



# AUSTIN FIRE DEPARTMENT DOCTRINE

---

Written and Developed for the  
Members of the Austin Fire Department

## OUR MISSION AND VISION

A leader in the fire service, the Austin Fire Department (AFD) is committed to creating safer communities through prevention, preparedness, and effective emergency response. We set the standard among public safety agencies, serving the community through innovation and collaboration, while honoring tradition and embracing inclusion, equity, and diversity for all.

### MISSION

The Austin Fire Department is committed to creating safe and resilient communities through prevention, preparedness, and effective emergency response.



### VISION

The Austin Fire Department sets the standard among public safety agencies, serving the community through innovation and collaboration, while honoring tradition and embracing inclusion, equity, and diversity for all.



## OUR MOTTO

Excellence beyond our standards. Service beyond your expectations.

## PURPOSE

Our Mission, Vision, and Motto drive everything we do. These three tenets are the cornerstones of our purpose: to serve the community members of, and visitors to, Austin as compassionately and selflessly as possible. On every shift, for every call,

we strive to go above and beyond our customers' expectations. Whether it is a family's worst day ever or someone simply doesn't know who to call for assistance, the members of the Austin Fire Department will be there to help.

## THE DOCTRINE

The Austin Fire Department provides our community with the services to not just meet their expectations, but to exceed them whenever possible. Responsive, high-quality public safety provided by dedicated AFD personnel build community capital in our department—the “profit” we make in exchange for those services—which directly determines the level of trust our various stakeholders have in the department's leadership to make decisions in their best interests.

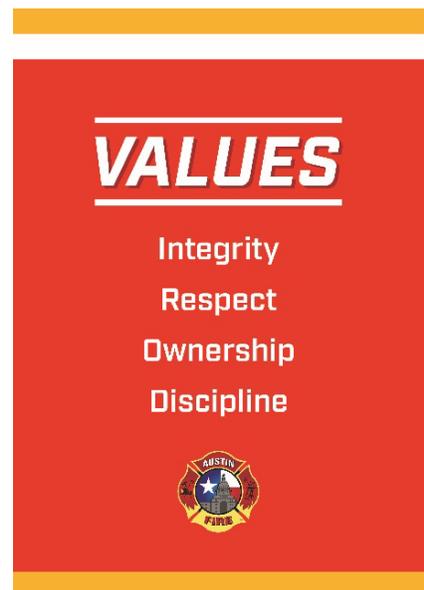
This is an area in which we should always be striving to do more; essentially, it's a goal we can't—and never should—meet. Continually working on improving our relationships with our customers means we are always listening, learning, and growing; to do otherwise means we are stagnant, believe we have discovered all we need to know, and no longer value the ever-changing dynamic of a city as diverse and fluid as Austin. When we think we no longer have anything left to learn—from ourselves, each other, and/or those we serve—then we have essentially written our own obituary. The information outlined in this Doctrine is designed to ensure that doesn't happen.

### Core Values

Core Values (CVs) determine not only how we see ourselves, but how others see us as well. In turn, that image is magnified both internally and externally by each individual that makes up AFD; when viewed collectively, there is one team...under one name...with one mission.

What exactly are those CVs? For those of us who proudly wear the Austin Fire Department patch on our shoulder, they come down to four things:

- **INTEGRITY:** Do the right thing. Integrity is a quality you develop by adhering to moral principles. Organizational and personal integrity are essential to the success of our department; anything less is unacceptable. We are committed to upholding the trust given to us by those we serve by adhering to, and maintaining, the highest standards in our [Code of Conduct](#). Honesty and transparency develops loyalty to both the community and the Austin Fire Department.



- **RESPECT:** Be nice. Respect allows us to appreciate the best in other people. Putting forth your greatest effort is a sign of self-respect, a vital ingredient in this overall value. Remaining humble in serving others, being inclusive of all, and having pride in what you do demonstrates the respect you have for yourself, your co-workers, and our community.
- **OWNERSHIP:** Know your job. To be effective, you must have a personal commitment to both the fire service and those you serve. You must hold yourself accountable for your words, thoughts, deeds, and actions. Never stop learning; have a steadfast commitment to developing as an individual and as a member of the Austin Fire Department. Becoming better at your job every day is paramount to success.
- **DISCIPLINE:** Be consistent. Always do your best, not just the minimum to get by. Take a stand for, and act on, the things you know are honorable. Be courageous and stand up for what is right and just.

Otherwise known as IROD, these four simple but imperative values are, in short, our “code” for everything we do and say. If it doesn’t meet the code, then we probably shouldn’t be doing it or saying it.

Each individual can and does make a difference. Every employee is expected to accomplish their work while keeping the CVs uppermost in mind, and with a sense of duty and honor to the department, their fellow employees, and the community we serve.

Just as a crew on an incident scene cannot effectively operate if they do not communicate and work together as a unit, inclusive, equitable teamwork is how we get things done...and it’s what our community members expect and deserve. Active participation by, and support of, *all* AFD employees is essential to the successful pursuit of our mission and vision.

As the 14<sup>th</sup> largest fire department in the country, the Austin Fire Department is not only a leader in many areas of the fire service; we’ve also set the standard in several disciplines that other departments around the country now follow. Our employees made a conscious decision to come work here. Why? Because they wanted to work for one of the best fire departments in the nation, and alongside others who had the same passion for service and excellence. The leadership of this organization has a corollary obligation to ensure you have all the resources necessary to accomplish our mission. This symbiotic relationship provides as many opportunities for personal and professional growth as those who choose to embrace them. Each of us is empowered to take action supported by the principles outlined in this Doctrine, as long as those actions are reported through the chain of command and with respect to the various departmental branches.

## DECISION-MAKING PRIORITIES

The Austin Fire Department's decision-making culture, built on the acceptance of a mission-driven process, should first and foremost—directly or indirectly—benefit the community we serve. Considered next are the needs and benefits to the department as a whole. Personnel in various branches should make decisions aligned with the needs of the department and community, but also must consider the impact of their decisions on other sections within AFD; those which benefit one branch should not have an adverse effect on another.

There are many groups within AFD and all are important. Decisions made to benefit one should also be applicable to others similarly situated. Individual needs are also critical to our success; decisions made to benefit one individual should be applicable to others similarly situated and who make the same request. Decisions based on racism, sexism, favoritism, nepotism, and/or territorialism will not be tolerated. Applying this systematic approach assures mission-driven decisions are derived from mission-driven motives.

In order of importance, the decision-making priorities are as follows:

1. **Community:** All decisions made by Austin Fire Department leaders and personnel should first, directly and/or indirectly, benefit the community we serve.
2. **Department:** Considered next are the needs and benefits to the Austin Fire Department as a whole.
3. **Branch(s):** Decisions in a branch must be made in alignment with the needs of the department and community, but the impact of those decisions on other branches must also be considered.
4. **Groups:** There are many groups within AFD, and all are important. Decisions made to benefit one group will also be applicable to others that are similarly situated.
5. **Individual(s):** Decisions made to benefit an individual will be applicable to those similarly situated who make the same request.
6. **Leader:** The needs of the leader/leadership are considered last.

### Leadership Culture

All AFD leaders will be visible and engaged in meaningful interactions with personnel across all ranks and positions, both uniform and civilian, fostering good morale. Leaders will be predictable, establishing expectations and consistently modeling those expectations. Leaders will be accessible and approachable at all levels, creating an atmosphere where employees can be heard and feel comfortable addressing needs and concerns. The final piece of the leadership culture is being accountable. All members of the department will answer for the results of their actions if not in line with this Doctrine.

- **Visible:** Being visible and engaged in meaningful interactions with personnel fosters good morale.
- **Predictable:** Austin Fire Department leaders are predictable, establishing expectations in accordance with departmental controls and consistently modeling those expectations.
- **Accessible:** Austin Fire Department leaders are accessible at all levels, creating an atmosphere where employees are heard.
- **Approachable:** Austin Fire Department leaders are approachable, and employees feel comfortable addressing them with needs and concerns.
- **Accountable:** Everyone answers for the results of their actions if not in line with the department's Doctrine.

### **Organizational Priorities**

The number one mission of the Austin Fire Department is emergency response; it is the reason for our existence. Activities related to training, maintenance, fire prevention, communications, safety, human resources, and support services comprise a strategic approach to the overall organizational priorities. A lack of understanding of the department's priorities and their relationship to our mission can lead to frustration or apathy among elected, appointed, and community leadership, as well as our own personnel. To minimize this possibility, the strategic approach to accomplish our vision and mission includes the following organizational priorities in rank order:

- I. Human Resources**
- II. Emergency Response Readiness**
- III. Professional Development**
- IV. Facilities, Equipment, Supplies, and Technology**
- V. Customer Service**
- VI. Public Information, Education, and Relations (PIER) Programs**

Continuous assessment of our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges will dictate the emphasis placed on each of these with regards to specific financial and strategic planning.

Our top priority is delivering the highest quality emergency response and public safety service in the most cost-responsible manner. It is every leader's responsibility to ensure his/her section's actions are making the best use of the funds appropriated to each by the taxpayers. Where there is inefficiency or duplication, changes will be made to ensure better use of resources. We must always be looking for ways to add more value to the services we provide by utilizing the current resources we are allotted in ways that benefit our customers.

So then how can this document be used as a guideline for our organizational priorities? By providing departmental direction, and establishing and attaining our stated goals and objectives. The Austin Fire Department is not a for-profit business selling a product; however, the service we “sell” generates the profit we receive: community capital. And that hopefully translates to votes in our favor at the ballot box when the time comes for bond packages that will provide funds for new stations, facility improvements, etc.

Our strategic approach addresses the following, noted in order of importance:

### **I. Human Resources**

- To meet our operational and strategic goals, we must have the best personnel available in the labor pool.
- We must effectively recruit and retain good people.
- AFD must provide competitive salaries, benefits, and opportunities that attract and keep the best employees for a full career term.

Personnel must have faith in AFD’s leadership in guiding their efforts to a successful outcome. They must also trust in the judgment and actions of their fellow members, even when faced with the risk of making the ultimate sacrifice. It is the belief in our core values—and how we embody those as individuals and as a group—that we develop the trust necessary in each other to do this job. Without it, we fail our residents, damage our image and reputation, and become a liability to the City organization...and ourselves.

### **II. Emergency Response Readiness**

- Any emergency that is not of a law enforcement nature is the purview and responsibility of AFD.
- We must formally assess our community’s risks and determine our current capabilities of responding to mitigate those risks, thereby minimizing the loss of life, property, and the impact of disasters on the environment.
- We will work diligently to be adequately staffed, trained, equipped, and prepared to respond to all AFD-prescribed emergencies, from a choking baby or cardiac arrest to an overturned fuel tanker on the interstate, from an airport operations emergency to a structure or wildland fire. When our community members call, we will be ready to respond.

Community risk and resource capability assessments identify and rank potential emergencies and disasters; strategic and operational plans should focus on eliminating gaps in these capabilities. The issue we face is balancing risks against available resources, in essence asking, “What is the acceptable level of risk that our stakeholders are willing to accept and pay for?”

Standards of Response Coverage (SORC) combine service-level objectives with staffing levels to define how and when resources will respond to a call for service. In essence, SORC statements identify criteria for trained personnel and response times needed to effectively mitigate an incident. We identify these SORC targets and goals for major hazards (e.g., fires, medical calls, technical rescues, and hazardous materials incidents). Measuring our performance against SORCs allows us to determine if current resources and service objectives effectively address the assessed risks within the City of Austin.

Additionally, an efficient pre-fire survey and inspection program not only secures our property insurance rating (ISO 1), but also increases response efficiency by having prior knowledge of specific buildings before any involvement in an emergency incident. Fire- and life-safety concerns noticed and corrected during a fire inspection can eliminate hazards and prevent loss. Through these methodologies, the overall emergency response needs for those we serve can and will be realized.

### **III. Professional Development**

- AFD will develop and adopt a succession plan and professional development model that meets the knowledge, skills, and ability requirements for each rank and position of the department.
- We will develop a plan to provide training and professional development opportunities for our members' career success within AFD.

These important measures ensure individuals and the department as a whole can deliver the services our community members expect and deserve. As we continue in our quest for excellence, we know our greatest assets in this area are training and professional development. So making sure we maintain a consistent focus on these two key components helps us build a workforce that is at the top of their game and always ready to meet whatever challenges they may face.

### **IV. Facilities, Equipment, Supplies, and Technology**

- Without adequate facilities, equipment, supplies, and technology, we only have good intentions. We will formally assess the location and condition of all AFD facilities, and develop strategic plans to relocate and renovate those improperly positioned and/or grossly deteriorated.
- Fire apparatus, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), SCBA, rescue tools, and equipment must be assessed to determine replacement needs.
- A replacement program will be established for all major equipment purchases for "best-in-class" fleet, fire equipment, and rescue tools.
- We must also ensure AFD has adequate technology so that we can accomplish our mission and vision.

All equipment used in the delivery of our services must be of the highest quality and perform when needed. Our facilities, equipment, supplies, tools, and technology are all critical components to fulfilling our mission and realizing our vision. Most issues related to these items can be planned for and scheduled, although some are unforeseen and will be handled accordingly.

#### **V. Customer Service(s)**

- In this context, customer service means more than just going the extra mile for our stakeholders. It also includes identifying all emergency and non-emergency services and programs provided by AFD, then assertively marketing those to our customers.
- We must dispel the perception that all we do is fight fires and assist Austin-Travis County EMS on medical calls.
- Securing our Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) accreditation is essential to our customer service culture.

We are dedicated to identifying customer needs and then doing everything possible to meet those needs. This is not a desire; it is an expected level of performance by AFD members across all sections and ranks. Providing exceptional customer service is an essential part of the fire service; responding directly to the needs of our stakeholders is the most effective way to gain their support, and the support of local elected and appointed officials. By doing so, we are then able to trade on that “community capital” and secure new resources, programs, etc.

#### **VI. Public Information, Education, and Relations (PIER) Programs**

- **Public information** informs the public about fire operations and actions taken by the Austin Fire Department during emergencies.
- **Public education** works to change people’s attitudes and behaviors related to safety, as most fires and injuries can be prevented with altered behavior.
- **Public relations** develops positive public perceptions about the Austin Fire Department, and its personnel, programs, and services.

An informed public is the best way to secure support for fire and emergency services. It is important to look at the relationship of public information, public education, and public relations’ functions and their role in fire departments, both today and in the future. They are the keys to effective prevention programs and garnering support for our vision.

Remember: the public pays our bills. They have the right to know about our operations. Our public information efforts ensure they are aware about what we do and the services we provide, both emergency and otherwise.

The human element is the primary cause of fires. Most incidents are due to carelessness or inappropriate behavior. Our public education efforts seek to change those behaviors, theoretically lowering the number of fires resulting in injuries/fatalities/property loss.

Public relations' programs encompass tools utilizing the traditional press alongside social media and other methods to inform, educate, and persuade the public about our efforts over and above what they may see and hear about in the news cycle. Public relations means we get to “tell our own story” the way we want to, without being dependent on a media outlet’s agenda, platform, or time limit.

## CONCLUSION

The future of the fire service will continue to be driven by changes in society: higher demands and expectations of stakeholders and fire personnel—including greater accountability in the use of public resources—improving the overall efficiency of programs and services, a laser focus on inclusivity, and true transparency. The Austin Fire Department is committed to becoming the leader in all of these areas, but it won’t happen without hard work, commitment, and dedication to creating a legacy beyond ourselves. We will also periodically review our Mission, Vision, and Values to ensure they remain truly reflective of our department and those we serve.

What will the Austin Fire Department of the future look like? Many things remain a mystery, but one thing is certain: it will be a department filled with opportunities, some of which will be disguised as challenges. But we will be prepared to meet all of them with an open mind, a grateful heart, and a renewed commitment to service above self.

