

**Louisiana Fire and Emergency Training Commission Meeting
March Meeting Minutes
March 29, 2021**

Commission Members Present:

Chad Major	Professional Firefighters Association of Louisiana
Butch Browning	State Fire Marshal
Louis Romero	Professional Firefighters Association of Louisiana
Matt Lee	Chancellor's Designee from LSU
William Parker	Louisiana State Firemen's Association
Bryan Adams	Governor's Appointee

Commission Members Absent:

Brian Lindberg	Louisiana State Firemen's Association (zoom)
Brandon Davis	Governor's Appointee (zoom)
Ken Himel	Louisiana Fire Chief's Association (zoom)
Russell DiSalvo	Louisiana Fire Chief's Association (zoom)
Karen St. Germain	

In Attendance:

Loree Ramezan	FETI
Christine Earnheart	FETI
Carey King	FETI
R. Keith Bennett	FETI
Ken Fowler	FETI
Kathe Jones	FETI
Dan Wallis	SFM
Michael Donahue	FETI
Matt Robertson	Alexandria
Kevin Fontenot	FETI
Wes Anders	Ball FD
Byron Johnson	Alpine FD
Mike Truax	FETI
David Coco	(Zoom)
Megan Broom	(Zoom)
Miranda Meynard	(Zoom)
Sam Joubert	(Zoom)
Unidentified call in listener	(zoom)

QUORUM PRESENT

The Louisiana Fire and Emergency Training Commission was called to order by Mr. Chad Major. Invocation was performed. Pledge was performed as well. Mr. Major called the roll and announced that a quorum was present. The meeting began.

Mr. Major stated that the minutes from the meeting held on March 15th were not available for approval at this time but would be for the next meeting.

Financial Report

Ms. Ramezan presented the financial report. She stated that the month of March was not complete yet, so she did have a balance sheet available yet. It would be available at the next meeting. There had not been any out of the ordinary expenses.

She informed the commission that they would be conducting one of the interviews tomorrow afternoon for the accounts receivable position.

Mr. Major asked if there were any other questions regarding the financial/budget report. None were voiced.

This concluded the presentation of the financial/ budget report.

Director's Report

Mr. Donahue presented the director's report. He stated that based on the discussion that had taken place at the last meeting concerning the salary levels and compensation for the staff at FETI, he had contacted LSU's HRM, and they were going to do a third comprehensive salary study that they have done in the last 9 years. Their communication to him was that they would ask them to understand that they compare apples to apples so what they will do is survey similar job descriptions from state training agencies across the southeastern United States. They do not look at job titles. They look at actual duties. Their estimation for completion was around 4 weeks which would give Mr. Donahue the opportunity to compile the information, potentially share it with Dan and present it to the commission.

He also mentioned that when doing an evaluation, they needed to look at metrics and how they make that comparison. At the last meeting, it was mentioned that 1% of the classes at their physical location were municipal in nature and the rest were other. It just didn't reflect the true picture. If they really wanted to see who was using FETI, they could look at customer contact hours and that number changed from 1% to 37%. He was trying to avoid misconception about the activity occurring at FETI.

Mr. Major asked in regard to the salary survey if the employees there fell under a certain pay matrix. Mr. Donahue answered that their employees would fall under the matrix relative to their department, for example IT employees fell under the IT matrix. When the employees were assessed, he reiterated that the job titles did not matter, but job responsibilities did and were reviewed carefully. It was the only way to assess it fairly because job titles did not make the job and duties for the same job title could fluctuate. The work that was done is what truly reflected the job.

Mr. Browning asked if LSU was open to using other places to survey. He felt that survey training centers may not be the best way to compare. Mr. Donahue stated that it was a valid point but the only problem that he was aware of was that every fire training center he knew of was a response agency and even though they were instructors, they were paid based on the fact that they were responders. They were not on salary. He stated that he could suggest that but ultimately, he would not be the arbitrator for the survey.

Mr. Major asked if there were any other questions regarding the director's report. None were voiced.

This concluded the presentation of the director's report.

Chief's Report

Mr. Fowler presented the report. He stated that he only a few updates. Last week, he had spent the majority of the weekend in northeast Louisiana. There had been several good meetings with chiefs up there. One particular department that they had never delivered training to now had a new administration. They had invited Mr. Fowler to come in and a proposal schedule had been presented. They were actually going three times in April every Tuesday to try to get some of the newer members up to speed with the basics. He had also met with the chief in Tallulah who was in the process of trying to get his training ground up and running and he was trying to bring some interest back into retention of his program. They were going to schedule a weekend school for him so that they could knock out his 12 hours of officer training all at one time and help the chief's people out.

Mr. Adams wanted to go on record that any classes that were conducted at his facility, under their direction, he did not have to respond to any one of them that went through the proper chain of command which was through his office. This statement was given due to an issue that had come up the week before. Mr. Fowler thanked him for clearing that up.

Mr. Major asked if there were any other questions regarding the chief's report. None were voiced.

This concluded the presentation of the chief's report.

Certification Report

This report was not addressed.

Chairman's Report

Mr. Major presented his report. He began by asking Chief Wallis to give a report at this point. Chief Wallis addressed the commission. He wanted to clarify some things that Mr. Donahue had spoken about. He had the number of classes and hours broken down and a comparison of regional-based classes and facility-based classes. He had learned many things when he was looking at hazmat and the staff had been helpful.

Ms. Ramezan had provided him with the reports, organizational charts, etc. He stated that he would not share on his personal opinions at this time but would just be reporting the data. A paper copy of the report was provided to the commission members. He reviewed the data with the group. He had been given a tour of the hazmat training grounds and he was very impressed with the amount of training props that were assembled and the classroom that was provided for hazmat. He pointed out that there was continual maintenance on the props being used. As he spoke and looked at the numbers, he was intrigued with the obvious lack of participation from industrial clients at their well-established and equipped facility. It seemed like to him that there were just not enough people coming there to take advantage of what was being offered. It could be that some of the training was being done by private companies. It was mentioned that there had been some talks with the military about providing hazardous material training in the near future. This would definitely need to be considered as they looked forward into the future. He was also informed the new ProBoard standard for certification for industrial fire brigade will now require both hazmat awareness and operations. So, he had consulted with Christine and there were 240 certifications/testings in 2018, 278 in 2019, and 160 in 2020. Taking into consideration that about half of the clients that were currently sitting for the 1081 testing had already met the pre-requisites before they even came in. So, he had assessed and calculated how they should project as they had moved forward and how that would enhance the awareness and the operations that were actually being taught there.

He had asked Kathe to provide him with the short-term/long-term strategic plan because he felt it would be one-sided if he had only presented data for one or the other. He wanted to show not only where they were but also where they wanted to go. He asked if anyone had any questions before they continued. Mr. Bryan Adams asked if he could tell them how many students that had attended as well. Chief Wallis stated that he did not have that in the report, but he did have the information and could provide it to them by email following the meeting.

Mr. Major asked once again if there were any more questions. None were voiced.

The next meeting was scheduled for April 19 at 10 am.

This concluded the presentation of the chairman's report.

Old Business

Mr. Major opened the floor for the presentation of old business. The first matter was regarding the 3 positions that had been discussed which included the Hazmat manager. He reminded the commission about the 2 candidates that had been presented. They had been able to get to know them and conduct a Q & A with them. He opened the floor for discussion regarding the candidates.

Mr. Adams stated that he still was of the same opinion and he did not think that they should make a move yet. He did not feel that the numbers matched the data. He did not see the reason for the position. He had asked Mr. Davis about it and he still felt that they should gather more data and see where to go with this. He just did not feel that they could justify the salary and the position. Mr. Davis via Zoom messaged that he agreed. Mr. Donahue respectfully asked what data he actually want to see. Mr. Adams wanted to know what this manager would actually be doing for 40 hours a week. Mr. Donahue answered that he would be generating the revenue for the program. As in many agencies already in place there, they were given a bucket of money at the beginning of the year. The hazmat program started with \$0. So, they ran a deficit until they earned that money. With no manager to earn that money, then in fact the program would just fall into disarray.

He did want to clarify that when analyzing the data, how many instructional hours in a year did not capture what was required of the manager to do such as preparation for the class. The courses for this department were not basic or straight off the shelf. Many were customized to fit the customer's needs. The manager would need to go meet with customer to outline their needs initially, then bring the information back and compile the curriculum and course material needed. The class did happen there on site, but each class was customized to fit the customer's needs. It was way more involved than the regular manager for areas with basic courses.

Mr. Adams stated that he had read through all job descriptions for the manager and instructor. He felt that the managerial position should be handled by Mr. Donahue and his current staff and possibly a simple instructor hired. Mr. Donahue respectfully disagreed and stated that he would love the opportunity to sit down with him and discuss that in more detail. Mr. Donahue added as well that an adjunct employee was usually paid 25 dollars an hour and 7% in benefits that went to the state which was 1/3 of the salary paid to a full-time employee. If all the adjunct instructors that were on staff had been listed as full-time instructors, their budget would not have been able to handle it. He added that managers manage people as well as projects. He felt that there was some data missing if the opinion of the commission was that they were manager heavy and instructor light. Mr. Davis via Zoom commented

that he still thought they needed to consider the set-up of the rescue/hazmat program. He did not disagree that they needed a hazmat instructor not a manager. Mr. Adams stated he agreed with Mr. Adams. He personally felt they needed to strive for full-time instructors and the WAE program was a viable entity but if it was their primary means of doing things, they would need to try to find a different way of doing it. He just felt after reviewing the budget that there was some re-organization that could take place that could get them more money through that. He did feel that they should hold off on hiring a manager right now until they could review the re-organization possibilities.

In the light of re-organization and restructuring and listening and observing during the meeting, Mr. Major stated the staff was already stretched and overworked. They did not have time to go out and bring more business in which was what Chief Wallis had previously stated as well. They had great equipment, props and curriculum but it just seemed to be underutilized. So, every day that they did not make a decision in light of this situation, it was just prolonging the loss of revenue. He had no issue with the combining of hazmat/ rescue programs. A decision just needed to be made and they needed someone in the field managing and selling this department.

Ms. Jones commented that this situation was a double-edged sword from the hiring manager's position. The commission was asking them to wait until they figured out whether they needed a marketing person was the best use of these funds, but in the meantime, no one was in charge of that program. No one was discussing with their existing clients upcoming trainings or necessary trainings. Logistically, it was putting a strain on the current staff in ways that could not reflect on paper or in data. The manager's job was to manage people, curriculum, invoicing and admin duties as well as having the experience and the knowledge to sell the program and teach. She stated that she had seen the place when they had a lot of full-time people and the place where they were slim. At this time, they were able to get experience on the part time side of things because they were paid at part time. They would never be able to afford on the existing budget to pay people with the experience levels they were wanting full-time. She reiterated that they were not opposed to and were very open to the recommendations of the commission, but there were still job duties that were not being done because things were so thin in that area. It was very frustrating as a manager when you didn't have the people in the places they needed to be in and the people you did have were being run ragged.

Mr. Romero asked if they could possibly do an interim manager for the time being and run a nationwide application again to see if they received any more candidates and use the person already working with LSU to serve in that position. Mr. Major assumed that they could.

Mr. Major stated that as every other member on the commission he wanted to see them be the best they could be and he did not want to be viewed as an obstructionist to moving forward. He wasn't sure that they could gather all the data and information that they needed to review and understand in the next two days, two weeks, or even two months. He felt that using an interim may be the answer and then see where they were a few months from now.

Mr. Browning asked who else already hired could assist with the marketing of the department. Ms. Jones stated that there was not an allocation currently for someone to only do marketing. She and another co-worker did the marketing currently and what was done was very organic and basic. The marketing was only once piece of this manager's job.

Mr. Adams did not feel like they were holding anything up. He felt that all they were asking was for some of the current people that were hired to step up and help build the program. He stated that he didn't have an issue with the commission, but he would not be in support of it personally.

Mr. Major asked plainly what exactly the commission wanted to see in order to make this decision. Mr. Adams asked to be informed on the number of participants in addition to the amount of classes and hours available. Mr. Donahue added an explanation of how the self-generated model worked. Each class was charged a class minimum fee regardless of the amount of participants. Some discussion ensued regarding all that Mr. Fowler was doing in each department. Mr. Davis asked via Zoom if they could have FETI administration evaluate the self-generating operations' organization and propose a restructuring org chart to streamline the position and have Keith as the chief of the group. That way he would be the point of contact to all customers because the rescue manager was open along with hazmat. Keith responded that he did not currently do anything with rescue. He did not do rescue training and he was not familiar with it.

Ms. Jones desired to asked Mr. Davis if he meant for one person to be a subject matter expert on rescue, hazmat, fire and EMS because all four of those were under the self-generating industrial program. Mr. Donahue stated that he could forward them the organizational chart that was done just two years ago. There was valid reason to fill the hazmat position and when there was a valid reason to fill the rescue position, they would be back to the commission to request it. Mr. Major asked what would make it a necessity to fill that position. Mr. Donahue answered that when the volume of business was such that the planning and the execution could not be done by Kathe exclusively and the need was sustained not just a one-time moment of demand. He also pointed out that another reason that class numbers were low was because of Covid but that was all about to change.

Mr. Browning stated that he was just learning that there was a reorganization done two years ago. He mentioned a few examples of where they could pull additional monies to put the full-time people out such as reducing the 54% paid by municipal to 30% since most municipal in his opinion was handled offsite. He felt that was where they had all differed about understanding what needed to be done. He stated that Mr. Donahue's opinion was the way it had always been done and the commission had never had a say in that. But now, they would have a say because at the end of the day, he stated that the most important thing that they did was to provide training to the fire fighters across the state. Mr. Donahue asked who was paying for the 27,000 students expenses that had been through their training programs and how was the administration of the students' expenses being paid for. He reiterated that 80% of their activities were municipal in nature.

Chief Lindberg asked via Zoom what the timeframe for it to be sustained was, what is the criteria for these decisions and who was making these decisions. He wanted to know if it was based off of the strategic plan and wished to see a copy of strategic plan. Mr. Donahue answered that in their strategic plan, every program had a manager so the answer to that was yes, the request was built off of the strategic plan. As well, the definition of sustainability was if the revenue supported the direct and indirect expenses, not just activities, but also revenue. Mr. Donahue stated that he did not have a copy of the strategic plan with him, but he would get that for anyone wanting a copy. The discussion returned to the present item of old business which was the hazmat manager position.

Mr. Major stated his thoughts as discussion out loud. If they filled the hazmat manager position today, the rescue side picked up and they wanted to create the hazmat/rescue manager position and the person that they were choosing now did not have the qualifications to be able to handle that position

then what would they do at that point. Mr. Donahue answered that they currently had a candidate who was qualified to teach in all four of the programs although he was not licensed by the bureau of EMS in the state of Louisiana but had all the credentials. They had another individual who did not have all the credits if this was the consideration. He felt that if they hired an individual, and in the future, if there was a legitimate need for rescue then he could submit to LSU for a change in job description. He was aware that they did not really care for the WAE model, but it existed for them because of the limited number of full-time instructors that they had that could not be subject matter experts in every field.

Mr. Browning stated that the culture of the fire service needs to live in the state fire training agency. The way you do that is to get those people who have the 10-year people who have the passion to be a fire training instructor. Cross training is very important. WE have got to attract people here who have the municipal and industrial fire experience. We have to get the people who have the education to teach the subject matter.

Mr. Donahue stated he agrees that we have to have the best people to teach the subject matter.

Mr. Browning stated that WAEs should not be the primary means for a center like this to operate. He says that we need to find people who have all these skills and are cross trained as they will be the best fit for FETI.

Mr. Donahue stated that cross-trained people are excellent responders. However, nowhere in the cross training is the capability for these people to instruct. The missions for response and training are different. Not every best business practice for a response agency is the best in an education or training environment. At some point of time, we may have to diverge for what is the best interest for the program.

Mr. Donahue appreciated the thought that the commission was putting into this position for over the past 107 days on this difficult decision. When it is outside of their box, it is difficult. 100% of the HazMat manager's job is for enterprise. The program has to self-sustain themselves. He explained that they would pay an instructor \$48K when they would pay the Manager \$62K. A difference of \$14K and plus benefits which would equal a saving of \$20K with the opportunity cost of no incoming revenue from the hazmat program and loss of customers. When you shift it all down, we are not talking about a manager, we are talking about \$20K. As well, the workload that was left untended got shoved off on someone else's shoulders to have to handle and as a result, the productivity in the other programs suffered as well as the staff who are putting in the extra work.

Mr. Davis commented via Zoom that would free up some funds to enhance the organization in other manners, such as more instructors, etc. Most times, in the industrial setting and the emergency response coordinator was in charge of hazmat and rescue. This was the same model that he was pushing for because the coordinators did not have time to talk to four different people.

Ms. Jones asked for clarification from Mr. Davis.

Motion was made by Mr. Adams to enter into executive session to discuss the hazmat manager position further and Mr. Romero seconded the motion. No objections were voiced.

MOTION PASSED.

Commission entered into executive session.

Motion was made by Mr. Major to call the meeting back to order after executive session ended and Mr. Romero seconded the motion. No objections were voiced.

MOTION PASSED.

Motion was made by Mr. Romero to hire Mr. Albert Anthony as the interim hazmat manager for a trial period of time so that Mr. Wallis could review data and Mr. Anthony could begin to build the program. The floor was opened for discussion. Mr. Donahue requested that the commission consider what Mr. Anthony was currently doing and who was going to be taking those duties from him. Mr. Major stated that interim was possibly not the correct term. This was a compromise in trying to help both sides. Mr. Donahue added that if this was approved, he would need to go back to LSU HRM and explain this situation. LSU did not do interims and since Mr. Anthony would be doing a job that was not advertised, they would require FETI to readvertise for the interim manager position for a specific length of time. Mr. Romero asked if they hired someone for the position was there not a trial period anyway. Mr. Donahue stated that there was not a probationary period with LSU. When you came in on the job on day 1, you were expected to fully function and do the job.

Since there did not seem to be a way of compromise, a substitute motion was made by Mr. Adams to defer the decision of the hazmat manager position for six months and Mr. Parker seconded the substitute motion. Four voted for and one voted against and there was one abstention.

MOTION PASSED.

Mr. Major asked what the wishes of the commission was in regard to the accounts receivable position. It was a current job that was vacated.

Ms. Ramezan explained that the employee who was the accounts receivable person was promoted to Business Manager. Currently, the Business Manager is doing half of her new duties as well as all of her previous job duties. Ms. Ramezan is doing the other half of the Business Manager's duties. Mr. Romero asked if interviews were still being conducted for this position. Ms. Ramezan replied that the first interviews were completed and the second interviews were taking place tomorrow if anyone from the Commission was able to sit in. The other candidate will not meet tomorrow so we will need to figure out a time to meet with her. Mr. Romero stated that since we had a couple of candidates were they going to be brought to the Commission. Ms. Ramezan stated that she wasn't sure if the commission wanted her at that level because this is a coordinator level position in the Business Office to bring the candidates before the Commission. Also she has a candidate that is not local. Ms. Ramezan made a request that we have a commission member present at the interviews and that Commission member could bring the information back to the Commission [as opposed to bringing the candidates to the whole commission].

Motion was made by Mr. Major that the candidates for this level position did not need to come before the commission and Mr. Parker seconded the motion. No objections were voiced.

MOTION PASSED.

The Region 4 manager position was brought before the Commission. It was asked if we had candidates for this position. Mr. Ken Fowler responded that we have not even posted the position yet. The intent was to try to fill it by the beginning of the FY so he wanted to get it on their agenda so they had an appropriate amount of time to make a decision on where we want to go.

Motion was made by Mr. Browning to move forward with filling the position and Mr. Romero seconded the motion.

Mr. Romero stated that since this position would be in his area he would like to be involved in the interviews. Mr. Fowler stated that he would include Mr. Romero.

No objections were voiced.

MOTION PASSED.

A question by Mr. DiSalvo was read to the commission. He stated as a representative from the LFCA attending the meeting via zoom, do I have a vote? Mr. Major stated that he does not.

Mr. Lee stated that he is working on the request at the last meeting regarding reciprocity. He has his staff looking into it and found that the entities in the state are not accredited by IFSAC but are FESHE. He is talking to the board of regents and he will get a resolution to that.

This concluded the presentation of old business.

New Business

Mr. Major began the presentation of new business.

Motion was made by Mr. Browning to recommend that Mr. Wallis get with Mr. Donahue to work with LSU, EOC and the commission to facilitate an MOU with FETI emergency employees and equipment in states of emergency and coordinate that with ESF 4 & 9 and Mr. Adams seconded the motion. No objections were voiced.

MOTION PASSED.

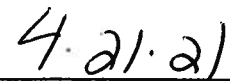
Mr. Major asked if there were any more questions or objections. None were voiced.

This concluded the presentation of new business.

Motion to adjourn was entertained by Mr. Major. Motion was made by Mr. Major to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Romero seconded the motion. No objections were voiced.

Meeting was adjourned.


Approved by: Chad Major


Date: