*Fiscal Facts by Wisconsin Policy Forum*

**Challenges facing Union Grove-Yorkville Fire Department are similar to many statewide**

The Union Grove-Yorkville Fire Department is an outlier among its peers in its continued exclusive use of part-time responders. And as call volumes continue to grow, any desire to improve its response times and service levels will likely require greater use of full-time staffing.

This and other conclusions come from a recent Wisconsin Policy Forum report commissioned by the Union Grove-Yorkville Fire Commission and the villages of Union Grove and Yorkville. The report looks at fire departments in peer communities to examine options for how emerging challenges might be addressed, though it does not make recommendations on how to do so.

Union Grove-Yorkville Fire Department (UGYFD) is staffed primarily by volunteer members who receive compensation only when called in to respond to a call or for time spent on training and education. It is now struggling to maintain services in the face of increasing call volumes and increasing difficulty in recruiting and retaining part-time volunteers.

Our experience working with fire departments in at least a dozen Wisconsin counties reveals that many smaller fire and emergency medical services (EMS) agencies in Wisconsin that maintain similar paid-on-call staffing models are experiencing challenges similar to those of Union Grove-Yorkville. Many of these departments are considering or have already moved toward combination or full-time staffing models.

This particularly appears to be the case when departments approach an average volume of three calls per day (which is currently the case for UGYFD), as relying on paid-on-call responders to field that type of volume can be difficult.

A key question is how quickly the move toward a career staffing model should occur and what is the proper balance between paid-on-call, full-time staff and paid-on-premises staff, who are paid on an hourly basis and scheduled to be physically located at a station, typically for 8-hour daytime shifts.

The answer to that question should first and foremost take into account whether elected officials and citizens wish to improve response times and enhance other elements of service quality. Inevitably, it will also come down to cost.

In addition, while UGYFD and other fire departments may have little choice but to adjust their staffing models, they may wish to consider a range of options for doing so. Those might include exploring a merger with similarly challenged neighboring departments as a means of reducing the number of full-time staff that are collectively needed and sharing costs.

*This information is provided to Wisconsin Newspaper Association members as a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at wispolicyforum.org.*