



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

# COMMS 101: COMMUNICATIONS FOR LOCAL LEADERS

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# INTRODUCTIONS- WHAT IS YOUR ROLE/RESPONSIBILITY?

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- President
- VP
- S/T
- Executive Board Members
- Communications Director / Committee



# COMMS 101: THE BASICS

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- **Inform, Educate, & Inspire Your Membership:** Increase membership engagement. *Win hearts & minds.*
- **Control Public Perception:** We are trusted public safety professionals advocating for our communities.
- **Increase Political Influence:** Educate decision makers, community partners, and stakeholders on the important role firefighters play in the community



# IN THE FIRE SERVICE, WE HAVE A **PLAN** FOR EVERYTHING



# COMMUNICATIONS **PLANNING**

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## **Why you need a plan:**

- Union membership has declined by 2.9 million since 1983
- Most new hires have no previous union experience
- Textbooks diminish the role and contributions of unions in public and civic life
- Popular culture depictions of unions are rarely positive



# COMMUNICATIONS **PLANNING**

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- Communications should support the overall mission & goals of your Local
- Communications shouldn't be an afterthought
- Communications should be integrated into all union functions
- Your Local should build a thoughtful and deliberate internal and external communications plan



# **INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS**

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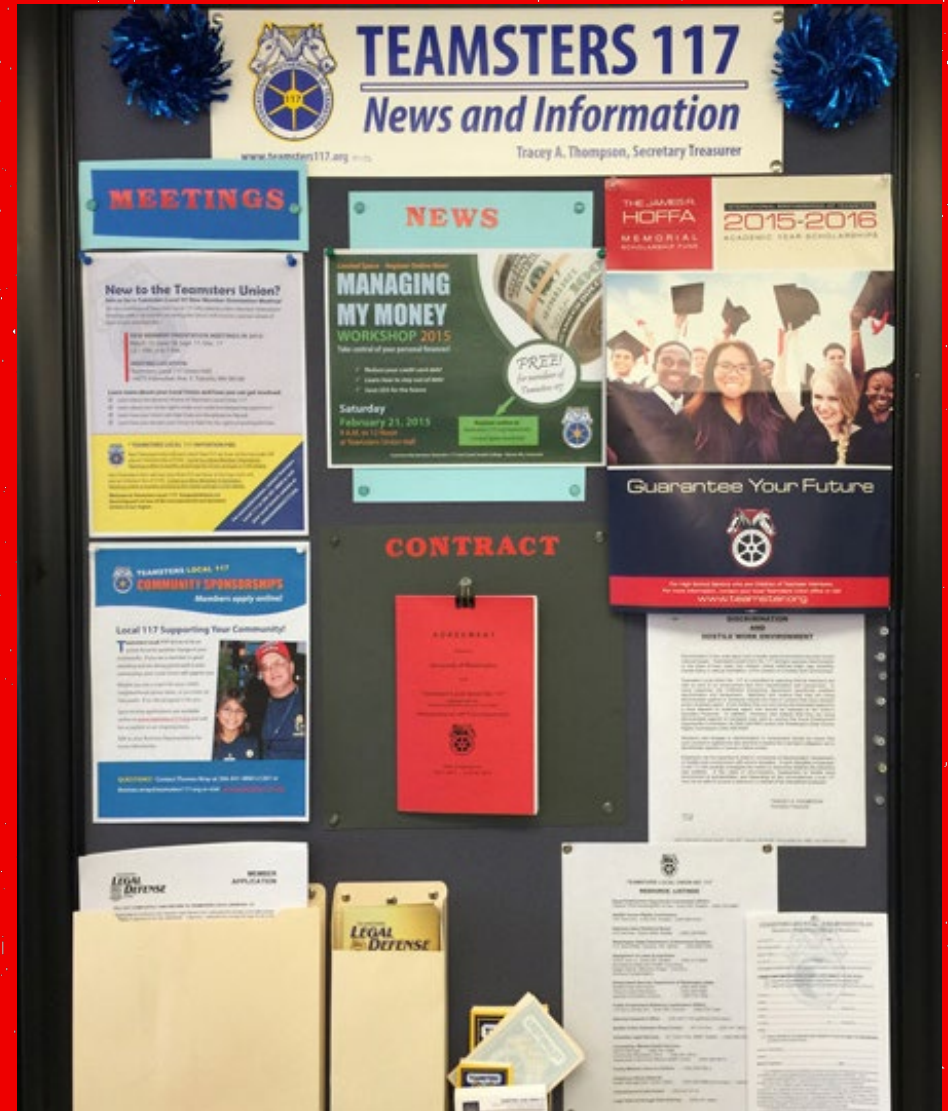
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## A thoughtful & deliberate internal communications plan:

- Can combat anti-union messages
- Can educate, engage and *activate members*
- Can build loyalty among the membership
- Can reduce the damage caused by rumors



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT



# LOCAL 947

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



## GROUP EXERCISE

Develop a list of the **communication channels** your Local uses to engage members.

As a table, **discuss the effectiveness of these channels**, note gaps or weaknesses, and prepare to **share key takeaways with the group**



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

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- Email
- Text
- Social media (inward facing)
- “Traditional” (newsletter, bulletin boards, print flyers)
- Virtual
- Face-to-face (station visits, stewards/ reps, union meetings)
- Videos
- QR Codes



# **INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT**

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**If it can't be measured, it can't be managed**



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

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## Assess these items when conducting your audit:

- The tool / method of delivery
- Membership engagement
- Membership action / absorption



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

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## Assessing the Tool / Method:

- Who is your email marketing service?
- It is user friendly?
- Is it cost effective?
- Is it a quality product?



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

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## Assessing Engagement

- Are you tracking open rates?
- Are you tracking times sent?
- Are you tracking device used by members (mobile v. laptop)
- Are you tracking % of click rates for links?
- Are you tracking % bounced / bad email addresses?



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

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## Membership action / absorption:

- There's a difference between click rates and “absorption rates”
- Is the content of our speech “landing”
- Does our messaging educate members?
- *Does our messaging move members to action?*



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

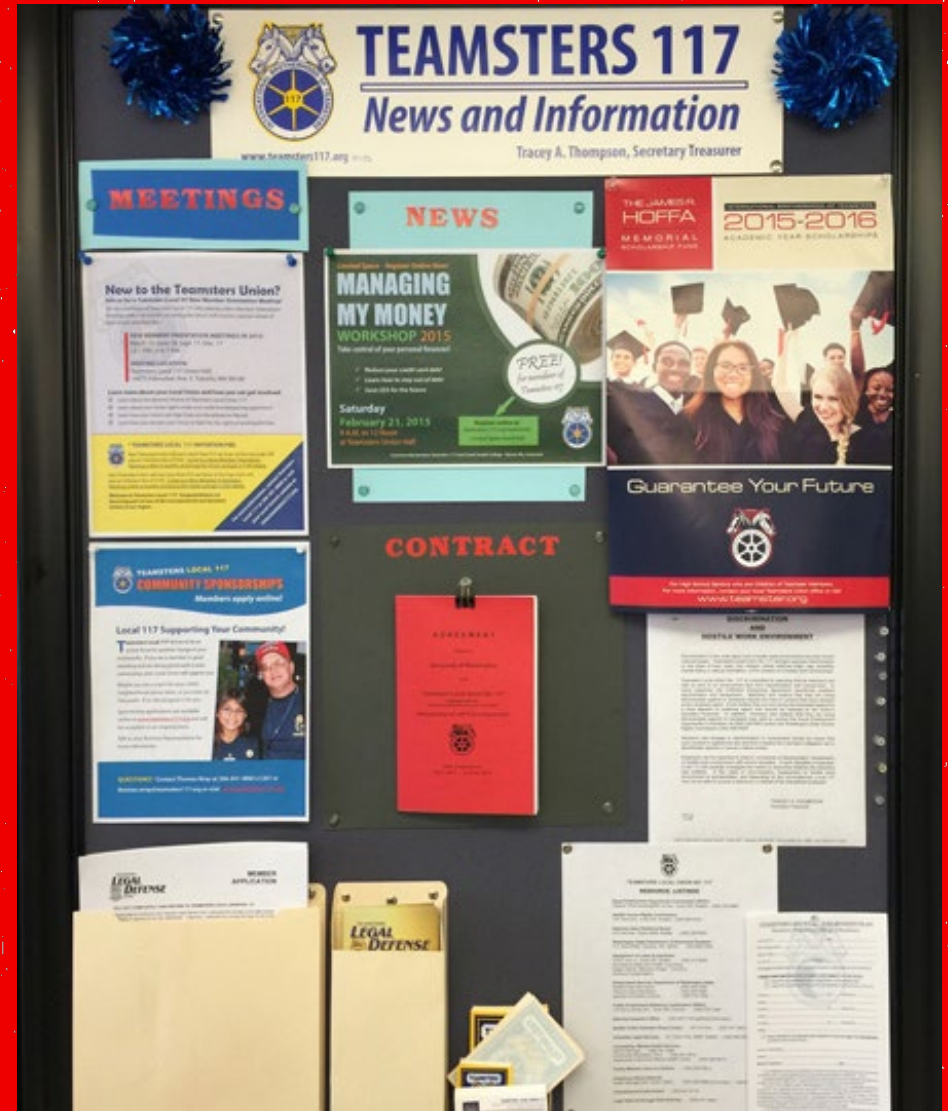
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## Simplifying the audit:

- What tools, methods, and messaging are we currently using?
- Is it effective? (You must determine the parameters)
- Once you assess current situation: Is it full steam ahead, tinkering with the program, or abandon ship?



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

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## Have you planned for the following?:

- Event communications template
- Educating members
- A crisis



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

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## Don't wing it

Create a **preplan** for known events / situations / circumstances. Create plans to address obstacles



# GROUP EXERCISE

**Scenario:** Your Local is unable to consistently reach quorum at quarterly union meetings

**Task:** Develop a comprehensive internal communications plan to increase meeting attendance, including messaging, channels, timing, and accountability



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

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## Increase Union Meeting Attendance

- Create a Local union calendar and add all meeting dates
- Publicize meeting via email, social media, and text
  - Monthly email update
  - Meeting email sent at specific intervals (1 month, 1 week, day before, day of)
- Internal social media posts made at specific intervals
- Identify member who will take pictures during the meeting
- Video update by President following the meeting with photos



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

- Video update to members after the meeting
- Post pictures from meeting on internal / external social media
- Pictures and accompanying article in quarterly newsletter



# INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

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## Three questions to answer when planning:

- Who is responsible for the communication?
- When should the communication happen?
- Are you delivering your message effectively?



# **EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS**

# COMMUNICATIONS **PLANNING**

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# EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

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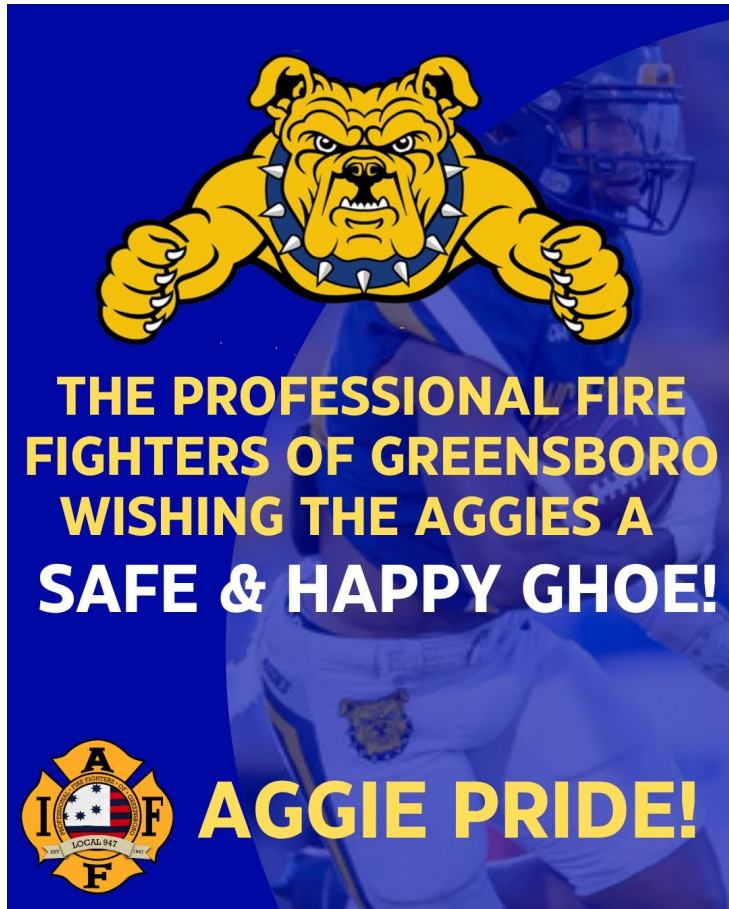
## Create messages around:

- **Community:** Leverage community interests and priorities to develop messaging for public engagement.
- **Safety:** Establish your firefighters as the public safety experts of the community
- **Issues:** Convince voters to support issues important to firefighters



# EXAMPLES

# EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS: COMMUNITY



## Leverage community interests and priorities to develop messaging for public engagement

- NC A&T Homecoming
- 600+ likes, 32 shares
- 11K views
- Council members, NC A&T Chancellor



# EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS: SAFETY

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**Establish your firefighters as the public safety experts of the community**

- IAFF Public Safety Messaging
- Instagram carousel with 4 slides
- Develop press release, tag news outlets / reporters



# EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS: ISSUES



## Convince voters to support issues important to firefighters

- Comprehensive public campaign
- FB, IG, yard signs, community support
- Passed by 71% margin

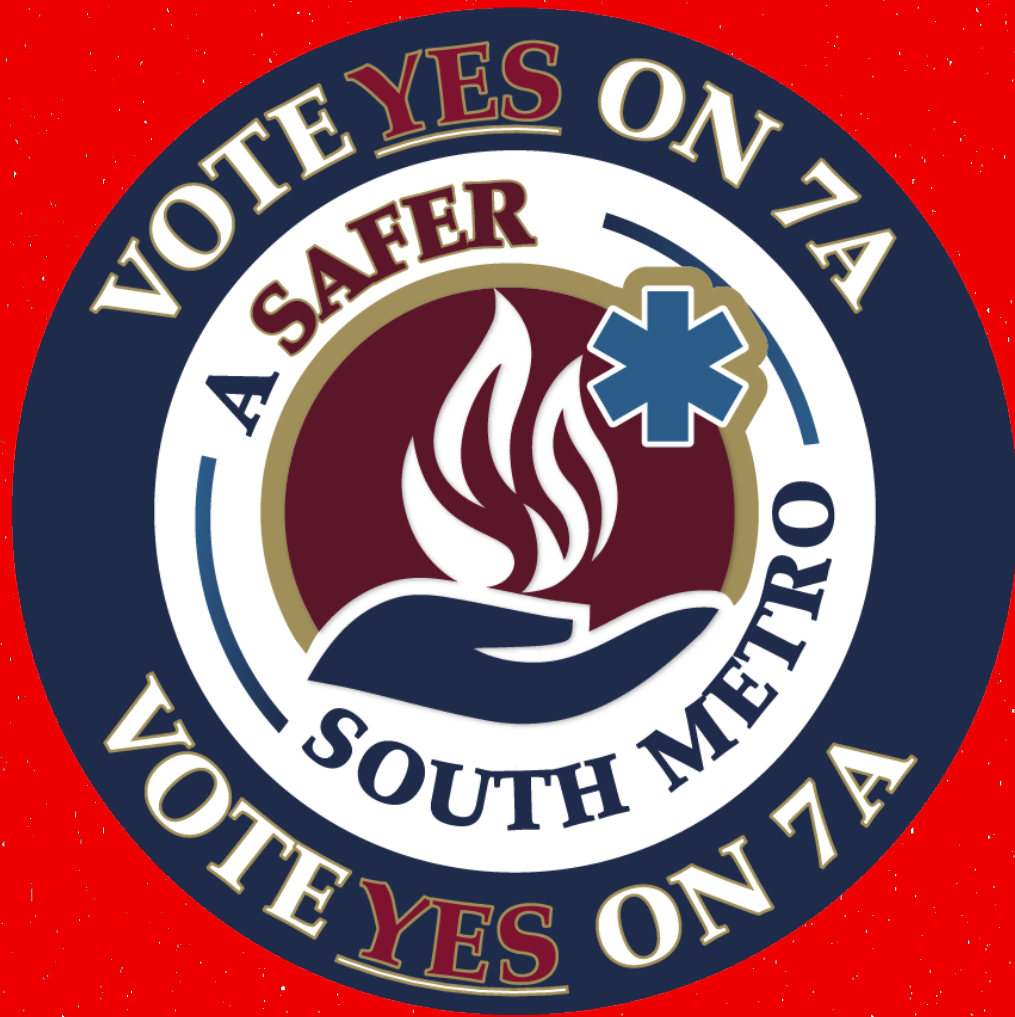


# EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS

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- Broadcast Media
  - TV, radio, video
- Traditional or Print Media
  - Newspapers, op-eds, letters to the editors, interviews
  - Direct mail
  - Presentations to community groups
- Digital Media
  - Social: Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, X, YouTube
  - Digital Ads
  - Email newsletter
- Outdoor Media
  - Bus stop signs, public transport, billboards, business signs





# GROUP EXERCISE

**Task:** Select a message category (Community, Safety, or Issues)

**Activity:** Develop a concise public message and select appropriate communication channels

**Report Back:** Audience, message, and explanation of your approach



# PLANNING COMPONENTS

# COMMUNICATIONS **PLANNING**

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# COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIC PLAN

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## Communications Strategic Plan:

- Time based to do list
- Executed in order of importance
- Based on goals and priorities of your Local



# PLAN COMPONENT: CALENDAR EXAMPLE

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## Building Your Communications Calendar:

- **Internal:** List all internal events (union meetings, Local elections, city/county elections, holiday party, calls to action)
- **External:** List all external events and your community messaging (support for community events / initiatives, safety messaging, issues-based messaging)
- **Staffing and Budgeting:** Who is going to do it and how much does it cost?



# PLAN COMPONENT: CALENDAR EXAMPLE

Event Month	Event Day of Month	Event Frequency	Event Name	Event Type	Event Content	Links	Event PAST Content Link
January	1	Annually	First Day of Fire Fighter Cancer Awareness Month	Month Event			
January	1	Annually	New Years Day	Federal Holiday			
January	1	Annually	Last Day of Kwanzaa	Holiday			
January	20	Q4 Years	Inauguration Day	Federal Event			
January	3rd Monday	Annually	Martin Luther King Jr. Day	Federal Holiday			
February	1	Annually	First Day of Black History Month	Month Event			
February	1st Full Week	Annually	Burn Awareness Week	Week Event			
February	14	Annually	Valentines Day	Holiday			
February	3rd Monday	Annually	Presidents Day	Federal Holiday			
March	1	Annually	First Day of Women's History Month	Month Event			
March	8	Annually	International Women's Day	Event			
March	2nd Sunday	Annually	Daylight Saving Time starts	Event			
March	17	Annually	St. Patricks Day	Holiday			
March	3rd Full Week	Annually	National Poision Prevention Week	Week Event			
March	22nd, 2023	Changes	First Evening of Ramadan	Holiday			



# STAFFING FOR COMMUNICATIONS

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- Communications Director Model
- Committee Model



# STAFFING FOR COMMUNICATONS

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## Communications Director Model

- Serves as a “PIO” for your Local
- Subject Matter Expert in all aspects of communications
- Can be a paid position separate from your Executive Board
- Responsibility rests with 1 person



# STAFFING FOR COMMUNICATONS

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## Communications Committee Model:

- Committee model offers better division of labor
- More hands can make lighter work
- Multiple perspectives
- There can also be too many cooks in the kitchen



# INVESTING IN COMMUNICATIONS

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1. Invest in tools
2. Invest in personnel



# INVESTING IN COMMUNICATIONS

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- Website
- Email marketing system
- Desktop publishing software
- A/V equipment
- Printing / Postage
- Apps



# INVESTING IN COMMUNICATIONS

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- Strive (pre-req for CTA)
- IAFF CTA
- IAFF District events
- Educational opportunities from state AFL-CIO
- Community Colleges
- Other educational institutions (community / arts centers)
- Succession planning



**IN CLOSING**

# COMMS 101: THE BASICS

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## AREAS WHERE WE CAN PROVIDE ASSISTANCE:

- Logo design
- Graphic design
- Digital ads
- Drafting a communications plan
- Canned crisis communications statements
- Contact list for media market
- Newsletter development
- Branding
- Local Strategic Planning



**VOTE  YES**  
ON  
**FARGO MEASURE 3**

**Fargo Measure 3:** Is a vital investment in Fargo's public safety

**Fargo Measure 3:** Helps recruit and retain talented public safety officers

**Fargo Measure 3:** Is supported by Fargo's fire fighters and police officers

**VOTE  YES ON FARGO MEASURE 3**

**SUPPORT PUBLIC SAFETY!**





**DARRELL ROBERTS**

Strategic Campaigns / droberts@iaff.org

**THANK YOU!  
ANY QUESTIONS?**



**DAVE COKER**

Strategic Campaigns | dcoker@iaff.org

# EVALUATION AND WIN AN IPAD!

- **Submit your workshop and overall evaluations to be automatically entered in two drawings for a new iPad!**
- **Complete your evaluations using the IAFF app:**
  1. Download the IAFF app and sign in with your iaff.org username
  2. Tap the 2026 Strive for Excellence Summit event image to enter the event's dashboard
  3. Tap "Sessions" and tap on the workshops you attended
  4. Tap "Evaluation" and complete the evaluation
  5. Tap "Submit"

**For the event's overall evaluation, follow steps 1 and 2, then tap "Event Evaluation" located in the event's Dashboard.**

