

**Louisiana Fire and Emergency Training Commission Meeting  
Meeting Minutes  
December 12, 2018**

**Commission Members Present:**

Chad Major	Professional Firefighters Association of Louisiana
Charlie Metcalf	Louisiana State Firemen's Association
Ken Himel	Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association
Butch Browning	State Fire Marshal
Michael Donahue	Chancellor's Designee from LSU
Martin Latino	Louisiana Fire Chief's Association
Brian Lindberg	Louisiana State Firemen's Association

**Commission Members Absent:**

Karen St. Germain	Governor Appointee
Louis Romero	Professional Firefighters Association of Louisiana

**In Attendance:**

Loree Ramezan	FETI
Carey King	FETI
T.K. Devall	FETI
Ken Fowler	FETI
Kevin Fontenot	FETI
Nick Palmer	FETI
Christine Earnheart	FETI

**QUORUM PRESENT**

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

Mr. Major entertained a motion to adopt the minutes from the meeting held in November 2018. Motion was made by Mr. Metcalf to adopt the minutes and Mr. Browning seconded the motion. No discussion was made. No opposition was noted.

**MOTION PASSED.**

**Meet and Greet**

Mr. Major stated that they would now be entering the meet and greet with the candidates in question for the Chief of Municipal Training Operations position. It was decided that Mr. Kevin Fontenot would be first, and the other candidates were asked to step out. Mr. Major asked Mr. Fontenot to introduce himself and give his background. Mr. Fontenot stated that he had worked for some time with the fire service and then retired and he was very interested in returning and working at a different level. He had served in many capacities within the fire service. His mission had always been with the fire service and his goal was to train and work with the people in the fire service and FETI to continue the services that were being provided, making sure that they were effective and efficient and also using the resources that they had within their disposal to the best of their ability.

Mr. Major asked if there were any questions from the commission. Since there were none voiced, Mr. Major began the questioning. He asked Mr. Fontenot what his vision moving forward was going to be. Mr. Fontenot felt that he was blessed to be able to see down the road and visualize what should be done and how to do it. The vision he had was first of all to continue the work they were doing at present since it seemed to be working. He wanted to confirm that the methodology they were using in presenting classes was meeting the generations of students that they had. There were younger generations coming up and he felt that there were different technologies that were out there to utilize.

In the short term, he wanted to know what the fire service expected and needed from him. He remembered when Brian was involved in the last project and his frustrations. He did a lot of work and it got shut down. His vision was to have a 1, 3, and 5-year plan based on the feedback from the fire service and take that, look at the resources available financially, people-wise and equipment-wise and try to make it as good as they could possibly have. He did want to take a good look at the way they were teaching and presenting classes. As well, FETI had a two-part mission within the fire service. They served the basic fire departments with limited resources and secondly, they served departments that had training officers and training grounds. He wanted to look at what FETI would have to offer those types of departments and what they could bring to them that was a level up from what they already had. He did have some thoughts, ideas and plans on that.

Mr. Metcalf asked what he thought FETI's greatest challenge was in moving forward besides money. Mr. Fontenot didn't feel that there were any challenges with FETI. Mr. Metcalf asked what he felt was a challenge for the Louisiana Fire Service as a whole. Mr. Fontenot felt they were behind in some of the national trends in the things they did. He thought they should keep the national trends in the forefront of what they presented through the fire service. He felt there were little things they could do to promote education in current issues that was not expensive. He had been on an advisory committee with FETI in the past and they had a lot of great ideas, but it just died. He planned to do something in the future along the same lines.

Mr. Lindberg asked Mr. Fontenot if he had any visions for regional trainings. He stated that the first thing he wanted to do was not necessarily a change, but more of an evaluation of the techniques that they used to present their materials. He wanted to re-vet the instructors and make sure that the instructors are at their proper level of instruction. From a regional standpoint, those were some of the things that were at the top of his list. He also wanted to learn more about teaching the younger

generation. He had recently taken the time at a conference to have a lengthy conversation with a young man who had taught basic fire fighter classes and he was able to get some good ideas.

Mr. Lindberg asked regarding communication how he was going to reach out to the fire service for the state of Louisiana because he felt this was one of biggest downfalls right now from previous people who had held the position in question. On a personal level, Mr. Fontenot stated that he planned to go out and do a meet and greet as appropriate. He wished to be the face of FETI. Personally, he was well known because of his past involvement within the fire service and with FETI. He was not hard to get in touch with. He did feel that face to face interaction was important.

Mr. Himel asked if he would be interested in implementing the EFO program within FETI. Mr. Fontenot stated that it had been on his mind and was on his to do list. He was interested in more officer development. There were different facets that they would need to explore such as civil service approval and LSU approval. Mr. Latino asked what Mr. Fontenot felt his greatest strengths and weaknesses were. Mr. Fontenot stated that two of his greatest strengths was that he did have vision which had served him well over the years and he was a good communicator. He listened well, and he asked plenty of questions. He did like to see something and how it was going to impact things.

One thing he felt was a weakness was the fact that he was not confrontational and sometimes it could be viewed as weak. Some people enjoyed getting in other people's faces, but that was not his style. He liked doing things in a reasonable manner. He was capable of making hard decisions, but he just handled things differently. Mr. Latino asked if Mr. Fontenot felt that training and certification's relationship in the past had augmented each other enough or did he have a vision to improve it. Mr. Fontenot answered that the relationship between training and certification should be as such that they are teaching the same material that would show up in the certification testing. This was a fairly easy thing to do. He believed that the prior certification was a little muddy with the training.

Mr. Major took back over the floor. He asked Mr. Fontenot how he planned to address safety with the fire fighters now training. Mr. Fontenot stated that he had been a safety officer for twenty years. He done a lot of major projects, seatbelts, OSHA projects, etc. He had a very low tolerance for unsafe acts such as no breathing apparatus, taking unnecessary risks, etc. He wanted to teach safety down to the very basic level. Safety was not a stranger to him at all. He outlined several of the projects he had been a part of. Mr. Metcalf asked how Mr. Fontenot thought the three major organizations in the state could help with FETI's mission and how would he plan on using them. He stated that he felt there were a lot of common grounds for the three agencies to work on, but they did have their differences as well. He felt there needed to be a concerted effort between the three organizations to help guide the efforts of FETI or provide the feedback to help FETI go in the right direction.

At this point, Mr. Major asked if there were any other questions for Mr. Fontenot. None were voiced. Mr. Major thanked him for meeting with them. Mr. Fontenot left the meeting. The commission took a short break.

After some time, the meeting reconvened. Mr. Major welcomed the next candidate, Mr. Ken Fowler. Mr. Major stated that Mr. Fowler had submitted a lengthy plan for the future of FETI, and he asked him to reiterate for the commission what his vision for FETI moving forward. Mr. Fowler stated that he would first like to see them having more intermediate level programs. He felt they did a wonderful job offering basic classes there and throughout the region, but he did want to see them have more intermediate level classes that expanded on the 3-hour blocks that they did.

He stated that he would also like to see them develop a track for volunteers. There were several states that had a separate track for volunteer firefighters, but presently they did not have one in FETI and basically had one end goal which was Fire Fighter One and certification. They did have 3-hour courses that were being offered in the region, but they were centered around PIAL. He wanted to have a pathway when they were going out in the region to assist the fire departments with retention and further education. He was interested in offering on a volunteer level which many other states did a course which would allow them to be interior qualified to fight fires.

Mr. Donahue asked Mr. Fowler to review his work history and experience in the fire service with the commission. He reviewed his work experience and history including his current position which was held at LSU. Mr. Metcalf asked Mr. Fowler what he thought the fire service's greatest challenge was at this time. Mr. Fowler did not feel that their challenge was the actual cost of classes that the students needed access to. He felt that one of the issues was communication with the chiefs and departments and letting them know up front what classes were going to cost and being able to give them that information, so they could prepare and put it in their budget.

He felt the basic firefighter classes were something that should be covered by their stat debt. The intermediate classes were going to be cost-associated classes which in turn could possibly bring monies into FETI as a secondary revenue stream. He felt that even though they had the stat debt funds to depend on that they did need a secondary revenue source.

Mr. Metcalf stated that the certification advisory committee and the advisory committee had been very helpful to FETI over the years and he asked Mr. Fowler what his opinion of those committees was and what his plan for using them was in the future. Mr. Fowler felt that committees were a great asset. No one person could accomplish everything. The volunteer track that he had referred to was not something that he could envision just going out solo and dream up and build a plan for it. He thought there should be subject matter experts brought in from various areas to help discover what needs there were and then work as a group to build a product to service them. He definitely supported having a committee.

Mr. Metcalf asked how the three major organizations, LSFA, the fire chiefs and the professionals, could help with the mission that he had for FETI. Mr. Fowler stated that for the most part those organizations were the voice of the fire service within the state of Louisiana. He felt that the issues and work that was important to them should be important and priority to FETI as well. There should be communication and representatives from these entities meeting to give feedback. To him, his view would be based on how we could help them accomplish and fulfill what they needed.

Mr. Latino asked Mr. Fowler what he felt his greatest strength and his greatest weakness was. Mr. Fowler felt his greatest strength was his broad and extensive experience and his educational level. He did have a Masters' degree and he was working on his doctorate which he was hoping to have completed in 2019. He did state that he had only been in Louisiana for 5 years, so his greatest weakness would have to be fully understanding the Louisiana fire service, but he was working everyday to accomplish that.

Mr. Latino asked how he envisioned the relationship between training and certification there at LSU. Mr. Fowler felt they went hand in hand and that retention was important. The key to retention was enabling volunteers to have access to the training and the ability to fulfill the mandates required. He

firmly believed that the end goal for every fire fighter should be certification. There were different avenues to get to that point, but at the end of the day, the goal was the same. All types of fire fighters faced the same dangers and risks.

Mr. Metcalf expressed if they wanted to grow their own organization, they would have to be involved in other entities outside of their own. He felt they would not be able to solve problems within their own organization if they didn't see the problems outside in other groups and learn how they were resolved. He asked Mr. Fowler what major organizations he belonged to or that he had worked with. Mr. Fowler stated that in the past he had worked with quite a few different organizations including being a founder of the SUSAR organization, a member of the Fire Investigators Association, various state organizations, a member of the National Association of Search and Rescue, and member of the NASAR Wild Land Search and Rescue. He agreed with Mr. Metcalf about being involved in organizations outside their own.

Mr. Lindberg asked if Mr. Fowler felt that they had the infrastructure to handle the types of classes he was suggesting. He stated emphatically that they absolutely did. There was talent currently within FETI and subject matter experts throughout the state that could present various classes. He outlined creative ways of setting up for classes with transportation and hotel accommodations. He stated that it was being done all over the country and he felt they should be moving in this direction.

Mr. Lindberg asked what his plan for communication with the different geographical areas was going to be. Mr. Fowler answered that anyone in this position would have to leave the office and meet fire department staff and recruits face to face. He felt that a large percentage of the job was attending meetings out in the regions and attending some of the trainings.

Mr. Himel recognized that Mr. Fowler's focus was on higher education. One of the things LSU had been discussing was how they would accommodate Individuals who did not qualify for the EFO program. Other states such as Texas had a state level EFO program. Mr. Himel asked if Mr. Fowler could see FETI facilitating that type of program if it were ever to come to pass. Mr. Fowler stated that he actually could see them doing that. The small-block officer development classes were something that he had included in his plan that he had submitted to FETI. He felt that was one of the areas that they could expand upon and do better in. He did however feel that instead of him dictating what the fire service needed, that the fire service should be telling them what they wanted and needed. He felt that FETI had the capability to not only create those classes and/or bring in those package programs, but they had the ability to deliver them with efficiency. The end goal would be to look at offering something similar to an EFO program.

Mr. Major asked how Mr. Fowler felt about the recent discussion regarding the job description and requirements for the training certification director. Mr. Fowler stated that he was definitely a firm believer in higher education, but what worked for him may not work for the next person. A degree to him did not mean though that one person was any better or any more talented or capable than the next person. To him, it simply meant that he put forth the time and effort to advance to a certain level of degree. Regarding this particular job, he did not apply based upon the required degree. He applied because he felt he was qualified based on his experience and ability.

Mr. Major expressed that safety was vastly important to him. He asked as far as FETI was concerned what did Mr. Fowler see as ways to deliver the information regarding the PIL rating and safety. Mr. Fowler stated that the rating was important, and he knew that they needed to assist fire departments in

helping to lower their ratings. That mission could be accomplished by giving hands-on instruction addressing the safety issues that had been mentioned and in turn it would create better fire fighters.

Mr. Lindberg asked Mr. Fowler what he felt that LSU FETI did for the state of Louisiana. In his mind, Mr. Fowler visualized FETI as being the hub which made everything run smoothly. His goal would be to make sure that FETI was doing its part to do just that.

Mr. Major asked if there were any other questions for Mr. Fowler. None were voiced. Mr. Major thanked him for meeting with them. Mr. Fowler left the meeting. The commission took a short break.

The meeting reconvened. Mr. Major opened the questioning for the third candidate, Mr. Nick Palmer. He asked what was his vision for FETI was moving forward. Mr. Palmer stated that first they had to look at the mission of LSU FETI which was to provide training and education to fire service responders and to protect life, property and the environment. FETI and the fire service at the core had the same mission. FETI fulfilled the mission through training and not the deployment of resources in emergency situations. Their goals were the same however. So first, they would have to be mission-focused. He would begin by reviewing what they were currently doing and evaluate the effectiveness of it. In a nutshell, he felt they had to be better across the board in how they performed their training. He also felt that in the past there was more trust in LSU. He was aware that times changed, and he felt that they did need to change with the times. He wanted to re-instill that trust that they used to have.

Mr. Donahue asked Mr. Palmer to review his work history and experience. Mr. Palmer began by saying that he felt first of all that whoever was put in this position needed to have a love for the fire service. His began when he was a little boy and he knew he wanted to be a fire fighter from early in life. Anyone working with the fire service should want to propel it forward and watch in grow in a positive way. He stated that he was able to be a fire fighter specialist in the Air Force as a young man. He was involved in multiple facets of the military and eventually ended up working for LSU as an instructor.

Mr. Metcalf asked Mr. Palmer what he felt that the Louisiana fire service's greatest challenge moving forward would be. Mr. Palmer stated that the constant challenge that FETI and Louisiana fire service faced was change and a willingness to accept change. Their approach to problem solving and their approach to accomplishing their missions had to change with that environmental change and it was the key that would bridge both of their respective organizations. He stated that another big challenge was communication and in his personal opinions, there had been breakdowns with this between the fire service and FETI. Without communication, there was no understanding. FETI had to understand what the fire service needed and wanted and what the expectations of FETI were to the fire service.

Mr. Lindberg asked geographically as a system director how Mr. Palmer would reach out to the various regions and managers and the fire service. Mr. Palmer stated that he would get in the car and go see them face to face. It was a must. Large organizations did have to be targeted. He would have to show up in their meetings, go to their conferences, build relationships and be known. He stated that an advantage that he and all the candidates already had was that the relationships were already established. So, at this point, the relationships needed to be fostered and built. He felt they needed to make themselves available and listen.

Mr. Lindberg then asked what specific direction he would be planning to begin improvements or follow through with his vision for FETI. Mr. Palmer stated that they did need to change with the times and adapt to more online training. They did need to integrate but should start on a smaller level. They did

need to have more of an online presence. Times are changing, and they needed to be flexible with regional delivery. Information in this day was readily available and they had to determine what was most needed or desired.

Mr. Metcalf asked what Mr. Palmer's opinion was on advisory committees and was it in his plan to use them. Mr. Palmer stated that he definitely felt they were a good idea and he would want to revive that. He did feel that they could not solely rely on that one committee though, but instead combine it with other outlets. He did believe it was crucial as they moved forward for individuals from the fire service to have a voice in the direction that FETI moved. Teamwork and relationships had to happen. Mr. Metcalf asked what major organizations outside of FETI and outside of Louisiana he belonged to and was actively involved in. Mr. Palmer stated that in the beginning he joined LSFA to establish those interstate relationships. He was a part of the ARFF Working Group and assisted in reviewing FAA Part 139 and federal regulations. He was also a part of the NFPA. He mentioned several other groups he was involved with and in state and out of state venues and events he had presented for. He had tried to do all he could to broaden himself and his understanding of the fire service as a whole. However, his main focus was on Louisiana. He felt that understanding and being involved with outside organizations helped with assessing and leading Louisiana in the direction they needed to go. He was always looking for ways to train about the fire service. It was not what he did. It was simply who he was.

Mr. Major presented his questions. PIL rating and safety were most important to him. He asked how Mr. Palmer saw LSU playing a role to better provide awareness and training on the safety side and giving departments what they were lacking for the rating. Mr. Palmer stated that as LSU instructors they had educate themselves and stay up with the current knowledge that was available. FETI had to invest in their own people as well as training for the fire fighters in the state. They should be encouraging their instructors to take every opportunity they could to broaden their knowledge on different topics such as cancer risk, modern behavior in safety, and mitigating cross contamination. Once gained, their instructors needed to make sure that they were passing that knowledge on. He did feel that there were ways that FETI could be helpful with PIL rating and that they should amend their mission statement to include certification as a goal.

His success at Pine Country had taught him a lot and helped him grow as a leader. He did feel that his lengthy career in multiple areas with FETI and LSU made him uniquely qualified for the position. He expressed his appreciation for allowing him this opportunity to meet with the commission. Mr. Major asked if there were any other questions for Mr. Palmer. None were voiced. Mr. Major thanked him for meeting with them. Mr. Palmer left the meeting.

This concluded the meet and greet of the finalist candidates.

### **Director's / Financial Report**

Ms. Ramezan stated that the November balance sheets were in the packets. There was nothing new to report other than on the grant cost share account. The updates were shown in the report and she pointed out the location and explained the updates.

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

This concluded the presentation of the director/financial report.

**Chairman's Report**

Mr. Major stated that they had met recently so he did not really have much to report either.

This concluded the presentation of the chairman's report.

**Certification Report**

This report was not addressed.

**Old Business**

No old business was addressed.

**New Business**


No new business was addressed.

The next meeting was scheduled for January 25<sup>th</sup>.

Some discussion ensued regarding the timeline on the second interviews for the candidates and hiring for the position. Mr. Donahue stated that he was pressing for the following week, but he would be relying on LSU HR to do their part as well and with the holidays that might prove difficult. They were trying though. It may end up being the first week of January, but they would be pushing for much sooner to present their final offer.

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

Meeting was adjourned.

  
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Approved by: Chad Major

1.25.19  
Date: