



Tasmania Fire Service

AUSTRALASIAN FIREFIGHTER EXCHANGE FELLOWSHIP

INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL APPLICATION INFORMATION

CONTENTS

Page

Introduction3

 What is the Firefighter Exchange Fellowship?3

 How does the program operate?4

 Application Process – Overview5

 General Terms and Conditions.....6

 Accommodation6

 Changes to Application6

 Costs.....6

 Deed of Exchange.....6

 Family7

 Insurance7

 Length of Exchange7

 Matching of Applicants7

 Medical Certificate.....8

 Pre-requisites.....8

 Rank8

 Recreation Leave8

 References.....8

 Reporting8

 Salaries and Conditions9

 Selection9

 Union / Association Membership9

 Work Conditions.....9

INTRODUCTION

What is the Firefighter Exchange Fellowship?

An exchange program briefly defined: “is an opportunity for two persons of the same profession, working for different employers to temporarily exchange their jobs for a defined period of time”.

The International Firefighter Exchange Fellowship (IFEF) was initiated by the Metropolitan fire Brigade, Melbourne, as a Centennial program in 1992.

The program is a cooperative venture between Australian and New Zealand Fire Services with participation from overseas Fire Services. Initially Fire Services in Canada and UK were approached to pilot the program, and to date, exchanges have been made with Canada, Sweden, United Kingdom, Ireland and the USA. The program provides an invaluable opportunity for networking between Fire and Emergency Services around the world.

Following its inception, it was identified that there is also a benefit in the exchanging of ideas within Australia and New Zealand, and thus the Exchange Fellowship Program also includes interstate exchanges and exchanges between Australia and New Zealand.

The term ‘Fellowship’ is used to indicate the spirit of the exchange. The concept of Fellowship is used in the hope and expectation that those firefighters and their families will be keen to join the network of others who have benefited from an exchange and will continue to participate in promoting the program to others.

Fellowship also refers to the hope that you and your exchange partner will develop a bond of friendship through your shared experience which will last beyond the formal boundaries of the exchange.

The Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) is a keen participant in this program and hope that if you are successful in your application, you will:

- Be able to share knowledge and improve efficiency and morale
- Build international networks
- Professionally represent your home fire service
- Gain knowledge in specialist areas
- Gain interesting life experience from living in a location away from your home base
- Experience growth in your professionalism and understanding of different organisations/cultures.

How does the program operate?

To be eligible to participate in the program you will need to be an experienced and qualified firefighter employed under the TFFIEIA, with a minimum of four years full time service. Officers may apply, but while on the exchange, will perform the duties of and be paid as a Leading Firefighter. On a case by case basis the TFS may consider applications from other staff employed under the TFFIEIA i.e Firecomm etc. The TFS has established criteria for participating in the program. Overseas firefighters must have the endorsement of their Fire Service to participate in the program.

Exchanges are usually not just about the exchanging of jobs. In most case, houses and possessions are also swapped. The professional needs of exchange partners are taken care of by the matching of skills and experience, social and family environments. Seniority and rank are not interrupted during the exchange. All benefits are retained.

All costs for travel, personal and health insurances and living expenses are your own responsibility.

Costs for induction and uniforms will be met by the host Fire Service. You will need to ensure that TFS has an employment insurance scheme (e.g. workers compensation) that will cover you whilst working internationally. If it does not, you will need to arrange private insurance at your own expense, before the commencement of the exchange.

The TFS accepts internal applications and external expressions of interest from overseas/interstate firefighters to participate in the exchange program at any time. See page 5 Application Overview section for further details.

One of the hardest parts of the exchange process can be locating a suitable exchange partner. In the case of TFS employees it will be up to individuals to arrange/locate suitable exchange partners. The TFS does not locate exchange partners. *Note that it can sometimes take years before a match is found.*

When an appropriate match occurs, the exchanging firefighters are invited to communicate with each other, and if the arrangements are acceptable, to consent to the offer. It is important that all aspects of the exchange arrangements are discussed and agreed to in writing. Please refer any questions to the coordinator of the program in your fire service.

APPLICATION PROCESS - OVERVIEW

Thank you for your interest in the Firefighter Exchange Fellowship Program. All information in this document and the General Information document has been compiled to assist you in your consideration of an exchange. Please ensure you read both documents carefully

There will be many issues to consider when going through the consideration and application process for a position on the Firefighter Exchange Fellowship program.

The TFS will accept external (international and national) enquiries and internal TFS applications at any time.

Remember, that your lifestyle will be different, both personally and professionally than that of your exchange partner, but hopefully, that is why you are interested in participating in the program.

External Enquiries

Before lodging an expression of interest you need to make enquiries with your own agency that an exchange will be supported.

Without this an exchange will not proceed.

There needs to be someone with the appropriate authority to oversee the process, usually referred to as the 'Exchange Coordinator'. Your Human Resources Department is a good place to start or if you know someone who has previously been on exchange find out who managed their program.

Lodge an expression of interest with the TFS Firefighter Exchange Coordinator
chris.tomes@fire.tas.gov.au

TFS Applicants

Read all the Exchange Program information.
Submit an application.

The Exchange Coordinator will review the application and will make a recommendation to the relevant Regional Chief.

If the application is deemed suitable an interview will be conducted by the Exchange Coordinator and Regional Chief for further review of the application, including service record.

The Exchange Coordinator and Regional Chief recommendation will be forwarded to the Chief Officer for endorsement.

The Exchange Coordinator will notify the successful applicant.

Note - The TFS generally does not arrange/locate a suitable exchange partner. It is up to individuals to arrange/locate a suitable exchange partner.

GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS

This program operates as far as practicable on a cost neutral basis. Fire Services are not responsible for costs incurred by exchanges.

Firefighters replace each other, time for time, position for position, leave for leave, working agreement for working agreement. They do not exchange salaries or benefits and they do not lose their seniority while absent on an exchange

Accommodation

When an exchange includes the exchange of accommodation, the exchange partners are deemed to have sole occupancy of the property for the full term of the exchange, unless an alternative arrangement is negotiated in writing. The original owner or occupier of the dwelling will continue to bear responsibility for the insurance and mortgage instalments or rent on the property. Current photographs of all rooms and the property must be submitted with the application.

Housing features such as built-in air conditioning are not standard across all countries. If this is a pre-requisite then be specific about any housing features you required. Please consider carefully as your exchange accommodation will be for a 12 month period and be sure that you can deal with compromises for the length of your stay.

The TFS takes no responsibility for the suitability of accommodation. Accommodation issues must be settled between individual exchange partners.

Changes to your application

You must notify the TFS, in writing, of any change to your professional or personal situation, particularly if this changes your ability to participate in the program. This also includes application details such as a change of residence (new photos must accompany the details of the change, where applicable).

Costs

Exchange partners are expected to meet the cost of return airfares for themselves and their families, and make their own arrangements for passports and visas (OS).

Applicants should be aware that exchange rates can fluctuate considerably (OS) and that successful applicants must make their own appropriate financial arrangements and are responsible for their own living arrangements.

Deed of Exchange

All participants in the exchange, including both home and host fire services, and appropriate associations, will be required to sign a legal Deed of Exchange, cementing the exchange and conditions. From that time onward, the Deed will be considered standard and may not be varied by any party. Indemnities are comprehensively addressed in the Deed.

Family

If your exchange involves relocating family, their support of the exchange is critical. An exchange can often be more difficult for a spouse and children, being taken away from family and friends, consider this carefully and discuss your application fully, before submitting.

Exchanges are dependent on the ability of the exchange partner and family to obtain a visa to the host country. Exchange partners and all persons accompanying them must satisfy and continue to satisfy the residency requirements of the host country. You may wish to confirm eligibility prior to submitting your application. Contact your consulate, or the embassy or high commission of the country you wish to travel to. This is particularly important for those who may have criminal convictions.

Insurance

Work Related Insurance

Exchanges **cannot** proceed until all work related insurance details are finalized. Workers Insurance needs to be provided as per usual by your home fire service.

Home fire services must arrange and finalize details of all Workers Compensation and other insurance that is deemed necessary to protect you during the full term of the exchange. The Exchange Coordinators will need to provide written confirmation of this for the exchange to proceed.

If it is not possible to be covered under your employer's scheme, you **must** take out personal insurance to cover you in the event of a work related accident.

Health and Travel Insurance

Arrangements for health and travel insurance are your responsibility. It is vital that this is organized prior to the exchange taking place.

Length of Exchange

The Tasmania Fire Service generally expects exchanges to be for 12 months. If you are unable to give this length of commitment, you must indicate this in your application. The starting date for an exchange will be coordinated to suit organisational and environmental conditions. Exchange partners and their Fire Services are required to sign a Deed of Exchange which necessitates them to remain in the overseas/interstate posting for the specified period. Exchange partners will not be entitled to resume their previous position or return to their original accommodation until such a period has expired.

Locating a Suitable Exchange Partner

Whilst the TFS is responsible for endorsing an exchange the TFS generally does not locate a suitable exchange partner. It is up to individuals to arrange/locate a suitable exchange partner. The TFS Exchange Coordinator regularly receives overseas enquiries from firefighters enquiring about the program. Generally these exchange opportunities are e-mailed to all operational staff allowing anyone to make direct contact with the firefighter making the enquiry. *Note that it can sometimes take years before a match is found and not all applicants accepted into the program will locate an exchange match.* There is a greater chance of obtaining a suitable exchange partner if your options are as flexible as possible.

It remains the responsibility of individual exchange partners to be satisfied that the exchange is suitable before accepting. Ensuring all agreements are in writing helps to avoid misunderstandings.

Medical Certificate (OS)

A medical may be required prior to the issue of your visa. Contact your relevant consulate for details.

Pre-requisites

Any firefighter selected to participate in the exchange must have a minimum of four years full time career service at the time of application. Applicants are selected with due regard for their aptitude, performance, competence and contribution to their profession. Applicants should be prepared to obey all lawful instructions given by an Officer of the host fire service or its representative who is legally responsible for giving such instructions.

If an exchange is proposed between two countries with differing languages, it is expected that the exchange partners participating will develop sufficient language skills to be able to operate on a fire ground effectively. Competency in an approved bilingual examination may be required as evidence.

Rank

All exchange partners, irrespective of rank with the home fire service, will take the rank of Firefighter for the duration of the exchange. No command and control or managerial duties will be required.

TFS Officers note: At the discretion of the Chief Officer, positions within the Station Officer/Senior Station Officer, Communications Officer ranks will be allowed to exchange. Officers will temporarily drop to the rank of Leading Firefighter, including rate of pay, for the period of exchange and upon completion of the exchange be reinstated to their respective permanent rank and rate of pay.

Salaries

Exchange partners remain in the employ of the home fire service. Successful exchange partners will continue to receive salaries and benefits whilst on an exchange, with continuing deductions (including mortgages and insurances where applicable).

Overtime

This program operates as far as practicable on a cost neutral basis so generally any overtime accrued needs to be recorded and then taken as time off in lieu. There is generally no facility for overtime payment whilst on exchange.

Recreation Leave

The exchanging firefighters agree to accept the vacation or leave period of the person they are replacing. In short, they become that person for the term of the exchange. This includes the: vacation choice (how the vacations are selected within a crew), the number of days or weeks off on leave, lieu days or any extra leave, and the debiting of that leave by the host agency from the persons leave 'bank' they are replacing.

The date the exchange is completed, is the date the firefighters now becomes themselves again. Only at this point do firefighters use the vacation or leave they are entitled to from their "Permanent Employee".

Problems might arise because of the difference in vacation scheduling between Departments and Brigades. To prevent this, Exchanging firefighters must work out any differences as fairly as possible. If there is a discrepancy regarding vacation, the firefighters will accept the lesser of the leave.

The difference in vacation schedules often causes concern and some anxiety with firefighters who fear they may lose entitled vacation because of a discrepancy. It is up to the firefighters to be as fair as possible with each other when dealing with vacation. Common courtesy and clear communications between the firefighters is the only way to sort out discrepancies.

Reporting

It is important that to apply as an exchange firefighter, you are able to articulate what benefit you will get from the exchange, and how this will be applied upon return to your home fire service. It is common that following an exchange, firefighters are required to submit a detailed report to the home agency and the host agency. In many cases, a home agency may set a specific task or project to be researched, such as specialist equipment, rescue techniques, paramedical roles of firefighters etc.

It is critical to remain in contact with your home agency on a regular basis. This should be negotiated with your home agency prior to departure.

Selection

Firefighters selected for exchange must be worthy representatives of their profession and of their jurisdiction/country. Since participating in an exchange is regarded as a privilege, the firefighter, and their family, should be prepared to conduct themselves in such a way as to bring credit to their organisation.

Union / Association Membership

Exchange firefighters are usually 'adopted' by the host Union or Association as honorary members for the period of the exchange.

Work Conditions

All exchange partners must comply with the appropriate terms and conditions of the fellowship as determined by the TFS and clearly established in the Deed of Exchange.

Driving Emergency Vehicles

Exchange participants will not be required to drive or operate an emergency vehicle during the exchange period regardless of any driver's license they may hold.

What do I do now?

Consider completing the online application form and forward it to the Exchange Coordinator chris.tomes@fire.tas.gov.au

Remember you should only apply if:

- You have read and understood the Exchange Program information;
- You are serious about exchanging;
- You are adaptable, and able to work in diverse situations;
- You possess a keen interest in professional development; and
- You can assume the role of 'ambassador' of your fire service while on exchange.

This program can only be successful if those who choose to exchange apply for the right reasons.