments are located in rural and remote areas, it is sometimes not practical or financially feasible for fire departments to send their firefighters to the JIBC. Further, many volunteer firefighters hold full-time employment outside of the fire service, and are unable to take time off from work to acquire training.

In addition, over the years, the certification criteria for firefighter training have changed numerous times. For example, before the NFPA training standards were instituted on January 1, 2003, the BC Fire Service Training Standards were the requirement for all firefighters. These changes have resulted in frustration for many firefighters who have been working to achieve something that is no longer recognized.⁵⁰

3) *Administration burdens*: fire departments operating independently must handle all of their department's administrative and operational activities in-house, and since most volunteer firefighters work full-time, volunteers are typically unable (and unqualified) to take on responsibilities other than firefighting. In many cases, administrative tasks such as filling out forms and reporting are simply not undertaken, because they are either too

⁴⁹ The Ministry has become aware of these challenges over the years, through the fire service, and through various meetings and other communications.

⁵⁰ The challenges associated with training can also make it difficult to retain and recruit new firefighters, especially volunteer firefighters.

complicated or too time-consuming and burdensome. In addition, most volunteer firefighters are not interested in administrative tasks, because they simply want to focus on fighting fires. As a result, administrative recordkeeping and reporting in some fire departments is either ignored or done poorly and inconsistently.

4) *Duplication of services*: the delivery of fire services is “patchy” and costly in many areas. This has led to both the duplication of services and the inefficient utilization of resources. Fire departments operating independently from one another do not take advantage of scale economies, such as in the purchasing of equipment (which has created problems, for example, of incompatible fire apparatus and communications equipment among neighbouring departments). Fire departments often have different communication systems, equipment, and operating standards from department to department. This has created some challenges for fire departments in not only communicating with one another, but also with local governments and with other emergency service providers.⁵¹

5) *Fire safety inspections*: as discussed earlier, the *Act* requires only municipalities to provide for a regular system of fire safety inspections for all public buildings and hotels located within their boundaries, and there is no requirement for such a service in areas outside of municipalities (i.e. electoral areas). This has created a safety concern in areas that are not currently inspected. While the idea of mandating fire safety inspections outside of municipal boundaries (i.e. requiring regional districts to undertake fire safety inspections in their jurisdictions) has been raised, it has been a controversial proposition for most regional districts due to the perceived liability associated with providing such a service, and due to the stringent enforcement requirements and the regulatory nature of formal fire safety inspection schemes.⁵²

6) *L AFC system*: concerns exist about the efficiency and effectiveness of the L AFC system, especially in the areas of recruitment, training and retention. The qualifications of local assistants are of concern because do not receive adequate training that they need to fulfill their duties. Ironically, many initially become L AFCs as a means of obtaining *some* training (which they otherwise would not have received if they were only firefighters).⁵³ Also, with over 1,200 inconsistently trained L AFCs located throughout the province, the consistency of approach varies significantly. For example, “in some cases, the Local Assistant is a highly qualified and trained fire fighter and in other cases may be a volunteer with minimal level of training or experience”.⁵⁴ Also, with so many L AFCs, it often becomes difficult for the Fire Commissioner, local governments, and other fire personnel to communicate effectively with L AFCs and vice versa.

The next section provides an overview of the Innovations Program, which was designed to help address some of the issues and challenges described above.

⁵¹ Gary Filmon, “Firestorm 2003 - Provincial Review” , (February 15, 2004), <<http://www.2003firestorm.gov.bc.ca/firestormreport/FirestormReport.pdf>>.

⁵² While one would expect insurance companies to require fire safety inspections before issuing home insurance, home insurance premiums are only tied to the level of fire protection a property receives, not safety inspections.

⁵³ Personal communications, OFC staff.

⁵⁴ Kim Thorau, “Policy Paper,” 8.

2.4 Innovations in Fire Services Pilot Program

This section provides an overview of the Innovations Program, including the reasons and context within which the program was developed, the key objectives the program was intended to fulfill, and an outline of the participants involved in the program and the types of activities the program has generated to date.

2.4.1 Program Development

A review of the *Act* in 2002 determined that both legislative and non-legislative changes were necessary to ensure an efficient and effective fire safety system in BC.

Consultations with the fire service and with local governments determined that imposed provincial solutions or legislation, by themselves, would not address the fire service's various capacity issues. Rather than leading with legislation, a decision was made to postpone the legislative reform and, instead, begin by addressing the fire service's capacity problems through the regionalization of fire support services.

To address the fire service's capacity problems, the Ministry and the OFC decided not to pursue any of the following top-down, regionalization strategies:

- create a provincial fire service to encompass the entire province under the supervision of the OFC;
- develop two types of fire departments (as is the case in the State of Victoria in Australia, where two state-run fire departments - one for metro Melbourne and one for the remainder of the state - serve the entire state)⁵⁵;
- legislate the amalgamation of regional or municipal fire departments; or
- impose requirements on current fire departments and the fire service (such as requiring standardized provincial training or requiring regional districts to conduct fire inspections outside of municipal boundaries).

Instead, however, in the spring of 2004, the Ministry undertook and launched an experimental, bottom-up, collaborative, pilot project approach, which utilized the Ministry's philosophy and took into account both the nature of the fire service and the tensions facing the regional district system. The Ministry and the OFC agreed that this would be the best approach for a number of reasons.

First, it was expected that a pilot project approach would enable regions to create their own solutions to meet the unique needs of their geographic areas and their specific situations. The Ministry and the OFC recognized that each region's fire service landscape differed, and that, as a result, tailored local solutions were necessary to build capacity from the ground-up. For instance, the training needs of firefighters vary greatly depending on the geography of a region. For example, in some regional districts, volunteer firefighters require training in fighting forest interface fires rather than in fighting fires in multi-level buildings.

⁵⁵ The State of Victoria's geography is similar to BC's in that it also has large areas of land that are in some places, sparsely populated.

Second, the pilot-project approach took advantage of the province's existing, flexible, collaborative and layered regional district system, without fundamentally disturbing any feature of the local government system (i.e. as would have likely been the result if changes had been legislated). Essentially, the pilot project approach allowed the Ministry and the OFC to create another layer of fire service delivery atop of the existing delivery mechanisms, without disrupting/changing the existing layers. This meant that smaller fire departments would remain intact while the regional districts would take on some type of a support service for their local fire departments.

Third, the pilot project approach was consistent with the Ministry's philosophy of encouraging local governments to find their own local solutions and working with local governments using facilitation, trust and mutual cooperation.

Fourth, the Ministry and the OFC believed that a pilot project approach would yield practical information sharing, learning and best practices. It was anticipated that an experimental pilot project, rather than a top-down approach, would result in a better understanding of the delivery of regional fire support services (i.e. what works and what does not), because such an approach would have been tested on the ground.

Finally, the pilot project approach was viewed as a means of engaging all stakeholders at many different levels, to collaboratively work together to develop sustainable, long-term solutions (as opposed to imposed solutions).

2.4.2 Program Objectives

The Innovations Program aimed to encourage regions (outside the major metropolitan areas of Vancouver and Victoria), through financial incentives, to coordinate and provide support to fire departments in the areas of training, administration, communication, public education, safety assessments⁵⁶, and *regional fire prevention manager* models⁵⁷.

The program did not limit regional districts to develop fire support services for only regional district-run fire departments. Rather, the program provided each regional district with the option to design and deliver fire support services to any or all fire departments, (regardless of their local government affiliation), and in a manner that best suited the region's needs. The program also did *not* fund capital or other infrastructure-related projects.

⁵⁶ **Safety assessments** are a non-regulated approach to inspecting properties for fire hazards. Unlike formal, regulated fire safety inspection schemes which require vigorous enforcement and regulation, safety assessments do not impose fines or penalties on owners, rather they aim to educate and raise awareness about fire risks. Safety assessments expect property owners to comply and correct any fire risks to their properties, on a voluntary basis.

⁵⁷ A *regional fire prevention manager* model is an idea initiated at the Ministry level, under which, instead of LAFCs appointed by the Fire Commissioner, regional districts are able to develop a centralized position at the regional district level to carry out LAFC-type duties. Such a model is envisioned to have no direct links to the Fire Commissioner and is envisioned by the Ministry as a replacement to the current LAFC system. *Regional fire prevention managers* would be able to appoint their own assistants and the managers themselves would be designated by regional districts.

Ultimately, the goal of the Innovations Program was to encourage the collaborative provision of fire support services to improve safety and property protection in BC. The specific objectives of the Innovations Program were as follows:

- to encourage regional districts to develop sustainable, widely-supported, self-financing regional services for their region's fire departments;
- to reduce and fill service gaps that currently exist within the fire service;
- to achieve higher levels of coordination among local fire departments;
- to inform future amendments to the *Act*; and
- to help foster and build good working relationships, through cooperation and collaboration, between regional districts, the Ministry, the OFC and the fire service.

Appendix 4 provides a conceptual overview of the Innovations Program in the form of a logic model. This model outlines the inputs, the outputs and the ultimate objectives of the Innovations Program.

2.4.3 Program Activities & Participants

In the spring of 2004, the Innovations Program extended an invitation to regional districts to forward "expressions of interest" describing how they would collaboratively work with the fire service in their regions to improve supports to local fire departments. Feasible "expressions of interest" each received \$5,000 development grants to develop their proposals further. Proposals received were then judged on the degree to which they demonstrated the following criteria:

- 1) *innovativeness and creativity* (the degree to which a proposal addressed fire service delivery issues in new ways and the potential of the proposal to be transported to other areas);
- 2) *broad based support* (the degree to which a proposal identified support from different sectors, such as from the fire service, municipalities and fire protection districts within a region);
- 3) *collaborative participation at the regional, sub-regional or multi-regional levels* (the degree to which a proposal demonstrated wider participation in regional support programs);
- 4) *range and sophistication of services being implemented* (the degree to which a proposal involved an assortment of services and the level of complexity of support services); and
- 5) *long-term sustainability* (the degree to which a proposal demonstrated long term financial and productive sustainability).

Winning proposals were awarded design grants of \$25,000 (cost shared 50:50 with the Ministry and the RD for a total project shareable cost of \$50,000) to further develop and implement their regional service delivery approaches.

The program provided two rounds of grants, the first in 2004 and the second in 2005. In the first round, eight regional districts were awarded \$5,000 proposal development grants,

and of these, *five* were awarded cost-shared project development grants of \$25,000; in the second round, five regional districts were awarded \$5,000 proposal development grants, and of these *four* were awarded \$25,000 project development grants.

The Ministry and the OFC provided regional districts with a great deal of support during the planning, development and implementation of their proposals and projects. During the course of the Innovations Program, the Ministry and the OFC traveled to each of the regional districts to meet with key individuals from each region’s fire service and discuss each project in detail. The Ministry and the OFC facilitated the development of each region’s proposal and project by providing advice, support and guidance throughout the course of the program.

The Ministry also hired the services of a consultant to help regional districts overcome issues and obstacles during the development of their proposals and projects. Some of the consultant’s specific support duties included responding to the enquiries of regional districts, providing clarification and expertise on the Innovation Program’s goals and objectives, and proactively initiating contact with regional districts to determine how they were managing with the design and implementation of their proposals and projects.

Currently, all nine winning pilot projects, ranging from regional training initiatives to regional safety assessments, are underway. However, only six of these projects (all five from the first year of the program, and one from the second year of the program), are within the scope of this research study.⁵⁸ Table 2 below summarizes these six pilot projects, and Table 3 summarizes the three projects that are not within the scope of this study.⁵⁹

Table 2: Pilot Projects Studied

CSRD	Columbia Shuswap Regional District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative standardization (fire reporting documents, fire hall maintenance records, etc.) • <i>Regional Fire Prevention Manager</i> model
RDCK	Regional District of Central Kootenay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional firefighter training curriculum (that also included the development of a regional training site)
RDCO	Regional District of Central Okanagan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional fire safety inspections
RDEK	Regional District of East Kootenay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various regional initiatives including firefighter training, purchasing, public education/fire prevention, communication and coordination
RDFFG	Regional District of Fraser-Fort George	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional communication and dispatch • Regional training centre feasibility study
RDNO	Regional District of North Okanagan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional fire district model (includes public education of safety assessments, fire investigation and fire education, and service delivery to unprotected areas) • Regional ammonia/chlorine emergency response program

⁵⁸ Selection of pilot projects chosen for this research study is explained further in the methodology section.

⁵⁹ An overview of each of these six regional districts can be found in Appendix 7.

Table 3: Pilot Projects Not Studied

FVRD	Fraser Valley Regional District	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional training strategy
RDCS	Regional District of Comox-Strathcona	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Filling regional fire support service gaps in electoral areas
RDOS	Regional District of Okanagan- Similkameen	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multi-jurisdictional regional training centre

3.0 RESEARCH STUDY

This section outlines the purpose and methodology of the research study.

3.1 Purpose

In the summer of 2006, the researcher joined the Ministry of Community Services to carry out a research study to collect feedback and harness the learning from the Innovations Program. The purpose of the study was to gain a preliminary understanding of some of the benefits, challenges, and opportunities of delivering fire support services regionally by capturing the experiences and thoughts of participants from the Innovations Program. The results of the study were expected to enhance the Ministry's knowledge of, and inform other stakeholder about, the regional delivery of fire support services.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Research Design

This study was carried out using a *qualitative, non-experimental* design, with *face-to-face interviews* as the primary means of data collection.

Qualitative studies are typically best suited for capturing the unique stories and experiences of participants and in helping the researcher understand the meaning of a program.⁶⁰ For these reasons, a qualitative design was the most appropriate for this study.

A *non-experimental design*, otherwise known as an implicit design, was the most suitable design for this study because there was no control group. Other non-participating regional districts (RDs) could not have acted as a control group because of the numerous geographic and locational variations present within each RD. Also, both a quasi-experimental and an experimental design were inappropriate because the study was carried out after the Innovations Program had been implemented and because RDs had each voluntarily chosen to participate in the Innovations Program and were, therefore, not randomly assigned (qualitative studies require participants to be randomly selected).

A *non-experimental design* was also chosen because there was no opportunity to construct baseline measures. Although the Ministry collected some baseline information regarding the status of fire service delivery in each RD before the Innovations Program began, the extent of this information was limited and could not have been solely used to compare "before" and "after" results. Further, since the objective of the study was on *learning* about the benefits, challenges, and opportunities of delivering fire support services regionally, the baseline data was of limited usefulness. In other words, this study was centered more on learning about the *experiences* of the RDs, rather than on comparing before and after data. For these reasons, a non-experimental design was appropriate.

⁶⁰ James C. McDavid and Laura L. Hawthorn, *Program Evaluation & Performance Measurement: An Introduction to Practice*, (California: Sage Publications Inc., 2006).

Non-experimental designs do have limitations because they can sometimes result in conclusions that lack certainty. In this study, triangulation (or collecting data from a variety of sources) and baseline data (where appropriate) were used to increase the confidence and the validity of study results.

Face-to-face interviews were the primary means of data collection in this study because they were the optimal method of exploring and capturing the experiences of program participants.

3.2.2 Sample

Sampling, or the process of selecting *cases* and *people* for the research study, was deliberate rather than random, because the study was qualitative.

All five of the regional districts (i.e. *cases*), from the first year of the Innovations Program were selected for the study, as well as one regional district from the second year of the program, for a total of six regional districts: Central Kootenay, Columbia-Shuswap, Central Okanagan, East Kootenay, Fraser-Fort George, and North Okanagan. The remaining three regional districts were identified as still being in the development stage and, as a result, were not suitable candidates for the study.

The selection of *people* for the study was done using a purposive sampling method, because the study evaluated a specific program in which program participants were already known. Snowballing sampling, or sampling that relies on participants to identify other individuals who may be a rich source of data, was also used in the study. The intent of the study was to interview two to five individuals, with different backgrounds, from each of the six RDs. Ministry staff initially identified one to two individuals from each of the six regional districts. These individuals were then contacted by the researcher and asked to identify other individuals (such as a fire chief or an administrator) who had either had a significant role in the development or implementation of, or who had been significantly affected by, the RD's pilot project. Table 4 below provides a summary of who was interviewed in each regional district. A total of 22 individuals, ranging from fire chiefs to fire coordinators to administrators, were interviewed over the course of two months. At least one interviewee from each RD was the primary individual responsible for developing or implementing his/her pilot project within his/her regional district.

Table 4: Information on Research Sample

CSRD	Columbia-Sushwap Regional District	1. Manager, Works Services 2. Fire Services Coordinator 3. Fire Chief
RDCK	Regional District of Central Kootenay	4. Fire Service Advisor 5-11. Fire Services Group (7 people)*
RDCO	Regional District of Central Okanagan	12. Director, Engineering Services 13. Contractor / Fire Chief
RDEK	Regional District of East Kootenay	14. Emergency Services Coordinator 15. Chief Administrative Officer** 16. Dean of Instruction (local college) 17. Training Coordinator (local college)
RDFFG	Regional District of Fraser-Fort George	18. Manager, Public Safety 19. IT/Communications Analyst 20. Fire Chief
RDNO	Regional District of North Okanagan	21. Fire Prevention Officer 22. Protective Services Officer
* The fire services group consisted of various fire service personnel, including fire chiefs, representatives from the local college, and a regional district employee. ** This was not a formal, planned interview, but an ad-hoc interview with discussion around the key research questions.		

3.2.3 Human Research Ethics Approval

As the face-to-face interviews involved contacting people and obtaining information from them, an Application for Ethical Review of Human Research was submitted to the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Committee. The application was approved in May 2006, and the interviews were carried out as approved.

3.2.4 Data Collection

Selected program participants from each of the six regional districts were first informed about the study through a letter from the Ministry (see Appendix 5). The researcher then contacted these same participants, via telephone, to arrange interviews in each of the six regional districts. During this time, participants were also asked to identify other individuals within their region who would be a rich source of information for the study. After interviews had been arranged with each participant, they were each sent an information package, via email, containing information about the purpose of the study, a copy of the introductory letter from the Ministry, and the data collection instrument, that is, an outline of the possible interview questions they could expect (see Appendix 6).

The data collection instrument, a semi-structured interview outline containing open-ended interview questions, was prepared by the researcher in conjunction with Ministry staff. This type of data collection instrument was used because it allowed participants to openly share their experiences and thoughts, it enhanced the opportunity for a fuller discussion, it enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions, and it reduced the chances of the researcher imposing her viewpoints onto the interviewees. Generally, the instrument was structured in a manner that enabled the researcher to systematically ask participants about

the development and implementation of their regional fire support services (that is, it followed the interviewees from pre-Innovations Program to post-implementation). Two different interview outlines were developed, one tailored towards interviewing study participants who had either helped develop or implement the pilot projects (i.e. fire service coordinator), and the other for those individuals who had been affected by a pilot project within their region (i.e. a fire chief).

Over the course of two months, the researcher traveled to each of the six regional districts to meet face-to-face with each study participant. All participants, except in the Regional District of Central Kootenay (where it was easier to schedule and interview all eight interviewees at the same time), were interviewed individually by the researcher. Interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes. Most of the interviews were tape recorded by the researcher (with permission from study participants).

3.2.5 Data Analysis & Interpretation

The researcher analyzed both primary and secondary data.

For primary data analysis, the researcher reviewed both written notes and the interview recordings. The researcher captured most of the recorded information by personally transcribing each of the recorded interviews. During transcription, the researcher identified key quotes that helped capture or summarize the themes that had been expressed by a large number of the interviewees. This data was compiled and used to develop the written synthesis of the findings (see Appendix 8 for detailed findings).

Also, where applicable and available, secondary data was analyzed. This included project proposals from each of the six regional districts, any baseline data collected by the Ministry, feedback provided to the Ministry by the regional districts, and various other reports and information provided by study participants and the Ministry. Secondary data was incorporated as each of the six regional districts was being analyzed.

4.0 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The following were considered limitations of the research study.

First, the scope of the research study only extended to six of the nine regional districts that participated in the Innovations Program. The remaining three regional districts were not involved in the review, and, as a result, the study does not represent a comprehensive review of the entire Innovations Program. However, this exclusion does not limit the usefulness of the results obtained from the six regional districts that were reviewed.⁶¹

Second, the study intended to interview individuals who had been involved in the development of, and who had been affected by, the Innovations Program's pilot projects. However, in the Regional District of North Okanagan, only RD employees (that is those who developed the pilot projects) were interviewed, because, due to summer holidays and scheduling issues, no other fire service personnel (i.e. those who had been affected by the pilot projects) were available.

Third, interviewees involved in the study may have been influenced by the interviewer, however, as with most qualitative studies that involve face-to-face interviews, interviewer bias is difficult to avoid. To minimize this bias, the researcher tried to be conscious of her behaviour, including her tone and nonverbal actions, throughout all of the interviews. In addition, during interviews held at the RD of Central Kootenay, a senior Ministry staff member from the Office of the Fire Commissioner joined the researcher. The presence of this staff member may have influenced the responses of the interviewees.

Fourth, the results obtained in the study are more likely to reflect positive views about the delivery of regional fire support services because each of the regional districts self-selected themselves to participate in the Innovations Program, and were, therefore, already inclined to pursue regional fire services.

Fifth, it is important to recognize that some of the regional districts had not fully developed and/or implemented their pilot projects when the data was collected.⁶² They were, therefore, not able to fully comment and provide feedback on the development and implementation processes. To address this limitation, where relevant, interviewees were asked to foresee what problems they could face as they continued to develop and eventually implement their projects.

Finally, it is recognized that qualitative data analysis can sometimes be skewed by the researcher's interpretations of the data. The researcher, to the best of her ability, has attempted to analyze the data in a non-biased manner.

⁶¹ Note that this study is purposely purely qualitative in nature (and does not include any quantitative data), because it was intended to capture the *experiences* of program participants.

⁶² While the data was also collected approximately eight months ago, it is still valid and useful (as the data still reflects the experiences of participants during the development of their programs).

5.0 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

This section presents a summary of the findings obtained from the recorded interview data, the researcher's interview notes and other relevant secondary data. Findings are summarized and presented according to each of the six cases / regional districts. For a complete and thorough overview of the findings, please refer to Appendix 8.

5.1 Case Study #1 - Columbia-Shuswap Regional District (CSRD)⁶³

The CSRD undertook two initiatives under the Innovations Program. First, to help overcome a lack of commonality in operations, the CSRD undertook the standardization of administrative procedures for its 13 volunteer fire departments. This involved the development of common procedures and forms (including reporting practices), common standards for equipment, training and service delivery, and a common system for operations and maintenance. Second, to help overcome inefficiencies in its LAFC system (such as having numerous LAFCs who are not adequately trained), the CSRD undertook steps towards implementing a *regional fire prevention manager* model. In developing this model, the CSRD hired one individual to begin carrying out LAFC-related responsibilities, such as fire investigations, for all of the unincorporated areas of the RD.

Interviews revealed that the CSRD not only had the geography and fire service landscape to implement its regional fire support services (i.e. easily accessible fire departments), but that it also had a basic level of regional cooperation (stemming from the RD's various mutual aid agreements and its regional training centre) upon which to build.

While the CSRD faced a few challenges during the development and implementation of its regional fire support services (mainly opposition from long time fire chiefs), it overcame such challenges through active and ongoing communication, and through events such as a local fishing derby. The CSRD is now realizing a number of benefits as a result of its efforts to develop regional fire support services. These benefits include: increased consistency in training, more efficient record keeping, cost savings from the joint purchasing of fire equipment, and increased efficiencies and enhanced relationships arising out of the movement towards a *regional fire prevention manager* model.

Generally, the CSRD's regional administrative standardization initiative and its movement towards a *regional fire prevention manager* model are being perceived as successes. Interviewees attribute much of this success to the extensive operational experience of the individual who is now beginning to move into the role of a *regional fire prevention manager*. Other success factors included: willingness from all levels to partake in a regional service, approval and support from the CSRD's board, and increased cohesion among the RD's 13 fire departments.

While many elements of the CSRD's scheme are transferable (such as its standardized administrative forms and procedures and its preliminary development of a *regional fire prevention manager* model), interviewees suggested that individuals with operational

⁶³ For an overview of the CSRD and each of the other five regional districts reviewed in this study, including information regarding population, area size and location, please refer to Appendix 7.

experience were a prerequisite for any other RD considering similar regional fire support services.

Interviews revealed that the CSRD sees itself as having further potential for the regional delivery of fire support services, particularly in the areas of public education / fire prevention, multi-regional purchasing, and communication across other emergency services. Generally, the CSRD is very supportive of the concept of regional fire support services in BC.

5.2 Case Study #2 - Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK)

As part of its Innovations Program pilot project, the RDCK took on the task of standardizing education among its 17 regional district fire departments (part of the training initiative involved the development of a regional training site⁶⁴). The RDCK wanted to overcome the following issues: training and education inequities among its fire departments, frustrations with the JIBC's training delivery system, a lack of education standardization across its fire departments, and a lack of an accessible and practical training site. More specifically, the RDCK wanted to provide its rural (largely volunteer) firefighters with an affordable and practical training curriculum, because the training that was available to them through the JIBC was much too advanced for the needs of volunteer firefighters, and also very expensive.

The RDCK used its existing partnerships and relationships with fire service stakeholders, particularly with the local Selkirk College, to develop and begin delivering a non-accredited (but JIBC recognized), affordable and practical training curriculum to meet the basic needs of its firefighters. The RDCK was driven by the need to ensure that, ultimately, all of its fire departments and firefighters were operating in a safe and efficient manner. The RDCK has also been able to successfully develop its training program and training site because of the support and positive attitude of its regional board.

Interviews revealed that the main challenge the RDCK has faced in the development and implementation of its regional initiatives has been opposition from, and the attitudes of, some fire service personnel who are resistant to change. The RDCK is trying to overcome this challenge by actively communicating changes with all affected individuals, including through the Training Officer's Society, and by implementing changes slowly (because the RD has realized that the entrenched independent nature of fire departments can only change slowly, over time). The RDCK is also seeking to fill the position of a central fire service coordinator which it believes is imperative for pulling together and coordinating the regional initiatives.

Both the Selkirk College and the RDCK believe that the Innovations Program and the resulting regional initiatives are producing benefits for everybody, including the community, the college, the RD, and most importantly, the fire service. Interviews reveal

⁶⁴ It should be noted that the Innovations Program did not fund capital projects, therefore the RDCK did not receive money to build its training site. The RDCK chose to pursue the facility, however, as part of its larger training strategy.

that the Innovations Program has been invaluable in helping the RDCK kick-start its regional training initiative.

The RDCK believes that the regional training curriculum and training site will pave the way for future regional fire support services in the RD, in areas such as communications and safety assessments. However, the RD believes that a key step in any future regional fire support service is the development of a regional bylaw for fire support services that, for example, could set aside educational funding for fire departments on a yearly basis.

The RDCK's program is highly transferable to other RDs interested in a regionally-coordinated entry-level training program on behalf of local fire departments in their area. Typically this training program would be appealing to the volunteer departments that exist in smaller municipalities and rural areas. RDs wanting to develop such a training program, should, according to the RDCK, develop and build relationships with their local colleges and other community stakeholders. Generally, the RDCK is highly optimistic and supportive of the concept of delivering regional fire support services in BC.

5.3 Case Study #3 - Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO)

Under the Innovations Program, the RDCO undertook the development and implementation of a regional fire safety inspection service that would extend to all public and commercial properties of the RD, including those located in its unincorporated electoral areas.⁶⁵

In 2004, to deal with the lack of fire safety inspections in the RDCO, the RD adopted a bylaw to establish a service of fire prevention for its electoral areas. The service involved a number of activities, including the establishment of a system of fire prevention inspections for public buildings. Since then, the RDCO has contracted out the regional fire safety inspection service to its newly acquired Westside Fire Department, a department that already provided a safety inspection service to properties located within the (now former) Westside Fire Protection District. Efforts are being made to standardize the RDCO's safety inspection service between all electoral areas and municipalities. In addition, the RDCO has implemented a *fire/life safety self assessment* program for properties located within the City of Kelowna. Under this program, a business owner/manager can conduct a self assessment of their premises to correct any violations, before a fire safety inspection is conducted.⁶⁶

The RDCO has also undertaken steps towards a *quasi-regional fire prevention manager* model. Three staff members from the former Westside Fire Protection District are now undertaking responsibility for fire investigation, fire recordings, and incident reporting to the OFC, on behalf of all of the RDCO's electoral areas.

Interviews revealed that the RDCO has been able to successfully develop and implement a regional fire safety inspection service because it is geographically small, compact and

⁶⁵ The RDCO has four regional district fire departments and four municipal departments

⁶⁶ Thus avoiding any fines under the City of Kelowna "Fire Prevention Regulations Bylaw"

fairly urbanized. The RDCO believes that aside from geography, its regional fire safety inspection service has been successful to date because of the support the initiative has received from the RD's regional board (a board that is proactive and one that pursues and encourages regional initiatives), and because it has actively communicated to its local fire service about the regional fire safety inspection service through its Fire Technical Advisory Committee. Part of the initiative's success rests on the fact that the RD already has more than a basic level of cooperation through its variety of regional services (such as its region-wide rescue service).

Interviews revealed that the RDCO is experiencing a number of benefits as a result of its regional fire safety inspection service, including enhanced safety, increased consistency and standardization, and cost savings. Interestingly, the RDCO has not experienced any major challenges or obstacles in the development and implementation of its regional fire safety inspection service.

The RDCO believes that there a number of opportunities for further regional fire support services within the RD, including a regional fire service (i.e. a regional fire department), a regional training program and a regional communication system. In addition, interviews revealed that the RDCO's service can be best transferred to higher density RDs with easily accessible properties.

Generally, while the RDCO has been pleased with the Innovations Program, it does not see itself participating in any future similar initiatives, as it believes that they require too much effort. The RDCO would, however, like to undertake its own final evaluation of its regional fire safety inspection service to fully understand the costs and benefits of this service.

5.4 Case Study #4 - Regional District of East Kootenay (RDEK)

Within the RDEK's boundaries, there are six regional district fire departments, eight municipal fire departments, and one improvement district fire department.

The RDEK undertook a number of initiatives as part of its pilot project under the Innovations Program. These initiatives focused on improving training, increasing coordination/cooperation (among all rural, municipal and improvement district fire departments and other emergency providers), broadening service delivery, establishing a framework for regionalized service delivery, developing fire prevention/education programs and volunteer recruitment strategies, enhancing support services, and improving emergency communications. While the RDEK's main focus was primarily on its six RD fire departments, the RDEK's initiatives have not been limited to only these departments. Where possible, the RDEK has tried to involve its municipal fire departments as well. The impetus for the RDEK's "regional" attitude came about over time, through a recognition that its electoral area fire departments were struggling with a number of basic issues (such as training and administration).

To date, the RDEK has focused the majority of its efforts on the development of a firefighter training program, for which it teamed up with a local college (the College of

the Rockies) to design and deliver an accredited⁶⁷ training program for all firefighters (career and volunteer). Another noteworthy regional activity has been the RDEK's decision to hire one fire chief for two separate rural fire departments in an effort to begin increasing coordination and standardization among the RDs fire departments.

The RDEK believes that its only real challenges in the development and implementation of its regional initiatives, to date, have been the lack of time, money and other resources to develop all that it set out to do under the Innovations Program. The RDEK has focused on making changes slowly and with care, as it has grown to recognize that attitudes towards regional initiatives will not instantly change. The RDEK has communicated, and will continue to communicate, with regard to its regional activities through a steering committee which it has developed specifically for the changes.

The RDEK believes that it is taking the correct approach towards developing regional fire support services in the RD. The RDEK believes that there are a number of factors that have made, and will continue to make, its current and future regional initiatives successful. These include the following: political appetite and support from the regional board, a central contact and champion, a supportive and collaborative relationship with the local college, taking a "soft" approach to regionalization, respecting the autonomy of fire departments, developing a steering committee with representation from the local fire service (particularly fire chiefs who are better able to achieve buy-in from firefighters than the RD staff), and developing a "regional" attitude at the regional district level. The RDEK is working on a framework (an establishing bylaw) which it believes will be vital in facilitating all future regional fire support services within the RD.

Although the RDEK is beginning to see the benefits of its regional activities, it is not far enough along in the development and implementation of most of them to be able to accurately assess their positive impacts. However, the RDEK believes that the benefits of the Innovations Program are substantial, and cites the program as having acted as a catalyst for the region because it enabled the RDEK to begin thinking seriously about regional fire support services.

Most of the RDEK's regional initiatives are expected to be transferable to other RDs (such as its training program). Any RD wishing to develop similar initiatives must, however, according to the RDEK, develop partnerships, have political support, appoint a champion with technical expertise and experience, and take a "soft" (non-enforcement) approach. In terms of future opportunities, the RDEK will continue to focus on developing its various regional fire support services. Also, while the concept of regional fire safety assessments is still a politically contentious issue within the RD, there is potential that this service may one day be considered within the RDEK (due to increasing commercial development in outlying areas). The RDEK also sees more potential and efficiencies in delivering services on a sub-regional basis, to better suit its large

⁶⁷ The National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications (Pro Board) accredits fire service training agencies that use the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA's) professional qualification standards. In the RDEK, the College of the Rockies obtained Pro Board certification.

geographical area (the RD already delivers a number of program on a sub-regional basis for administrative purposes).

5.5 Case Study #5 - Regional District of Fraser-Fort George (RDFFG)

The RDFFG supports 13 volunteer fire agencies and three rescue agencies. The RDFFG undertook two pilot projects under the Innovations Program: 1) a study to determine the feasibility of building a regional fire training centre to help overcome a lack of affordable, practical and accessible training for all fire departments located within the boundaries of the RDFFG; and 2) a multi-jurisdictional Computer Aided Dispatch and Records Management System (CADRMS) spanning over four regional districts and covering 72 fire/rescue agencies, in an effort to overcome a lack of support, a lack of coordination and access to information, and a lack of integration with other agencies. This multi-jurisdictional communications system was also intended to help fulfill the RDFFG's board's vision to be the 911 service provider for the North.

The feasibility study determined that while there was much interest for a regional training facility in the community, it should not be built because it was economically and financially unfeasible for the RD (i.e. the costs to operate the facility would have been far greater than the revenues). The training centre, had it not been too expensive, would have been positive endeavour that would have benefited all of the RD's fire departments. The RDFFG still believes that a training centre located in Prince George (its most populated city) would make sense because it would save each firefighter at least two days of travel costs and time. While the RDFFG would still like to have such a facility, it believes that support and commitment from industry (which it did not receive) are necessary before any future training facility is considered. Overall, the business case developed as a result of the feasibility study may be useful for other regional districts that are considering a similar facility.

The RDFFG is currently responsible for fire/rescue call taking and dispatch for its own region and for the Cariboo Regional District and a portion of the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. The RDFFG's multi-jurisdictional CADRMS project aims to build on its existing fire/rescue service. The expanded service will provide both computer aided dispatch (under which multiple emergency calls from a number of regional districts can be managed in a consolidated centre), and a records management system (under which a magnitude of information can be organized, compiled, tracked and referenced, including, for example, information regarding fire incidents, fire investigation, and building inspections) to over 70 fire/rescue agencies. The communications system will also be expanded to include a fourth RD, the Kitimat Stikine Regional District.

While one of the key objectives of the RDFFG's multi-jurisdictional communications project has been to use modern information management systems to meet the needs of its fire service in a consistent manner, it has faced some technological challenges. In many rural areas of the RDFFG and the other three participating RDs, access to broadband and high-speed internet is either poor or non-existent. The RDFFG has tried to overcome this challenge by choosing the best technology available over dial-up internet service. Another challenge the RDFFG has faced has been the unanticipated amount of financial

and human resources that have been required to develop its multi-jurisdictional communications system. Without the funding provided by the Innovations Program, the RDIFFG does not believe it would have been able to undertake such a large initiative.

Generally, the RDIFFG believes that its multi-regional CADRMS will provide better, accurate and quicker dispatch services, and it will enhance coordination and communication with other agencies. The service is also expected to increase consistency and enhance public safety. The CADRMS is also anticipated to be fully scaleable, meaning that any other regional district will be able to join onto the system once it is underway. To date, both the Regional Districts of Northern Rockies and Peace River have expressed interest in joining the communication system. The RDIFFG also sees potential for the service to be delivered along the Alaskan Panhandle.

The RDIFFG believes that both its feasibility study and the CADRMS project have been successful to date, because of the following factors: political support, appetite and willingness from all levels, and the services of an experienced and knowledgeable consultant.

The RDIFFG sees much potential for regional fire support services within its region, namely in the following areas: regional emergency planning, region-wide mutual-aid, equipment standardization, and a *regional fire prevention manager* model. Overall, the RDIFFG is supportive of regional fire support services and believes that they make sense.

5.6 Case Study #6 - Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO)

The RDNO undertook the development of two pilot projects under the Innovations Program. The first project aimed to supply fire prevention education, fire response, and fire investigation services to parts of its electoral areas (particularly low density populated areas that were not receiving any fire services). The objective of this project was to “focus on providing a service to the people in the unprotected areas to increase awareness and understanding from a structural and wildfire interface perspective”.⁶⁸ The program used a voluntary facility review and compliance approach, rather than an inspection and enforcement regime. The second project involved the development of a region-wide ammonia/chlorine emergency response program intended to enhance the safety of the public, workers, and public facility owners across the entire regional district, while ensuring that they were in compliance with requirements under “Work Safe” and the *Environmental Management Act*.

Interviews revealed that the RDNO not only had the geography (a small geographic area) but it also had a very sophisticated level of existing regional cooperation and collaboration to undertake its two pilot projects under the Innovations Program. For example, the RDNO’s fire departments have an extensive history of regional participation in a number of areas, including Jaws of Life, 911 dispatch, victim’s assistance and a regional training centre. In addition, the RDNO already supplied its fire jurisdictions

⁶⁸ Regional District of North Okanagan, letter to Ministry of Community Services (not dated), 2.

(except for the City of Vernon) with fire investigation, fire prevention education and fire investigation services.

The RDNO faced a number of challenges in the development of its programs, specifically a change in the RD's administration which resulted in some setbacks in the development of both projects. A key champion of regional service delivery resigned in the RD and, as a result, both of the initiatives were left at a standstill for some time. Aside from this, the RDNO faced some resistance, namely in the development of its ammonia/chlorine response program, from individuals who either disagreed with the way the service was being developed and felt it should be different, and from individuals and municipalities who did not want to participate in the program (i.e. some of the municipalities initially did not want the service to be at a regional level). However, the RDNO overcame opposition and resistance by undertaking extensive research and communicating the need for the program (i.e. legislative requirements for public facilities). There were also some budgetary and human resource constraints in the development of both projects.

Once fully operational, the RDNO expects both of the programs to ultimately enhance public and worker safety. The Innovations Program was extremely useful for the RDNO because it acted as a catalyst in the development of both projects. The grant money enabled the RDNO to commit to the development of both programs and it helped the RD analyze and focus the programs to meet their needs. For example, initially the RDNO wanted to develop a fully regional Hazmat program, however, after some analysis, it realized that it did not require such an extensive service. The Innovations Program, therefore, helped the RDNO tailor the service to meet its unique local needs.

The RDNO's projects can be viewed as having been successful to date (and are expected to be successful in the future), because of the following factors: commitment and leadership of individuals involved in the development of both programs; the RD's prior experience with regional activities; and a thorough and replicable development process, using a detailed checklist, that was transparent and clear. More specifically, the RDNO has been successful in developing both of its programs because it undertook a non-threatening approach and communicated and presented accurate and relevant information to resistant individuals.

The RDNO believes that there are opportunities for further regional fire support services within its RD in areas such as confined space rescue and in the development of a regional fire department. The RD also mentioned that its ammonia/chlorine response program could be expanded to a more comprehensive hazmat program if the need ever arises. The checklist and supporting documents used in the development of its ammonia/chlorine program is also transferable to any other RD that is considering a regional service. The RDNO believes other RDs can also be successful in the development of similar services if they use a non-threatening approach, if they ensure that no jobs are lost in the development of regional approaches, and if service reviews are undertaken to determine what problems exist and what resources are available to the RD for the relevant service. The RDNO stressed the need to take into account individual personalities and the need to compile research when considering any type of regional service.

Interviews reveal that the RDNO is very supportive of regional fire support services because it believes that such services make economic sense. The RDNO mentioned that fire support services at the regional level can help reduce duplication, decrease costs, and increase consistency for the fire suppression services being provided at the local level.

6.0 ANALYSIS & LESSONS LEARNED

Review of the six case studies reveals some important lessons learned about the regional delivery of fire services in BC.⁶⁹ While it may be too early to assess the ultimate effectiveness and success of the Innovations Program's pilot projects, some definite patterns are beginning to emerge about the concept of delivering fire support services regionally. (Lessons learned are highlighted in *italics* in this section).

6.1 Regional Characteristics / Geography

Each of the six case studies has unique geographical and fire service characteristics that naturally lend themselves to certain forms of fire service delivery. The smaller compact regional districts, such as the Central Okanagan and the North Okanagan, have both developed a fire service that extends to the entire regional district, partly because they both have easily accessible fire departments. The RDCO has also contracted out its regional fire safety inspection service to one of its specific fire departments.

On the other hand, larger regional districts such as Central Kootenay, East Kootenay and Fraser-Fort George all have some level of difficulty in accessing some of their rural fire departments. As a result, regional fire support services in these larger areas have typically taken more time, effort and cooperation. All three of these larger regional districts have also focused on building partnerships in an effort to deliver their services more efficiently and effectively across a large geographic area. For example, both the East Kootenay and the Central Kootenay are working with their local community colleges to develop and deliver regional training, and the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George is partnering up with a number of its bordering regional districts to develop and implement a multi-jurisdictional communications system. Further, both the East Kootenay and Fraser-Fort George expressed interest in the practicality of delivering fire support services on a sub-regional basis.

- *Certain regional characteristics naturally lend themselves to certain forms of regional fire support services*
- *Geographically compact and densely populated regional districts can typically offer region-wide fire services more easily than geographically large regional districts with sparsely populated areas*
- *The higher the inaccessibility of a regional district's fire departments, the more time, effort and cooperation is likely required to develop effective and efficient regional fire support services*
- *Geographically compact regional districts are typically better able to take on services by contracting them out to a specialized fire department, whereas geographically large and dispersed regions are more likely to require centralized, sub-regional, or multi-regional service delivery through partnerships*

⁶⁹ Note that some of the lessons learned are based on information that is presented only in the detailed findings section in Appendix 8.

6.2 Common Support Issues

Each of the six regional districts faced a number of specific issues with respect to the fire services in their regions, but ultimately each RD was concerned about the lack of public and firefighter safety. There were some common and related issues across regional districts. Training for volunteer firefighters was an issue in five of the six regional districts reviewed. A lack of accessible and practical training and frustrations with the JIBC's, as well as the OFC's, delivery systems were some of the major concerns in relation to training.

One of the other most common issues was a lack of economies of scale in some aspect of each of the six RD's fire services. Columbia-Shuswap lacked economies of scale in administration, records and reporting, the Central Kootenay and East Kootenay in training, the Central Okanagan in fire safety inspections, the Fraser-Fort George in communications, and the North Okanagan in fire protection, fire investigations and ammonia/chlorine response.

The LAFC system was a specific issue that Columbia-Shuswap wanted to address, but other regional districts also expressed concerns over the effectiveness of the current LAFC system (such as Fraser-Fort George). Inefficiencies in equipment purchasing was an issue in both the CSRD and the RDIFFG, while communications was a specific issue to the RDIFFG and has also been recognized as an area of concern for the RDCO. Interviews also revealed that regional fire safety assessments are still a politically sensitive issue in all regional districts, except the Central Okanagan which has successfully been able to develop a regional fire safety inspection service.

It appears that some RDs continue to be blocked by issues that other RDs have already overcome. For example, both the North Okanagan and the Columbia-Shuswap RDs have already had an operational regional training centre in place for some time, but the Central Kootenay is just beginning to offer such a facility, while Fraser-Fort George is still in need of such a training centre. This suggests two things: 1) regional districts can and should learn from what other regional districts have already done; and 2) regional districts likely face different issues because of different factors in each region (such as the political environment, geography, etc.).

- *Regional districts are ultimately concerned about public, including firefighter, safety*
- *Regional districts face a wide variety of fire service related issues. These issues depend on a variety of factors, including geography, the local fire service and the local political environment.*
- *A formal, regulated, and enforceable regional fire inspection service remains a politically sensitive issue in many regional districts*
- *Some regional districts have likely already "solved" some of the same fire service delivery issues that other regional districts are currently facing*

6.3 Prerequisites Required for Regional Delivery of Fire Support Services

A number of factors were found to be predictors of success in the development of regional fire support services, including an understanding of the organizational history of all fire departments, organizational capacity, a basic level of cooperation and some experience in collaborative regional activities, a basic fire suppression service in rural areas, accessible fire departments, and a willing and supportive political environment. The need to establish a basic framework for fire support services (i.e. a service establishing bylaw for fire support services) is also becoming more apparent.

Any regional district proposing to set up regionalized fire support services must first have an intimate knowledge of the organizational history of each and every fire department located within its boundaries. Understanding how each “type” of fire department feels about regionalized support services is an important prerequisite before embarking on initiatives that require, for instance, rural departments to cooperate with municipal ones. In some cases, such as in the early stages of the Central Kootenay’s development of its training program, rural volunteer fire departments are quite resistant in having the regional district come in and coordinate a fire support service on their behalf.

Organizational capacity is another important prerequisite in providing regionalized fire support services. All of the fire support services piloted under the Innovations Program were undertaken by regional districts. This suggests that organizations that already have the ability to facilitate cooperation and provide multi-jurisdictional or regional services are the best type of organizations to provide such fire services. Therefore, it is important that fire support services be delivered at the regional district level.⁷⁰

Prior to the introduction of the Innovations Program, as highlighted in the table below, all six of the regional districts were undertaking some sort of a regional activity (beyond mutual aid agreements). Therefore, at the outset of the Innovations Program, each of the RDs had some basic level of cooperation, a previous history of regional initiatives, or existing partnerships and relationships with stakeholders. Prior experience with regional activities is an important prerequisite because it demonstrates that a RD, and all of its rural, municipal and improvement district fire departments, are at least able to think beyond their own boundaries. This is a necessary element before RDs can offer more sophisticated regional services, such as training and fire safety assessments, because these types of initiatives typically require higher levels of collaboration and cooperation.

⁷⁰ The Innovations Program received a number of proposals from organizations that were not regional districts, however, the Ministry did not fund any of these projects because such proposals did not have the sufficient organizational stability and sustainability as those put forward by regional districts. (Source: Ministry staff).

Table 5: Regional Activities Prior to the Innovations Program

Columbia-Shuswap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regional training facility • regional purchasing • existing fire services coordinator • CSRD 9-1-1 system • various mutual aid agreements
Central Kootenay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working partnership with the local college • some joint procurement of equipment
Central Okanagan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of regional activities (i.e. region-wide rescue) • existing fire safety inspection service in one fire protection district • various mutual aid agreements • cooperation and communication via an inter-departmental Fire Chiefs Advisory Committee
East Kootenay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sub-regional delivery of some program • involved in the RDEK's three emergency programs • existing fire/emergency services coordinator
Fraser-Fort George	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regional 911-service with a number of other regional districts, contracted out to City of Prince George • existing fire services coordinator
North Okanagan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • history of collaboration in many areas, including Jaws of Life, 911 dispatch, Victim's assistance • centralized LAFC that carries out fire safety inspections, investigations and fire prevention education • regional fire training facility and program • protective services officer (fire & emergency services combined)

All six of the RDs were also either considering or were already developing their regional fire initiatives (that they undertook for the Innovations Program) before the program began. For example, Central Okanagan had already adopted an establishing bylaw and was working towards the goal of developing a regional fire safety inspection service. The Columbia-Shuswap RD had already hired a regional fire services coordinator and East Kootenay was already considering doing something about firefighter training at the regional level. This demonstrates that there was an existing appetite for the regional delivery of fire services under which RDs had come to the realization, on their own, that they needed to think regionally about fire support issues.

A basic level of fire service, including fire suppression, is also necessary before regional districts can pursue more sophisticated regional fire support services such as regional fire safety assessments. For instance, Central Okanagan first developed a bylaw to provide its electoral areas with a basic level of fire protection. It was then able to expand its existing fire safety inspection service to those unincorporated areas that began receiving suppressions services. In most cases, it simply makes sense to provide more sophisticated levels of fire support services after a basic level of service has been established in an area.

Easily accessible fire departments are another prerequisite for the effective delivery of fire support services. RDs that can easily access their fire departments, such as the

RDNO and RDCO, are better able to provide regional fire support services to their departments. RDs that do not have this advantage, such as Fraser-Fort George, will likely find it much more difficult to develop and deliver a regional service that includes all of its fire departments.

Another prerequisite required for regional service delivery is political willingness and support. Without an enabling political environment, it is extremely difficult for regional fire support services to be initiated.

- *Regional districts have the best organizational capacity to develop and deliver regional fire support services*
- *Regional districts that fulfill a number of prerequisites before they begin developing a regional fire support service will likely be more successful in that service*
- *Regional districts should have an in-depth understanding of the organizational history and structure of each and every fire department located within their boundaries before pursuing regional fire support services*
- *Regional districts should have a basic level of cooperation, fire suppression and collaboration experience before pursuing more sophisticated regional fire support services*
- *Regional districts that have prior experience with, and an existing appetite for, regional activities are more likely to undertake future regional activities*

6.4 Impetus and Need for Change

After reviewing the six case studies, it is clear that there is a real need for regional fire support services in many parts of BC. Regional districts, and in some cases the fire service, are becoming more aware of this need and of the importance of collaborative regional fire support services. All six of the RDs mentioned that the need to develop a regional fire support service had been growing in their region over time. Both the RDs and the members of the fire service are beginning to recognize and accept that there are capacity-related issues in the fire service that require attention, and as a result, the attitudes and the isolated culture of the service are slowly beginning to change.

While some RDs are more advanced in the delivery of regional fire support services, others are just beginning to see their importance. For instance, the RDNO has had a form of *regional fire prevention manager* (i.e. a central LAFC) in place for a number of years, whereas the CSRD recently began moving towards such a model. Other RDs have been aware of the need for a regional service, but have not been able to gain the necessary support or funds. For example, the Innovations Program was the second of two attempts by Fraser-Fort George to build a regional fire training centre (about 10 years ago, the RD also tried to build a similar facility).

Aside from a concern for public safety, the six RDs had various reasons for wanting to participate in the Innovations Program. These reasons ranged from enhancing consistency and standardization to improving access to information and communications.

In some cases, the regional projects were championed and developed because of the efforts of certain individuals.

- *Regional districts and the fire service are becoming more aware of the need for, and importance of, regional fire support services; regional districts are realizing that they have an important role to play in the delivery of regional fire support services*
- *The attitudes and the isolated culture of the fire service are slowly beginning to change as fire service capacity related issues become more recognized and accepted*

6.5 Types of Regional Fire Support Services

A number of lessons can be learned about some of the specific types of regional fire support services involved in the Innovations Program, including fire safety assessments, training, and the *regional fire prevention manager* model.

Regional Fire Safety Assessments

The table below outlines the status of regional fire safety inspections/assessments in each of the six RDs. *Fire safety inspections* are the traditional, formal, regulated approach to assessing properties for fire risks. These types of inspections involve regulations and consequences for property owners such as penalties and fines for non-compliance. *Safety assessments*⁷¹ are a non-regulated approach to inspecting properties for fire hazards. Safety assessments do not impose fines or penalties on owners, rather, they aim to educate and raise awareness about fire risks. Safety assessments expect property owners to comply and correct any fire risks to their properties on a voluntary basis.

⁷¹ The Ministry first learned about the concept of fire safety assessments from the Cowichan Bay Improvement District which carries out fire safety assessments in its boundaries without any mandate or any formal requirement to do so. Cowichan Bay has contracted out its safety assessment service to a private company. The service is provided in an effort to improve the safety of both the public and of firefighters. There is no enforcement, and compliance is voluntary, but the service has thus far proved quite effective for the improvement district (source: a previous study undertaken by the researcher, entitled “*Case Studies in Regional/Rural Fire Inspection Services*”, April 2005).

Table 6 - Regional Fire Safety Assessment Services in Each RD

Columbia-Shuswap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> regional fire services coordinator carries out fire safety assessments for properties located in unincorporated areas, on a request-by-request basis; believes it requires a building inspection scheme before regional fire safety assessments are introduced in rural areas
Central Kootenay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no regional safety assessment service in place or being developed, but the RD believes its regional training initiative could be the first step in the possible delivery of other regional fire support services, including regional fire safety assessments
Central Okanagan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> has developed and is implementing a regional fire safety inspection service that extends to all areas of the RD
East Kootenay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> still viewed as a service with a lot of jurisdictional issues, but there has been more of a willingness to talk about regional fire safety assessments recently due to increased commercial development in rural areas
Fraser-Fort George	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognizes that there is an issue with a lack of safety assessments in its electoral areas but believes it would be difficult to implement such a service in the RDFFG; concerned about liability
North Okanagan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> central LAFC provides fire safety inspections to all of its municipalities (except one) and to four other local service areas. The RD is working on implementing a full regional safety assessment service (through educational awareness/self-assessments approach) for unprotected areas of the RD

Although the results indicate that there is a need for regional fire safety assessments in many areas of BC, only two of the six RDs, Central Okanagan and North Okanagan, are establishing some type of a fire safety assessment or inspection service for their electoral areas. Both of these RDs are geographically compact, but while they share similar geographic characteristics, they have each taken a very different approach to their fire safety inspection services.

The Central Okanagan has established a service bylaw that enables it to provide for a system of fire safety inspections for public buildings in its electoral areas. The service is being contracted out to one of the RDCO’s fire departments, whose LAFCs will begin undertaking fire safety inspections in approximately 80-90 additional properties. The service is regulated and inspection violations carry weight (i.e. penalties).

The North Okanagan, on the other hand, has taken an educational approach that involves working with property owners to identify fire-related property risks (i.e. safety assessments). The RDNO has been able to address a fundamental public safety issue in rural areas by developing a plan for the fire safety evaluation of public buildings and hotels in currently non-inspected areas, all while avoiding the challenges (such as liability concerns) and costs of a more comprehensive, formal and regulated fire safety inspection program. The RDNO has also implemented a system of *fire safety self assessments* in the City of Kelowna. This type of service enables property owners to self assess their premises and avoid penalties and fines.

It is interesting that the Columbia-Shuswap region perceives the lack of a building inspection scheme in its rural areas as a barrier to providing regional fire safety assessments. A regional safety assessment approach does not require the existence of such a building inspection service because it is an approach that aims to educate property owners and raise awareness about fire risks.

The North Okanagan's example demonstrates that there are ways of addressing some of the concerns associated with traditional fire safety inspections in rural areas. While the issue remain contentious in some of the RDs, it is expected that as development in rural areas increases, such as in the East Kootenay, the need and demand for safety assessments will also grow.

- *A formal, regulated, and enforceable regional fire inspection service remains a politically sensitive issue in many regional districts*
- *The concept of regional fire safety assessments is a more practical and effective approach for regional districts looking to provide their unincorporated areas with some type of a fire inspection service and in regional districts where regulated fire safety inspection schemes are contentious*
- *High levels of compliance can be achieved through self-assessments and through fire safety inspections that are requested*
- *Attitudes towards regional fire safety inspections are beginning to change, but some regional districts are first waiting for successes in other regional districts*
- *Regional fire safety assessments can be offered more easily in geographically smaller regional districts*
- *In larger regional districts, sub-regional fire safety assessments may be more practical*
- *The need for rural fire safety assessments increases as development in rural areas increases*

Regional Training

Training appears to be an area of importance for all of the RDs. Of the six RDs reviewed, two (Columbia-Shuswap and North Okanagan) already had a fully operational training centre and program; two (Central and East Kootenay) are developing some sort of a regional training curriculum under the Innovations Program; and one (Central Okanagan) cited it as an area of further opportunity. The sixth remaining RD, Fraser-Fort George, undertook a study to determine the feasibility of building a regional training facility, and although it was deemed uneconomical to build, a need still exists for such a facility in the Fraser-Fort George region. These results demonstrate that training is a priority in all six of the RDs.

Under the Innovations Program, the two RDs that are undertaking regional training initiatives are each undertaking a very different approach. The Central Kootenay has developed a non-accredited, but practical and condensed (as compared to the JIBC), training curriculum. The Central Kootenay's curriculum enables firefighters to meet the minimum NFPA 1001 requirements, while providing them with the option to continue

with the JIBC's certification process if they desire. It essentially enables firefighters to receive the training that they need without requiring them to travel. Therefore, the program not only reduces costs, but it ultimately enhances safety (through better educated firefighters).

The East Kootenay has developed an accredited training curriculum that offers both the NFPA 1001 (Firefighter I and II) program, and a customizable training program (designed to allow each fire department to choose the level of training that they require). To date, the East Kootenay has "piloted" training curriculum with a number of firefighters and is realizing positive results. The College of the Rockies has also purchased the NFPA curriculum, including the multi-media materials and hardware, to share with all municipal and rural departments in the RD. This has increased cost efficiencies because, otherwise, fire departments would have to each purchase their own.

The efforts of these two RDs suggests that regional training efforts can help regional districts build and facilitate cooperation with a number of stakeholders, because such regional training efforts typically involve many individuals within a regional district, including firefighters, colleges, the regional district, and various organizations (i.e. the local fire chief's association). As a result they have the potential to pave the way for other, more complex services, such as regional fire safety assessments.

- *A regional training program can help pave the way for other types of regional fire support*
- *Regional training initiatives work well with partnerships and in collaboration with local colleges*
- *A regional training initiative can result in cost savings, build cooperation and communication between fire departments, and can better equip fire departments to respond to emergencies collaboratively*
- *Many regional district fire departments and volunteer firefighters simply require a basic, entry-level fire training curriculum, rather than a full comprehensive and complex curriculum (as would be required for career firefighters in metro areas)*

Regional Fire Prevention Manager Model

The study reveals that there are numerous inefficiencies in the current LAFC system, and that with over 1,200 LAFCs across the province, the LAFC system is ineffective and unsustainable in its current form. All of the regional districts expressed dissatisfaction with the system. One particular concern of RDs was the lack of effective training that most of their LAFCs received. In some RDs, it was determined that many LAFCs simply become LAFCs to receive some form of formal training (even though many of these individuals do not want the responsibilities of an LAFC). In the Fraser-Fort George region alone, there are anywhere from 36 to 50 LAFCs, most of whom assumed LAFC roles in an effort to receive some formal training.

- *The current LAFC model is largely inefficient and ineffective to meet the needs of the fire service*

- *Issues with training and the current LAFC system are interrelated*

Three of the regional districts have taken steps to implement alternative approaches to the traditional LAFC scheme. North Okanagan has had, for many years, a centralized LAFC who carries out fire investigations, safety inspections, and fire prevention education for all municipalities within the RD (except one) on a contract basis. In the North Okanagan, the central LAFC has developed an expertise in investigations and safety inspections. Concentrated expertise typically results in more effective service delivery.

The Central Okanagan has only three individuals who act as LAFCs (who operate out of one fire department) for the entire regional district. They provide fire safety inspections and fire investigation services for the entire regional district, including in electoral areas.

The Columbia-Shuswap's creation of a regional fire services coordinator has eased the administrative burden on its volunteer fire departments because the regional coordinator provides administration support and coordination at the regional level. This has enabled volunteer firefighters to focus on what they do best, "fighting fires". The regional fire services coordinator has also been able to negotiate a contract to have all of the volunteer fire department's fire trucks serviced at the same time (rather than having each fire department request maintenance services at different times and at different costs). The centralized position has also helped increase cost savings through joint purchasing. The CSRD has saved over \$100,000 in group purchasing of fire apparatus in the past two years. In addition, the regional fire services coordinator has begun taking on LAFC-related roles and responsibilities which has allowed the RD to streamline fire safety inspections (by request) and investigations in rural areas. In doing so, Columbia-Shuswap has eliminated all other LAFC positions within the RD.

- *Regional fire service coordinators can enable specialization of skills by enabling firefighters to focus on firefighting activities rather than administrative tasks*

While the examples above provide alternatives to the current LAFC system, these examples are still structured within the existing LAFC framework, under which individuals carrying out LAFC-related duties must still be appointed by, and report to, the Fire Commissioner. While individuals in these regions are centralized at the regional district level, they continue to be overseen, guided and trained by the Fire Commissioner. There is a need to provide regional districts with the authority to be able to designate and manage *regional fire prevention managers* who are able to carry out the responsibilities of what LAFCs currently do. Such regional fire prevention managers could then be able to appoint as many of their own assistants as they need for the regional district. Such a scheme would require a new legislative framework but would be more efficient for the Fire Commissioner (who would no longer have to appoint, train or manage 1200 LAFCs), for regional districts (that would have centralized individuals to carry out duties and who understand the region), and for the fire service as a whole (which would require fewer LAFCs and result in a more efficient fire service).

- *A regional fire prevention manager model would be effective, efficient and practical for the OFC, regional districts and the fire service*

- *A regional fire prevention manager model could be customized to meet the unique needs of a region*
- *Regional districts require legislative powers to designate individuals as regional fire prevention managers*

6.6 Preliminary Benefits of Delivering Fire Support Services Regionally

Although some of the pilot projects are still being developed and implemented, a number of benefits of delivering fire support services regionally are already beginning to emerge. Beyond the specific benefits mentioned above in relation to regional training, fire safety assessments, the *regional fire prevention manager* model and other services, RDs are realizing the following benefits: cost savings, consistency in operations, training and other standards, more efficient and effective fire services, increased sharing/pooling of resources, a reduced number of service gaps, improved coordination among fire departments, strengthened communities, and overall, enhanced public safety.

The number and range of benefits arising out of the Innovations Program suggests that a small amount of funding (a total of \$50,000 per pilot project) can result in benefits far greater than the initial monetary investment. Beyond tangible monetary benefits, regional districts have been able to establish meaningful relationships with their community stakeholders. These relationships have also resulted in positive spin-off effects, such as for the two local colleges involved in developing training programs with the RDCK and the RDEK. These colleges are not only fulfilling their educational mandates, but they are also receiving praise and recognition from their communities regarding their involvement in the projects. Regionalized fire support services are also helping pave the way for future fire support services in the six RDs reviewed, and in other RDs who may not be ready to undertake regional fire support services unless others have tried them first. As the benefits become more apparent, regional fire support will likely be undertaken more often.

- *Delivering fire support services regionally, through economies of scale, can successfully result in cost savings and more efficient and effective fire services*
- *Collaboration between local governments and the fire service, at the regional district level, can result in improved service delivery and improved safety*
- *Regional service delivery efforts, no matter how small, can often result in benefits far greater than their initial investment*
- *The delivery of regional fire support services can result in many benefits for regional districts, the fire service, the community and other stakeholders*

6.7 Preliminary Challenges of Delivering Fire Support Services Regionally

A number of different challenges were faced by the six RDs during the development and implementation of their pilot projects.

Resistance to Change

A common challenge faced by most RDs was opposition from individuals who were opposed to the changes that were being made to the fire service. Such individuals

(primarily long-time fire chiefs and firefighters) were typically concerned about losing independence and/or territory. In some cases, they were simply unaware of, or lacked adequate information about, why the changes were happening.

Similarly, individual personalities were a concern in some RDs. For example, in the development of its regional ammonia/chloride response program, the RDNO initially came across individuals who were confident that their approach was better than the RDs, because they had had some previous experience a number of years ago in the delivery of water services. While these individuals did in some cases provide useful information, they often caused unnecessary delays in project development and sometimes publicly disrupted meetings. While most of the RDs have made much progress in reducing opposition, there remain some individuals in each RD who will likely always oppose the development and delivery of regional fire support services.

- *A common challenge in the development of regional fire support services is opposition from fire personnel who are concerned about losing independence and control*
- *Some individuals will likely always oppose the idea of regionalized fire support services*

Lack of Resources

Regional districts also referred to the lack of resources as another challenge, including insufficient time, money and staff to fully develop their regional services. For example, the East Kootenay believes that at least \$80,000 a year is needed to fund a staff member who can fully commit to the development of effective regional fire support services in its region. Although the Innovations Program provided some funds to help RDs develop their regional services, all RDs recognized that the funding was limited and that they will eventually need some alternative method of paying for their services. For instance, Central Kootenay has established the Kootenay Firefighter Training Society to manage and help raise funds for their new regional training site. Other RDs have developed (such as the RDCO and the RDNO), or would like to develop (such as the RDCK and the RDEK), establishing bylaws so that the RD has a means of cost recovery for all future regional fire support services. Adequate funding for regionalized fire support services, however, remains an outstanding issue in regional districts.⁷²

- *A lack of sufficient time, money and human resources can be a challenge in the development of effective regional fire support services*

Technology

Developing regional fire support services in rural areas has been challenging for RDs who are pursuing services requiring technology. For example, a significant challenge facing

⁷² In 2004, the Task Force on Community Opportunities (TFOCO) was developed in BC to explore new approaches to strengthening economic growth and delivering integrated, results-oriented services to communities. The TFOCO released its report in October 2006. In that report, the Task Force also reviewed the Innovations Program and determined that regional districts lacked sufficient resources to develop fire support services. The TFOCO recommended a revenue sharing scheme, linked to the provincial Insurance Premium Tax, to help fund the delivery of fire support services in BC.

the Fraser-Fort George is the lack of access to broadband and high-speed internet for the delivery of its CADRMS in rural areas where there is no internet communication.

- *Regional fire support services in rural areas can be limited by a lack of access to technology*

Political Support

Although RDs have been able to manage and overcome many of the challenges they have faced, a change in the political environment and a lack of political support is a challenge that can be difficult to overcome, as it is typically outside the control of RD staff. While some RD boards have been eager to support the development of regional fire support services, others have been hesitant. Those who have reservations about the concept are concerned with issues of liability associated with independent fire departments. While most of the RDs have supportive boards, there have been challenges along the way. The RDNO in particular has faced setbacks because of changing local leadership.

- *Without adequate political support and willingness, a regional district will likely have a difficult time developing a regional fire support service*

Legislation

None of the RDs cited legislation, including the *Fire Services Act*, as any sort of a barrier or impediment to their regional fire support services. All six of the RDs have been able to develop services that meet the needs of their region and their fire service within the existing legislative framework. RDs utilized establishing bylaws and employed voluntary programs (such as self-assessments and safety assessments) to fulfill their service goals. The successful development of regional fire support services by all six of the RDs, within the existing legislative framework, suggests that the challenges facing the fire service are indeed capacity related rather than legislative, and that the solution lies in building this capacity further. With that being said, however, moving towards a fully operational *regional fire prevention manager* model would require some changes to legislation as regional districts do not currently have the ability to designate individuals for such positions (only the Fire Commissioner has ability to appoint LAFCs).

- *The existing legislative framework does not appear to be an impediment or a barrier in the development of effective regional fire support services*
- *The development of a regional fire prevention manager model would likely require some legislative changes*
- *The issues facing the fire service are largely capacity-related*

6.8 Keys to Success

All six RDs view their regional fire initiatives as having been successful to date. The successful development and implementation of these initiatives can be collectively attributed to a number of factors:

- *The success of a regional fire support service is based upon a number of factors*

Partnerships & Relationships

Developing partnerships and relationships with other stakeholders, such as community colleges, other local governments (including other regional districts) and the fire service was an important aspect in the successful development and implementation of most of the regional initiatives under the Innovations Program.

For example, the Fraser-Fort George partnered up with a number of other neighbouring regional districts to develop a CARDM system, while both the regional districts of Central and East Kootenay partnered up with their local colleges to develop and deliver different types of training programs. The Central Kootenay also benefited greatly from a number of other relationships through which it has managed to receive various donated services and materials for its regional training site (such as a shipping container from a trucking company, a rescue tower from a communications company and welding services from the college's welding program). Further, the Central Okanagan has partnered up with one of its largest fire departments, the Westside Fire Department, to deliver a regional fire safety inspection service on a contract basis. Without these partnerships, the RDs would have had a much more difficult time in developing their regional services.

On the other hand, Fraser-Fort George believed that had it received industry support and buy-in for its proposed regional training facility, it would have likely had a higher chance of going ahead with the project. The RDFFG may have also benefited from following the RDCK's model of building partnerships and relationships to receive support (i.e. donated materials and services) for its proposed training facility.

- *A regional collaborative approach to fire service delivery is not likely to work without the proper relationships with stakeholders and participants*
- *Regional districts that build, develop and maintain partnerships and relationships with other stakeholders are more likely to develop successful regional fire support services*

Effective and Ongoing Communication

An important success factor in all six of the RDs has been targeted and ongoing communication with individuals affected by the regional services. Communicating the changes and the reasons for the changes has been important in ensuring that those impacted by changes understand why the changes are occurring. For example, Central Kootenay and East Kootenay both established steering committees to communicate to fire service personnel, while North Okanagan (in relation to its regional ammonia/chlorine response program) identified and communicated to individuals early on before any strategy was actually developed. Other RDs communicated regularly at various meetings (such as fire chief's meetings and through organizations (such as a training officer's society in the RDCK).

Communication has also been necessary among those developing the specific projects, such as between the two working groups that have been created in the RDFFG to develop a regional communications system. Other RDs have developed committees to provide input into the development of regional services.

- *Early, effective and ongoing communication with those involved in, and affected by, a regional fire service is essential in ensuring the success of that service*
- *Providing relevant information and communicating about the reasons for change can help RDs reduce opposition and overcome resistance to change*

Leadership & Experience

One of the essential factors in developing a regional fire support service is leadership from individuals who are not only experienced, but who feel passionate about, and believe in, the benefits and importance of the regionalized services they are pursuing. In all six RDs, the presence of a central contact and a champion to lead the project was a necessary success factor. For example, the CSRD attributes a large part of its success to the operational experience of its regional fire services coordinator. The regional initiatives in North Okanagan have been led by individuals who are committed to making regional services work in their region, despite facing a number of setbacks (such as a change in administration and a reduction in political support). Individuals who can develop relationships, “softsell” and convert negative attitudes to positive ones are important in achieving success. In many cases, without the right individuals to champion the regional initiatives, the projects in such regions would never have been developed.

Hiring experienced consultants to develop key elements of a regional fire support service is also important. For example, Fraser-Fort George attributes a lot of its success in the design and development of its multi-regional communication system to the experience of an E-Comm consultant. The RDFFG also hired an experienced consultant who determined that it was not feasible for the RD to build a regional training facility.

- *Experienced leadership is essential in ensuring the success of a regional fire support service*
- *An individual that can champion the delivery of regionalized fire support services in their area can enhance the chances of success of that service*
- *Hiring experienced consultants is important in developing the right regional fire support service*
- *Effective leadership can help get regional fire initiatives off the ground*

Political Support

An essential component of success in all six of the RDs has been willingness and support from each of the RD’s boards and from the RD’s administration. In all cases, the RDs were able to pursue a regional service because there was willingness and support from a political level. Often, the boards and administration that already supported other regional services (such as in RDCO, where there was existing support for a region-wide hazmat rescue program) were more inclined to pursue regional fire support services under the Innovations Program. In many cases, regional initiatives, regardless of their potential, may never get off the ground unless they are backed by the RD’s board and administration.

The importance of political support is highlighted by the fact that North Okanagan began experiencing some setbacks in its regional initiatives after changes in its administrative environment. In addition, more sophisticated and sometimes politically contentious issues, such as regional fire safety assessments/inspections, can be developed if a RD has a board with a positive attitude (such as in the RDCO where the regional board understands and has accepted that liability will always be a risk in pursuing a regulatory type of regional fire safety inspection service).

- *Regional fire support services are much more likely to be successful when there is political and administrative support for such services*
- *Changes in a regional district's political and administrative environment can cause setbacks for the development and implementation of a regional fire support service*

Sufficient Resources

Sufficient resources such as time, money and personnel must be committed to all regional fire support services in order to ensure their success, otherwise such services may never be fully, or effectively, developed or implemented. For example, East Kootenay initially set out to develop a number of regional initiatives in many areas (including training, public education, and communication), but since it began making changes, the RD has realized it was initially too ambitious in wanting to pursue so many initiatives. It has realized that each of its initiatives will require numerous resources, most importantly, time, to help the fire service change its culture of isolation and independence. The RDEK has decided to focus on one or two initiatives at a time and allow individuals to adjust slowly, rather than overwhelming them with many changes all at once.

- *Regional districts must commit sufficient resources, including time, money and personnel, for the effective development and delivery of a regional fire support service*
- *Regional fire support services should be undertaken slowly so that individuals have time to adjust, and because individual attitudes and personalities cannot be changed overnight*

Other Success Factors

A number of other success factors also exist for the effective delivery of regional fire support services.

First, regional services that are practical for the specific needs of the region are the most effective. For example, Central Kootenay is building a basic training site to meet the needs of local firefighters and East Kootenay has developed a training program that can be customized by each fire department to meet their individual needs. In addition, the North Okanagan has developed a regional ammonia/chlorine response program tailored to meet the needs of the RDNO's facilities; initially the RD wanted to develop a comprehensive hazmat program, but it soon realized that it only needed a specialized program rather than the complete hazmat service.

- *Regional fire support initiatives that meet the local needs of the fire service and that are tailored to suit the region's geography are the most likely to succeed*

Second, regional fire support initiatives that retain the existing fire service structure and that do not threaten jobs or independence are much more likely to be successful. Each of the RDs has developed a regional service without harming the jobs of any firefighters and without closing down any fire departments. Also, regional fire support services that do not impose any new costs or additional liability are the most widely supported by others. For instance, the safety assessments being implemented in the rural areas of the North Okanagan are much more accepted and much less controversial than traditional fire safety inspection programs which are typically associated with increased liability. Essentially, RDs that place another “layer” of service on top of their existing fire service structures will achieve the most acceptance from others. Regional fire support services at the regional district level offer this advantage because they do not require existing structures to be altered.

- *Regional fire support services that do not threaten the loss of jobs, identity or control are likely to succeed*

Third, regional fire support services that use existing programs, relationships and structures can engage in efficient fire service delivery. For example, rather than reinventing the wheel, both the RDEK and the RDCK have worked with the JIBC and used the JIBC’s existing training curriculums to develop and build training programs to meet the needs of the individual fire departments. The RDCO has contracted out its fire safety inspection service to an existing fire department whose staff were already trained and familiar with fire safety inspections (rather than training somebody new), and the North Okanagan is utilizing existing local resources to provide fire protection service to its electoral areas. Using existing programs and services enables an RD to build upon that same program or service later, if it were interested in expanding it. For example, RDNO’s ammonia/chlorine response program could be expanded into a full Hazmat program, if required, at a later time. In addition, the RDNO has the ability to train a second team to act as responders, if it turns out that one team (which is currently the City of Vernon’s fire department) is not sufficient.

- *Regional fire support services that build upon existing services, programs and relationships work well and can be expanded on later, if necessary*

Finally, those regional fire support services that are driven/requested from the fire service itself are more successful than those that are imposed by the regional districts. In Columbia-Shuswap, the RD began recognizing the need for a regional fire services coordinator when its firefighters began coming to the RD for help. This means that those who ask for change are the most likely to accept it when it happens.

- *Regional fire support services that are initiated at the request of fire departments and firefighters themselves are more likely to be accepted than those developed by RDs on their own*

6.9 Opportunities for Further Delivery of Regional Fire Support Services

A number of opportunities exist for further regional fire support services, both within the six regional districts reviewed and in other RDs across the province.⁷³

First, each of the six RDs identified a number of regional services that they may one day be interested in pursuing, or that they are considering developing in the near future. Table 7 below summarizes these areas of interest for each of the six RDs.

Table 7: Other Regional Services RDs are Interesting in Pursuing

Columbia-Shuswap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public education/fire prevention • multi-jurisdictional purchasing • fire safety assessments
Central Kootenay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public education • regional fire investigation services • regional fire office (centralized administration) • regional fire safety assessments
Central Okanagan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a regional fire service (i.e. one regional department with one fire chief, etc). • regional training • regional communications
East Kootenay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continuation of regional fire initiatives • increased interest in regional fire safety assessments
Fraser-Fort George	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regional emergency planning • region-wide mutual aid • equipment standardization • <i>regional fire prevention manager</i> model
North Okanagan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confined space rescue • expansion of ammonia/chlorine response into full hazmat program (if needed) • regional fire department

Judging by the number and range of activities provided in Table 7, it is clear that there is significant potential for further regional fire support service in each of these six RDs. As previously mentioned, each of these RDs has had prior experience with regional services and a basic level of cooperation. Added to this has been the experience of the Innovations Program. These RDs, through their experiences under the Innovations Program, have even more of a desire and have developed a better capacity to participate in other regional fire activities.

- *Once regional districts begin taking on the delivery of regional fire support services, they are more likely to take on further such initiatives*

⁷³ The report of the Task Force on Community Opportunities (TFOCO) also developed a list of priorities for the further development of regionalized fire support services; these included the following: regional safety assessments, regional “fire prevention manager”, regional fire training and communications, and regional emergency planning and response. (source: Task Force on Community Opportunities, *Building Stronger Communities: Better Services Economic Growth, Solutions That Work*, (October 2006), 13).

- *Successful delivery of regional fire support services increase the capacity and desire for more regional fire support services in a region, especially as benefits become more apparent and as stakeholders become more involved in the development and delivery of regional fire support services*
- *There is significant potential (and appetite) for more efficient and effective fire services in BC through the development and delivery of further regional fire support services in a number of areas*

Second, opportunities exist in transferring elements, parts, or entire programs or services created by each of the six regional districts to other RDs. Each of the six RDs has not only developed a service or program that may be useful in another regional district, but they have utilized certain processes that have helped them develop programs and services that meet the needs of various stakeholders. For example, for the development of its regional ammonia/chlorine response program, the RDNO developed and used a “regional service checklist” and a corresponding transparent process that was up-front and clear about each element of the service that was being developed. The checklist and supporting documentation outlines the key elements of the proposed services, including scope, purpose, goals, outcomes, financial plans, cost sharing, governance, service delivery, service review and withdrawal provisions, and service establishment process. The RDNO’s checklist can be used in any other RD considering the development of a regional service.

Third, aside from processes, there may be opportunities to provide advice and assistance regarding services that one RD has already developed, but that another RD is considering. The following provide some examples of such opportunities:

- the Columbia-Shuswap, which is moving towards a *regional fire prevention manager* model, and the North Okanagan, which has a central LAFC in place, may be able to provide useful advice and assistance to Fraser-Fort George, which has expressed interest in looking into the possibility of such models for its region (likely on a sub-regional basis);
- the RDs that have undertaken training initiatives, namely Central Kootenay and East Kootenay, may be able to provide advice and assistance to other RDs interested in similar initiatives, such as the Central Kootenay;
- the Central Kootenay’s development of its training site (which has benefited from a number of partnerships and received a number of donations) may be able to provide some insights to the RDFFG regarding the development of such a facility (since the RDFFG has attempted twice in a number of years to develop its own regional training facility);
- the RDCO is undertaking a communications study to enhance communication, therefore, it may benefit from the advice and assistance of Fraser-Fort George which is already well underway in the development of its multi-jurisdictional communications system;
- East Kootenay may be able to provide advice and assistance to all other RDs on a unique aspect of one of its regional activities that involved hiring one fire chief for

two separate fire departments.⁷⁴ Already, the two fire departments are working on updating their mutual aid agreements, focusing on common safety issues, and better coordinated training activities; and

- many of the RDs have combined their fire and emergency coordinating functions into one position, while others such as the CSRD have maintained separate functions (i.e. there is a separate fire service coordinator and a separate emergency services coordinator). Therefore, there is potential for regional districts that have combined both functions to communicate with other RDs about their experiences of having one such combined position.

Finally, some opportunities may also exist in terms of transferring or implementing entire programs or services from one RD to another, including the following:

- the Central Kootenay's non-accredited training curriculum can be offered to any fire department in the province;
- the East Kootenay's accredited training program is capable of providing training to any interested fire department from any area;
- the North Okanagan's public education and safety assessment approach to rural fire safety inspections can be transferred to other regional districts, especially larger ones, that are interested in providing safety assessments in rural areas, but who are concerned about taking on liability;
- the Fraser-Fort George's communications system is fully scaleable and can be expanded to include other regional districts or areas; and
- the Columbia-Shuswap's preliminary development of a *regional fire prevention manager* model and the North Okanagan's centralized LAFC approach are transferable to other regional districts.

The examples above highlight a handful of opportunities that exist, but there are likely many more in other RDs, and with the development of more regional fire support services, the opportunities are only expected to grow.

- *Many regional districts can learn from the regional fire support services undertaken by the regional districts under the Innovations Program*
- *Many elements of the processes used by each regional district to develop their own regional fire support services can be used in other regional districts*
- *Many regional fire support services developed in the six RDs are transferable to other regional districts*

6.10 Success of the Innovations Program

The Innovations Program was the first program of its kind that aimed to enhance fire support services by building capacity at the regional district level. Although the program itself has ended, most of the pilot projects are still in various stages of development and

⁷⁴ The RDEK has appointed a fire chief to act as the fire chief for both the Windermere and Fairmont Fire Departments. A combination of factors led to the appointment, including the retirement of a long-serving fire chief in one of the departments and the increasing administrative burden on small departments.

implementation. It is, therefore, premature at this time to evaluate the ultimate success of the program.

However, it is possible to say that the program has been successful *to date*, because it has yielded positive and collaborative approaches to fire support service delivery and because it has sparked discussion, in all six regional districts, about the delivery of regional fire support services. All of the regional districts believed that a pilot project approach under the Innovations Program was a positive and meaningful initiative because it enabled them to do the following:

- develop local solutions to meet their local and unique fire service issues;
- pursue an opportunity to focus their efforts on a program or service that they had been wanting to develop for some time, but either did not have the money or the opportunity to devote to it previously;
- pursue an opportunity to actually devote resources to regional initiatives that otherwise may not have been developed or considered seriously by the local politicians; and
- provide more scope, clarity and direction to regional fire support services that were already being developed.

It is highly unlikely that an imposed legislative approach would have produced the same benefits or enabled the same type of creativity.

The program has also, over the past three years, helped many individuals become more aware of the fire service and its issues. Many individuals in each of the six regional districts, including those at the RD level and those within the fire service, have over the course of the Innovations Program changed their attitudes and opinions about the fire service and about the need and importance of regional fire support services. The independent and isolated culture of the fire service is slowly beginning to change as a result of these changes in attitudes and opinions. Hopefully, these attitude and opinions continue to change, so that more can be done to build capacity in the fire service.

- *The experimental, bottom-up, collaborative approach taken by the Ministry has resulted in many benefits and is paving the way for future regional fire support services in BC*
- *Imposed solutions are less likely to work in the fire service in comparison to experimental and collaborative approaches*
- *The Innovations Program has been successful to date because it has enabled regional districts to develop creative solutions to unique local problems and because it has helped many individuals change their attitudes and opinions about the fire service and about the delivery of regional fire support services.*

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations should be considered to further increase the efficiency and effectiveness of BC's fire service.

7.1 Strategic Direction & Approach

Findings from the Innovations Program demonstrate that the delivery of regional fire support services has many benefits for many stakeholders. In most of the cases reviewed, the Innovations Program acted as a catalyst for regional districts that were either in need of, or considering the development of, a regional fire support service. In many cases, the Innovations Program provided regional districts with an opportunity (as well as added scope, clarity and direction) to undertake projects that they may not have otherwise actively pursued. Further, all case studies recognize a need for the continued delivery of regional fire support services in both their own jurisdictions and in the fire service as a whole. The Innovations Program has demonstrated that encouraging cooperative behaviour can result in more effective service delivery. The success of this program suggests that other opportunities and avenues to advance and promote this approach to service delivery should be sought out.

Recommendation 1

Encourage more regional districts to develop regional fire support services because there is an appetite, willingness and need for such services in BC

Recommendation 2

Build on the momentum created by the Innovations Program to develop more regional fire support services

7.2 Areas of Focus

Each of the six regional districts reviewed in this study have faced, and continue to face, a variety of fire service issues. However, there is a need to focus attention on three issues: training, the LAFD system, and safety assessments. While other issues such as regional administration, communication and public education/fire prevention are also important, some of these areas can be addressed by first addressing the three priority areas.

Issues in relation to training and the LAFD appear to be somewhat interrelated because findings and analysis indicate that many LAFDs simply become LAFDs to obtain some form of training (which they would not have likely received otherwise). If efforts are focused on providing accessible, practical and affordable training throughout the province, it is possible that fewer individuals would want to become LAFDs in the first place (which could automatically help reduce the number of LAFDs). Many regional districts simply require basic, entry-level training programs for their firefighters. Therefore, enhanced and targeted training that meets the needs of firefighters would help increase safety, and the effectiveness and efficiency of the fire service.

Recommendation 3

Future regional fire support services should focus on providing accessible, affordable and practical firefighter training

The study also demonstrates that there are concerns with the OFC's current LAFC system; many find the system to be ineffective and unsustainable in its current form. Although individuals in some regional districts have centralized LAFC-related duties at the regional district level, individuals in these regional districts continue to be overseen, guided and trained by the Fire Commissioner.

Recommendation 4

The OFC should review the effectiveness and efficiency of the current LAFC system

It is becoming more practical to provide regional districts with the authority and power to develop LAFC-type positions in their own regional districts, rather than having the Fire Commissioner appoint, train and manage 1200 LAFCs throughout the province. Regional districts should be able to designate and manage *regional fire prevention managers* who are able to carry out the responsibilities of what LAFCs currently do. Such regional fire prevention managers could then be able to appoint as many of their own assistants as they need for the regional district. Such a scheme would require a new legislative framework but would be much more efficient and manageable for the Fire Commissioner (who would no longer have to appoint, train or manage 1200 LAFCs), for regional districts (who would have centralized individuals that understand the region to carry out LAFC-type duties) and from the fire service (which would require fewer LAFCs, which will ultimately help improve efficiency in the fire service).

Recommendation 5

Efforts should be made to encourage, develop and implement *regional fire prevention manager* models in regional districts

While the issue of regional fire safety inspections remains an outstanding one in most of the six regional districts reviewed, research indicates that a regional fire safety assessment approach is more practical and effective in RDs where there are concerns about the liabilities associated with a formal, regulated fire safety inspection scheme.

Recommendation 6

Efforts should be made to develop and implement regional safety assessment approaches, as opposed to formal, regulated, fire safety inspections schemes, in those areas that do not currently receive any type of fire inspection service

Before embarking on regional fire support services that require extensive coordination and collaboration, regional districts should ensure that they meet a number of basic prerequisites (such as a basic level of cooperation on fire suppressions activities, organizational capacity, and an understanding of its fire departments).

Recommendation 7

Regional districts should continue efforts to meet a number of prerequisites, including the development of basic levels of cooperation and other regional activities, so that they are eventually better able to offer more sophisticated regional fire support services

7.3 Opportunities for Regional Fire Support Services

This study has demonstrated that there are a number of benefits to delivering fire support services regionally. This study has also highlighted that there is a need and an appetite for more regional fire support services. To capitalize on the positive outcomes of the Innovations Program, efforts should be made to continue building support for the concept of delivering regionalized fire support services.

All six of the regional districts reviewed in this study highlighted the need and importance of obtaining political support when considering or developing a regional fire support service. In many cases, political support and willingness was a key component of success, and without it, many RDs would not have been able to pursue or continue developing / implementing their regional fire support services. Any new regional service delivery initiatives should not only be considered within the local political context, but they should also be marketed to regional boards first, because such boards have a significant amount of control in determining the direction of regional fire support services within a regional district.

One of the key challenges faced by all of the RDs was opposition from individuals, particularly long-time fire chiefs and other fire staff. However, while they may resist change, fire chiefs are an important group to focus on, because they can be extremely influential (once “converted”) in helping gain support for a regional fire support service. The RDEK, in particular, explained the importance of channeling information about regional fire support services through fire chiefs (that is, because fire chiefs are influential among their local fire service). This means that along with regional boards, fire chiefs are the other most influential group of individuals that can help move regional fire support services forward.

Recommendation 8

The advantages and benefits of regionalized fire support services should be specifically highlighted to regional district boards and to fire chiefs to build further support around the concept of delivering regional fire support services

Aside from support, more needs to be done by regional districts themselves to encourage the development of future regional fire support services. Regional districts have a unique ability to facilitate cooperation within their fire service and with other stakeholders, therefore, they are in an ideal position to encourage more regional fire support services within their areas.

To facilitate further regional fire support services, all regional districts in BC will need to work horizontally and collaborate with one another and with their local fire service. This study has concluded that one of the keys to successfully delivering regional fire support services is the development of relationships and partnerships with various stakeholders (such as the fire service, local governments and with local colleges). It is through such partnerships and through horizontal collaboration that regional districts will be able to find support and opportunities for enhancing their local fire service further. For example, the Columbia-Shuswap Regional District believes that there are potentially large economies of scale to be realized if the purchasing power of *regional districts* was combined to procure equipment. This is just one example of the type of synergies that may be experienced if regional districts collaborate horizontally.

Recommendation 9

Horizontal collaborations should be encouraged between regional districts and fire departments as much as possible

The regional approach used to develop various fire support services under the Innovations Program also has the potential to be used in other service areas. This study has demonstrated that there are numerous benefits to providing services at the regional level. Therefore, it makes sense to apply this scheme to other services that may be facing similar service gaps and inefficiencies (such as, for example, rural water service delivery).

It may also be useful to combine the delivery of regional fire support services with other protective services, mainly emergency planning and response. About half of the RDs currently have regional district positions (such as the RDNO's Protective Service Officer position) that combine both fire and emergency management. In other RDs, the management of these two services is kept separate (as it is in the CSRD). In addition, in some regional districts, emergency planning is done and managed at the regional level (such as in the RDNO), while in others, it is done individually by municipalities and also by the RD (resulting in about five separate emergency plans, rather than one consolidated plan).

Recommendation 10

Encourage and apply a regional service delivery approach to other services facing similar service gaps as the fire service

Recommendation 11

Where possible, the delivery of fire and emergency services, such as emergency planning, should be done together on a regional basis

7.4 Legislation and Regional Fire Support Services

None of the six regional districts identified the current fire service legislation as a barrier or an impediment to the development of regional fire support services. Regional districts believe that they have access to all of the necessary tools that they need to develop regional fire support services (such as service establishing bylaws). Each of the six RDs,

for example, has been able to develop a different regional fire support service from the others, all within the existing legislative framework. The six RDs believed that imposed provincial solutions (i.e. legislation) would not have enabled them to develop as effective and creative regional fire support services as they were able to develop under the Innovations Program (which utilized a collaborative and bottom-up pilot project approach).

The Innovations Program demonstrates that imposing legislative requirements on regional districts to deliver certain fire services (such as mandating them to conduct fire safety inspections in unincorporated areas) would likely be less effective than collaborative and flexible approaches. Therefore, the Ministry should pursue more non-legislative solutions to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the fire service. The Ministry should continue to encourage regional districts to develop their own solutions and also ensure that any future changes to fire service legislation do not inhibit regional districts from collaborating.

Recommendation 12

Continue to encourage regional districts to collaborate and develop regional fire support services through non-legislative approaches. Imposing legislative requirements for the development of regional fire support services should be discouraged as much as possible.

Recommendation 13

Any future legislative changes should encourage (not inhibit) regional districts to develop regional fire support services

7.5 Funding, Support and Resources

In all of the cases reviewed, the small grants provided to regional districts through the Innovations Program helped RDs develop capacity and fill service gaps in numerous areas, including firefighter training, communications, administrative standardization, and fire safety assessments. In many cases, without the funding provided by the Innovations Program, regional districts would not have been able to fully develop and realize the potential of their regional fire support service initiatives/ideas. The funding, therefore, played an important factor in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the fire service in all six of the RDs.

With only a small amount of funding, regional districts have been able to make much progress in filling service gaps and improving fire support services within each of their regions. However, now that the Innovations Program has ended, and with a lack of sufficient resources in many RDs, continued financial support for regional fire support services is necessary.

It is important to provide regional districts with some sort of sustainable funding (i.e. an ongoing incentive) so that they can continue to develop, or seriously consider the development of, regional fire support services within their regions. It is also important to provide this incentive soon so that the momentum built from the Innovation Program can

be used to develop further fire service capacity, not only in the six RDs reviewed, but in others as well.

Recommendation 14

Provide regional districts with a reliable, long-term source of funding to encourage the development of regional fire support services

Aside from financial support, regional districts will need other forms of support as well. The Ministry and the OFC should provide continuing support to regional districts who are currently participating in the Innovations Program, and to regional districts who are interested in developing regional fire support services. This support could involve appointing a liaison from either the OFC or the Ministry to act as a central contact and as an information resource for interested regional districts. The Ministry or the OFC could also help interested regional districts contact other regional districts that are able to provide useful tips for a service they may have already developed. For instance, many of the interviewees in this study were eager to share information. These individuals would likely be very interested in helping and providing advice to other regional districts.

Recommendation 15

The Ministry and the OFC should provide support to regional districts that are interested in developing regional fire support services

Recommendation 16

The Ministry and the OFC should maintain relationships with, and provide continued support to, regional districts that participated in the Innovations Program

7.6 Communicating Success of Innovations Program

Only nine of the province's 27 regional districts participated in the Innovations Program, and only six of these nine RDs were within the scope of this study. In order to ensure that fire services are enhanced throughout the province, and not just in the RDs that participated in the Innovations Program, it is important to share and communicate the knowledge from the Innovations Program and the experiences of program participants.

Regional fire support services cannot be developed without adequate funding, but funding alone cannot help change attitudes and personalities that are required to develop and deliver regional services. Therefore, sharing and communicating, raising awareness, and educating others about the delivery of regional fire support services are important factors in changing the isolated culture of the fire service. Many individuals within the RDs who participated in the Innovations Program have, over the course of the program, shifted their attitudes and opinions and have begun to understand the need for regionalized fire services. It is this same shift in attitude that is required all across the province.

The Ministry and the OFC should encourage program participants to raise awareness and share their knowledge with others through a number of ways. The recommendations below provide some ideas as to how this could be done.

Recommendation 17

Present information about the Innovations Program in an industry or local government newsletter so that others can learn about the activities undertaken through this program

Recommendation 18

Provide opportunities for Innovations Program participants to meet with one another and with other non-program participants to discuss and share their experiences and knowledge about regional fire support services (which may encourage those who did not partake in the program to consider such services)

Recommendation 19

Encourage regional districts to directly communicate with one another, rather than through the OFC or through the Ministry, to encourage horizontal collaboration and facilitate the sharing of ideas

Recommendation 20

Develop an internet website that provides the fire service with a forum for discussion and access to key information about the delivery of regional fire support services (such as best practices)

Recommendation 21

Share the results of this study with regional districts and other fire service stakeholders

7.7 Continuing the Learning

A final evaluation report detailing experiences, best practices and other learning should be provided by each of the regional districts once the pilot programs have been underway for at least a year. At this time, it is difficult to harvest the full learning from the Innovations Program because most of the RDs have not had the opportunity to work out the implementation and delivery issues of their regional fire support services. Once fully operational for at least a year, RDs will be in a better position to reflect upon their regional fire support service as a whole.

In addition, only six of the nine regional districts that participated in the Innovations Program were reviewed in this study, therefore, there may be potential for much more learning beyond what has already been captured by this study.

Recommendation 22

Once all nine regional districts have fully implemented and operated their regional fire support services for at least a year, they should each provide a final evaluation report to the Ministry.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

This study was commissioned to gain a better preliminary understanding about the benefits, challenges and opportunities in relation to delivering regionalized fire support services in BC. The lessons learned from the Innovations Program reveal that the regional fire service initiatives of six different regional districts are not only working to build much needed capacity in the fire service, but they are also paving the way for future regional fire support services in BC.

The recommendations provided in this report aim to build on the success of the Innovations Program to date. The recommendations encourage more regional fire support services through non-legislative solutions and they also advocate changes to the current LAFC model. Further, the recommendations highlight the need for more communication within and across regional districts, as well as the need to provide support, including financial support, to regional districts for the continual development and delivery of regional fire support services.

This report serves as a basis with which to initiate further discussions around the delivery of regionalized fire support services, both within the fire service and at the Provincial level. The ideas and initiatives highlighted in this report may also have some applicability to other regional districts that are facing similar fire service issues. Also, the application of this report could be useful in other service spheres, beyond fire, such as, for example, other emergency and protective services and rural water services.

While this report has been useful in capturing the experiences and thoughts of six regional districts, it does not represent a complete and comprehensive reflection of the entire Innovations Program. As a result, further work should be undertaken to review the remaining three regional districts not covered in this study. Further research should also be undertaken, at a later time, once all nine regional districts have had an opportunity to fully implement and reflect upon their regional fire service pilot projects.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Regional Service Delivery Elsewhere

The idea of delivering fire services at a regional level is neither new, nor unique to BC. Research indicates that there are many other cities, states, and countries that are either considering, are actively using, or will be implementing some form of a regional approach to fire (or rescue/emergency) services within their jurisdiction. The effect of this section is not to imply that BC should model its own fire service after these jurisdictions, rather it is to demonstrate that there are many other places in the world that have the same ideas and streams of thinking as BC when it comes to delivering fire services at the regional level. The cases presented below may offer BC, including both the proponents and opponents of regional fire service delivery, with a better understanding of just how regional delivery is being utilized around the world.

The snapshots provided below offer glimpses of regional service delivery elsewhere and the reader is invited to explore the links under each region to gain a richer understanding.

Alberta

The Province of Alberta has committed to providing \$500,000 to enhance fire service training initiatives across Alberta. The program, which recently completed its third year, provides Alberta's 26 regional training centers with conditional grants to fund the delivery of certified training courses, in areas such as search and rescue, hazardous materials response, and wildland firefighting. The program places a special focus on volunteers, with 80 percent of the spaces in training sessions reserved for volunteers. Aboriginal firefighters are also encouraged to participate in the program.

The objectives of the program are as follows: 1) to allow more firefighters access to certified training by eliminating the need for firefighters to travel to access certified training; 2) to bring together personnel from neighbouring fire departments in an effort to encourage innovation and municipal coordination; and 3) to ensure that fire training programs are of consistently high quality across the province.

The provincial grants have allowed regional training centres to tailor a comprehensive list of accredited courses (supplied by the Fire Commissioner's Office) to the specific local needs of their areas. Program funding also includes an innovations component that finances both the development of new training initiatives and supports departments that may need to deliver training through alternative methods.

According to Alberta's Fire Commissioner Pat Graham, the program has been a great success thus far, because it has helped promote high quality, certified training for all firefighters and because it has enabled Alberta's fire services to develop local solutions to meet the needs of individual communities. Others agree that the program has been positive, because it has enhanced training for both large and small departments, and enabled fire departments to share resources and expertise.

To learn more about Alberta's fire training grant program, please visit the Province of Alberta's Municipal Affairs Website www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca

Finland

In 2003, Finland undertook a regionalization process to change its rescue services (including fire), which were run by over 400 municipalities, into a regional system consisting of 22 regional organizations. The reform was intended to make the use of resources more effective and to improve the quality and the availability of the services.

Finland's rescue services system required reform because its existing municipal system had a number of weaknesses. The small size of many of the municipalities resulted in a number of problems, including the following:

- financial limitations of small rescue service units (which meant, for example, that the purchase of a fire engine could only be done once every 20 years;
- limited personnel resources, (limiting possibilities for staff to specialize);
- a lack of municipal cooperation at the administrative level (leading to the duplication of work); and
- great differences in the level of the rescue services from one municipality to another.⁷⁵

While Finland considered a number of options for reform (such as a state rescue service), regionalization was ultimately chosen as the best approach, because it was expected to address a number of challenges, from risks that were becoming more complicated and covering larger areas, to the growing need for prevention activities requiring an extensive network of partners.

The regionalization process was undertaken without any additional resources to the rescue administration and without any cuts in jobs. A new piece of legislation (*Act on Regional Rescue Services*) was created for the reform, requiring municipalities to establish and maintain joint regions. While the new system remains a municipal one, the actual rescue activities are no longer run by individual municipalities, but by the 22 regional entities. Under the new system, the non-daily work of the rescue service has been concentrated to a single point, including the administrative, financial, procurement, planning and maintenance functions. For example, centralized functions have enabled fire chiefs to concentrate on fire prevention activities rather than on administrative tasks.

Just two years after the reform took place, the benefits of regionalization are already apparent in Finland. For example, under the new system, rescue units are able to cross municipal boundaries and target their rescue capacity where it is most needed. Training of rescue personnel, which was previously inconsistent and more spread out among municipalities, has improved, with specialized training offices in each region now providing all internal and external training. Further, the role of the Volunteer Fire Brigades has been enhanced to become an integral part of the overall national rescue system. Although the rescue service still faces challenges under the new system, such as rescue regions that are not aware of the availability of rescue units in neighbouring rescue regions, the overall regionalization strategy of the Finnish government is proving to be quite effective.

⁷⁵ Halonen, A. & Hellenberg, T, *Regionalization of Finnish Rescue Services*, March 2006.

To read more about the reform of Finland's rescue service, please refer to the report entitled "Eurobaltic Case Study Report: Regionalization of Finnish Rescue Services", accessible at http://www.helsinki.fi/aleksanteri/hankkeet/tutkimushankkeet/eurobaltic_case_study_regionalisati_on_of_finnish_rescue_services.pdf

State of Maine

In 2005, the Maine state government implemented a pilot, \$1 million grant program entitled, "the Fund for the Efficient Delivery of Local and Regional Services" to encourage municipalities to develop joint municipal services, including in relation to fire services. The program, administered by the Maine Development Foundation (MDF), awards grants to municipalities based on the extent that their proposed joint ventures demonstrate cooperation among local governments, result in property tax savings, involve a regional service center, and exhibit long-term sustainability.

By March 2005, the program had awarded grants for 26 projects that involved 121 municipalities and government entities. Projects funded have varied in terms of cost, scope and complexity. Examples of the types of projects that have been funded include an assessment of the fire equipment needs of five towns to prevent duplication, and a feasibility study to consolidate the fire and police services of two towns into a single public safety service. Other projects, however, stretch beyond the fire service sphere into areas such as storm water management, and accounting and financial services.

To ensure success in forming new collaborative partnerships, the MDF strived to provide each grantee with as much support as possible during the development of their projects by spending considerable time working with grantees to help them overcome various issues and obstacles.

To date, the 26 projects funded by the regionalization initiative are proving to be successful as they have already begun to demonstrate more effective and efficient delivery of municipal services.

To learn more about Maine's regionalization efforts, visit their website: <http://www.maine.gov/dafs/fund.htm>

United Kingdom

In 2002, the UK government initiated an independent review to examine the issues facing its fire service. One of the primary goals of the review was to determine how the country's fire service could be delivered with optimum efficiency and effectiveness. The review was based on existing reports on the Fire Service, written evidence from key stakeholder organizations and the public, and visits with firefighters and other key fire service staff in various Fire Brigades throughout the country. One of the key conclusions

of the review centered on the need for more collaboration and cooperation within the UK fire service. More specifically, the review concluded the following⁷⁶:

- “brigades should work together where it is clear that increased efficiencies and economies could result...At a local level, there should be more collaboration between brigades and other service providers”
- “...the benefits to be gained from increased co-operation and collaboration should be pursued within the current organizational structure, with amalgamation between authorities if appropriate or by mutual collaboration on a case-by-case basis”
- There should be an emphasis on collaboration and cooperation, including: a) introducing common training standards and reducing training and other facilities duplicated within or across brigades; b) making more use of the facilities of local colleges of further education; c) coordinating procurement, including timetables, sharing and using best practice; and d) developing local strategic partnerships. “Several submissions to us have argued in favour of the creation of a regional structure for the Fire Service in England and Wales to make it better able to handle these issues”.
- “it is essential that the Fire Service be firmly rooted in the community where work on fire safety is based...whatever the high-level structure, the Fire Service should be managed by people with good understanding of the local issues. And experience with local authority reorganization indicates that amalgamations have not produced the large economies that were expected”
- “It will be difficult to get people’s minds attuned to the idea of more collaboration. But we believe that fire authorities and senior managers in the Fire Service must constantly be reminded of the need to consider which activities they can deliver themselves and which would be better handled collaboratively”
- “Fire authorities face major challenges. Leadership will be required from them and chief fire officers. The need for regional co-operation between neighbouring authorities will increase. Greater co-operation should be encouraged at local and institutional level”
- “Many areas of Scotland rely heavily on retained, rural or volunteer firefighters for their emergency cover, and respondents welcomed further consideration of how these individuals could be better recruited, supported and retained”
- “The Executive...envisage change coming about by sharing best practice and pooling activities such as procurement. They do not envisage major change to the structure; the emphases are on community fire safety, collaboration between forces, and value for money.”

To read more about the UK’s review of its fire service, please refer to the article, “The Future of the Fire Services: reducing risk, saving lives”, accessible at <http://www.irfs.org.uk/docs/future/index.htm>

⁷⁶ Excerpts from section 6, “The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives:”, available at <http://www.irfs.org.uk/docs/future/index.htm> pp. 45-56

Appendix 2 - Fire Service Stakeholders

The following is a list of the primary components and partners that make up the fire safety and prevention framework in BC:

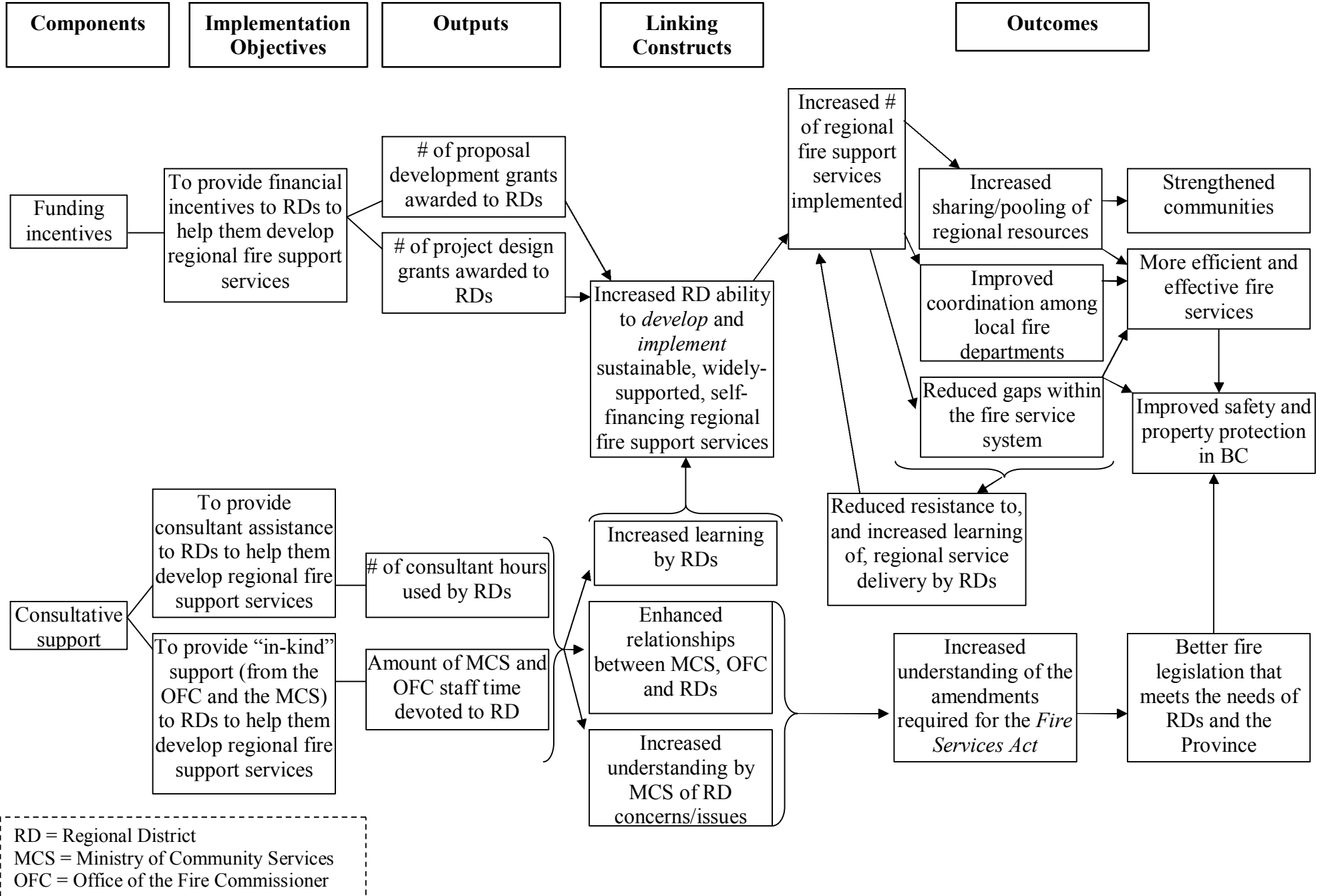
- **Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC)** – the Fire Commissioner is the senior provincial fire prevention authority. Under the *Fire Services Act*, the OFC, through a network of Local Assistants is responsible for fire investigations and inspection of fire hazards. The OFC is also responsible for maintaining statistical data on all non-forest fires in BC, issuing orders to correct fire hazards, either directly or through delegation to LAFCs, resolving appeals on orders issued by Local Assistants, and supporting the fire suppression activities of local governments, including setting standards for selection and training for fire services personnel.
- **Local Governments** – local governments provide fire suppression and fire protection services in their communities. The nature and scope of fire suppression activities varies from large municipalities with paid professional fire departments to smaller municipalities with a paid fire chief managing a volunteer fire department or a strictly volunteer fire department with no relationship to the local government council. In rural areas of regional districts, there may not be organized fire suppression service of any sort. As well, under the *Fire Services Act*, municipalities, but not regional districts, are required to conduct regular inspections of hotels and public buildings.
- **The “Fire Service”** – this term encompasses all independent local fire departments and individual firefighters employed by a fire department, appointed as an auxiliary member of a fire department or acting voluntarily as fire fighters. These organizations and individuals are represented by various voluntary associations, including the Fire Chiefs Association of BC, the Volunteer Fire Fighters Association of BC, the Professional Fire Fighters Association of BC, the Fire Training Officers’ Association, and the Fire Prevention Officers’ Association.
- **Regulation of Building Construction and Building Use and Occupancy** – the BC Building Code establishes standards for the construction of new buildings, including standards for fire safety systems such as fire separation, fire retardant properties of material, and requirements for sprinkler systems. Enforcement of the Building Code is the responsibility of local governments that may determine the extent of their role through local bylaw. The BC Fire Code ensures that building use and occupancy are consistent with the building design and construction requirements and that the required life and fire safety systems are being maintained. The Fire Code applies consistently throughout the province, including in regional districts.
- **The Insurance Industry** – this industry also has an interest in fire safety, prevention and protection in the province. Though independent of provincial and local governments, insurers and underwriters set their own standards on risks on client properties and may perform their own inspections on large property complexes depending on the degree of risk assumed.

The fire service in BC is represented by a number of organizations and associations, including the following:

- **BC Fire Training Officers Association (BCFTOA)** - represents approximately 200 member fire departments and associate members from all over BC, including volunteer, paid on call, composite, industrial, and career fire departments. BCFTOA gathers and provides information to fire departments on training standards so that they can better train their members. The organization also hosts an annual conference where fire departments meet and share their ideas about training and leadership.
- **British Columbia Professional Firefighters Association** - this organization is comprised of the 48 local associations who represent the professional firefighters of BC. All 48 locals are members of the parent organization, the IAFF.
- **Fire Chief's Association of British Columbia (FCABC)** - the FCABC is a non-profit organization that provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and educational information regarding the province's fire service. The FCABC's goals are to improve fire and life safety in BC, and to reduce the loss of life and property from fires. The FCABC is a member of, or maintain relationships with, other provincial, national and international fire service agencies and associations.
- **Fire Prevention Officers' Association of British Columbia (FPOABC)** - the FPOABC, consisting of over 250 individuals from 85 fire departments, represents public officials who are engaged in either fire prevention and/or fire investigation activities. The organization provides a forum for its member to discuss and exchange information regarding laws, codes, regulations, inspections and education related to the cause, prevention and spread of, and escape from, fire. The FPOABC is a key stakeholder in the protection of life and property, and it maintains a strong presence on the Building and Fire Code development and review committees in the province.
- **Fire Service Liaison Group (FSLG)** - a group recently created to review, and make recommendations on enhancing, the fire service in BC. The group is chaired by the president of the FCABC and includes representatives from career, volunteer and industrial fire fighters, the Union of BC Municipalities, as well as from training and fire prevention officers.
- **International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)** - the union that represents fire fighters in both the US and Canada. It consists of 280,000 full-time professional fire fighters and paramedics, and represents approximately 18,000 Canadians.
- **Volunteer Firefighters' Association of BC** - this organization represents the province's volunteer firefighters. The organization has four key goals: 1) to promote fire safety and the preservation of life and property within the province; 2) to promote and participate in the development and delivery of educational programs related to fire training; 3) to present a strong, united voice on behalf of all volunteer firefighters in BC; and 4) to confer and cooperate with other organizations within the fire community on training, safety and public education.

Appendix 3 - Distribution of Fire Halls in BC

Appendix 4 - Innovations Program Logic Model



Appendix 5 - Introducing the Research Study to Participants

[Date]

[Name]

[Position]

[Regional District]

[Address]

Re: Innovations in Fire Services Pilot Program: *Collecting Feedback and Harvesting Learning*

Dear [Name]:

I am writing to invite you to participate in helping us *collect feedback and harvest the learning* from the Innovations in Fire Services Pilot Program (“Innovations Program”).

The Innovations Program is an experimental pilot program designed to promote innovative new approaches to regional fire support services. The main phases of the Innovations Program are already underway, and in the coming weeks, program participants will be provided with an opportunity to help us collect feedback and harvest the learning from the Innovations Program.

The [Regional District] is one of nine regional districts participating in the Innovations Program. In order to fully learn from the Innovations Program, and to share the knowledge learned by one region with others, we are asking for your region’s participation in collecting feedback and harvesting the learning from the Innovations Program. This is an important opportunity for program participants to share their insights and experiences regarding the Innovations Program’s pilot projects. The information provided by your region will enable the Province to develop a better understanding of the role regions can play in supporting independent community fire departments. This information will also be valuable to other regional districts, jurisdictions and agencies.

The Innovations Program is one of a number of provincial initiatives currently underway to promote more effective local and regional service delivery. For example, the Premier’s Task Force on Community Opportunities (PTFCO), launched in September 2004, has a mandate to explore regulatory reform, service delivery reform and revenue sharing opportunities to help strengthen BC’s communities and regions. The learning from the Innovations Program may also be valuable to initiatives such as this one, where innovative ways to promote effective service delivery associated with possible revenue sharing opportunities are being sought.

Collecting feedback and harvesting the learning of the Innovations Program is a jointly sponsored initiative by the Ministry of Community Services and the Office of the Fire Commissioner, in conjunction with the University of Victoria’s (UVic) School of Public Administration. Rena Bindra, a graduate student from UVic, will be collecting your region’s feedback of the Innovations Program. She will contact you in the coming weeks to arrange interviews with key individuals from your region.

We look forward to your cooperation and participation in this important facet of the Innovations Program. If you have any questions on this initiative, please contact [Name and contact information].

Yours truly,

[Name]

[Position]

Appendix 6 - Data Collection Instruments

Interview Outline: Individuals who Developed / Implemented Pilot Projects		
Part	Objective(s)	Questions
1. Understanding the Position	Understand the individual's role within the region's fire service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Please describe your role within your region's fire service (position duties, other responsibilities). ▪ How long have you been in this position (since the beginning of the Innovations Program?)
2. Understanding the Community	Understand the RD and the community in which pilot project is being implemented (especially the characteristics that relate to delivery of regional fire support services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Please describe the RD in terms of population, size, structure, # of fire departments, etc. ▪ What, if any, characteristics of the region make it a natural choice for some type of a regional fire support service?(e.g. compact geographic region)
3. Pre-Pilot Program Environment	Understand the RD's fire service environment prior to the implementation of the pilot projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe the region's fire services prior to the pilot projects. ▪ What were the main problems, issues, or challenges, with the region's fire services prior to Innovations Program?
4. Pilot Program Rationale & Objectives	Understand why the Innovations Program was developed in the RD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When did you first hear about the Innovations Program? What were your initial thoughts about it? ▪ Why did your region want to participate in the program? Essentially, what was the impetus for change in your region? ▪ Please outline and describe the specific objectives the RD wanted to achieve through the Pilot Program. ▪ How and why did the RD choose this specific regional service delivery approach? ▪ Were there other approaches that were considered? Why were these not chosen? What prevented them from being considered in your region? Why did you think they would not work in your region? ▪ What sort of precautions did you take during the development process? What factors did you consider were the most/least important during development?
5. Development Implementation	<p>Understand how the Innovations Program was developed and implemented in the RD</p> <p>Understand the challenges faced by the RD during development and implementation</p> <p>Understand the strategies used by the RD to overcome challenges and embrace opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Please describe the details of your specific regional fire support service(s) that you have implemented or are implementing. ▪ How was the approach communicated to everyone? ▪ Were there any variables outside your control that affected the implementation process (i.e. changes in context, such as employees leaving, financial issues, government changes, etc.). ▪ What were/are the main challenges of implementation (i.e. financial limitations, human resource constraints)? How did you overcome/are overcoming these challenges? ▪ What resistance did you face – where did it come from? Local governments? Fire services? How did you overcome this resistance? ▪ What kind of support (and from where), did you use during the implementation process?

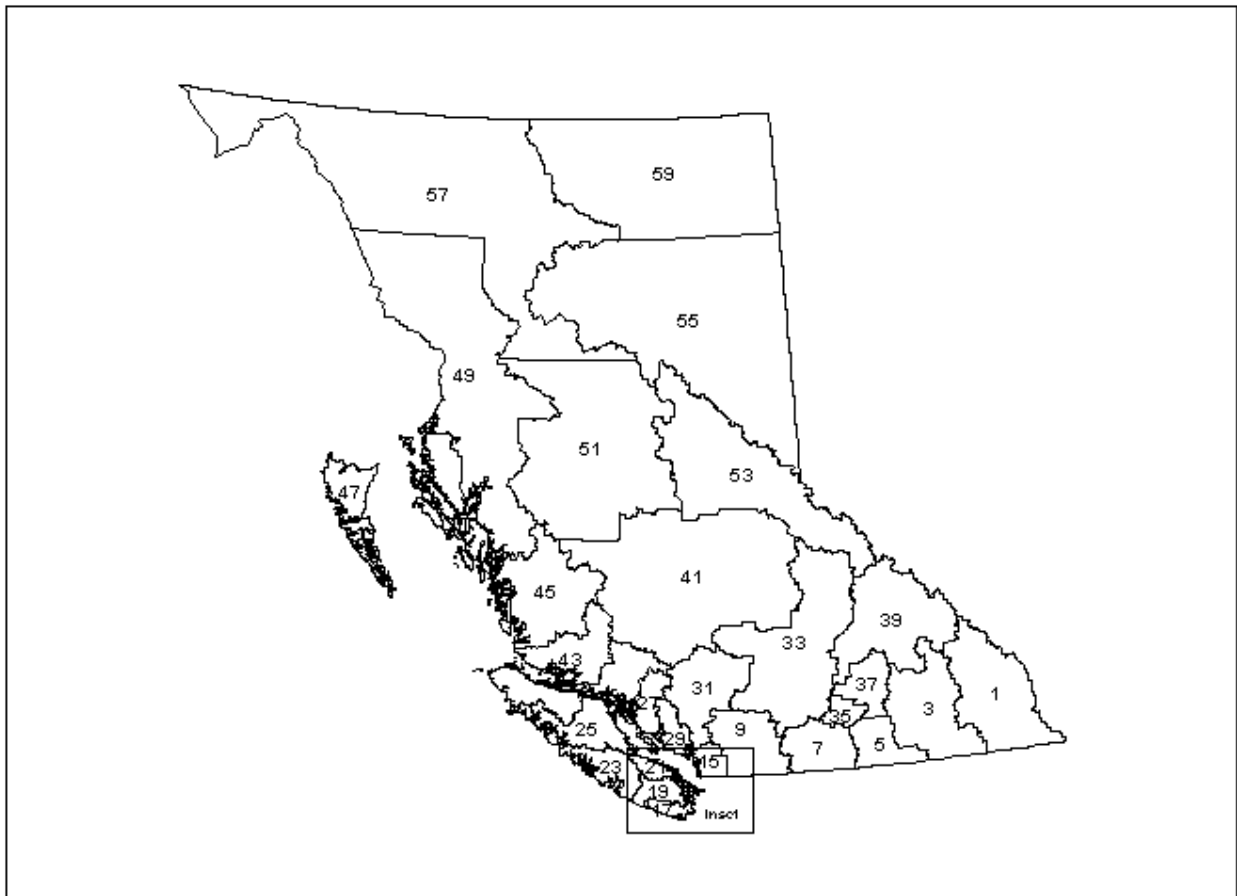
<p>6. Experiences & Insights</p>	<p>Learn about the experiences of program participants; what do they think about the challenges, barriers and opportunities of this and perhaps other regional service delivery approaches.</p> <p>Understand what the RD might have done differently (hindsight)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How is the approach working thus far? What kind of results are you seeing (i.e. increased efficiencies? improved coordination?)-would you call it successful? Has the region met the objectives it laid out in the proposal? Will you meet them if you haven't already? ▪ Do you believe this approach would be useful in other RDs? ▪ How exactly do you think this pilot project could be rolled out into other RDs? What are the necessary requirements/factors that these regions need to have? What are your thoughts about the "regional" LAFC model? Do you think it is possible to implement this in other regions? How? What would be the biggest challenge in doing so? ▪ In your opinion, are there any key impediments that are preventing regional service delivery from achieving its potential or from being implemented more widely? (E.g. legislative constraints, liability issues)? ▪ Is there any thing you would have done differently either during the development or the implementation of your pilot project?
<p>7. Overall thoughts</p>	<p>Gain an overall impression of participants' perceptions regarding program and pilot projects</p> <p>Understand participant's perceptions regarding transferability to other regions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are your overall thoughts regarding the pilot projects and the Innovations Program as a whole? ▪ Do you believe that your region will continue to use more regional service delivery approaches? Why or why not? ▪ How do you feel about these types of regional service delivery approaches in general? Do you believe it is a more effective method of delivering fire services? Why or why not? ▪ If you were advising other RDs who were thinking about developing a similar type of initiative, what advice would you offer them?

<p>Interview Outline: Individuals Affected by Pilot Projects</p>		
<p>Part</p>	<p>Objective(s)</p>	<p>Questions</p>
<p>1. Understanding the Individual</p>	<p>Understand the individual's role within the region's fire service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Please describe your role within your region's fire service (position duties, other responsibilities). ▪ How long have you been in this position (since the beginning of the Innovations Program?) ▪ Describe how your fire department/organization fits into the region's fire service?
<p>2. Pre-pilot program environment</p>	<p>Understand the fire department's/individual's fire services environment prior to the pilot projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How did the fire services operate prior to the changes that took place because of the pilot projects? ▪ From your perspective, what were the main challenges, problems, or issues with the region's fire services prior to the Innovations Program?
<p>3. Pilot Program Development</p>	<p>Understand how individuals felt about the launch of the pilot projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When did you first hear about the Innovations Program? What were your initial thoughts about it? ▪ Did you initially think such a project would help resolve some issues, problems, concerns you outlined earlier? ▪ How were the details of the pilot projects communicated

		<p>to you/your organization?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did you support or disagree with the pilot initiative developed by your region? ▪ Were you involved in the development of the project? How so? If not, would you have liked to been involved?
4. Development and implementation	<p>Understand how the Innovations Program was developed and implemented</p> <p>Understand the challenges faced during development and implementation</p> <p>Understand the strategies used to overcome challenges and embrace opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What role did you play in the implementation of the pilot project? ▪ Do you think it was implemented properly? ▪ What were the main challenges with the implementation of the pilot project? Did you yourself face resistance from anyone during its implementation? How did you overcome this resistance? ▪ What kind of support (and from where), did you use during the implementation process?
5. Experiences & Insights	<p>Learn about the experiences of program participants; what do they think about the challenges, barriers and opportunities of this and perhaps other regional service delivery approaches.</p> <p>Understand what the RD might have done differently (hindsight)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How is the approach working thus far? What kind of results are you seeing (i.e. increased efficiencies? improved coordination?)-would you call it successful? ▪ Do you believe this approach would be useful in other RDs? ▪ How exactly do you think this pilot project could be rolled out into other RDs – what are the necessary requirements/factors that these regions need to have? What are your particular thoughts about the “regional” LAFC model? Do you think it is possible to implement this in other regions? How? What would be the biggest challenge in doing so? ▪ In your opinion, are there any key impediments that are preventing regional service delivery from achieving its potential or from being implemented more widely? (E.g. legislative constraints, liability issues)? ▪ Is there any thing you would have done differently for the pilot project? Is there another option that you think should have been considered but was not; should it be considered in the future?
6. Overall thoughts	<p>Gain an overall impression of participants’ perceptions regarding program and pilot projects</p> <p>Understand participant’s perceptions regarding transferability to other regions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are your overall thoughts regarding the pilot projects and the Innovations Program as a whole? ▪ Would you support future, similar initiatives? Why or why not? ▪ How do you feel about these types of regional service delivery approaches in general? Do you believe it is a more effective method of delivering fire services? Why or why not? ▪ If you were advising other RDs who were thinking about doing a similar type of initiative, what advice would you offer them?

Appendix 7 - Overview of Each Regional District

	<i>Columbia-Shuswap</i>	<i>Central Kootenay</i>	<i>Central Okanagan</i>	<i>East Kootenay</i>	<i>Fraser-Fort George</i>	<i>North Okanagan</i>
<i>Location (on map below)</i>	39	3	35	1	53	37
<i>Land Area-km²</i>	29,000	22,000	2,900	27,500	51,000	7,500
<i>Population*</i>	54,520	60,651	173,026	63,169	101,881	81,888
<i>Member municipalities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golden • Revelstoke • Salmon Arm • Sicamous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Castlegar • Creston • Kaslo • Nakusp • Nelson • New Denver • Salmo • Silverton • Slocan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kelowna • Lake Country • Peachland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canal Flats • Cranbrook • Elkford • Fernie • Invermere • Kimberley • Radium Hot Springs • Sparwood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prince George • Mackenzie • McBride • Valemount 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armstrong • Coldstream • Enderby • Lumby • Spallumcheen • Vernon
<i>Electoral areas</i>	6	11	2	6	7	5
<i>RD's fire departments</i>	13	17	4	6	13	8
* 2006 estimated population obtained from BC Stats						



Appendix 8 - Detailed Findings by Regional District

This Appendix presents detailed findings obtained from the recorded interview data, the researcher's interview notes and other relevant secondary data. Findings are presented according to each of the six cases / regional districts.

Case Study #1 - Columbia-Shuswap Regional District (CSRD)

Pilot Projects - Background

The CSRD undertook an initiative related to administrative standardization as part of its Innovations Program pilot project, which included the development of the following for use by its rural volunteer fire departments: 1) common procedures and forms, including reporting procedures and practices; 2) common standards for equipment, training and service delivery; and 3) a common and comprehensive system for operations and maintenance. Also, as part of the Innovations Program, the CSRD took steps to develop a *regional fire prevention manager* model.

Interviewees

Three individuals were interviewed from the CSRD; two regional district (RD) employees and one fire chief from one of the RD's 13 fire departments. Both of the RD employees played key roles in the development and implementation of the pilot projects in the CSRD. One of the RD employees interviewed is the regional fire services coordinator (as well as an adjunct training instructor for the RD's training centre). The fire services coordinator was initially hired on a part-time basis, but is now a full-time employee with the RD. The fire chief had limited awareness of the Innovations Program itself, but had been aware of, and was affected by, the regional fire initiatives arising out of the Innovations Program.

Community and Fire Landscape

The CSRD is made up of four municipalities, and six unincorporated electoral areas. It has 16 rural fire suppression service areas and administers 13 rural volunteer fire departments (Anglemont, Celistia, Eagle Bay, Falkland, Malakwa, Nicholson, Rancho/Deep Creek, Scotch Creek/Lee Creek, Shuswap, Silver Creek, Swansea Point, Tappen/Sunnybrae, and White Lake). All of the 13 departments developed independently and at various times, and as a result, vary significantly from one another. For example, the largest of the departments, with two fire halls and six firefighting vehicles, had an operating budget of \$280,000 in 2005, while the smallest of the departments had an operating budget of \$52,000 in the same year.

The CSRD holds mutual aid agreements with all CSRD volunteer fire departments (except one), the Town of Golden, the District of Sicamous, the City of Enderby/Shuswap River Fire District, and the Township of Spallumcheen/City of Armstrong. The CSRD also provides a contracted fire suppression service to two First Nation lands, and a portion of an electoral area from a neighbouring regional district.

The CSRD also operates a regional fire training centre in conjunction with 11 of its fire departments and the District of Salmon Arm. The training centre is accredited by the Justice Institute of BC.

Community and Fire Service Characteristics Suitable for Regional Fire Support Services

The CSRD was a good fit for administrative standardization of fire procedures, and for a *regional fire prevention manager* model, (and hence, the delivery of fire support services in general), because:

- of the close proximity of fire departments: “although it is a large regional district, 12 of the 13 fire departments are within a 1.5 to 2 hour drive from the regional district”, which makes them accessible and easy to manage from a regional district’s and regional fire service coordinator’s standpoint;
- the regional district already had more than a basic level of cooperation and collaboration, as is evident by the various mutual aid agreements, the contracted fire suppression services, and the regional fire training centre.

Pre-Innovations Program Environment - Fire Service Issues

Prior to the Innovations Program, the CSRD faced a number of issues with respect to its fire services. First, there was inconsistency and a lack of commonality in operational methods, type and frequency of training, equipment types and purchasing, and overall management. This was due to the differences in funding, priorities, philosophies, and overall development of each of fire department. Interviewees cited the following in relation to the lack of commonality between the CSRD’s fire departments:

- there were “no directional goals as far as training, records keeping, records management” and there was “poor communication between fire departments”
- “training was all over the map” and “everyone had a different training method” with no set goals as to what level of training was required within each fire department. For example, many fire departments were unaware of, or did not understand the requirements for firefighter safety under the *Workers Compensation Act* (partly because there was no one in the RD, prior to the fire service coordinator, who enforced these requirements)
- “ironically, we did get together with Enderby [for training], outside of the regional district, but we never did anything within our own departments”
- from the fire chief’s perspective, “paperwork wasn’t a big thing for us” and “we never kept track of our practices” because most firefighters worked full-time in other non-firefighting-related jobs, and they just did not have the time to worry about administrative procedures and record keeping.

Second, the CSRD was experiencing problems with the Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner (LAFC) program. According to the CSRD, over the years, the “calibre and delivery of the [LAFC] education program have diminished and those bona fide LAFC members are being called upon...to complete tasks or inspections for which they have no education, mandate, or remuneration”.⁷⁷ One interviewee expanded on this issue

⁷⁷ CSRD, “Innovations in Fire Services Proposal”, February 2005, p. 4.

by stating that, “the LAFC program has got an awful lot of power to it under the [*Fire Services*] Act, and to give someone that power without the training, or the knowledge of the power, or any understanding of fire prevention, or fire education or fire inspections, is just ridiculous and is not a good idea”.

Finally, the CSRD was experiencing difficulties with the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) communicating directly to fire departments and bypassing the CSRD, particularly during emergencies, rather than channelling communications through the RD.

Impetus for Change and Impetus for Participating in Innovations Program

To address some of its issues and increase commonality among its fire departments, the CSRD decided to regionalize some aspects of its fire service and participate in the Innovations Program. Interviewees cited the following as the combined impetus for this decision:

- “because of the mutual aid agreements there [had] to be commonality ...in today’s fire service, there is no room for one department to be doing it their way and another to be doing it their way – you have to have interoperability”
- “we [firefighters] felt there needed to be a change...we did not know what any of the regulations were... we never tested [any equipment] and we all knew that something had to change because it was a matter of time before somebody could get hurt”
- the program provided an “opportunity to secure extra funding to pursue the further needs of the citizens in the regional district. We were going to go ahead with [the regional fire support initiatives] anyways, [the Innovations Program] just happened to come along” at the right time.

Strategies for Dealing with Fire Service Issues

To help overcome the challenges faced in its fire service the CSRD:

- has taken steps to develop a *regional fire prevention manager* who is also the RD’s fire services coordinator to undertake fire inspections, fire investigations and other key duties on behalf of the CSRD. The position of the fire services coordinator has resulted in many benefits for the RD including cost savings. For example prior to the development of such a position, fire departments would receive requests for fire inspections, and refer them on to the Salmon Arm fire department, which would then have to come out to conduct the inspection. Rural fire departments would each pay for such inspection services, but now, the *regional fire prevention manager* receives all requests for, and conducts all, of the CSRD’s fire inspections (it should be noted that the *regional fire prevention manager* has replaced all other LAFC’s in the CSRD), and when the *regional fire prevention manager* took over, the CSRD took away the badges of all other LAFCs in the regional district)
- has adopted a training standard for the RD to enhance training. The standard requires all firefighters to be trained to a basic firefighting level (which includes the basic nine modules of firefighting, plus Live Fire 1 & 2, hazardous materials awareness training, emergency vehicle driving, and pumps and pumping). To date, the CSRD has trained 250 of its firefighters up to fire level 1

- has been building commonality between all of its fire departments by working closely with fire suppression committee
- has developed a set of standardized forms for fire reporting, as well other standard operating procedures, including those for group or purchasing.

Challenges Faced During Development and Implementation

Generally, prior to the development and implementation of regional fire activities, the CSRD's challenge was that each fire department thought independently, as if they were 13 separate departments, rather than as if they were one department with 13 fire halls ("it was territorial...[each fire department was] living in a little box and they couldn't get outside that box").

The CSRD's main challenge in developing and implementing a standardized approach to administration (i.e. record keeping, reporting procedures, etc), was opposition from, and the attitudes of, fire personnel, particularly long-time fire chiefs, who disliked or disagreed with the changes:

- "I think the biggest challenge management has in regional districts is having to deal with long term fire chiefs who somehow may feel threatened about losing so called power. Unfortunately a lot of these chiefs have not been able to keep current with training and operational issues, and how can they I suppose, as most are just volunteering their time and receive very minimal per diems for all their hard work".

In developing and implementing a *regional fire prevention manager* model, the CSRD faced some opposition from those who had their LAFC badges taken away. However, the *regional fire prevention manager* noted that the majority of LAFCs did not want the responsibility and many were more than willing to give up their badges, and "the ones who were upset, did not understand the authority [that came with the title], and once they did, they understood that they did not have the training to meet the requirements...and they accepted it".

Overcoming the Development/Implementation Challenges

To help overcome resistance, the CSRD actively communicated with fire personnel, (i.e. through meetings, fire training opportunities), at all stages of development and implementation. The CSRD continues to build comradery and cohesion among the 13 fire departments through ongoing communication, and through events such as a fishing derby, which enable fire personnel to come together and become more aware of each other's, as well as the RD's, fire-related roles and activities.

Benefits of the Regional Fire Support Service Initiatives and the Innovations Program

The CSRD is realizing a number of benefits as a result of its regional fire support services, including increased consistency in training, more efficient record keeping, cost savings from the joint purchasing of fire equipment, and increased efficiencies and enhanced relationships arising out the regional fire services coordinator's role. For example, with the movement towards a *regional fire prevention manager*, the CSRD's fire departments now have a single point of contact for such services as fire inspections and investigations. Specific benefits cited by interviewees include the following:

- “we have saved over \$100,000 in group purchasing of new fire apparatus alone in the past 2 years. I cannot put a value on the skills and knowledge that the firefighters have gained in the last 4 years by attending all the training sessions, but to send a volunteer firefighter to a Justice Institute live fire level 1 course in Maple Ridge, the cost would be approximately \$8-900 per person, for course cost and expenses for the weekend. We deliver the same accredited course up here at our training facility for approximately \$150-200 per person”
- our fire department is “more organized and structured...we have spread the workload over everyone...everything is delegated. Before, if anything went wrong [the firefighters would come to the fire chief] now, so and so is looking after that or this, they all have a role now” and with enhanced responsibility, individuals who once complained, are changing
- in regards to paperwork, and recordkeeping, forms for fire departments contained “way too much information for [the CSRD’s firefighters]...we did not need to go up skyscrapers...it didn’t really apply to us. [The regional fire services coordinator made the forms] more user friendly and tailored them to us. Now, we fill them out and send them to [the regional fire services coordinator] and he sends them all out to the OFC. The last thing you want to do is paperwork but we realize it’s important”
- “at least we know we’re getting the right training now...we used to just go through cones [for example], but now its more challenging”
- prior to the program each department had different types and brands of equipment (such as breathing apparatuses), but now, “we buy the same so if we have to help each other at least it’s the same”
- the regional fire services coordinator also contracted out the servicing of all of the fire department’s pumpers to one individual, for a cheaper rate, whereas previously, each fire department hired someone from the Lower Mainland, “to come up and service truck and then go back down... we’d have to pay for the hotel...it was expensive, now this guys does a few in one day and it is much more efficient”
- the initiatives have “...made the goals achievable for us...because if you expect us [firefighters] to go out and learn everything then you need full time guys ... we’re volunteers and we work four hours a week...the program has taken away all the extra stuff that we didn’t need to know”.

Keys to Making CSRD’s Regional Service Delivery Initiatives Successful

All interviewees believe that the regional fire initiatives undertaken by the CSRD have been successful to date. Interviewees attribute the success largely to the individual role of the regional fire services coordinator who brought along a great deal of operational experience to the job. Interviewees believe that the fire service coordinator position is working largely because the individual is “experienced in fire operations” and “can make informed decisions, such as [when it comes to] group purchasing of fire trucks”. One interviewee cited the regional fire services coordinator as “a guy who is hands on, [and who] understands the fire service”.

Other keys cited for the CSRD’s success include willingness from all levels to partake in the development of regional fire support services, approval and support from the CSRD’s

board, and increased cohesion among fire departments as a result of increased awareness and events such as the fishing derby.

Opportunities for Further Regional Fire Support Services

Interviewees believe there are further opportunities for the delivery of regional fire support within the CSRD, particularly in:

- public education and fire prevention: the CSRD is keen to look at regional initiatives in this area. While it was interested in developing a public education initiative as part of the Innovations Program, the CSRD chose to focus on its highest priority - building operational capacity first
- joint purchasing across regional districts: one interviewee cited that “there is great potential for economies of scale if regional districts talk to each other...the combined purchasing power of regional districts is great”
- enhanced communication with other emergency services / personnel: “we need more cohesive communication between all [service] spheres” such as police and forestry.

Transferability and Advice to other Regional Districts

Interviewees believe there is potential for transferring the CSRD’s *regional fire prevention manager* model (to date) and regional administrative standardization initiatives to other regional districts (“this approach would be very useful in other regional districts” and “from an administrative point of view, the development of something like this is definitely doable elsewhere”). Particular aspects that could be transferred include the common reporting procedures and forms, the training and service delivery standards, the joint equipment and apparatus purchasing, and the ongoing development of a *regional fire prevention manager* model. According to one interviewee, “I can not understand why regional districts would not look at implementing a similar program as to what we have done in the CSRD”.

When interviewees were asked to provide advice to other RDs who may be interested in pursuing similar initiatives as the CSRD, within their own regions, they cited that other regional districts should “hire someone with an excellent operational background, who understands the fire service part of it”.

Generally, the CSRD believes that fire service coordinators and emergency coordinators should not be combined into one position because the former need to have “a very good operational understanding of firefighters and firefighting...[to make] sure the departments are meeting their requirements for training and equipment purchasing and risk management” while the latter “have to be dealing with multi jurisdictional agencies and have good knowledge of social services to victims and people that may be displace and effected by a large scale emergency”.

Overall/Interesting Perceptions, Thoughts and Experiences

Overall, all interviewees believe that the Innovations Program was a great endeavour for the CSRD and that the development of regional fire support services is a direction that “is certainly working for us, and it’s just going to get better”.

Case Study #2 - Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK)

Pilot Project - Background

As its pilot project under the Innovations Program, the RDCK undertook an initiative to standardize education among its fire departments (which involved the development of a practical fire training site/centre)⁷⁸. The RDCK wanted to develop its initiative by creating meaningful partnerships with area organizations.

Interviewees

A total of eight individuals were interviewed from the RDCK. Only one of the individuals was an employee of the RDCK, and the others included local fire chiefs, representatives from the Selkirk College, and a fire services advisor who was the former fire services coordinator for the regional district (and who was currently leading the development of the training initiative). The interviews enabled discussion from varying perspectives including the fire service, the college, and the regional district.

Community and Fire Landscape

The RDCK has nine municipalities and 11 electoral areas. There are 17 regional district fire departments with approximately 330 firefighters in the RDCK. Also, the RDCK is one of only a very few regional districts in which the “entire regional district has a blanket mutual aid agreement with all of the fire departments in the regional district and with many in the municipal departments too”.

Community and Fire Service Characteristics Suitable for Regional Fire Support Services

The RDCK is ideally suited for the regional delivery of fire services because its fire departments are geographically spread out and some are so isolated that they can only be reached by ferry (“we have some real challenges...you have fire departments up the Spokane Valley, some in Castlegar, some in the eastshore Kootenay and one that can only be reached by ferry or skyway. It is a very widespread area and some of the firehalls are several hours away, so it is fairly difficult to meet the needs of all of them”). As a result, the RDCK’s fire departments are in need of a regional approach (to training), because they cannot individually meet the required training needs on their own.

The RDCK is also suitable for the regional delivery of fire service because it has, over the years, developed a number of partnerships and relationships with various fire service stakeholders, many of which it can continue to build on for future regional fire support services. For example, the RDCK has been working with the local college, Selkirk College, since as far back as 1994, when the two jointly hosted the region’s first Firefighter Training Symposium. Since then, the RDCK has “created a lasting partnership with the Selkirk College’s continuing education program”.

⁷⁸ The Innovations Program did not fund capital expenditures, therefore, the RDCK’s infrastructure for its training site was not directly funded by the Innovations Program. The training site was a part of the RDCK’s larger training initiative.

Pre-Innovations Program Environment - Fire Service Issues

Prior to the development of a regional fire training program in the RDCK, the regional district believed that “in reality, the education of firefighters is a serious challenge. Especially in rural settings, where most firefighters are volunteers, quality and continuity of education is rarely achieved. Regardless of the dedication and motivation of firefighters, there remain serious impediments to achieving compliance with existing standards”.⁷⁹ More specifically, the RDCK’s training issues were as a result of the following factors:

- *inequities between fire departments*: an audit undertaken by the RD revealed that “there were have and have not fire departments. Some were very well funded and others had funding challenges; some had professional training officers [to deliver training] and others did not...this resulted in departmental inequities, [with some departments] being well trained in some areas and not so well in others”
- *frustrations with the JIBC*: “the JIBC’s certification program was an untenable solution for us because to get the field trainers to these remote locations was impossible”. For example, “the only certified trainer was in Trail, and for that trainer to come to the CKRD’s fire department in Yak, was impossible”. Also, hardly any volunteer firefighters could afford the time and expense of the JIBC’s 12-week pre-employment certification course for firefighters (which was taught in Maple Ridge). Also, the course materials that were available were often impractical for the CKRD’s needs, and the testing requirements were often difficult and onerous (such as high wait times for return of test results)
- *lack of standardization*: education delivery mechanisms varied across fire departments, as some departments “continued [using] the JIBC certification program”, while others “adopted [the expensive] IFSTA student texts and train[ed] in house to the best of their abilities”, and, in addition, there was no standard for record keeping among the RD’s fire departments
- *no training facility*: fire departments did not have access to a central training facility.

Impetus for Change and Impetus for Participating in Innovations Program

When the Innovations Program was announced, the RDCK was already undertaking changes to reform its firefighter education system. In light of the Innovations Program, the RDCK decided to participate and begin making even more changes for the following reasons:

- the RDCK “recognized the need for a more formal curriculum...we were left without an adequate training program and the regional district was very concerned about the level of education and the safety of all fire personnel...the best model we could come up with was a single solution, region-wide that would assure that all firefighters were training to a respectable standard, the NFPA 1001 provincial requirement”
- ultimately, the RDCK wanted “to ensure that fire departments were operating in a safe and efficient manner...it just came down to a concern on safety and the more we investigated the more we realized that fire departments needed guidance, and the regional district just really stepped up to the plate and embraced it”

⁷⁹ Regional District of Central Kootenay, *Innovations in Fire Services Pilot Program Proposal*, 1.

- the vision of the RDCK's board was "to ensure that all of its fire departments were operating in a safe manner and that they were fulfilling their obligations to the regional district"
- there was more and more "talk amongst fire departments themselves... we realized that there were so many discrepancies amongst one another, and at the end of the day, you just want everyone to go home safe and sound"
- the Selkirk College got involved because: "we have two goals, to work with the community and to work with other organizations...our primary goal was to bring the long-term picture into this and work with community so that, for example, firefighters could have a legacy and they could, if they wanted to, check back ten years later and pull up their transcripts".

Strategies for Dealing with Fire Service Issues

To help overcome its challenges in relation to training, the RDCK undertook the development of a regional fire training site and a non-accredited training curriculum. The ultimate objective of the curriculum was to provide firefighters with a more practical and affordable alternative to the JIBC's comprehensive and expensive curriculum that simply did not meet the needs of the RDCK's firefighters.

Training Site

- the RDCK has entered into an agreement with Selkirk College to develop a training site at the college's Nelson campus. Without such a site, "the closest training centres are in Kimberley and Vernon, which are quite far...sending anyone to these live training centres cost thousands of dollars in travel and time off of work"
- the Kootenay Firefighter Training Society, a non-profit educational society dedicated to training initiatives, has been created to manage the training site. This society will also be responsible for ongoing funding for the site (since the grant money provided by the Innovations Program was limited)
- the training centre is being designed in a practical way so that it meets the specific needs of the RDCK's firefighters. The RDCK's "interest was to create a local training area that complements the larger facilities currently available in the Province"
- the training site has benefited from a number of partnerships, including the following: Selkirk College has provided materials for the site, particularly for the Swedish burn tank (a burn tank to demonstrate live fire); the college's welding students are building the site; Fortus Electrical donated steel; a trucking firm is shipping the containers for the burn tank from coast to coast; City of Nelson donated the in-ground props and provided a donation to bury the gas lines; City of Castlegar donated the plumbing and hydrants; and Telus donated a rescue tower.

Training Curriculum

- the RDCK has developed a non-accredited and performance based curriculum by modifying a curriculum provided to the RDCK by the JIBC (that the JIBC previously used). The RDCK's curriculum includes the following components: 1) NFPA standards capable of being completed in about one year; practical and economic core curriculum based on an older JIBC document; enables in-house testing using a standard JIBC evaluation check sheets (to ensure consistency with content for JIBC certification); ensures that the training provided can be ladderred to full certification

through the JIBC (by challenging JIBC exams); and training officers can attend four one-day workshops in curriculum delivery, in which they learn about preparing lessons and delivering course material

- the RDCK’s curriculum is flexible and practical because their curriculum “meets a minimum standard while allowing each department to customize it to meet their needs...we’re dealing with 18 or 20 different departments and it’s not a cookie cutter fit in a lot of cases”
- to date, the RDCK has finished revising the JIBC’s curriculum and has obtained input and feedback from training officers regarding the training materials. The training program is already being used (“it was piloted in Beasley...and about 47 training officers from 25 different departments have gone through part of the program”)
- the RDCK is also “writing a proposal to take to Selkirk college to get the training program certified, which would make it easier for other colleges to pick this up too”
- the development of a performance-based, non-accredited training firefighter curriculum in the RDCK came about as a result of recommendations in a report developed by a provincial steering committee (composed of representatives from various fire organizations, as well as the JIBC and the RDCK). The RDCK made a strategic decision not to accredit their training curriculum, “because many fire departments are not interested in full certification and to implement the report’s recommendation, we had to move away from accreditation”. Other reasons for not accrediting included the following:
 - “fire chiefs in CKRD had attempted to do certified courses and it was very hard for them...there was a universal concern throughout the province that it was not practical in a rural setting. You cannot everyone trained to a high level, plus have the certification and accreditation background to do testing...the testing procedures were onerous (some firefighters did not receive their test results until a year later”
 - “we recognized that we would be far better off not accrediting, because under a non-accredited program, training could take a firefighter up to one year to complete, but for a fully accredited training program through the JIBC, it could take seven years!”
 - “to accredit, you have to offer training on a full-time basis, in a highly structured way with full security over tests and with fully certified instructors. This would preclude the model that we wanted too implement which was decentralized and which could be offered in each fire department. We felt that at the end of the day, what we needed to do was ensure that the firefighters on the ground were adequately trained to the NFPA 1001 level, and that they knew what they were doing”
 - accreditation is typically tied to legal action: “if someone says they have been trained to a certain level and if you have a certificate then it would stand up in court of law. Personally, what I think is needed, for any organization, such as a regional district or a fire department, are training records. If you can show someone that you have a training curriculum that meets NFPA 1001, and you can show records that demonstrate what the individual has been doing to meet the standard and the test results, then that is just as defensible as any accredited course”

Training Records

- software is being developed to help maintain records on firefighter training (the RDCK has had no previous standard on maintaining such records). The software, which “will be maintained by the regional district but housed at the Selkirk College, “will keep track of training hours and progress...and allow firefighters to request transcripts of their training records at any time”. The software will be owned by the OFC and “can be distributed to any other regional district”

Challenges Faced During Development and Implementation

The main challenge in the development and implementation of the RDCK’s regional initiatives has been the opposition from, and the attitudes of, some fire service personnel who are resistant to change, as they realize that they must begin to think and act differently than they have ever before. Interviewees cited the following in relation this challenge:

- “those few individuals that have strong personalities and resist, even though they are very smart and they run good operations, it has been a challenge to get them on board. Their main concern is that they do not want anything taken away from their [fire]hall”. However, “while there are pockets of old mentality, things are much better than they were two years ago...now it is becoming more and more accepted... you have certain [resistant] individuals and once those people begin to move out of the system, they are replaced with [individuals with] newer attitudes”
- “fire departments have acted independently for so long and now they are in transition, they have to start recognizing that they are not their own entity but that they are representing the regional district”
- “as opposed to having a central fire service model [the RDCK] has individual fire halls and no central figure in terms of getting total buy-in...with this model it is a long process”.

Overcoming the Development/Implementation Challenges

To help overcome some of its development and implementation challenges, particularly in relation to those who have been resistant to change, the RDCK has tried to actively communicate with the affected fire service personnel. It has used the Training Officer’s Society (which fire chiefs often attend as well) to communicate key changes and discuss important training issues. Further, the changes are being undertaken slowly, because as one interviewee cited, “some departments have lived in isolation for over 20 years and so it is going to take some time to change that”.

The RDCK also realizes that there is an imperative need to fill its vacant fire protection/emergency services coordinator position, as such a central figure is important in helping individuals overcome resistance to change. The RDCK is currently searching for an individual to fill this role.

Benefits of the Regional Fire Support Service Initiative and the Innovations Program

The RDCK is realizing a number of benefits as a result of its regional training initiative, including the following cited by interviewees:

- the RDCK has been able to develop a practical and very affordable solution (“the curriculum is really just the cost of photocopying through the regional district”) to address the education and training issues facing its firefighters. The training curriculum does not require firefighters to travel so “the biggest cost saving are the travel savings...” and the curriculum is available and accessible to each and every firefighter in the RDCK
- from Selkirk College’s perspective, “this is an excellent example of a community partnership where we are befitting the whole community”
- “this initiative has already involved many fire service stakeholders...it has created a domino effect, once you get it going, it keeps going”.

Interviewees also cited some specific benefits from the Innovations Program:

- “we would not have been able to do this without the Innovations [Program] funding”
- the Innovations Program provided “tremendous scope to this initiative...we would have struggled to put funding together for this [training] facility. For the regional district to have coughed up \$25,000 would not have happened, so when we got the grant it was an easy decision for the regional district to match it and at the end of the day, \$50,000 is a drop in the bucket compared to the benefits that this region is starting to have and will continue to have for years to come”

Keys to Making RDCK’s Regional Service Delivery Initiative Successful

Interviewees cited a number of factors as the keys to making the RDCK’s regional initiatives successful to date. These include:

- *attitude of the RDCK*: “this regional district is quite progressive. I have found their attitude to be open and accepting of concerns and the direction that we wanted to take”
- *partnerships, relationships and collaboration with others*: the RDCK has been able to effectively develop a practical and cost-effective curriculum because of the cooperative effort between Selkirk College and the JIBC. In addition, the RDCK’s training centre has been developed with donations from a number of businesses, cities, and other stakeholders. These have included a rescue tower donated by Telus, plumbing and hydrants donated by the City of Castlegar and construction help from the Selkirk’s school of welding, just to name a few
- *developing a cost effective solution*: “the idea was to create a curriculum package that could be given to a have-not department. If that department cannot afford a full, advanced, curriculum, they can use this one and still meet NFPA 1001 requirement”.

Opportunities for Further Regional Fire Support Services

The RDCK will continue to implement its regional training curriculum in all of its fire departments, and it will continue to finish building, and eventually begin utilizing, its fire training centre. The Kootenay Firefighter Training Society has also been developed; it “will be responsible for scheduling and organizing training at the RDCK’s new training centre, and it will serve as a vehicle for raising funds to continue the development and operation of the centre” once the funding from the Innovations Program runs out.

The RDCK is still looking to hire a fire protection/emergency services coordinator for the RD who can continue to encourage individuals to participate in, and who can manage, the

regional training initiatives. While the RDCK has adopted the new training curriculum as the training standard for all of the RDCK's fire departments, there is still a need "to develop a regional bylaw that could be implemented for the whole regional district for education, [because] regardless of access to tax money, fire departments need assurance that they have access to fire education. A regional bylaw could also lead to many other things".

All in all, the RDCK believes that the regional training initiative could be the first step in delivery of other regional fire support services such as safety assessments, communications, public education/fire prevention, regional fire investigations and a regional fire office (i.e. centralized administration).

Transferability and Advice to Other Regional Districts

Many elements of the RDCK's regional fire training program are transferable to other regional districts, particularly the non-accredited training curriculum which can be easily given to any fire department for little cost ("we have created a model that is based on a single curriculum for the entire regional district and that can be replicated for the entire province").

Other transferable elements include the curriculum for trainers and the process of building the training centre and the idea of building and using relationships with municipalities, industry, and colleges to develop and fund a training centre. In the RDCK's point of view, as one interviewee cited, "several other regional districts would fit the criteria in which they could benefit from something like this... regional districts that have outlying areas and smaller municipalities like the Cariboo Regional District and the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George... anytime that you have a travel time of an hour to two hours away from nearest municipality, this will work".

Other regional districts are interested in what the RDCK is developing. As one interviewee put it, "there is a lot of interest from more remote fire departments... they are really anxious to see what the RDCK is developing, and other regional districts are starting to take a little bit more interest in this and more are watching to see what is going on here".

When asked to provide advice to other regional districts that may be interested in developing/implementing a similar regional fire training program or training centre, one interviewee cited the following: "I highly recommend any community working with this curriculum to, if they can, work with their community college because there is a definite advantage to it".

In response to why other regional districts would want to pursue something like the RDCK's regional training curriculum or training centre, one interviewee cited the following:

the benefits always come down to safety... there is a huge risk for any municipality, regional district or improvement district that comes from fighting fires and from having firefighters working for them... [regional districts] need to ensure the safety of their fire personnel and provide assurances to local

governments that they are doing their due diligence...I don't think that any regional district or any municipality that has more than one fire department could justify allowing [its fire] services to find their own way...they need to have direction and assurances to make sure that their purposes are being supported.

Overall / Interesting Perceptions, Thoughts and Experiences

Overall, all interviewees believe that the Innovations Program has been a great endeavour for the RDCK, and that the pilot project approach has enabled the RD to develop a very useful and practical training curriculum and training centre. In one interviewee's opinion, regional service delivery is an ideal way to achieve a consistent education program in a regional district, and that "regional services are the only way to go especially in services like fire protection".

Case Study #3 - Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO)

Pilot Project - Background

As part of its Innovations Program pilot project, the RDCO undertook the development and implementation of a regional fire safety inspection service that would extend to all public and commercial properties of the regional district, including those located in the unincorporated electoral areas. The RDCO's specific objective of its pilot project was as follows:

to develop a financially viable, sustainable fire inspections program for delivery of the service to all areas of the Regional District of Central Okanagan...to ensure fire safe buildings, thereby reducing dollar loss fires, reducing the chance of injury or death, and ensuring a safer environment for workers within facilities, the public and emergency responders.⁸⁰

Interviewees

Two individuals were interviewed from the RDCO, the Director of Engineering and a retired fire chief on contract with the RDCO. Since both individuals helped develop and were actively working on implementing the regional fire safety inspection service in the RDCO, both were very familiar with the Innovations Program.

Community and Fire Landscape

The RDCO is made up of three municipalities and two unincorporated electoral areas (Central Okanagan East and Westside). It has four regional district fire departments and four municipal departments. Prior to the Innovations Program, the three member municipalities all provided a fire safety inspection program within their service areas. In addition, the most populated areas of the Westside electoral area received a fire safety inspection service within the boundaries of the Westside Fire Protection District as authorized by the Westside Fire Protection Improvement District Board. Westside also provides fire protection and fire safety inspection services to the RDCO's two Indian Reserves (Westbank IR 9 and IR 10) under contract.

During the course of the Innovations Program, however, on January 1, 2006, the Westside Fire Protection District dissolved to become part of the RD. The Westside Fire Department has since then been integrated into the RDCO, and is now a regional fire department with 4 fire halls, 70 paid-on-call firefighters, and an operating budget of over \$1.6 million. The RDCO has four other regional fire departments, which have a total of six fire halls and which are fully operated and staffed by 95 volunteer firefighters. Generally, the RDCO's fire departments work well together by providing mutual aid to other departments, and by providing advice to the RD and to members of the Fire Technical Advisory Committee.

The RDCO also provides a region-wide rescue service that includes hazmat and marine rescue, and has a successful, region-wide emergency plan that has been in place for at

⁸⁰ Regional District of Central Okanagan, *Innovations in Fire Services - Pilot Project Proposal Submission*, (September 15, 2005), 2.

least 10 years. The emergency plan covers the entire RD, including member municipalities, and is effectively managed and administered on behalf of the RDCO (under contract) by the City of Kelowna, with active involvement from all fire departments. In addition, to ensure that all RDCO residents receive a fire protection service; the RDCO has expanded many of its fire departments to include properties that have previously not been protected.

Community and Fire Service Characteristics Suitable for Regional Fire Support Services

The RDCO is a good fit for a region-wide fire safety inspection service, and the delivery of regionalized fire support services in general, because

- it is geographically small and compact, and fairly urbanized, making the delivery of a regional fire safety inspection service relatively accessible and manageable from the RDCO's point of view
- the RDCO has a proactive regional board that is either actively pursuing or encouraging, a number of regional initiatives (many of which are already intended to increase standardization within the RD)
- the RDCO has more than a basic level of cooperation as is evident by the various regional initiatives underway in the RD.

Pre-Innovations Program Environment - Fire Service Issues

Prior to the Innovations Program, a fire safety inspection service was provided only within the boundaries of the three municipalities, the Westside electoral area, and the Westbank Indian Reserves. All other areas of the RDCO did not receive a fire safety inspection service (approximately 80-90 inspectable properties), and none of the RDCO's volunteer fire departments (excluding Westside) provided such a service. For the RDCO, the lack of fire safety inspection in some areas of the RD was "a general concern" as "it was a service that was no longer provided by the OFC unless it was really needed".

Impetus for Change and Impetus for Participating in Innovations Program

The RDCO decided to pursue a regional fire safety inspection service because there was "recognition that it was important". More specifically, the RDCO:

- believed that because it was highly urbanized, "all [its] facilities should be inspected; if municipalities have the service, then why wouldn't the same hold true for all other properties outside of municipalities, such as resorts, schools, etc."
- thought, "from a safety perspective" that it was "important to provide a consistent level of service regardless if [individuals] were in an incorporated area or not". The RDCO did not believe that properties in one area should be held to a higher standard than properties in another area
- "wanted to make sure that all the services it could provide were being provided", and since the RDCO was already "moving forward with a bylaw to provide fire protective services in the entire regional district, one of the key issues remaining was inspections"
- "participated in the [Innovations] Program thinking that there would be some value in it for [the RDCO]" but noted that "we were on that track anyways". The Innovations Program enabled the RD to delve "more in-depth than what [it] was doing before the

program” by forcing them to “be more keenly aware of the implications of global liabilities, costing and costing recovery”.

Strategies for Dealing with Fire Service Issues

In 2004, to deal with the lack of fire safety inspections in the RDCO, the regional district adopted a bylaw to establish a service of fire prevention for its electoral areas. The service involved a number of activities, including the establishment of a system of fire prevention inspection for public buildings. Since then, the RDCO has been pursuing a regional fire safety inspection service. Key strategies, activities and elements of this service include the following:

- “staff who provided fire inspections, restricted previously to the Westside Fire Protection boundaries, [will] now also complete fire inspections for approximately 80-90 additional inspectable properties in the regional district rural areas, which were not previously provided inspection services”⁸¹
- efforts are being made to standardize the frequency and requirements for fire safety inspections in all areas of the RD, including the RD’s three member municipalities who currently each do their own safety inspections (i.e. “whatever is happening in the City of Kelowna, we want to standardize with what is happening in the rest of the regional district”). Also, Westside will be expanding its own inspection service to include properties it did not previously inspect, such as “bed & breakfasts”
- Kelowna has implemented a fire/life safety self assessment program for properties located within the city of Kelowna. Under this program, a business owner/manager can conduct a self-assessment of their premises to correct any violations before a fire safety inspection is conducted. This self-assessment scheme is being considered in other areas, including Westside
- an inventory of all inspectable properties has been established and the inspection service will “start with the highest priority ones first”
- “the cost of the inspection service will be paid for by all properties within the regional district electoral areas” [i.e. through property taxes]⁸²
- the RDCO has also undertaken steps towards a quasi-centralized LAFC model; three staff members from the former Westside Fire protection District are now LAFCs for the entire regional district, including the electoral areas. The Westside Fire Department will also undertake, on behalf of all of the RDCO’s electoral areas, responsibility for fire investigation, fire recordings, and incident reporting to the OFC.

Challenges Faced During Development and Implementation

Interviewees cited no major challenges in the development and implementation of the regional fire safety inspection service in the RDCO, however, the following points were mentioned:

- “there were some complaints about downloading” when the RDCO was developing the fire safety inspection service
- “there were some concerns about the fire inspector in the Westside being overworked”

⁸¹ Regional District of Central Okanagan, *Fire inspection services update* (March 21, 2006), 2.

⁸² *Ibid.*

- “boards are typically paranoid about taking on liability. I think we have come to a point where we are going to always face a liability issue, but what we have to do is what is best for the community and just be aware of liability. It shouldn’t stop us from doing anything, otherwise we would end up doing nothing”.

Overcoming the Development/Implementation Challenges

To help overcome some of the minor challenges faced in the RDCO during the development and implementation of the regional fire safety inspection service, the RD actively communicated with key stakeholders, including elected officials, regional fire chiefs, fire personnel in member municipalities, and the Westside Fire Protection District (before it was changed) throughout the process. The RD also relied on its Fire Technical Advisory Committee, an interdepartmental committee made up of fire chiefs that meets monthly to discuss fire issues, to communicate back to individual fire departments and fire staff about the regional fire safety inspection service.

Benefits of the Regional Fire Support Initiative and the Innovations Program

Once fully underway, the RDCO expects to achieve the following benefits from its regional fire safety inspection service (the RD stated it was not far enough along in the implementation process to be able to fully assess the benefits):

- enhanced public safety as a result of inspecting all public and commercial buildings in the RD
- some type of cost savings, although the RD is unsure exactly of how much⁸³
- increased consistency and standardization between the municipal and electoral areas as the service continues to develop further. The three LAFs from Westside, who are now LAFs for the entire RD, will help increase standardization because if they implement a standard or practice in Westside, they will likely tailor it for the entire regional district as well (i.e. these LAFs will be carrying out fire investigation and fire safety inspections for the entire RD and will, therefore, be in a better position to develop consistent practices in RD)
- Westside will also be implementing “company inspections” by training its own “firefighters to a certain fire inspection level, so that firefighters can go out in a crew and do inspections. Westside thinks it is proactive to keep firefighters involved in public safety...this gets them into buildings for familiarity and it also takes a load off the inspectors”. This strategy would enable firefighters, for example, to go out to a building for three fire safety inspections, and a trained fire inspector would go in for the fourth inspections.

Keys to Making RDCO’s Regional Service Delivery Initiative Successful

Both interviewees commented that the keys to making the RDCO’s fire safety inspection service work have been willingness and support of the regional board, the compact geographic nature of the RD, active communication through the Fire Technical Advisory Committee, and an understanding that liability issues will always exist.

⁸³ Note: a cost benefit analysis conducted by the Ministry of Community Services in November of 2005, revealed that the overall net benefits of fire safety inspections in the Westside Fire Protection District were positive and amounted to approximately \$2.1 million, over a period from 1990 to 2002, or \$165,000 annually.

Opportunities for Further Regional Fire Support Services

Interviewees believed that there are further opportunities for the delivery of regionalized fire support services within the RDCO, particularly the following:

- *regional fire service*: “we have five fire departments and some unprotected lands, I would like to see us move towards one regional department with one chief and one hall, where all of the training and coordination, management, procedures, and accountability are managed as one function. Obviously this will have political and community challenges, but we would keep the capital commitment obligations separate...ultimately, I would like to see one true regional department”
- *regional fire training*: each fire department currently trains individually and, as a result, training is not consistent within the RDCO. “Some volunteer departments. are quite progressive, others are not, it depends on where they are and who runs it ... we are trying to coordinate as much as possible...we adopted Firefighter Level 1 last year so now [the fire departments are] working towards it...”
- *regional communication*: the RDCO is undertaking a large communications study (valued at \$80,000) “on the processes, on dispatch functions, on how we all fit together and on the interoperability of all radios in the district” in an effort “to strengthen fire and emergency services, and hazmat [because] communication is critical from a fire department’s point of view, but [right now] everybody is doing their own thing.”

Transferability and Advice to Other Regional Districts

In terms of exporting the RDCO’s regional fire safety inspection service to other regional districts, interviewees, while agreeing that it works for them, commented that “there is no one size fits all approach” and that aside from willingness, other regional districts would need accessibility to rural areas and a basic level of building inspection to make this work for them. The RDCO’s point of view is that this type of service “works best in higher density regional districts such as Nanaimo”, but in areas “where access to inspectable properties is limited, such as only by float plane or helicopter, it [would be] a big cost to communities, especially if some areas do not even have a basic level of fire protection”.

Overall/Interesting Perceptions, Thoughts and Experiences

Generally, interviewees believed that the regional initiatives are positive endeavours for the RDCO. Other comments from interviewees regarding their overall perceptions, thoughts and experiences were as follows:

- “once a couple of regional district do [a regional fire support service] then others will want to do it too”
- in terms of the Innovations Program, “these types of initiatives take [a lot of] effort to do...we are busy. We [participated in the program] more for the benefit of others...we made a great plan, but the [Innovations Program] involved a lot of steps, even though we already knew the answers” to much of what was required for the program proposal. Essentially, “we expanded the scope [of our program] for the benefit of the Innovations Program”
- eventually, “we would like to wrap it up, and do an evaluation to look at what things have changed, what some of the costs and benefits are...there are some good lessons to be learned but it will have to wait until [the regional fire safety inspection service] is up and running”.

Case Study #4 - Regional District of East Kootenay (RDEK)

Pilot Project - Background

As part of its Innovations Program pilot project, the RDEK undertook a number of regional fire support service initiatives that were focused primarily on the RDEK's six fire departments, in the following seven areas:

1. increasing cooperation and coordination between jurisdictions and between fire departments;
2. improving training for volunteer firefighters through a partnership with the College of the Rockies and through training delivered on a sub-regional basis;
3. broadening service delivery by surveying existing services and providing things such as enhanced mutual aid agreements and seamless service delivery in the South Country;
4. increasing sustainability by establishing: a) a framework for regionalized service delivery; b) partnerships and agreements with institutions and industry; c) a management committee with fire department representatives; d) alternative/supplemental funding sources; and e) formal review process.
5. continual quality improvement that focused on fire prevention/education initiatives and strategies for volunteer recruitment;
6. enhancing support services through group purchasing, and other supports, including website/email, educational, and database; and
7. improving emergency communications by surveying and enhancing existing communication capabilities, including fire dispatch, public warning systems and on-scene communications.

Interviewees

Four individuals were interviewed from the RDEK: the RD's emergency service coordinator, the Chief Administrative Officer⁸⁴, and two staff members from the College of the Rockies. All interviewees, except one from the local college, were aware of, and had been involved in the development of, the RDEK's pilot project from the beginning.

Community and Fire Landscape

The RDEK has eight municipalities and six electoral areas. It has a total of six regional district fire departments (two departments are strictly volunteer and the other four have some paid on-call staff), eight municipal fire departments, and one improvement district fire department. The "operating budgets, types of properties protected and specific challenges vary widely between departments; annual budgets for RDEK departments, [for example], range from \$50,000 to \$350,000" depending on the taxation base.⁸⁵

All fire departments provide a core set of services including structural fire protection, initial wildland fire suppression, vehicle fires. some departments offer additional services, such as hazardous material response, fire prevention/public education, dive

⁸⁴ The Chief Administrative Officer's interview was informal and unplanned, and was not as comprehensive in nature as all of the other interviews in this study.

⁸⁵ Regional District of East Kootenay, *Innovations in the Fire Services - Regional District of East Kootenay Proposal* (2005), 2.

teams, and confined space rescue. Some departments also have service agreements with other agencies, such as the Ministry of Forests, to provide specialized services such as wildland/urban interface fire suppression, beyond the RDEK's boundaries. Further, the RDEK has seven fire protection service agreements with municipalities.

In 2004, the RDEK hired a full-time Emergency Services Coordinator who is now responsible for fire protection, wildfire initiatives, staff health and safety, the 9-1-1 system and emergency programs. The Emergency Services Coordinator also serves to enhance coordination among the RDEK's fire departments and as a result, much effort has been made over the last few years to develop regional activities in the RDEK, including in the areas of group purchasing, training coordination and service enhancement.

Community and Fire Service Characteristics Suitable for Regional Fire Support Services

The RDEK has not fully implemented or even fully developed some aspects of its pilot project. Thus, as one interviewee cited "we do not know if we are a good fit yet [for the regional delivery of fire services]". However, the RDEK does, for administrative purposes, deliver a number of its programs on a sub regional basis with these sub regions being Columbia Valley, Central Sub Region, and the Elk Valley. As a result of this framework, one interviewee stated that while "the idea of having regionalization might not be feasible, mostly because of geography...we can see partial regionalization working here".

Pre-Innovations Program Environment - Fire Service Issues

Prior to the Innovations Program, the RDEKs fire departments faced a number of challenges. At that time, according to the RDEK the "immediate needs of operating fire departments make it difficult to focus on long-range planning, regional coordination, and review of best practices. At present, the approach to these concepts is haphazard. Everyone acknowledges their importance but it is very difficult to find the time to make significant headway".⁸⁶

The specific challenges faced by the RDEK's departments included the following:

- *firefighter* training: the RDEK faced training challenges whereby "each department did whatever they wanted to...it was a completely mixed bag, in which some people were not even aware of what was available, like the facility in Kimberley". Beyond this, the RDEK faced such issues as the following: lengthy and expensive training in which it sometimes took volunteers up to seven years to complete Firefighter Level I, an inability to customize training to suit the needs of individual departments, and a lack of access to qualified instructors
- *recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters*: the RDEK faced difficulty in recruiting and training qualified, motivated and committed volunteers
- *lack of administrative support and coordination*: "from an administration point of view, [there was a] wide-range of activities. Firefighters struggled with standardized

⁸⁶ RDEK Innovations Program Proposal, 3.

operating procedures, everyone was doing their own thing... firefighters were still struggling with the WCB requirements for volunteer firefighters and the recognition that a volunteer fire department was a workplace”. Also, the RDEK faced a large volume of administrative work;

- *lack of commonality, coordination and awareness*: “fire departments have developed by themselves and the regional district was only involved in funding them. There was no sense [among the fire departments] that there were common standards or common training, because everybody was busy doing their own thing. Any sort of coordination was an extra and they didn’t have time or see the need for it. For the regional district, there was no awareness that we needed to be involved or that we even had a responsibility under the WCB...”

Impetus for Change and Impetus for Participating in Innovations Program

According to interviewees, the impetus for change in the RDEK’s fire service that led it to pursue a number of regional fire support services was a combination of the following:

- “we just saw a lot of wasted effort, so many volunteer departments were struggling with training and administration, that was the basic thing. We were all so busy, so we thought why don’t we just pool our resources together...”
- “years and years of people [i.e. fire personnel] talking amongst themselves and becoming more aware of what was out there; people always worked with their neighbouring departments, but it was starting to make sense to spread out a little bit...”
- there “was an escalating need” due to “more and more work [for firefighters] ... the number of volunteers had decreased so much that it had become obvious that we needed to find a new way of doing things. Volunteers are happy to do operational stuff, but actually taking charge of a department and doing administrative stuff is the tough part [for them]”
- the College of the Rockies got involved in the program because “community colleges are mandated to meet the needs of their community and [RDEK’s regional training initiative] was exactly the type of thing that the college needed to help out with”.

Strategies for Dealing with Fire Service Issues

To overcome its fire service issues, the RDEK is doing a number of things to build a framework for the regional delivery of fire services. The RDEK is developing this framework by focusing on a number of areas, including the following:

- *firefighter training* - the RDEK has developed a training program in partnership with the College of the Rockies (“when the college first heard about this, they were interested. They said, look, we’ll contribute some money to this as well because we’re looking to expand our existing firefighter training”)
- the training program is accredited by the JIBC, but it is flexible and customizable (“we needed something for volunteer fire departments...we weren’t ready to force a standard, so we left it up to each fire department to decide what they needed beyond the core competencies. We looked at a way that any training that firefighters took would lead to Pro Board certification, but it wouldn’t force them take it that far. We wanted to keep it flexible, and get into recognized training, but we didn’t want to reinvent the wheel either”)

- the RDEK's training program has involved the following activities:
 - development of a curriculum for both a Custom Training Program and the 1001 (Firefighter I & II) Challenge Program
 - piloted the Firefighter 1001 course various firefighters from Kimberley and Cranbrook fire departments
 - piloted the fire instructor program with firefighters from Kimberley, Cranbrook, Elkford, Fairmont and Panorama Fire Departments
 - ordered books to be set up in the college's library for use by all of the RD's fire departments to "aid the members of these departments to receive the training they require
 - marketed training programs at the Fire Chief's Association and have received a good response
- *volunteer recruitment and retention* - the training program is also a part of the RD's recruitment strategy where it hopes that more volunteer firefighters will be interested in joining the fire service if they believe that there are valid training opportunities that are certified
- *fire prevention* - the RDEK is also trying to bring more focus on fire prevention measures through public education: "we pick a topic or two each year and communicate that message through newsletters, town hall meetings, radio ads, etc."
- *administration* - as a means of advancing towards regional administration for its fire departments, "a major step" for the RDEK has been the hiring of "one fire chief for both the Windermere and Fairmont fire departments". The single fire chief acts as the fire chief for both of the rural fire departments, but both departments remain separate and continue to have their own officers (such as deputies, training, safety, etc.). In the RDEK's point of view, "already the departments are working on updating their mutual aid agreements, increasing the shared use of resources, focusing on common safety issues and better coordinating training activities". The "shared" fire chief is "now a part-time RDEK management staff member-at 85% of full-time...his hours are flexible to ensure that he can best meet the needs of both departments". The decision to hire the single fire chief "was not a specific part of our proposal, it popped up while everything was going on"
- *integrated communications*: the RDEK is developing a website to provide the public with information about fire safety. The website will also be accessible to fire departments who "can log on to gain access to pertinent information" about fire-related matters
- Generally, while the regional initiatives are focused on the regional district's fire departments, the RDEK has also tried to involve the municipal fire departments. The RD has given the RDEK's municipal fire departments the choice to participate in the projects if they wish.
- The RDEK has many "pieces under development and [it is] starting to implement them", but it is taking its time and has realized that full development and implementation will take time.

Challenges Faced During Development and Implementation

The only real challenges cited by all of the interviewees was the lack of time, money and resources to be able to fully develop all that the RDEK had set out to do under the Innovations Program. A specific challenge cited by one interviewee was in trying to

coordinate meeting times because “lots of volunteers were not being able to make it to the scheduled meetings, which made some people upset”. The RDEK is also realizing that a framework is necessary before further regionalization efforts can take place: “we still need a framework to deliver some of the stuff...we can’t just pool the money from each of the fire departments...if we want to talk about a regional district training centre, then we need to build the framework in a bylaw for the collection of funding...”. The RDEK also commented that development process has actually “raised more questions than its given answers”.

Overcoming the Development/Implementation Challenges

To help overcome some its development/implementation issues, the RDEK has actively communicated to fire service personnel, through a steering committee, about the changes and the importance of the changes. The RDEK cites fire chiefs as a major factor in achieving buy-in from firefighters, as fire chiefs not only talk amongst one another, but they also communicate to their fire departments and can, therefore, help spread a positive message about what the regional district is doing.

The RDEK is going to continue work on building a framework for regional service delivery in the RDEK by developing a bylaw that will facilitate all future regional fire support services. The RDEK is also taking its time in developing its regional fire support services so that individuals have time to adjust and so that the RD does things right the first time (“it is not something that happens overnight and we want to move pretty slowly”).

Benefits of the RDEK’s Regional Fire Support Services Initiative and the Innovations Program

The RDEK is realizing some benefits as a result of its regional fire support services. However, since the development and implementation of some aspects of the RDEK’s pilot project have not been fully completed, interviewees were not able to fully comment on the benefits of delivering fire support services regionally. The benefits that were cited included:

- “this project has been the kick-start needed to get things done that have been talked about for a long time...it formalized some of the stuff we were doing anyways, [we thought] let’s take this opportunity to create a workplan for ourselves...lay it all out so we can work towards something”
- “it acted as a seed to get people thinking about [regional fire support services]...it was a springboard...it just gave us something to gel around, we were starting to move in that direction anyways, [we thought] here’s a reason to get everybody together”
- “as a result of the Innovations in the Fire Services Program, the RDEK is seeing movement on concepts that have been discussed for years”
- “smaller departments are starting to realize that they are part of a bigger world”
- “the real benefit of this project is the increased cooperation between fire departments, whether rural or municipal” and partnerships that have formed as a “direct result of discussions around this project”

- “personally I see the benefits of regionalization...increasing the safety of our firefighters, putting a stop to haphazard training, giving [firefighters] the tools they need, and removing burdens that they don’t need”.

Keys to Making RDEK’s Regional Service Delivery Initiative Successful

All interviewees believe that the RDEK is on the right track in how they are pursuing regional fire support services. While much work remains to be done, some of the RDEK’s keys to making their regional efforts successful to date have included the following:

- political appetite and support from the RDEK’s board (“political support is always necessary and the RDEK’s board has been deeply supportive”);
- a central contact and champion for the project (“you need to have a key contact and a strong driver to push the rest”);
- building relationships and partnerships, as well as support and resources from the College of the Rockies (“the College has been a huge internal support here”)
- “the timing was right and it was presented right”
- using the College of the Rockies’ existing expertise to design and deliver training (“the wheel does not need to be reinvented” in terms of training)
- taking a soft approach to regionalization (“we are not trying to standardize everything in the RD, that is not our preferred way of doing it...let this be an organic process, and once people identify that the need is too obvious, like in the case of training, then people will naturally start to work together, but coming in and telling them what to do usually crashes and burns”)
- respecting the autonomy of fire departments (“we did not want to come in and tell them what to do, we did not want to take a heavy handed approach...staged inclusiveness was important...we tried to create an atmosphere where people could share their ideas...we wanted to keep it quite informal”)
- changing attitude on the RDEK’s part (the RDEK is slowly “becoming more open” to regionalization with time and is now engaging in “helping out the fire departments” where it can, such as in “offering computer resources and photocopying”)
- developing a steering committee (with approximately 10 people), with representation from different areas and fire departments, and with dedicated and committed individuals, to communicate and help relay the regional initiatives back to the fire service personnel in their departments (“we got a bunch of people together and find out which ones were willing to work together and then developed a steering committee ... we relied a lot on the fire chiefs because we know that fire chiefs talk amongst each other and that is the best way to get people involved”).

Opportunities for Further Regional Fire Support Services

The RDEK has many aspects of its regional service yet to develop, and while it has largely focused, to date, on developing the regional fire training service, the RDEK is committed to continuing the development of the other aspects as well.

When asked about the potential for regional fire safety assessments in the RDEK, one interviewee stated the following: regional safety assessments “have a lot of jurisdictional

issues...initially [a few years ago] the board wanted to put it aside and deal with it later... now it is an evolving topic and there is a lot more willingness to talk about it. People are starting to talk and they are beginning to see the need because of commercial development in outlying areas, but let's see what happens in other places and learn from that".

Transferability and Advice to Other Regional Districts

In terms of transferability, the RDEK's training program can be used by all firefighters in all jurisdictions. According to the College of the Rockies, the fire training model developed by the college and the RDEK could be used elsewhere, and that other areas, including Smithers and Chilliwack, have expressed interest in the program already.

When asked to provide advice to other regional districts that may be considering, or are interested in, a regional fire support service, interviewees had the following to say:

- "you need to identify people in each department who have the respect of their peers, who like to work together, and who can call in additional resources"
- "do not enforce anything and take it slow"
- "even if you do not have political support, if a group of fire chiefs know what they want and what they need to do their jobs better, they should take their concerns to the politicians and they will be heard"
- "need technical expertise and a person with experience to lead the project"
- "you need to develop partnerships and relationships, and engage people from the start and keep them engaged"
- "the most important thing to do is to develop the [fire training] concept and ensure that it delivers what you want and that it is customized to meet the specific needs of firefighters...don't tell firefighters what they need, ask them".

Overall/Interesting Perceptions, Thoughts and Experiences

The RDEK has been pleased with the Innovations Program and the results that it has been seeing to date. However, in order to truly make a difference, once interviewee cited that "we need more money, at least \$70,000 to \$80,000 a year to sustain a staff person to actually do something".

Case Study #5 - Regional District of Fraser-Fort George (RDFFG)

Pilot Projects - Background

The RDFFG undertook the development of two pilot projects under the Innovations Program. First, the RD, through a consultant, carried out a study to determine the feasibility of building a regional fire training centre in the RD. Second, the RDFFG undertook the development of a multi-jurisdictional Computer Aided Dispatch and Records Management System (CADRMS), a system that manages multiple calls for a service and that operates as a central hub of information. The CADRMS involved four regional districts and over 70 fire/rescue agencies.

Interviewees

Three individuals were interviewed from the RDFFG; two RD employees (the Manager of Public Safety and an IT/Communications Analyst), and a fire chief from one of the RD's municipal fire departments. The two RD employees have been working for the RD for 15 and 23 years respectively. Both have been involved in the development of the pilot programs in the RD, although one has only been specifically involved in the development of the CADRM System. The fire chief was a useful source of information largely regarding the pilot project involving the regional training centre.

Community and Fire Landscape

The RDFFG has four member municipalities, seven electoral areas, and is the largest, geographically, of all the six regional districts studied in this review. The RD has 13 fire departments (one of which is a paid department), located at Bear lake, Beverly, Buckhorn, Ferndale/Tabor, Hixon, McBride, Ness Lake, Pilot Mountain, Pineview, Red Rock/Stoner, Salmon Valley, Shell-Glen and Valemount. Management committees established by the RD oversee the day-to-day activities of most volunteer fire departments.

The RD also has a Fire Services Coordinator who is responsible for the following duties: acting as a liaison between the RD and the volunteer fire departments, coordinating bulk purchases, setting up training courses, conducting training sessions in conjunction with local training officers, developing and implementing operating guidelines, and acting as a liaison between its fire departments and the JIBC.

The RDFFG is responsible for fire/rescue call taking and dispatch for the RDFFG, as well as for the Cariboo Regional District and a portion of the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN). The dispatch service is contracted out to the City of Prince George, who also employs the fire dispatchers. The service is centralized at the Fire Operations and Communications centre (FOCC) which is located at #1 Fire Hall in Prince George.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Regional District of Fraser Fort George, *Innovations in Fire Services Pilot Program* (March, 2006).

Community and Fire Service Characteristics Suitable for Regional Fire Support Services

The RDFFG is suited to provide regional fire support services, particularly a regional training centre and a regional CADRMS because:

- it is “well spread out with huge areas of land and a low tax base, so [it] needs to look for partnering solutions”
- in terms of multi-jurisdictional service delivery, the RD is bordered by five other regional districts (as outlined in Appendix 7), and is, therefore, accessible to and by a wide geographic area
- there is a lack of an adequate training facility in central/northern BC

Interviewees also noted that because of its geography and its size, “region-wide initiatives that work in smaller compact regional districts would not work” in the RDFFG.

Pre-Innovations Program Environment - Fire Service Issues

Prior to the Innovations Program, the RDFFG was dealing with a number of fire service issues. In regards to training, the RD did not have easy access to an accredited training facility. For example, to train firefighters in a live burn centre, the RDFFG had to send its firefighters to a facility up in Fort St. James. This was both costly (due to travel and accommodation expenses) and inconvenient for the majority of volunteer firefighters. In addition, the RDFFG did not have any type of a customized training program to meet the needs of its rural fire departments. It also had to rely on accredited trainers/educators to come to the region, which meant that “local training [was] then dependent on the schedule of others and [was] not always convenient for the multitude of potential participants”.⁸⁸ Finally, in relation to the JIBC, as one interviewee put it, “they are difficult to deal with...their training doesn’t meet the needs of volunteer [firefighters]”.

In the area of dispatch and records management, the RDFFG’s fire and emergency service faced a number of issues, including a lack of support, coordination and access to information. Interviewees cited the following relation to these issues:

- “historically there has been no communication and support on the ground stuff”
- “52 agencies are dispatched out of the Fire Operations Communications Center, so communication is critical. But beyond dispatch, we lacked a lot...in terms of reporting and all of the other sorts of things that fire departments communicate about...there was no standardization as to how [fire departments] were doing their communications”
- “right now, for example, if a 911 call comes in from Terrace, it goes into the [Fire Operations Communications] Centre in Prince George...the operator that picks up that call has no idea, other than information on a paper copy, of who is available where...there is no access to information”
- “we could not manage integration with other agencies such as forestry...we need information from them, we need our own information, and we need it quickly, so tools are required. We have to integrate with other agencies with this large of a geographic scale...without the CADRMS, it would not be possible”

⁸⁸ Regional District of Fraser Fort George, *Pilot Project Submission*, (December 13, 2004), 1.

- “...coordinating information in the fire services and then from fire services with the province, and then to get information from police and ambulance...there is no link between all three of these agencies right now...there needs to be a standard protocol as to how information is handled and managed”

Impetus for Change and Impetus for Participating in Innovations Program

The RDFFG’s impetus for wanting to develop a regional training centre and a multi-jurisdictional CADRMS, and, as a result, its impetus for wanting to participate in the Innovations Program was due to the following reasons as cited by interviewees:

- “we needed the funds to kick-start the [training centre] project, to prove its feasibility. We collect taxes in the regional district for specific purposes so we could not use taxes to determine the feasibility [of the training centre]. We do have funds available to study the feasibility of new services, but not new projects...[the Innovations Program] provided us with the funding and a good opportunity to move the project along
- “there is certainly a need for the fire training [centre]...there is no really no training facility” in this part of the province “and no live burn facility and “that was a priority for people”
- “the board’s vision is to be the 911 service provider for the North, so all of these initiatives are working towards that goal”
- “as we expand and as we cover more and more areas, it is impossible for an operator to know everything...once Kitimat-Stikine Regional District comes on board, we will have an area of about 225,000km² to dispatch...without CADRMS we could not dispatch an area that large”

Strategies for Dealing with Fire Service Issues

Training Centre - the RDFFG undertook a feasibility study to build a regional fire training facility through the following phases: a needs assessment, analysis of facility requirements, analysis of facility costs based on the needs assessment, and operational delivery of the training:

- Originally the idea of a training centre was initiated in the RDFFG by the Prince George airport (“the Prince George airport approached the regional district to look at feasibility of a regional fire training facility. The Prince George airport had training needs and with 120 firefighters in Prince George, the idea was that even though there was training around other areas, it cost firefighters time and travel expenses to receive that training. The [RD] Board approved looking into the concept of a regional wide training facility”)
- the Innovations Program funding “was used to hire consultants” for the feasibility study. Feedback was collected from volunteer firefighters and others, and “through the process it was found that to meet the needs of industry, the airport, volunteer firefighters and the first nations, it would cost just under \$6 million to build and operate it. There were also a lot of environmental considerations -- chemical and water filtration the availability of water sources, etc.-- and all of that was going to cost money”
- The feasibility study ultimately determined that “the revenue that we anticipated generating, did not cover the debt costs of the facility, which would mean we would

have to go to referendum and ask the public... a decision was made not to build [the training facility]”

CADRMS

- the RDRFG’s multi-jurisdictional communications system involves two components, a Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system and a Records Management (RMS) system. The CAD system can manage multiple emergency calls from a number of regional districts from a consolidated centre, and a RMS, can organize, compile, track and pull-up a multitude of including, for example, information regarding fire incidents, fire investigation, and building inspections. The basic idea came from “the concept that a regional districts records management could also then support a regional dispatch centre”
- “one objective of the CADRM project is to use modern information management systems to ensure that local needs for service are being met in a consistent manner. This is supported by the ability of the CADRM to store all of the unique pieces of information particular to a jurisdiction or agency and to instantly retrieve them when required”
- the CADRMS involves a number of regional districts, including the RDRFG, the Cariboo Regional District (“once we took on the Cariboo RD we needed to do something... we took them on because we have the infrastructure to provide the service, and because we could provide the service a lot cheaper than if they were to do it on their own”), the Kitimat-Stikine RD and a portion of the Bulkley-Nechako RD
- originally the idea for the communications system came out of “the 911 standing committee - a committee made up of elected officials (regional directors) who participate in the service, including North Cariboo. The committee made a recommendation to the RDRFG’s board to proceed with the concept, and once funding that was required was received, the concept went back to council who approved it”
- the RDRFG’s project is quite large in scope and involves a lot of work; the RDRFG has developed a committee, with representatives from the City of Prince George, the RD’s IT department, technical departments of municipalities, and a project manager from the Cariboo RD, to help coordinate the project
- The RDRFG has had to “collect and verify a lot of data... the data all exists on paper somewhere” and put it into the system
- the RDRFG has already “acquired the software and gone through vendor training, and configuring the software”. Eventually, “everybody will be linked through the internet and each firefighter from each fire department will receive training on how to log on and use the system”

Challenges Face During Development and Implementation

The RDRFG’s feasibility study concluded that the training centre should not be built. Interviewees cited the following in relation to this:

- “the big issue was the revenue we were going to need to generate and manage it... \$400k needed to be raised to build and run it... it didn’t economically make sense. We did not get the support from industry that we thought we were going to get... industry wouldn’t make any commitment saying that they would use the facility for this much or that much”

- “there was lots of interest from the community, they thought it was a good idea, but no one wanted to be the person to commit...it wasn't the idea, it was ‘how are we going to pay for it?’”
- “to market it, you would need a good, full-time, person because if you don't bring in the people, then the taxpayers have to foot the bill”
- “if we we're going to consider it again, we would need to look for another piece of land because there was land available at the time, but that land is now gone [it was the airport's land and the airport has since expanded and is now using that land]”.

In terms of the CADRMS, the RDFFG has and continues to experience a number of challenges, including resource constraints and technological barriers and hurdles.

Interviewees cited the following in relation to these challenges:

- “the amount of resources that are being pulled out of the regional district are definitely more than what we had anticipated, both in terms of financial and human resources...”
- “broadband and high-speed internet is a technological challenge to delivering this service because there isn't internet communication in rural areas...it is difficult with remote and dial up access”
- “we are bringing in a very sophisticated piece of software that requires technical support, heavy user-training and ongoing training”
 - “operating with 24-hour support is different than how we operate in the regional district (i.e. 8am to 4pm)...the idea of a 24-hour operation is another business practice we have to adopt”
 - “dispatchers will need to learn a brand new system and it is going to take time...each dispatcher will be working a 6-monitor system [whereas the current system involves 2 to 3 monitors at the most]”
 - “it will be hard to train the people in rural fire departments...everyone will have to use a computer and some in the Cariboo [Regional District] don't even have a computer”.

Overcoming the Development/Implementation Challenges

To help overcome some its development/implementation challenges, particularly in relation to the CADRMS project, the RDFFG is doing a number of things, including the following as cited by interviewees:

- “we have established different project groups for different pieces (such as for software, development, and implementation) because the project is so big that it needs to be split”
- “the City of Prince George is constructing a training centre for ongoing fire dispatch and records management training”
- in relation to individuals/fire departments that do not have access to a computer, they “just wont be able to take advantage of computer-aid...they won't have the ability to manage data after the call and maintain records management, but we will still be able get info from them on an ongoing basis to dispatch them”
- in relation to off-hours technical support, “we're negotiating prices on that and we will be contracting it out”
- in relation to general technological barriers, “we've chosen technology that is the best in the world over dial-up and there were huge costs in doing that, but considering the nature of the communications will be doing, we had to do it”.

In regards to the training centre, when asked whether the training centre could have been scaled back to reduce its cost, the response was that “we would have had to scale it back a lot, to a bare minimum” and that would not have fully served the RD’s needs.

Benefits/Drawbacks of the Regional Fire Support Services and the Innovations Program

All of the interviewees view the regional CADRMS as beneficial. Interviewees also believed that the training centre, had it not been too expensive to undertake, would have been a positive endeavour. Interviewees cited the following specific benefits in relation to both of these initiatives:

- “we will now have ability to dispatch more accurately and more quickly...this is going to increase public safety”
- “it is going to make it easier to manage, coordinate and communicate with other agencies, especially with this large of a geographic area”
- the CADRMS enables the local needs of the fire service to be met in a consistent manner, because the system “can store all of the unique pieces of information particular to a jurisdiction or agency and instantly retrieve them when required”⁸⁹
- “why do something in five communities when you can do it at the regional level...”
- “there are definitely benefits for all fire departments in having a regional training centre for all departments...it was worthwhile to look at because it would have been a huge benefit to everyone...everyone in the surrounding area would have had access to it. Just by having training available is a cost benefit to us...two days of travel per person at a minimum is the cost saving from having a regional training center”
- “there’s not necessarily a training gap [without the training centre], but it would have made sense to have something closer to choose because geographically, the majority of the population is within the vicinity of Prince George”

One interviewee also cited the following as a drawback of the Innovations Program:

- “the Innovations Program is trying to address the needs of a very small percentage of activities...you’re spending money on regional districts, but municipal departments do most of the work...from our perspective, things are mandated and that is what we want to see the focus on...”

Keys to Making RDFFG’s Regional Service Delivery Initiative Successful

Interviewees believed that undertaking a feasibility study for the training centre and developing a CADRMS have both been successful endeavours to date. Interviewees attribute the success of these two initiatives to political support, appetite and willingness, and an experienced consultant. Interviewees cited the following relation to these key success factors:

- political support: the RDFFG board “is pretty proactive...it is one of the ones in the province that has been identified that has a cohesive board...other regional districts that do not have such a board have a lot harder time getting the approval of regional services”. The RD board supported the project because it enhanced public safety (“the

⁸⁹ Ibid., 5.

type of project determines the level of support including political support...if public safety is out there then there is more support”)

- appetite and willingness: “there was an appetite for the project already...it’s 2006, some sort of a records management system is needed in this day and age...”
- experienced consultant for the CARDMS: “ the primary key was to bring in experience that we did not have at the regional district level. We brought in a consultant with ‘E-Comm’ background. He helped us develop a project plan to make sure we weren’t overlooking anything. The consultant assisted in making recommendations because we knew the type of system we wanted but we didn’t know which vendor. He identified what was critical and what was just nice to have. It would not have been successful without the consultant”.

Opportunities for Further Regional Fire Support Services

Interviewees cited the following five areas as ones that hold potential for delivery at a regional level in the RDFFG:

- *Regional emergency planning*: the RDFFG is interested in a region-wide emergency response and recovery plan. Currently, “municipalities have their own plans and the regional district has its own...we would like to see one emergency plan and draw on resources from the City of Prince George to help out other struggling areas”. The RDFFG recognizes that it has “five plans within one regional area- it’s a duplication of resources. We have infrastructure for five people, training for five people, and five different people updating five different plans. Some smaller communities are saying that they just don’t have the manpower to do them”. The RDFFG believes that it needs “a coordinated approach because there are some real opportunities [to be realized] by partnering up and by drawing on everyone that is already trained”
- *Region-wide mutual-aid*: the RDFFG’s “board has considered the idea” of having mutual-aid across the entire RD. “Mutual aid agreements are typically neighbouring, and we already have those, but let’s not limit it to the people right next to each other...why not be able to bring in someone from another part of the RD and, say for instance, send up their spare equipment. We need to think about having similar services go beyond their boundaries to assist others...we have heard from fire agencies that they want something like this”. The RDFFG understands that such a scheme could be challenging to develop, so it “may need to take a feasibility approach”
- *Equipment standardization* - standardizing equipment is an area that the RDFFG feels needs more attention: “equipment and upgrades are hard to do at the regional level because everyone has specific likes and dislikes (but not necessarily needs) depending on who the fire chief is. It would be a good idea to set a standard for tendering. Standardization is cost effective, and while it makes sense, it is a political issue too”
- *Regional fire prevention manager* - the RDFFG thinks it may have anywhere “from 36 to 50 of the of 1200 LAFCs just in the RDFFG and maybe 14 or 16 in the City of Prince George alone...there are too many, but the reason we have so many is because of the training that they get, so that they get an idea of reporting, investigation and inspections ...we don’t do it because we need LAFCs, we do it for the training”. While the RDFFG is interested in some sort of a region-wide investigation scheme, the RD “has made the offer to have a handful of people within the RD who could be trained because if you’re going to be an investigator you have to be trained and if there

were a limited number then they could be better trained, but funding is an issue”. Inspections is another area of concern for the RD: “some want to do inspections but the regional district tells them they can’t...someone did an inspection on a public facility and they weren’t trained to do it and so it raises a liability issue”.

- *Training Facility*: the RDIFFG continues to recognize the need for a training facility within its regional district (“there is still a need for some type of a training facility but should it be a local government responsibility to build one?”). For now, “the RDIFFG will continue to send its firefighters to the live burn facility in Fort St. James...the City of Quesnel may be building a live burn facility, but their facility wouldn’t be as big of a project and it wouldn’t have as much as what we’re looking at”.

Transferability and Advice to Other Regional Districts

The RDIFFG’s feasibility study for the development of a regional fire training centre is a useful and transferable tool for other regional districts that may be considering a similar facility, because the Business Case that was developed as part of the feasibility study outlines relevant infrastructure and operating costs.

The RDIFFG’s CADRM System is expected to be “fully scaleable” so that any other regional district will be able to join onto the system once it is underway. The remainder of the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District is likely going to be a part of the service, and Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine is expected to join in 2007. Further, both the RDs of Peace River and the Northern Rockies have shown interest in participating as well. There is also potential for further opportunity in the Alaskan Panhandle. According to one interviewee, “all communication flows through Telus because they provide it all up Alaskan panhandle so we could use them [to expand there]”.

When asked to provide advice to other regional districts who may be considering a regional training centre interviewees suggested that local governments “try to get capital funds and commitment from industry [so that] taxpayers are not burdened”. In regards to a CADRMS, interviewees highly recommended that regional district “hire someone who has experience with the deliverable”.

Overall/Interesting Perceptions, Thoughts and Experiences

Overall, the RDIFFG is pleased with the direction that its CADRMS initiative is heading. It is also pleased that it undertook the feasibility study to determine that the training centre was not economically feasible. Some general and interesting thoughts from interviewees were:

- “if the funding is [available for a regional training centre and other regional fire support services] then no one is fighting over who is going to be responsible”
- “probably the only way to initiate [regional] ideas here, even if a staff has a great idea, is to prove that it is feasible”
- “I think you can’t look at everything being region-wide because it sometimes just doesn’t make sense, but having region-wide services where you have your municipalities also contributing to what their thoughts are on it and what the needs of their communities are, is an excellent opportunity to draw the regional district together as a whole”.

Case Study #6 - Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO)

Pilot Projects - Background

The RDNO undertook the development of two pilot projects under the Innovations Program. The first project aimed to supply fire prevention education, fire response, and fire investigation services to parts of its electoral areas. The objective of the project was to “focus on providing a service to the people in the unprotected areas to increase awareness and understanding from a structural and wildfire interface perspective”.⁹⁰ The program used a voluntary facility review and compliance approach, rather than an inspection and enforcement regime. The second project involved the development of a regional ammonia/chlorine emergency response program. The program was intended to enhance the safety of the public, workers, and public facility owners while ensuring that they were in compliance with requirements under “Work Safe” and the *Environmental Management Act*.

Interviewees

Two individuals were interviewed from the RDNO, the fire prevention officer (responsible for the program related fire services in unprotected areas) and the protective services officer (responsible for the ammonia/chlorine response program). Both individuals have extensive experience working with the fire service and both have been involved in the development of their regional programs since the beginning of the program.

Community and Fire Landscape

The RDNO is a geographically compact area that consists of six municipalities and five electoral areas. The RDNO has nine fire departments (three of which are operated by the regional district), and a total of 260 firefighters.

The RDNO has a number of existing regional programs and services, such as the following: a centralized LAFC that supplies all fire department jurisdictions, except the City of Vernon, with fire investigation, fire prevention and fire inspection services; regional Jaws of Life; 911 dispatch service; Victim’s Assistance; a regional fire training centre; and regional emergency planning.

A total of 23 facilities currently use ammonia or chlorine in the RDNO, namely municipal water/sewage treatment facilities, parks, and recreations facilities (with pools and rinks that use either or both chemicals).

Community and Fire Service Characteristics Suitable for Regional Fire Support Services

The RDNO is ideally suited to provide regional fire support services because of its compact geography (“our geography is workable in that regard”) and because of its extensive experience with regional activities (such as its regional fire training facility and

⁹⁰ Regional District of North Okanagan letter (not dated).

program, central LAFC, and other collaborative activities in the areas of Jaws of Life, 911 dispatch and Victim's assistance).

Pre-Innovations Program Environment - Fire Service Issues

Prior to the Innovations Program, the RDNO's fire service faced a few issues.

The RDNO contained pockets of low density populated areas that were not supplied with any fire services, including fire protection. Approximately 400 buildings were not receiving any fire inspection service, and inspection services were being provided to only those areas that also received a fire suppression service. Fire investigation services in unprotected areas were "the responsibility of the RCMP and the Office of the Fire Commissioner, [but] due to lack of human resources, higher priorities and a lack of training, fire investigation was in the unprotected areas"⁹¹.

In terms of its ammonia/chlorine response program, the RDNO had no real program in place to deal with such chemicals. While "some [fire departments] were doing stuff, they weren't writing it down on paper because they didn't want to be held accountable". Emergency responders had little or no training in the area, even though many believed that they did ("we were just faking it - it was all smoke and mirrors...Vernon had some limited training but they were trained maybe 10 years ago....fire departments did not have any mandate...they weren't trained or told that that's what they were to do...they would arrive on the scene and not know what to do"). While there are requirements in place under the WCB and under Ministry of Environment's legislation for handling ammonia/chlorine, the RDNO's municipalities over the years thought they were exempt [from these requirements] because were left alone and because there was an assumption that fire departments knew what they were doing...".

Impetus for Change and Impetus for Participating in Innovations Program

The RDNO's main reason for developing its regional initiatives was to increase worker and public safety.

With regards to its regional fire education, investigation and response initiative, the need to provide such services to unprotected areas came about because of growth and demand in unprotected areas. One interviewee elaborated on this as follows: "the growth [in unprotected areas] increased demand...there was a concern that people were moving into areas while not being fully aware of whether they had fire protection. There was kind of a misconception as to where fire protection begun and where it ended...some areas that are growing in numbers have been concerned and wanting some kind of a fire protection service".

The RDNO decided to pursue voluntary compliance through educational awareness rather than the traditional inspection schemes, because "compliance through voluntary or self inspections is a lot higher, so are inspections by request". The RDNO decided that inspections in unprotected areas "on an advisory level" were more practical ("these were

⁹¹ Regional District of North Okanagan, *Innovations in Fire Services Pilot Program Proposal*, 2.

the types of requests we were getting so we figured we should allow [property owners] to access their own materials and do it themselves”).

In relation to its ammonia/chlorine response program, the impetus for developing the program arose out of the following:

- “ultimately, we were concerned about the safety of responders...WCB requirement says you have to protect your workers...”
- “facilities that were once owned by Vernon or Coldwater are now owned by the regional district and the regional district became the largest owner of risk...we own 17 of the 22 facilities...we realized we have to do something ourselves - we have that obligation...at one time we weren’t the biggest owner but now we are so we have that obligation--all these regional facilities are within these local communities and citizens were relying on the local community’s firefighters to handle it...”
- WCB enforcement: “we got written up as a regional district for one of our chlorine facilities...so it was a warning. We realized at that point that we didn’t have an adequate plan and we couldn’t reopen the facility until the problem was fixed...this was a heads up. ”
- “after our facility had been written up, we had started to realize just how many facilities we were responsible for and we realized we have to do something...contractors thought their response was to call 911 and the fire department will come but the fire department was not trained to do anything...”

The RDNO ultimately participated in the Innovations Program because “we were going to have to do something anyways...we were already heading that direction...we saw it as a real benefit to us because we identified the need and when the Innovations Program came up, we proposed our idea”.

Strategies for Dealing with Fire Service Issues

Fire Education, Fire Investigation and Fire Response in Unprotected Areas

- The RDNO is developing and updating its existing fire district model to a regional format to unprotected areas within the RD. This involves the following: increasing fire prevention education, providing a higher level of fire response and instituting fire investigations for unprotected areas
- The RDNO has “developed an emphasis on fire education and awareness...[it is] providing a service to the people in unprotected areas to increase awareness and understanding from a structural and wildfire interface perspective, rather than an inspections and enforcement regime...[which includes] a voluntary facility review and compliance program”. “The Electoral areas have agreed to establish an education/awareness service for all electoral areas on a voluntary compliance basis”. The RDNO took this approach because “they [property owners in unprotected areas] really don’t want to be regulated and so the only way we could do this was by voluntary compliance...those who are living out there in the first place are out here because they don’t want anymore rules”.
- The RDNO will be using *Firesmart* as a blueprint for its educational awareness material (“education awareness goes along with *Firesmart*...we will be using that as our basic document, especially with regard to wildland issues”)

Ammonia/Chlorine Response Program

- The RDNO's regional ammonia/chlorine response program "will train an emergency response team in the City of Vernon...significant cost savings will be realized by contracting with the City of Vernon to provide the response service region wide". The RDNO also plans to "train each fire department to an awareness level so when a leak happens they can go in and assess situation while Vernon comes out to help". The RDNO is able to do this because it is geographically compact
- The RDNO has modelled its response and training requirements for the program after extensive research: "the chlorine industry has generally recognized requirements for leaks and if there was an injury or a death, the legal proceedings would be based on what reasonably could be done...so we've modeled our function after that ...we're not going over the top".
- In developing its service, the RDNO consulted with the Chlorine Institute, the WCB and its chlorine supplier to determine costs and training requirements ("they were very supportive...they wanted to make sure we were doing it right because we weren't doing anything negative, like taking away jobs")
- The RDNO is also not pursuing a full Hazmat program because: "if we were to train up to Hazmat materials and technician level, it would be weeks of training and thousands of dollars, but you really only need to know these gases up to a certain level...which will only take about four hours or so to learn...that is where we differentiated...we were able to shrink the training down to a bite size chunk as opposed to making it overwhelming"
- The service costs are based on the number of facilities, and will be shared by the local tax base. If a facility wishes to withdraw from the service, it must give 6 years notice so that the RDNO can rebudget costs among the remaining facilities

Challenges Faced During Development and Implementation

The biggest challenge faced by the RDNO in the development of both of its regional fire support services has been a change in its political environment. Interviewees cited the following in relation to this challenge: "none of the projects have progressed because the political situation has changed...the person that was a key person is no longer with us. We're at the stage of implementing these projects, but we need to fund them, which means we have to pass bylaws but that hasn't been done ...". For example, "the educational awareness component was to be kicked off this spring and implemented but because we haven't been able to get the bylaw passed, it has come to a grinding halt".

Aside from political challenges, interviewees also cited a lack of resources as a challenge: "besides the political challenges, there are budgetary challenges which are causing some human resource restrictions...we have had to step down our contractor...we had also planned to hire other people to help with implementation, but because that has not gone forward".

In developing its regional fire protection service, the RDNO quickly realized that safety assessments were the path of least resistance, because traditional fire inspections was a very contentious issue for those in unprotected areas ("for us to go out and say we're now coming out to your house and we're doing an inspections, that was not going to work with these folks, especially with businesses").

The RDNO faced a number of challenges in developing its regional ammonia/chlorine response program. These challenges included the following:

resistance from municipalities

- “some don’t want to be part of the function, while others think that there are already too many regional functions. Other places, like Vernon, want to run the whole thing themselves and don’t want this to be a regional function. Vernon however, only has one facility, and if they were to take this on, they would be responding to all of the regional district’s facilities, not just their own”
- “Armstrong wants to contract directly with Vernon...you could do that, but the City of Vernon will not be allowed to provide that function because it is the regional district’s RDs equipment”
- “we’re getting all this infighting, its now personal between municipalities...and that’s partly why we haven’t implemented it yet...”
- “we’ve already got the regional district budget lines to pay for this service...its Lumby, Enderby and Armstrong that we’re waiting for...they don’t realize that its so much cheaper and they don’t have to worry about the costs”

resistance and other challenges from the political level

- “to start buying all this equipment and start training without knowing whether its approved won’t work”
- “some politicians are slowing things down, they’re asking the same questions now that we have already addressed six months ago...its frustrating. In fact, some of the problems that we’re having is that there will be meetings at the political level and the people who are giving info and discussing the issue don’t know all the nuts and bolts and so they can’t answer and that’s where it gets derailed”

resistance from individuals

- “some individuals who sit on boards who worked in water treatment facilities think that they know what is required...they think this is how it was done in the past, so they keep bringing that to the table...sometimes you have to take those people aside and talk to them separately because when they are in a group they’re trying to show authority. You have to identify these people early on and talk to them separately rather than dealing with them in a group”

Other

- “figuring out whose requirements to meet was a challenge...it took a while to figure out what we were required to do for training because a lot of people think you have to do everything...we decided to meet WCB’s requirements”
- “the terminology is causing some difficulty for the program, some are trying to refer to this as a Hazmat program which it’s not, it’s hazmat materials response, chlorine is a hazardous material. This program is specifically for dealing with the hazards that are in our local government facilities ...we’re not dealing with industry and some people want industry to help pay for it, but that’s not the case...we have an obligation to pay for our own and to expect industry to pay for it is beyond the original scope. If we do

provide a service to industry, we would want them to pay to offset costs and not to pay for it entirely”.

Overcoming the Development/Implementation Challenges

To overcome resistance and its other developmental challenges, the RDNO used a “soft-approach” in selling its regional fire support services. The RDNO also undertook extensive research and compiled information for potential participants.

Interviewees cited the following in relation to overcoming developmental challenges:

Fire Education, Fire Investigation and Fire Response in Unprotected Areas

- “we introduced [the safety assessments] as a service for [electoral areas], something that we could help them with if they liked. There were no consequences for electoral area residents, from an enforcement aspect. That was all part of the education awareness, we just supply information and do whatever we can for them. If they really need for us to come out there, we can, but otherwise they can assess their properties themselves”
- active communication to raise awareness: “we have introduced the idea at community meetings, such as in Cherryville, and in meetings with directors and so on. We kicked the idea around and it was received fairly well”

Ammonia/Chlorine Response Program

- “I tried hard to get good background information and information on the legislative requirements outlining what we were required to do...it was the legislation that drove the developmental process because it explained to participants, here is what we have to do and here is what we are not doing!”
- “I identified the players very on and understood their past expertise...you need to treat them with respect and get them on side...that is where you really have to do your research”
- “I worked with WCB and asked them about the requirements”
- “we used a “process checklist in developing the bylaw...it was upfront and clear about everything...it was transparent”

Benefits of the Regional Fire Support Services and the Innovations Program

Both of the RDNO’s fire support services will help enhance public and firefighter safety. Also, the RDNO’s ammonia/chlorine program has already “encouraged some municipalities to upgrade their facilities sooner to save money later”. This occurred because some municipalities realized that they would not have to be part of the ammonia program if their facilities were already up to a high safety standard. The ammonia/chlorine response program is also resulting cost savings (“for each municipality to address its training needs would cost them 30-40K, but do it regionally is going to cost only about 2,000 per facility because we can spread the costs out over each facility”).

With regards to the Innovations Program, the RDNO believes the program “was a catalyst for sure, because it gave us a solid rationale to go forward with something we had always talked about doing”. The Innovations Program “helped us got moving in the direction that we wanted to go, because it gave us the means to do it ...the money, really

helped...allowed us to allocate human resources”. Generally, the Innovations Program “provided us with good seed money to actually to commit resources earnestly in trying to come up with answers”.

The Innovations Program also enabled the RDNO to develop a program to meet its local needs. “At the beginning, a full hazmat program was considered...but once we looked at it down to the grassroots when the Innovations Program came around, we realized quickly we did not require such an extensive program”.

Generally, the RDNO believes there “are real benefits to regionalizing services for economic reasons...we do a lot of it in the fire service, such as for example in investigations, where it is better than each place having to do their own”.

Keys to Making RDNO’s Regional Service Delivery Initiatives Successful

The keys to making the RDNO’s fire support services successful include the following factors: commitment and leadership of individuals involved in the development of both programs; the RD’s prior experience with regional activities; and a thorough and replicable development process, using a detailed checklist, that was transparent and clear. More specifically, the RDNO has been successful in developing both of its programs because it undertook a non-threatening approach and communicated and presented accurate and relevant information to resistant individuals. Specific comments in relation to these success factors include the following:

- “biggest factor considered was personality...you have administrators, politicians, fire chiefs and the public works personnel involved, so what I did was I went through and met with every administrator and public works manager on their turf...I went and specifically discussed the issues. I met with them and talked about what their needs were, and the differences in what they thought their needs were and what they actually were. I brought them a package of what their responsibilities were and had them look at it after I left, but I provided them with three options before I gave them the information - 1. do it yourself and do it all, 2. we the regional district can do it for you, or 3. we can have a mixture- they liked having options. I asked them each what they thought, and what they wanted to do...and then I told them if you never want to participate, here’s what you have to do to be in compliance...”
- “I tried to be friendly and not ‘in your face’. The reaction I got from every place was “wow this is great! I sold it in a certain way but I packaged it in a way that made sense...I wasn’t intimidating them, I was reminding them of their obligations...it can get very charged when you don’t have the desire to cooperate”
- “being involved from the beginning was important...it was recognized that I was the right person, I didn’t build bureaucracy...that’s one of the things about regional districts is that municipalities think that regional districts are another level of governments and that prevents them from wanting to work with the regional district RD...so I tried to make it simple. You need to have somebody who is very knowledgeable about the topic, and you shouldn’t have so many people working on the project that it appears to be another bureaucratic funnel to waste money...the philosophy of dealing directly with them and talking to them worked out very well”

- “in this case the regional district was doing stuff for free and helping them out...so they wanted it; when your giving something to people for free, then they are more receptive to listen and they are more willing to try it”
- retaining jobs - “all our people still remain with their fire departments...”.

Opportunities for Further Regional Fire Support Services

The RDNO believes there is opportunity for other regional fire support services within its region, particularly in relation to a regional confined space rescue service and a regional fire department for all of its electoral areas. The RDNO also has the capability of expanding its current regional ammonia/chlorine response program (“we also have the option available to us, in our budget to establish and train a second or to add a second response team with a little less capability, to act as backups”), and the option of expanding into a full hazmat program if the need ever arises (“one day it could become a full Hazmat program... Vernon and Armstrong, for example, could do it and we could have two teams...we would use the same transparent and clear process as we used to develop the ammonia program”).

Transferability and Advice to Other Regional Districts

Both of the RDNO’s fire support services have a high degree of transferability to other regional districts. First, the development process (i.e. the checklist) used by the RDNO to develop its regional ammonia/chlorine response, is, according to the interviewees, highly transferable:

- “the checklist is absolutely useful elsewhere[regardless] of the type of function that a region is trying to develop. The [development] process was very transparent and clear...initially there were questions, and the checklist was one of the things that really helped...I believe that if we were to start any new regional function that this checklist would be the way to go”

Second, the RDNO’s approach to conducting safety assessments in its electoral areas is highly transferable to other regions, especially in regions that are facing resistance in conducting traditional fire inspections in unprotected areas. According to the RDNO, “voluntary compliance and a safety assessment approach is quite portable...in more spread out areas it would make more sense...but it really comes down to how it is all presented to those in rural areas”.

When asked to provide advice to other regional districts who may be considering similar regional fire support services as the RDNO, interviewees mentioned that they should consider the following:

- *use a non-threatening approach*: “your approach has to be from a non-threatening position, you want to avoid the ‘big brother’ scenario, otherwise you will face resistance”
- *undertake service reviews*: “you have to take an inventory of your resources and the actual problem itself to determine what kind of service area you have... you need to strategize to determine what will service your own area in the best way possible”
- *take into account individual personalities and do research*

- *geography*: “you need the geography to make it work...this probably would not work in larger regional districts, such as the Thompson-Nicola Regional District or in Prince George...our projects are geographically workable in that regard”

Overall/Interesting Perceptions, Thoughts and Experiences

Interviewees felt that the pilot projects have been a positive endeavour for the RDNO.

Interesting comments that were cited overall include the following:

- “I would encourage doing things regionally because it leads to economies of scale...we should be trying to, where possible, do things regionally without having to add another level of government”
- “municipalities are so overworked already...if you can take something off of their plate and move it up one level, while still providing the same service” then they will be more inclined to join in the service
- “when you do things regionally, you can take everyone’s point of view into account and come up with a hybrid that meets the needs of all the participants and allows them to get a new approach”.

Common Acronyms

<i>CSRD</i>	Columbia Shuswap Regional District	<i>RD</i>	Regional District
<i>CAD RMS</i>	Computer-Aided Dispatch & Records Management System	<i>RDCK</i>	Regional District of Central Kootenay
<i>JIBC</i>	Justice Institute of BC	<i>RDCO</i>	Regional District of Central Okanagan
<i>L AFC</i>	Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner	<i>RDEK</i>	Regional District of East- Kootenay
<i>MCS</i>	Ministry of Community Services	<i>RDFFG</i>	Regional District of Fraser- Fort George
<i>NFPA</i>	National Fire Protection Association	<i>RDNO</i>	Regional District of North Okanagan
<i>OFC</i>	Office of the Fire Commissioner		

Useful Definitions

Fire Inspections: all municipalities in BC are required to provide for a regular system of inspections of hotels and public buildings within their jurisdictions to ensure that buildings are safe for both the public and for firefighters. During an inspection, buildings are checked for the condition and maintenance of fire protection equipment such as fire extinguishers, fire alarms, emergency lighting and power systems as well as exiting, fire department access and the presence of fire hazards.

Improvement District: a special purpose local government incorporated by the Province, to provide only the specific services authorized. Most improvement districts provide just one service, usually water or fire protection, but they do not have land use planning or general regulation powers. They are governed by a board of trustees elected at an annual general meeting by land owners.

Logic Model: A graphic representation of a program that visually describes the linkages between program goals, activities, and expected outcomes.

Municipality: a general purpose local government incorporated by the Province after an area's citizens vote in favour of incorporation. A locally elected council governs the municipality. Municipalities have few mandatory service responsibilities, two of which are local roads and, for those with a population of more than 5,000, policing. Generally, a municipality provides all local services and under the *Local Government Act*, has the broad power to provide any service that council believes is necessary or desirable.

Mutual Aid: reciprocal assistance by departments or organizations, under a prearranged plan or contract, that each will assist the other when needed for emergency management, fire rescue, hazmat, emergency, or other disaster response services.

Regional Districts: are comprised of municipalities and electoral areas, each of which has representation on the regional board. Regional districts provide province-wide services and inter-municipal or sub-regional services, and act as the general local government for electoral areas. There are 27 regional districts in BC.

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