

HOW DO I FIND OUT WHICH FIRE DEPARTMENTS ARE ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS?

Phase 2 – Organizing your firefighter candidate research binder into chapters

By Steve Prziborowski

Conducting research relating to when a fire department will be accepting applications is a critical element in relation to getting a job as a firefighter. Don't expect a fire department to call you when it is time to accept applications for the position of firefighter! You have to be prepared for that application filing period to insure success. One way to be prepared is to do develop your firefighter candidate research binder and start obtaining valuable information that can make a positive difference in your pursuit of becoming a firefighter.

In the last article, I discussed Phase 1: Developing your firefighter candidate research binder. This is critical because you want to have testing information at your fingertips and not have to wait for others to tell you which fire department is accepting applications. You should still be paying for a service to notify you of firefighter job openings as a back-up plan; but this research binder will put you in charge of your own destiny!

IS THIS A WASTE OF MY TIME DOING THIS?

First of all, it is not a waste of time. Think back to the need to be proactive. Do you want to be in charge of your own destiny, or do you want someone else to be? I would rather have myself be in charge. That way, I have no one to blame but myself. Also, think of it as a way to educate your self in your local and regional geography. Testing to become a firefighter took me to places I probably never would have ventured to otherwise, and it really educated me as to what cities and counties are within the State of California. Remember, knowledge is power. You never know when that information might be useful in the future. By building this data base now, it will help narrow your focus in the future, thus allowing you to save time and also concentrate on other areas.

The best way to be proactive is to do your own research. In the last article, I showed you how to start your research by getting a binder, and blank sheets of paper. I had you start by drawing a 50 mile radius around your residence, and then 100, 150, and 200 mile radius markings around your residence. I then had you list out county-by-county, each city that was within that county, within the 50 mile radius closest to your house.

Now we will continue developing your testing data base to assist you in finding out when a fire department will be accepting applications.

You will end up with a binder having 3 Chapters as follows;

- Chapter 1 – Fire Departments: County-by-county
- Chapter 2 – Fire Departments: City-by-city
- Chapter 3 – Action plan / to-do list

II. PHASE 2 (Organizing your firefighter candidate research binder into chapters)

A. CHAPTER 1: Fire Departments County-by-County.

Label your first section Chapter 1. This chapter will contain information on the cities within each county, and who provides the fire protection services. We now need to find out which Fire Departments are providing service within each county. How do we do this? We start by going to the local library. Every public library I have been to has a section of phone books, from the local area, throughout the state, and nationwide. Find a comfortable table and get the phone books from the first county you are going to research.

Let’s say your first county is Santa Clara County. In the front of most phone books are the blue pages, which are the government pages. Each city and county has listings in the blue sections, and is listed alphabetically. Here is where you will need to look, city by city, for the words fire department. If there is a fire department in that city, you will usually find the business phone number, in addition to the address of their headquarters.

For example, the City of Campbell is covered by the Santa Clara County Fire Department. The address and business phone numbers are listed there. Now on your sheet of paper that you have started by listing the name of the county and the cities within that county, to the right of the City of Campbell, write Santa Clara County Fire Department in the space under Fire Dept. In the blue pages, if you continue to the City of Cupertino, you will see they are also protected by the Santa Clara County Fire Department, so put the same information in the space provided. Gilroy is your next city, and they have their own fire department, so write Gilroy Fire Department in the space to the right. Let’s assume we’ve gone through the phone book for the whole county, and that here is the information we have discovered:

In theory, you should have anywhere from one county up to maybe 15 counties (or more, depending on how ambitious or motivated you are) listed in alphabetical order in Chapter 1.

<u>COUNTY:</u>	Santa Clara	<u>FIRE DEPT:</u>
<u>CITY:</u>	Campbell	Santa Clara County Fire Department
	Cupertino	Santa Clara County Fire Department
	Gilroy	Gilroy Fire Department
	Los Altos	Santa Clara County Fire Department

Los Altos Hills	Santa Clara County Fire Department
Los Gatos	Santa Clara County Fire Department
Milpitas	Milpitas Fire Department
Monte Sereno	Santa Clara County Fire Department
Morgan Hill	Santa Clara County Fire Department
Mountain View	Mountain View Fire Department
Palo Alto	Palo Alto Fire Department
San Jose	San Jose Fire Department
San Martin	South Santa Clara County F.P.D. / CDF
Santa Clara	Santa Clara Fire Department
Saratoga	Saratoga Fire District / Santa Clara Co. Fire
Sunnyvale	Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety

B. CHAPTER 2: Fire Departments City-by-City

Label the second chapter of your binder, Chapter 2. Now that we have found out which fire departments are in the county, we can now narrow our research down. Based on the Santa Clara County example above, I will start with the Santa Clara County Fire Department. Why? Because if you notice, they provide service to the cities/towns of Campbell, Cupertino, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, Morgan Hill, and portions of Saratoga. I can just write Santa Clara County Fire Department on the top of the page and list the cities that they provide services to. That way, I don't have to phone each of those cities individually, I can just contact the Santa Clara County Fire Department. Now you can write out individual pages for each city or fire department, but I would suggest creating a template (or using the sample I have provided), making copies of it to put into chapter 2.

NOTE: The testing process for firefighters for most county fire departments is usually done through the County Personnel / Human Resource offices, just like with municipal fire departments. However, in the case of Santa Clara County, the Fire Department Personnel Office handles the testing process.

Because you will be listing fire departments in various counties, I would suggest separating this Chapter with dividers of the Counties that you are concentrating on, in alphabetical order. For example, since I live in San Jose, I would initially concentrate on the following counties: Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Mateo, San Francisco, San Benito, Alameda, Contra Costa, San Joaquin, and probably Marin. That is a lot of different counties. Putting them in alphabetical order with a divider, starting with Alameda, would make my life easier. Then within each county, I would list the fire departments in alphabetical order.

Here is a sample form I suggest that you use. I feel it covers a majority of the information that a candidate would need to be one of the best prepared candidates.

SAMPLE FIRE DEPARTMENT INFORMATION TEMPLATE

Fire Department Name: _____
Headquarters Address: _____
F.D. Website Address: _____
Business Phone Number: _____ Year established: _____
Cities / Communities served: _____
Population Served: _____ Square Miles: _____ I.S.O. Rating: _____
Level of EMS provided: _____ ALS Engines? _____ ALS Trucks? _____
Ambulance Transport provided by: _____
Dispatching services provided by: _____
Total Calls last year: _____ EMS: _____ Fire: _____ Other: _____
I.A.F.F. Union Local #: _____ Name of Union President: _____
F.D. Budget: _____

APPARATUS

of Stations: _____ # of Engine Companies: _____ # of Truck Companies: _____
of Ambulances: _____ # of Rescue Companies: _____ # of Battalions: _____
of Haz Mat units: _____ Other specialized equipment: _____
Apparatus Manufacturers Used: _____

STAFFING (Personnel on each type of apparatus)

Engines: _____ Trucks: _____ Rescues: _____ Other: _____
Minimum # of personnel on duty each shift: _____

PERSONNEL

Total # of personnel: _____ # of uniformed: _____ # of civilian: _____
Fire Chief: _____
Deputy Chiefs: #: _____ Names / Divisions overseen:

Assistant Chiefs: #: _____ Names / Divisions overseen:

Division Chiefs: #: _____ Names / Divisions overseen:

Battalion Chiefs: #: _____ Suppression: _____
 Administrative: _____
 # of Captains: _____ # of Lieutenants: _____ # of Engineers: _____ # of Firefighters: _____
 Volunteer or Reserve Firefighter program? _____ # of Vol / Res FF's: _____
 Requirements: _____
 Their role: _____
 # of Fire Prevention Bureau personnel: _____ Fire Prevention positions: _____
 Fire Investigation duties handled by: _____
 Public Education duties handled by: _____

WAGE & BENEFIT INFORMATION

Type of Retirement System: _____ Retirement Formula: _____
 Retirement contribution: Paid by Department? _____ Paid by employee? _____
 Medical Benefits: Paid by Department? _____ Paid by employee? _____
 Entry Salary: _____ Top step Firefighter Salary: _____ Years to top step: _____
 EMT incentive? _____ Paramedic incentive? _____ Uniform Allowance? _____
 Other specialty pay: _____
 Type of shift worked: _____
 Vacation days: _____

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION:

Personnel / Human Resource Office:
 Address: _____ Phone: _____
 _____ Job Line: _____
 City / County web site: _____
 Utilize Cooperative Personnel Services (CPS) or Firehire for testing? _____
 Testing process consists of (check all that apply): written test: _____ oral interview: _____
 Physical ability test: _____ Background investigation: _____ Chief's interview: _____
 Medical Examination: _____ Polygraph: _____ Psychological Examination: _____
 Other: _____
 Minimum Requirements for firefighters: _____
 Last tested: _____ # hired off last list: _____ Next test? _____
 Present vacancies: _____ Projected future vacancies: _____
 Length of Academy: _____ Length of probation: _____

MISCELLENEOUS

Major Target Hazards: _____
 Type of area served by the fire department: _____

Future stations planned? _____
Future projects planned by the department? _____

First alarm assignment: _____
Second alarm assignment: _____
Third alarm assignment: _____
Busiest Station: _____ Busiest Unit / # of calls last year: _____

KEY POINT:

I would suggest making multiple copies of this form, punching 3 holes in them, and placing the blank copies in Chapter 2 since these will be your worksheets when you contact fire departments and personnel departments.

Feel free to modify this template as you find necessary. You may even think of many other relevant items to include when doing your research.

NOTE: If you would like a copy of this in Microsoft Word, email me at sprziborowski@chabotcollege.edu and I will email you a copy.

In the next issue, I will discuss how to obtain specifically obtain the information that is expected to be placed into each of the blanks on your fire department information sheet. That article will cover *Phase 3: Obtaining the necessary information for your firefighter candidate research binder*.

I will also discuss the last chapter of your binder, Chapters 3. Chapter 3 will be your action plan/to-do list so you can plan ahead and make notes to yourself as part of your action plan.

Until then, keep plugging away – there is a badge out there just for you!