MOSSADAMS

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. BACKGROUND, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

The Santa Monica Fire Department (the Department) provides fire protection, emergency medical care, and life safety services to approximately 93,000 residents in the City of Santa Monica (the City). Fire Department administration supports department operations by performing a wide variety of activities, including setting the Department's direction, securing and managing grant funding, performing financial transactions, coordinating activities, leading system changes, and reporting.

For the purposes of this review, Fire Department Administration (Fire Administration) includes leadership, coordinators, analysts, and staff assistants. Recent workload increases, leadership turnover, and system changes prompted the Department to request a review of its administration to identify opportunities for improvement in its staffing, processes, and systems.

The purpose of review is to analyze and optimize the efficiency of Fire Administration, including:

1. Evaluate the structure, function, and roles of personnel in Fire Administration
2. Identify opportunities for improvement in service delivery, organization, operations, and process efficiency.

The study was conducted between September 2018 and March 2019, and was informed by a review of relevant documents and data as well as interviews with administrative staff in the Department and employees in other related City functions, such as Finance and Information Services. This was not a classification study; the purpose was to identify opportunities for improvement in administrative service delivery.

B. SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our observations and recommendations are summarized below, presented in four areas: organization and staffing, operational processes, financial processes, and information system processes.

	OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
	Organization and Staffing	
1	**Observation**	The Department's administrative employees operate in a siloed environment with limited teamwork, collaboration, and intradepartmental support.
	Recommendations	A. Restructure support staff to operate as an administrative team that provides financial support and operational support to the Department as a whole.
		B. Add a staff assistant within operational support to enhance support services provided to other leaders within the Department, such as the Fire Safety Coordinator, EMS Coordinator, and other chiefs.

		OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
2	Observation	Despite operational siloes, members of the Department's administrative team lack clearly defined roles and responsibilities to understand their scope of work and related authority.
	Recommendations	A. Define and prioritize administrative tasks to support departmental efficiency and effectiveness. B. Assign administrative employees primary and secondary responsibilities to enable employee ownership, accountability, cross-training, and optimal use of Department resources. C. Update job descriptions according to employees' functions and tasks and align performance evaluations and career development plans accordingly.
3	Observation	Administrative personnel have limited capacity to participate in training and development opportunities that would advance their careers and the Department's goals.
	Recommendations	A. Ensure employees receive appropriate training and guidance on assigned tasks. B. Encourage administrative personnel to participate in development opportunities that encourage efficiency and effectiveness, including evaluating their processes from the lens of other departments and attending management training.
4	Observation	The Department's current structure limits its ability to identify and develop potential successors for key administrative positions.
	Recommendations	A. Develop a strategy to address workforce planning for key positions to support operational continuity. B. Leverage the Santa Monica Institute (SMI) and external organizations to provide training on administrative functions and encourage achievement of relevant certifications.
		Operational Processes
5	Observation	Administrative staff report inconsistency and confusion regarding their priorities, as they are determined by individual managers.
	Recommendation	Develop an annual or biennial administrative work plan that details ongoing core services as well as anticipated projects to improve departmental effectiveness and efficiency.
6	Observation	Communications among Fire Administration staff are disjointed and impede optimal efficiency and effectiveness.
	Recommendations	A. Establish formal communication protocols that encourage productive communication through cascading messaging. B. Hold regular staff meetings for support staff and administrators that include progress reporting, administrative updates, and ongoing project management.

	OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
7	Observation	The Department would benefit from project management tools to manage competing priorities, delegate tasks, and ensure follow-up.
	Recommendation	Ensure administrative employees receive project management training and tools to support their work.
8	Observation	The fire inspection process is highly manual, requires redundant data entry into multiple systems, and could be standardized across building types.
	Recommendation	Standardize the inspection process and move forward with opportunities to increase mobile technology in the field to reduce duplicative data entry.
9	Observation	Policies differ and are applied inconsistently within divisions, groups within the Department, and the rest of the City.
	Recommendation	Ensure that policies across the Fire Administration are standardized, aligned with City policy, and applied consistently throughout the Department.
	Financial Processes	
10	Observation	Fire Prevention billing practices are highly manual and applied inconsistently across inspections of different building types.
	Recommendations	A. Continue efforts to standardize and automate Fire Prevention billing. B. Consider implementing inspection capabilities within the new Emergency Reporting system and outsourcing billing to a third party.
11	Observation	The Department has some internal controls weaknesses related to financial transactions.
	Recommendation	Develop formal policies and procedures to ensure appropriate internal controls are in place related to check handling, deposits, payments, and reconciliations.
	Information System Processes	
12	Observation	Many of the Department's software systems operate independently of one another, requiring redundant data entry and additional manual processes.
	Recommendation	Continue collaborating with the Information Services Department to improve system integration and streamline processes.
13	Observation	Because many processes are manual, the Department struggles with accurate data collection and lacks capacity to utilize data analytics in decision-making.
	Recommendation	Continue automating processes and create a data governance system to support data integrity and move the Department toward data driven decision-making.
14	Observation	The Department struggles with ongoing management of adopted systems, potentially leaving existing system capabilities untapped.
	Recommendation	As new systems are implemented, the Department should assess opportunities to improve its processes, staff accountability, communication, system ownership, and operational continuity.

II. BACKGROUND, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

A. BACKGROUND

The Santa Monica Fire Department (the Department) provides fire protection, emergency medical care, and life safety services to approximately 93,000 residents in the City of Santa Monica (the City) and an estimated 6 million annual visitors. In fiscal year (FY) 2017, the Department had 136 full-time equivalent employees (FTE), 105 of which were firefighters. For the purposes of this review, Fire Department Administration (Fire Administration) includes leadership, coordinators, analysts, and staff assistants. Fire Administration supports department operations by performing a wide variety of activities, including:

- Setting the Department's direction, priorities, and culture
- Securing and monitoring grant funding
- Conducting financial transactions, such as billing, procurement, and payments
- Coordinating activities such as plan checks and inspections
- Leading system and process changes
- Reporting to City leadership and external regulatory bodies

In recent years, the Department has experienced workload increases that ultimately impact administration. There have also been high levels of turnover in the Department's Chief and Deputy Chief positions. Additionally, the Department is currently undergoing significant technological updates designed to improve operational efficiency and effectiveness. In light of these situations, the Department requested a review of its administration to identify opportunities for improvement in its staffing, processes, and systems.

B. SCOPE OF WORK AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of review is to analyze and optimize the efficiency of Fire Administration, including:

1. Evaluate the structure, function, and roles of personnel in Fire Administration
2. Identify opportunities for improvement in service delivery, organization, operations, and process efficiency.

The study was conducted between September 2018 and March 2019 and consisted of three phases: 1) fact finding, 2) analysis, and 3) reporting. During the fact-finding phase, relevant documents and data were reviewed and interviews were conducted with administrative staff in the Department and employees in other related City functions, such as Finance and Information Services. The analysis phase focused on the identification of gaps between Department operations and best practices. A draft report was reviewed with the Department to confirm the practicality of recommendations. This was not a classification study; the purpose was to identify opportunities for improvement in administrative service delivery.

III. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the input gathered from interviews, document review, and comparisons to best practices, we prepared observations and recommendations which are presented in four areas: organization and staffing, operational processes, financial processes, and information system processes. The observations and recommendations for each area are detailed below.

## A. ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

Organization Structure

	Observation	The Department's administrative employees operate in a siloed environment with limited teamwork, collaboration, and intradepartmental support.
1	Recommendations	A. Restructure support staff to operate as an administrative team that provides support to the Department as a whole. B. Add a staff assistant to enhance support services provided to other leaders within the Department, such as the Fire Safety Coordinator, EMS Coordinator, and other chiefs.

Fire Administration staff are not being deployed as effectively as possible because the Department's administrative personnel operate in silos with minimal collaboration. This is partially attributable to turnover in the Deputy Chief of Operations position and the reporting structure of support staff within the Department. Most support staff have different managers and operate independently from one another, performing activities that align with their manager's scope of work and priorities. However, many administrative tasks span across divisions and roles within the Department's operations, resulting in confusion over who has responsibility and authority over certain tasks. This confusion is felt both by staff outside of Fire Administration who are seeking assistance with a specific task and staff within administration. Additionally, this structure prevents several employees in leadership from having any level of administrative support, such as data entry, scheduling, coordination, research, reporting, and analysis. Because these employees must perform clerical work, their time is not being utilized in the most cost-effective way. Finally, staff report that differences among employees regarding personnel expectations, such as working from home, notifying managers when someone is late, and communicating absences, contribute to additional tension. Overall, operating in silos hinders employee teamwork, negatively impacts morale, and may result in duplication of efforts.

Over the course of this study, the Department experienced turnover in two of its five support staff positons and developed a new structure aimed at addressing role clarity and increased efficiency. The following organization chart depicts the Department's newly designed administrative structure, with support staff indicated in green:

FIGURE 1. UPDATED ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE
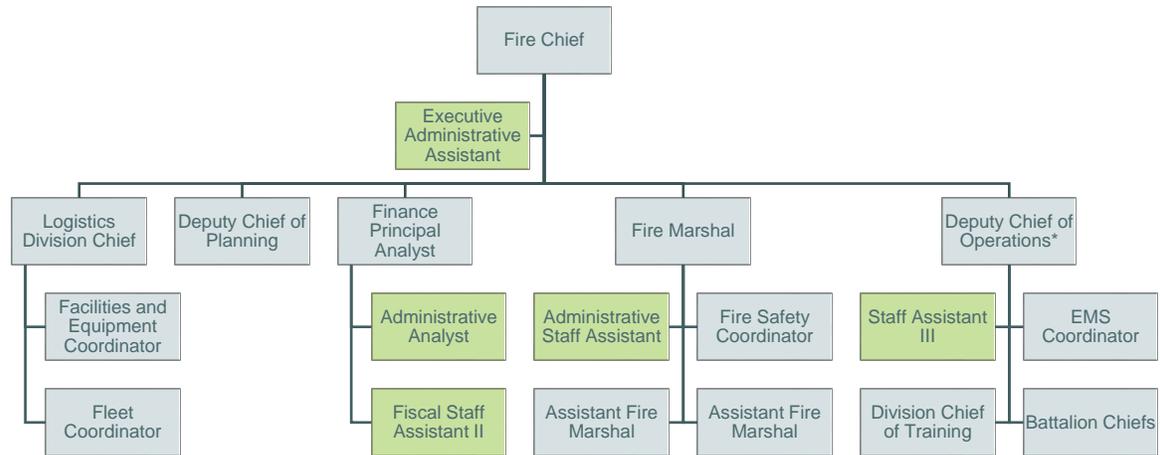
Deputy Chief of Operations is currently under-filled by a Battalion Chief.

The success of this structure is highly dependent on efficiency improvements, workflow changes, role clarity, and a shift in management philosophy as noted throughout this report. Isolation of the Fire Prevention Administrative Staff Assistant under the Fire Marshal presents an ongoing risk. Given this role's external customer service emphasis, consistent and timely responses to inquiries are of the utmost importance. This position currently operates at a 1.25 FTE capacity and the Department has not designated a backup or cross-trained other staff on these duties. This presents a risk to the Department in the event of absence or turnover. To be effective, cross-training among administrative support staff continues to be critical in order to ensure sustainability and consistency in key departmental functions.

In order to ensure continuity of operations and provide more effective intradepartmental support, collaboration, and customer service, we recommend the Department restructure its support staff to report centrally to an administrative lead and provide support to the Department as a whole. Under this model, support staff would fall into two categories: financial support and operational support. To be implemented successfully, the Finance Support and Operational Support teams should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Examples of activities and services provided by each category of support include:

Finance Support	Operational Support
• Accounts payable • Payroll • Procurement • Vendor management • Budgeting • Grants management • Reconciliations • Expense processing • P-card reconciliations • Billing and collections	• Scheduling and coordination • Project management • Customer service • Permit processing • Plan check processing • FSO assignment coordination • Data entry • Data analysis • Reporting • Research as requested • Process improvement

Employees should have responsibility over particular functions and perform that function for all divisions in the Department. Therefore, all chiefs and coordinators within the Department will be able to have a portion of their administrative needs delegated to support staff where appropriate and feasible. An organization chart reflecting this recommendation is included below.

FIGURE 2. RECOMMENDED ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE
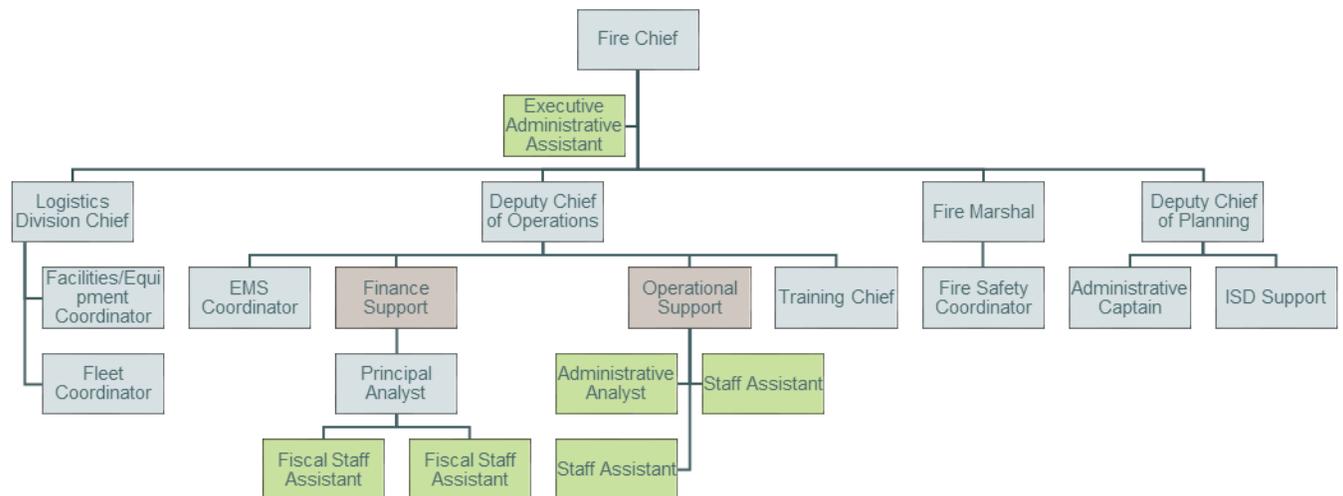
In collaboration with the appropriate chiefs, the administrative lead should be responsible for establishing consistent personnel expectations for all administrative support employees, an administrative work plan that defines priorities (Recommendation #5), assignment of primary and secondary duties (Recommendation #2), and accountability measures to promote teamwork and strong project management (Recommendation #7). At first, this role should focus on establishing and

enforcing clear roles and responsibilities for each member of the administrative team, including a shared responsibility for customer service among front office staff. Overall, reorganizing administrative support staff will help spread the Department's workload more evenly across staff, ensure all divisions have some level of administrative support, and help facilitate teamwork.

Roles and Responsibilities

2	**Observation**	Despite operational siloes, members of the Department's administrative team lack clearly defined roles and responsibilities to understand their scope of work and related authority.
	Recommendations	A. Define and prioritize administrative tasks to support departmental efficiency and effectiveness. B. Assign administrative employees primary and secondary responsibilities to enable employee ownership, accountability, cross-training, and optimal use of Department resources. C. Update job descriptions according to employees' functions and tasks and align performance evaluations and career development plans accordingly.

A culture of collaboration requires a clear, mutually understood sense of ownership and accountability. Department leadership and staff report that these traits are often lacking in initiatives and daily work due to fluctuating leadership, priorities, and expectations. The Department has undergone several reorganizations in the past year, which have contributed to changing roles in leadership and administration.

Several administrative personnel reported unclear, informal roles and responsibilities and related authority to complete tasks. For example, staff noted that activities are parsed out among administrative personnel based on availability rather than skills and expertise, which has resulted in multiple employees managing different parts of overlapping functions. There is confusion over each employee's role and level of authority throughout processes, including who should be involved at what time. Additionally, employees do not have back-up for their positions. Customer service relies primarily on one employee, who is also responsible for back-end office functions such as billing. When customers come to the office's front counter, only one employee is able to help them, resulting in frustrations with customers and front office staff. This results in delays, suboptimal customer service, and potential loss of institutional knowledge with employee turnover.

Unclear roles and parsing of duties typically results in poor morale because employees lack the feeling of accomplishment that accompanies a sense of ownership and authority over tasks. In addition, poorly defined responsibilities limit accountability because it is unclear who is responsible for completing a task and what corrective action would be taken if it was performed late or incorrectly, which could negatively impact the Department's operations and external funding. Furthermore, it can result in duplication of efforts among the support staff who respond to requests. For example, when an employee begins the procurement process for a piece of equipment, they may route the request through multiple channels, resulting in potential redundant work if multiple people were contacted as part of the initiation of this process.

To define and prioritize the Department's administrative tasks, the administrative lead should collaborate with other chiefs to list all potential tasks for support staff. In developing this list, the

administrative lead would focus on what processes would be more efficiently performed by support staff. For example, chiefs and coordinators typically conduct their own data entry, billing, reporting, and scheduling. Many of these activities are time consuming and prevent departmental leaders from operating at their highest possible level to benefit the Department and advance City initiatives. While the current levels of administrative support staff in the Department are not sufficient to eliminate leadership's clerical work, the utilization of an administrative support team would better address needs across the Department and centralize core support activities. Tasks should be prioritized based on their level of importance to the Department, with emphasis on promoting excellent external customer service.

Using this prioritized list, the administrative lead should assign duties according to each employee's functional scope of work, skills, and expertise. To promote ownership and accountability among administrative staff in the Department, the administrative lead should assign primary and secondary functions for each employee, as well as identify designated approvers, for each high and medium-priority task identified in the administrative task list. Primary responsibilities are the core tasks of each employee, with secondary responsibilities overlapping with other team members' primary duties. Employees should be trained on both their primary and secondary tasks to ensure consistency in operations when there are absences or vacancies. As similar efforts of assigning primary and secondary duties have been unsuccessfully attempted in the past, the Department should collaborate with employees throughout this process to increase buy-in and cooperation.

Going forward, the administrative lead should assign new tasks based on employee scope of work, workload, and career development plan. This process establishes a clear delegation of authority to specific employees to complete tasks and ensures that individuals have levels of authority commensurate to their responsibility within the Department, empowering them to perform these functions. Additionally, clear roles and responsibilities would enable the Department to utilize accountability mechanisms and ensure tasks are completed on time and correctly. Employees should feel a sense of ownership over their tasks and become subject matter experts in those areas.

Updated roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined in job descriptions and communication materials for other department personnel to ensure appropriate routing of requests. Additionally, employees should receive annual performance evaluations that align with their new scope of work. Performance evaluations are a critical component of clarifying roles and responsibilities because they provide management and staff the opportunity to reflect on areas of strength, potential issues, and areas for additional development. Evaluations should tie to employee growth and development plans that direct beneficial trainings and other leadership opportunities and align staff development with long-term departmental goals (Recommendation #3). In small organizations, career development often includes growth into new roles, responsibilities, and activities within the department rather than traditional promotions.

Administrative Employee Development and Training

3	**Observation**	Administrative personnel have limited capacity to participate in training and development opportunities that would advance their careers and the Department's goals.
	Recommendations	A. Ensure employees receive appropriate training and guidance on assigned tasks. B. Encourage administrative personnel to participate in development opportunities that encourage efficiency and effectiveness, including evaluating their processes from the lens of other departments and attending management training.

Currently, administrative personnel lack growth and development plans that would direct training and areas for further development within the Department. As a result of high workloads, staff have limited capacity to participate in training and development opportunities to enable process improvement, grow skills, and develop their careers. Some administrative personnel report feeling that there are minimal opportunities for growth in the Department. This can contribute to turnover, a sense of complacency, and inadequate employee performance management. All of these factors are felt particularly profoundly when workloads are elevated, which is the case in Fire Administration.

Some personnel also report feeling that they are not sufficiently trained or equipped with the correct information and tools to fulfill their duties. For example, tasks are sometimes given to staff without communication about its purpose, how it fits into the Department's operations, or training/guidance on how to correctly complete the activity. This practice does not prepare employees to be successful in their role or enable supervisors to hold employees accountable for tasks.

In addition to providing sufficient guidance and training on tasks, the Department should consider reviewing their administrative processes with other departments, such as the Police Department. Several employees have not assessed their processes to identify opportunities to increase efficiency in several years. By collaborating with other departments, support staff can understand alternative processes, potential benefits and drawbacks, and whether or not aspects of a process could be adapted to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department's operations. Accounts payable, billing, and travel expense processing are highly manual processes with potential bottlenecks that could benefit from an interdepartmental assessment. Although some employees have made significant efforts to improve their processes, efforts to conduct these assessments and enact changes have not been consistent throughout the Department. Instead, these efforts are largely the result of individual staff interests. These efforts should be applied consistently across the Department to encourage operational change that improves efficiency, effectiveness, interdepartmental communication, and customer service.

Additionally, employees with supervisory duties would benefit from management training to ensure employees receive appropriate guidance, communication, performance feedback, and authority to successfully fulfill their duties. Some staff noted that they encountered resistance from supervisors when suggesting potential process improvements. Supervisors should empower staff to make changes as appropriate and guide staff on what factors to consider when presenting potential changes, particularly given the evolution of the Department's technology and business needs. Depending on personnel needs, management training could focus on providing feedback, communication, teambuilding, conflict resolution, and employee empowerment and motivation.

Workforce Planning

4	Observation	The Department's current structure limits its ability to identify and develop potential successors for key administrative positions.
	Recommendations	A. Develop a strategy to address workforce planning for key positions to support operational continuity. B. Leverage the Santa Monica Institute (SMI) and external organizations to provide training on administrative functions and encourage achievement of relevant certifications.

The Department's organization structure has historically limited its ability to identify and train future administrative leaders. For example, the Deputy Chief of Operations oversees a number of functions, but the division lacks a middle manager position that would enable employee development and succession planning for this role. In addition, the Department has not yet clearly identified the required knowledge, skills, and abilities for key positions and developed a training program to support staff development in pursuing administration positions. At the time of report issuance, the Planning Chief was recently assigned to support staff development and ongoing succession planning.

The Department should create a strategy and timeline for developing succession plans for key positions, such as the Deputy Chief of Operations, the Principal Analyst, and the staff assistants. An effective workforce planning process should contain the following elements:

- A process to identify essential positions and their critical competencies
- A method for identifying and filling gaps in succession (i.e., strengthen internal capabilities and/or recruit from the outside)
- Procedures to identify, promote, and select high-potential staff, along with plans for individual career development
- Procedures to monitor individual development through coaching, mentoring, and performance management
- Active leadership involvement
- Integration with the Department's strategic plan
- Regular review of each essential position's plan to ensure its effectiveness

The Department has several options to support workforce planning and employee development among its administrative staff. The Department has the opportunity to leverage the SMI to pursue supervisory and other soft skill training. Additionally, several external organizations offer certification programs that the Department could incentivize participation in, such as the National Fire Academy's Managing Officer Program. This program provides information on foundational management and technical competencies, addresses issues of interpersonal and cultural sensitivity, professional ethics, and outcome-based performance. The Department should support staff participation in these training opportunities to ensure employees develop the appropriate knowledge and skills to fill administrative positions in the future. With the addition of another administrative employee, staff should have increased capacity to explore growth and development opportunities that benefit themselves and the Department.

B. OPERATIONAL PROCESSES

Administrative Work Plan

5	**Observation**	Administrative staff report inconsistency and confusion regarding their priorities, as they are determined by individual managers.
	Recommendations	Develop an annual or biennial administrative work plan that details ongoing core services, as well as anticipated projects, to improve departmental effectiveness and efficiency.

Support staff often receive inconsistent information about priorities as they are individually determined by each manager. This can result in unclear expectations and priorities, creating challenges in managing employee workloads and monitoring progress toward operational tasks. Employee morale can also be negatively impacted because employees operate with a day-to-day perspective, reactively responding to items, rather than seeing and understanding the long-term vision for their work and how it integrates with the Department. An annual or biennial work plan that defines priorities for the administrative team could support a long-term vision for their work, outline upcoming projects, and ensure consistent application of resources toward priority activities.

Developing a work plan presents an opportunity for administrative staff to work together and better understand their respective roles and skills. The plan should align with the Department's strategic plan, clarify leadership's expectations, and support transparent roles, responsibilities, and accountability for staff assigned to each task and project. Elements of a successful work plan include:

- Clear articulation of the administrative team's areas of focus and desired objectives
- Core services offered to intra- and interdepartmental staff, particularly those in leadership positions within the Department
- Key ongoing business activities, including dedicated resources
- Upcoming projects, including dedicated resources
- Strategic initiatives focused on internal improvement, including business process review and staff trainings

The work plan should be used as a management tool to support organizational focus, ensure individual accountability, and drive desired results. The Department should hold regular meetings to review and discuss the performance of core projects and processes over time to monitor progress (see Recommendation #6). As new tasks and projects arise, the work plan can serve as a decision-making framework for evaluating potential new initiatives and determining their priority level in relation to other ongoing tasks. Overall, this tool will help provide focus and direction to the administrative team, ultimately supporting efficient Department operations.

Communication

6	Observation	Communications among Fire Administration staff are disjointed and impede optimal efficiency and effectiveness.
	Recommendations	A. Establish formal communication protocols that encourage productive communication through cascading messaging.
		B. Hold regular staff meetings for support staff and administrators that include progress reporting, administrative updates, and ongoing project management.

Administrative support personnel meet quarterly to review their progress on tasks and discuss recent activities. However, these meetings occur too infrequently to enable teamwork or cross-functional support of departmental projects. Despite quarterly meetings, staff report that information often does not flow to the administrative team, and they are generally unaware of how others spend their time. Fire Administration staff also reported having a limited understanding of day-to-day operations and departmental decisions that impact their work. This suggests that administrative staff would benefit from additional meeting opportunities and more effective communication of the results from other departmental meetings. Without appropriate communication, staff are unable to successfully complete their duties, understand their contributions to the Department, and collaborate with others to improve operational efficiency and effectiveness. When combined with the individualized work of employees, insufficient meaningful communication hinders the sense of comradery among support staff. Often, unclear communication can result in micromanaging on the part of supervisors, which can breed resentment and erode trust.

The Department should establish formal communication practices to ensure that employees across the organization receive consistent, frequent, and transparent communication to remain informed. When communication successfully cascades from leadership to supervisors to front-line staff, it drives clarity and alignment around the Department's direction and goals. Whenever decisions that impact staff are made, supervisors should ensure they have a consistent understanding and message to share with employees. The cascading effect requires leaders and supervisors at every level of the organization to translate information in a way that is relevant to their specific team and consistently address potential concerns over issues and changes. When communication patterns are clear and documented, it can remove any question of whether or not information has been shared, freeing up staff and management to deal with more mission-critical work and ensuring that all employees receive the same information.

Additionally, reporting to a single administrative lead with a clear vision for the Department and a mission for each project will help give the administrative team purpose and direction. The administrative lead should formalize internal communications protocols, including staff meetings, regular performance reporting, and transparent project management (Recommendation #7). The administrative lead should also consider conducting biweekly support staff meetings that are informative and useful by:

- Reporting on progress toward goals and objectives
- Reporting on outcomes and upcoming work, including timelines and due dates
- Providing administrative updates on projects and departmental changes
- Recognizing employee achievements and contributions

Clear, frequent, cross-functional communications are critical to improving morale. Communication fosters the development of common values and goals, ultimately fostering a sense of teamwork and collaboration. When communication successfully cascades throughout the Department, it drives clarity and alignment around the Department's direction and promotes employee accountability.

Project Management

7	Observation	The Department would benefit from project management tools to manage competing priorities, delegate tasks, and ensure follow-up.
	Recommendations	Ensure administrative employees receive project management training and tools to support their work.

The Fire Department's administrative team often juggle numerous projects, including large special events, operational improvements, accreditation, community outreach, and City initiatives. However, the Department does not currently utilize a formal project management system. Personnel report that the beginning phases of project brainstorming and planning are strong due to the expertise and skills of staff, but clearly defining and assigning tasks to support project completion is often challenging. This practice contributes to unclear expectations and perpetuates a culture with limited accountability.

Additionally, without a project management system, the Department also lacks the tools to capture information on workload, activities, and other data that could help guide improvements to operations and demands. Without formal training and tools to facilitate strong project management and oversight, projects are often not implemented in the most efficient or effective manner possible and confusion regarding roles and responsibilities can occur.

To aid in project management, the Department should develop a project implementation template that encompasses the following elements:

- Defined project scope and requirements
- Description of project methodology
- Sequential presentation of tasks and grouping into phases
- Start and end dates
- Budget for each project phase
- Assignment of staff lead and contributors for each task with clear roles and responsibilities
- Description and designated timeline for each task
- Deliverable or determination of completion for each task
- Dependencies with other tasks, including how one task exerts influence on other tasks
- Change management plan, if applicable

Each project should be assigned a project manager to implement the work plan and serve as the point person, support accountability for staff leads, and coordinate activities across the Department. Project management templates that are widely accessible by all involved parties help establish clear accountability and expectations for project roll out, as well as communicating timelines and other details to the full project team. The Department will be able to implement projects proactively by providing a clear plan and assigning staff resources to tasks.

Inspection Standardization

8	Observation	The fire inspection process is highly manual, requires redundant data entry into multiple systems, and is not standardized across building types.
	Recommendations	Standardize the inspection process and move forward with opportunities to increase mobile technology in the field to reduce duplicative data entry.

The Department inspects businesses, residential, and high-rise structures to assess risk and mitigate potential fires and hazards. Like many fire departments, inspections are performed by one dedicated inspector or by suppression and rescue teams as they are available. This staffing model has contributed to inconsistent treatment and billing of some facilities, such as multi-unit facilities. Additionally, the inspection process itself is dependent on which inspector is assigned to the building. For example, the dedicated inspector has the ability to plan inspections and complete them as scheduled, whereas suppression and rescue teams' availability is dependent on call volume. Therefore, some inspections may occur outside of the annual timeframe, and customers receive differing timelines for notice and completion.

In addition to customer service differences, the inspection process is also reliant on paper forms and manual data entry. To complete inspections, inspectors currently use a paper form, which they then enter into Accela, the City's permitting system. Department staff report challenges in utilizing Accela for inspections, including the ability to leverage compatible mobile technology options that would eliminate the need for duplicative data entry. Manual data entry not only results in duplicative work, but also potential billing delays since owners cannot be billed until information is entered in the system. For suppression and rescue teams conducting inspections, data entry into Accela from paper forms is also dependent on call volume.

Overall, the current inspection process presents customer service challenges because it lacks consistency and predictability. Because of the gap between inspection completion and entry into Accela, customers may call the Department inquiring after their bill, but the staff assistant may not be able to respond to questions because the information has not been entered into the system and instead remains on paper forms used by employees conducting inspections. Most inspections (with the exception of annual permits for licensed facilities), are completed on an anniversary schedule, which can be difficult to track and may result in inspections occurring prior to the anniversary date, which increases the owners' overall annual bill, or after the anniversary date, which poses potential safety risks.

The Department has conducted significant work to improve the integrity and accuracy of the inspection process in recent years, but would benefit from additional standardization. Given limitations with Accela, the Department should continue to explore inspection processing through alternate systems. In October 2018, the Department initiated a pilot of the inspection module within its new records management system, Emergency Reporting. In assessing the efficacy of this pilot program, the Department should consider the following:

* Ability to successfully utilize mobile technology while on site
* Integration with the City's billing and financial systems
* Reporting capabilities, such as due dates and reminders
* Customer service features, such as automatic notifications, reports, and billing instructions

- Capacity to incorporate requirements for inspections of all building types
- Availability of real-time information that is accessible to inspectors and support staff

Apart from possible system changes, the Department should also assess opportunities to standardize the customer experience across building types. To do this, the Department should consider the following options:

OPTION	PROS	CONS
Transition all inspection types to a designated schedule based on building type.	• Decreases the risk of inspection frequency differences • Provides a general annual timeframe for business owners • Helps standardize the inspection process across building types	• Reduces flexibility for inspectors • May result in overflow between designated timeframes • Initially will result in some business owners receiving an inspection prior to their anniversary date
Develop a monthly reporting process to identify inspections requiring completion.	• Similar to the current model, but with additional management • Enables flexibility for inspectors in regards to location, building type, etc.	• Identification process is manual and potentially time consuming • Customer experience differences are likely to persist
Delegate coordination of inspections to a staff assistant that identifies inspections coming due, notifies customers, and assigns inspectors.	• Increases consistency in customer inspection experience • Provides a single point of contact for customer inquiries	• Department's existing support staff lack capacity to conduct this additional work • Ability of the staff assistant to perform this work is reliant on system ability to provide real-time information to the staff assistant

Policies and Procedures

9	Observation	Policies differ and are applied inconsistently within divisions, groups within the Department, and the rest of the City.
	Recommendations	Ensure that policies across the Fire Department administration are standardized, aligned with City policy, and applied consistently throughout the Department.

The Department lacks policies and procedures over several administrative functions, further complicating staff authority, roles and responsibilities, and operational continuity. In some cases, the Department's policy should automatically default to align with City policies. For example, the Department lacks policies and procedures for travel expense reimbursement that would typically include submission deadlines. This has historically resulted in significant processing delays. However, the City's travel expense policy states that all expenses should be submitted for processing within 30 days. It is unclear if the Department adheres to City policy in this domain, although it is apparent that the policy is not consistently applied. Additional examples of policy gaps that may or may not default to City policies include:

- Accounts payable processing
- Billing processes
- Check handling
- Grants management
- Purchasing approvals
- P-card utilization
- Attendance and tardiness notification expectations
- Flexible working schedule options
- Data governance
- Permit processing
- Regulatory reporting requirements
- Inspection processes, including customer service expectations

When policies do exist, staff reported a perception of inconsistency in how they are applied across divisions, stations, and certain employees. This may be, in part, due to differences in management styles across the Department and unique circumstances surrounding each situation. However, this perception has contributed to distrust among support staff and impacts morale.

The Department should inventory current policies and procedures, determine what additional procedures need to be created, and establish a prioritized schedule for developing and updating policies. This team should also ensure that any Department policies and procedures are consistent with City policies, and note when City policies should be used in lieu of potentially redundant Department policies. Once policies and procedures are updated, they should be available in a centralized location, such as an intranet, for employees to easily reference. As policies and procedures often live in many dispersed places, the Department should develop an organized, easy-to-navigate repository on its SharePoint website. Additionally, the Department should develop an ongoing governance structure with Department-wide procedures requiring the approval of the Fire Chief or Deputy Fire Chief, as well as regular reviews by process owners.

While policies and procedures are critical to consistency and effectiveness, the Department should also provide training and hold personnel accountable for implementing them. Due to the lack of current guidelines, historical accountability, and the future influx of two new staff members on the administrative support team, there is elevated need for training and expectation-setting for the adoption of published guidelines. As policies and procedures evolve over time, training should be revised and redelivered to ensure consistency across functions and locations.

Well-developed and properly applied policies and procedures will help increase employee accountability, smooth employee transitions, and ultimately improve Department operations. At their best, consistently applied policies and procedures convert random work efforts of many individuals into collective, focused results. To be effective, policies and procedures must be known to all Department employees, apply uniformly to all employees, and be consistently and appropriately enforced.

C. FINANCIAL PROCESSES

Fire Prevention Billing

10	**Observation**	Fire Prevention billing practices are highly manual and applied inconsistently across inspections of different building types.
	Recommendations	A. Continue efforts to standardize and automate Fire Prevention billing.
		B. Consider implementing inspection capabilities within the new Emergency Reporting system and outsourcing billing to a third party.

Fire Prevention bills customers for inspections, permits, filming, and plan checks. The billing process for each of these items is completed manually, often includes duplicative data entry, and can be handled inconsistently depending on the billing system utilized. Over the past three years, Fire Prevention staff have developed processes and systems to further automate and standardize the Department's billing process. While significant progress has been made, in particular with respect to integrity of billings, there are additional opportunities to improve the billing process. The table below summarizes how each fee type is processed by the Department, with manual entry shaded.

FEE TYPE	APPROXIMATE ANNUAL NUMBER	RECORDING SYSTEM	BILLING SYSTEM	REVENUE COLLECTION SYSTEM	PAST DUE COLLECTION PROCESS
Residential Inspections	3,600	Accela	NorthStar	NorthStar	Formalized through NorthStar
Business and Mercantile Inspections	4,600	Accela	NorthStar	NorthStar	Formalized through NorthStar
High-rise Inspections	76	Accela	Manual invoicing	City Financial System	Manually conducted in-house
Hazardous Materials Inspections (CUPA)	300	Accela	City Financial System	City Financial System	Manually conducted in-house
Special Event Permits	Varies, typically 274	Accela	City Financial System	City Financial System	Manually conducted in-house
Plan Checks (Fire Protection Systems)	1,000	Accela	City Financial System	City Finance System	Manually conducted in house
New Construction Permits	Varies, typically 1,000	Accela	City Financial System	City Financial System	Manually conducted in house

FEE TYPE	APPROXIMATE ANNUAL NUMBER	RECORDING SYSTEM	BILLING SYSTEM	REVENUE COLLECTION SYSTEM	PAST DUE COLLECTION PROCESS
False Alarms	Varies, typically 160	Accela	City Financial System	City Financial System	Manually conducted in house
Annual Permits	Varies, typically about 410	Accela	City Financial System	City Financial System	Manually conducted in house

As noted throughout the table, all of the fees involve manual duplicative entry because systems do not integrate with one another. Additionally, reliance on manual collection processes for overdue permits, alarms, and high-rise inspections results in inconsistent practices (depending on the fee type), revenue left uncollected, and elevated workloads for a staff assistant. As of November 2018, the Department had the following approximate amounts noted as past due:

- False alarms: $6,300
- Annual permits: $104,000
- Special events and construction permits: $9,000

To standardize the billing and collection processes, the Department should consider additional opportunities to standardize billing or potentially outsource billing to a third party.

Additional efforts to automate and standardize billing. Examples of possible options to explore include transitioning all billing to NorthStar, system integration between Accela and the City's financial system, and implementation of a new inspection system including integration with a billing system.

- Pros: Does not require third-party involvement and ongoing monitoring, leverages existing system capabilities, eventually reduces manual labor of staff assistant
- Cons: Delays efficiency gains, retains some manual processes, reliant on ISD and system support

Outsource billing to a third party. Particularly as the Department pilots Emergency Reporting as a potential inspection system, it should consider whether the system has the ability to send information to a third party that processes billing on its behalf.

- Pros: Eliminates duplicative data entry for inspections, frees up staff assistant to conduct additional work in the Department, supports revenue collection equitably across fee types
- Cons: Reliant on new system integration, requires ongoing vendor management, lack of control over billing customer experience, Emergency Reporting system may lack the capability

Internal Controls

| 11 | Observation | The Department has some internal controls weaknesses related to financial transactions. |
| | Recommendations | Develop formal policies and procedures to ensure appropriate internal controls related to check handling, deposits, payments, and reconciliations. |

During interviews with staff, some internal control weaknesses were identified:

- **Check handling:** The Department sometimes receives physical checks for employees and vendors from the City's Finance Department. However, it lacks a standardized process for picking up, storing, and releasing checks. To ensure proper handling of checks, the Department should assign an individual to pick up checks, establish a designated, secure area for checks to be stored, and require a signature from the individual who picks up a check.

- **Transaction Express login:** The Department uses Transaction Express to process credit card payments. However, the same login information is used by multiple users. To ensure proper handling and credit card processing, each user should be assigned a unique, confidential log-in.

- **Deposit timeliness:** City policy requires deposits to occur on a weekly basis; however, the Department currently completes deposits every few weeks depending on staff capacity. Timely deposits are important to protect both employees and City resources.

- **Grant reconciliations:** The Department has experienced challenges in reconciling grants in a timely manner. A component of this difficulty is linked to delayed travel expense processing, since travel is often grant-funded. According to staff, reconciliations often occur too infrequently to appropriately track expenditures for each grant, which can fluctuate throughout the year. To ensure proper accounting and monitoring of grant dollars, the Department should reconcile grants on a monthly basis.

Implementing internal controls over these areas will help protect City and Department resources.

D. INFORMATION SYSTEM PROCESES

System Integration

| 12 | Observation | Many of the Department's software systems operate independently of one another, requiring redundant data entry and additional manual processes. |
| | Recommendations | Continue collaborating with ISD to improve system integration and streamline processes. |

As noted in Recommendation #10, several of the Department's software systems operate independently without integration. There are several additional examples of systems used in Department operations that also experience these issues, such as Pre-Incident Plans and MDC integration. This results in siloed information that is difficult to reconcile between systems to provide a comprehensive and cohesive picture of Department operations. Additionally, the staff time and resources required to enter the same information in disparate systems inhibits the Department's ability to operate efficiently and effectively.

Knowing that many of its systems required upgrades and/or replacement in the near future, the Department developed a Technology Strategic Plan in 2017. The plan clearly outlines the Department's existing systems' benefits and drawbacks, outstanding needs, and desired outcomes. Implementation of this plan is an interdepartmental process requiring collaboration between the Department, Finance, City Manager's Office, and ISD. While new systems, including station alerting and records management, have been implemented, progress on the plan has been slower than the Department anticipated.

Staff changes in ISD have presented both obstacles and opportunities in supporting the Department. As new staff are brought on, the Department should develop clear roles to help facilitate constructive communication, progress on the technology strategic plan, and ongoing system integration efforts.

Data Collection and Utilization

13	Observation	Because many processes are manual, the Department struggles with accurate data collection and lacks capacity to utilize data analytics in decision-making.
	Recommendations	Continue automating processes and create a data governance system to support data integrity and move the Department toward data driven decision-making.

Throughout the course of its operations, the Department records a significant amount of data, such as number of calls, type of call, response time, employee overtime, and code violations, among others. However, this data is recorded manually by a variety of users into several disjointed systems with varying reporting capabilities. Both system deficiencies and related manual processes impact data integrity within the Department.

In interviews, several staff expressed concerns related to the integrity of data collected by the Department, citing both system and user issues. Manual data entry by several users not only requires significant time, but can also result in compromised accuracy. This limits the ability of Department leadership to utilize data in monitoring operations and decision-making.

To ensure the integrity of data and support data-driven decision making in the future, the Department should develop a data governance model. Data governance forms the basis for management of data, including its availability, integrity, usability, and security. To be effective, people, processes, and systems should align to ensure data is complete, correct, reliable, understandable, and useful. Therefore, the Department should establish a framework defining how it collects and uses data, and then assign clear roles and standardize processes accordingly. Data governance models, at a minimum, typically address the following:

- Establish a data dictionary, including usage
- Set standards for data intake and validation
- Define and implement data access permissions
- Institute controls on report development and standardization

When utilized appropriately by all relevant members of the organization, a data governance model can provide significant benefits, such as:

- Providing reliable data to support comprehensive decision analysis and support

- Clarified rules for changing processes and data to answer questions important to the Department
- Improved regulatory and grant reporting
- Clear and transparent communication through standardization

As the Department continues to implement new technology systems, it should seek opportunities to capture information that would inform and benefit operations.

System Adoption and Ongoing Utilization

14	Observation	The Department struggles with ongoing management of adopted systems, potentially leaving existing system capabilities untapped.
	Recommendations	As new systems are implemented, the Department should assess opportunities to improve its processes, staff accountability, communication, system ownership, and operational continuity.

Department staff and leadership report challenges in effectively managing and encouraging change within the organization. Resistance to change is primarily attributed to high staff workloads and the sense that employees lack the time to learn and implement new processes and systems. Similar to other facets of the Department, unclear roles and a lack of ownership pose challenges in successful implementation and ongoing management of systems. For example, the Technology Strategic Plan developed by the Department notes that potential weaknesses and areas of improvement include staffing to manage programs, processes and accountability, communication, ownership of programs, and staff continuity. While responsibility over system management is shared by the Department and ISD, the Department has the opportunity to improve its processes, accountability, communication, ownership, and staff continuity.

As new systems are implemented, the Department should take a critical look at each of these factors, including:

- Conducting business process re-engineering to streamline processes, reduce potential bottlenecks, and support communication within the Department
- Assigning system responsibility to one to two key individuals who are equipped with the technical and operational skills to identify and troubleshoot issues
- Creating a data dictionary that includes definitions for information captured in the system, how to record it, and how to develop meaningful reports
- Opportunities to integrate additional features in the system to benefit other areas of administration and operations
- Determining if the system should and/or could be integrated with another system used by the City or Department to streamline processes
- Identifying users with read-only and/or editing access
- Developing an end-user education process to train employees on system capabilities, utilization, and new workflows
- Ensuring consistent and appropriate system adoption through quality assurance reviews over the first 3 to 6 months

- Supporting staff adoption through quick guides that provide easy-to-follow instructions for common activities

- Documenting comprehensive policies and procedures to enable staff continuity.