

# Initial Impressions Report

## Type 3 Incident Management Organizations



Photo Credit: Dale Warriner

Skyland Fire, Friday July 27, 2007

Lessons Recorded by an Information Collection Team  
Report by the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center  
3265 E. Universal Way, Tucson, AZ. 85706

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## Introduction

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The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center (LLC) serves as a resource for the entire wildland fire community, performing its work by identifying, collecting and disseminating knowledge that might otherwise remain isolated to individuals or small groups. One way in which the LLC gathers and disseminates knowledge is by sending Information Collection Teams (ICT) to the field.

This initial impressions report describes and documents lessons learned and effective practices pertaining to the success of Type 3 Incident Management Organizations (IMO). This report also documents training and development challenges, as well as unresolved issues of concern that existed at the time it was written. It has become apparent that the wildland fire community will experience a growing need for, and use of, Type 3 IMOs in the coming years. Accordingly, the purpose was to learn from the experience of existing and successful IMOs, so that others starting out may benefit from their experience.

The LLC can best serve the fire community by getting these initial impressions in front of the people who are contemplating the formation of Type 3 IMOs, so that they may consider the information provided, as well as those responsible for policy matters relating to these teams, so that they may address those issues requiring their attention. Some issues may already be on the policy agenda, while others may not. However, the first priority of the LLC is to get information into the hands of people that need information, make policy, conduct training, and lead people.

### Successful Type 3 Incident Management Organizations

The information collection team interviewed seven existing Type 3 IMOs that were known to be successful including teams from Colorado, Florida, Maine, Montana, Nevada, Texas, and Wyoming. The LLC staff thanks the members of these teams for sharing their lessons and experiences. The knowledge they shared will undoubtedly help others working to organize and implement Type 3 IMOs.

The ICT members obtained the information by conducting focus groups with teams, interviewing team members individually and in small groups (both in-person and by phone), and by examining supporting documentation. A statement of work and the LLC's ICT Protocols guided the assignment.

### Moving Ahead

Learning organizations succeed because people at all organizational levels share information and learn from their experience. Within this context, this report can serve as a vehicle for learning from experience, capturing and spreading knowledge, sharing information, and purposefully modifying both policy and action on the ground to reflect the insight and knowledge gained by reviewing the experiences of successful Type 3 IMOs. It is our intent that this report will draw attention to valuable lessons, practices and issues and spur continued work in the future that will help sustain success and avoid repeated mistakes.

## Methodology, Assumptions and Limitations

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### Information Collection Teams

An Information Collection Team (ICT) includes two to six members, including a team leader. ICTs gather data and make observations regarding issues identified by the Lessons Learned Center (LLC) in consultation with subject matter experts (SME). Issues may pertain to policies, processes, tactics, techniques, or procedures. The LLC uses the data collected by the ICT to inform and update agency administrators, incident commanders, incident management teams, and other fire management personnel via various knowledge products. The LLC also shares information with training managers, developers and instructors to help assure that agency training reflects the current reality of practices and conditions in the field.

An Information Collection Plan, sometimes supplemented by a Statement of Work, guides the team's assignment and conduct. ICTs are not dispatched to evaluate, review or assess performance. ICT members observe field operations and interview people to collect information that may be of value to others, with the intent of helping fire management personnel reproduce success and avoid recurrent mistakes. The information collected by the Team or the knowledge products developed by the LLC may become a catalyst for policy change. However, identifying lessons learned, effective practices, innovative ways of overcoming challenges, and knowledge gaps must remain the sole focus of an ICT.

### Information Collection Methods

ICTs dispatched by the LLC may employ two methods of data collection; one being inquiry, the other being observation. They may employ a combination of both. Inquiry essentially involves formal interviews of incident personnel and inquiry served as the primary information collection method used for this information collection effort. ICT members are dispassionate observers, not reviewers or evaluators, critics or cheerleaders. Our job is to identify lessons learned, potential effective practices, innovative ways of overcoming challenges, and knowledge gaps. The observations, conclusions and recommendations reported here were primarily derived from interviews conducted during 2007. The information collection team members were:

Paula Nasiatka, Manager, Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center.  
Mike Dannenberg, Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist, Bureau of Land Management (MT)  
Michael DeGrosky, CEO, Guidance Group, Inc.

## Assumptions and Limitations of This Report

The impressions reported here do not address a single IMO or all IMOs. Instead, the IMOs that the ICT interviewed served as successful examples. Consequently, the lessons learned, effective practices, training and development challenges, and unresolved issues reported here represent a combination of elements both unique to these particular teams, as well as those which may be generalized across the Type 3 IMO work environment.

The report describes initial impressions gained by examining seven successful Type 3 IMOs and is not intended as a comprehensive, definitive assessment of the state of the discipline. In addition, people working in the Type 3 community have known about some of the factors identified here for some time. These factors appear in this report because they seem useful to people formulating new teams or because they represent issues that remain unresolved.

This document reports on lessons learned, effective practices and unresolved issues. Sometimes the report describes a topic as both a lesson learned and an effective practice or a lesson learned and an unresolved issue. This is because the lesson learned was that someone implemented a practice that worked or that they faced an issue that remains unresolved.

## Confidentiality

The conversations that information collection team members have with interviewees are strictly confidential. Team members inform anyone contacted of their commitment to confidentiality and respect the privacy of the individuals they contact. The Lessons Learned Center does not identify people by name, unit or other identifier in final notes or in the combined and condensed final report. The Center is interested in the “what,” not the “who,” and information collection team members will not attribute individual comments to the person interviewed. Consequently, from time-to-time, team members observe events or learn of information that cannot be reported-on given the Team’s purpose, approach to confidentiality, and the sideboards of its involvement in an incident or operation. The Lessons Learned Center does not release interview notes to others outside of our teams, including other teams, supervisors or managers.

## Themes from the Type 3 IMO ICT Assignment

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Over the course of the assignment, ten major themes emerged.

### Theme 1: **The Value of Rapid Response and Local Knowledge**

Successful Type 3 IMOs find that the earlier they can arrive at their assigned incident, the better they can get organized and positively influence the incident by establishing organizational structure, command, common communications and dedicated safety oversight. By doing these things, a Type 3 IMO can take much of the confusion out of rapidly developing extended attack incidents. They best accomplish this by serving a defined, local or regional geographic area.

### Theme 2: **The Importance of Support**

Type 3 IMOs succeed when they are well supported by the agency or agencies organizing the IMO, by agencies that will potentially receive the IMO's services, and by the employers of individual team members. Nearly all the teams interviewed by the ICT have succeeded because of the energy and commitment of either an individual champion or a core group of people who were committed to making the team a reality; people who advocated for the team and provided substantial support and energy.

### Theme 3: **The Commitment and Experience of Team Members**

The Type 3 IMOs featured in this report succeed because they benefit from both the commitment and the experience of their current team members. However, these success factors also present agencies with a paradox as they consider expanding the Type 3 IMO concept. While the commitment, passion and experience of team members undeniably contributed to the success of these teams, one must consider whether agencies can replicate these success factors given the demographics and changing expectations of their workforces.

### Theme 4: **Teams Need Opportunities to Exercise Their Skills**

Type 3 IMOs succeed because they receive an adequate number of mobilizations frequently enough to develop their skills and develop as a team. The more Type 3 IMOs get to practice their craft, the better they are. The opportunity to work on a variety of incidents improves both their skills and their teamwork as well.

### Theme 5: **Strong Interagency Working Relationships**

Type 3 IMOs benefit from strong interagency working relationships involving several aspects. First, they benefit from a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency team make-up. Second, they are effective because they cross jurisdictional lines and know the agency administrators in their primary response area. Finally, they work collaboratively with multiple agencies and often involve people who exercise influence in their "day jobs."

Theme 6: **Developing Team Depth and Succession Planning**

Success of a Type 3 IMO requires sufficient depth in key positions, particularly the Command and General staff. To be effective, a Type 3 IMO must be available when needed. Assuring that an IMO is available when needed requires that the team maintain sufficient alternates who can fill key roles when primary members are unavailable because of personal or professional commitments.

In addition, to sustain its success a Type 3 IMO needs enough people interested in being on the team to assure that there are people “in the pipeline” to move up into team positions as existing team members move on. Effective recruitment and retention represents a critically important aspect of this theme. The recruitment and training for team members is very important to sustained success, particularly developing the core group of the future, and must be managed strategically. The most successful teams constantly strive to bring new people onto the team and are very eager to bring trainees on assignments to develop people for key positions.

Theme 7: **Customer Service Orientation and Philosophy of Assistance**

Type 3 IMOs succeed because they guide their behavior with a team philosophy of service and assistance, striving to remain operationally compatible with local resources and local landowners. At the bottom line, these teams know their customers well, serve their customers well, and understand local issues, local politics, and the social and economic impacts of fire suppression in the local community. Successful Type 3 IMOs purposefully develop this culture and sustain these values by having existing members mentor new and up-and-coming team members. Mentoring aligns the interests of new members with the philosophy of the team.

Theme 8: **Team Members are Flexible and Work Across Functions**

Typically, members of Type 3 IMOs are flexible in both skills and attitude, key personnel are cross-trained, and team members work across functions. The members of successful Type 3 IMOs share in tasks and responsibilities beyond their assigned function. For this to work, collaboration and cooperation must transcend turf, the team must break down barriers between functions, and an attitude, or team philosophy, that no task is beneath any other team member, must prevail.

Theme 9: **Training as Well as the Qualification and Certification System Prove Critical**

Type 3 IMOs must be able to obtain the training they need, but success requires more than simply providing access to the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) curriculum. It seems that all Type 3 IMOs struggle to get their personnel to the training they need, and face several barriers to receiving needed training, Most notably, the nature of the delivery system, cost of training, scheduling of training, travel associated with training and the lack of timely training availability.

Currently, Type 3 IMOs succeed, in part, because there have been relatively few formal training and qualification requirements and because those that do exist include a degree of flexibility enabling competent and skilled people to jump in and

contribute. However, even with these advantages the qualifications and certification system and course prerequisite requirements have presented an ongoing challenge for Type 3 IMO members.

#### Theme 10: **Teamwork and Teambuilding**

Judging from the teams interviewed by the ICT, successful Type 3 IMOs understand the importance of being a team and understand that successful teamwork takes determined effort. They achieve a level of unit cohesion, know each other well and work together well. They have learned to trust each other and allow skilled people to do their jobs. They maintain high standards for their teams and team members. Consequently, new members feel challenged, and do all they can to meet the team's expectations because they want to prove themselves worthy of team membership. They know that the ability to work as a team depends both on effective interpersonal relationships and frequent intra-team contact and communication.

# Type 3 IMO Lessons Learned

## Lessons Learned: Factors Contributing to Success as a Type 3 IMO

*“We have talked about the idea of our Type 3 team being available regionally or nationally during periods when it makes sense. I think a very experienced team could be successful in that scenario but would certainly not be as successful as they are in their “backyard”. – Type 3 IC*

*“It has been mostly because of the team members’ individual commitment and passion that the team has succeeded. This is also one of the weaknesses of this team and of trying to expand the model regionally and nationally.” – Type 3 IC*

*Rapid mobilization allows a team to be on-scene in just a few hours and we can assume command of escalating incidents very quickly. Our response area was kept to a certain size to ensure this rapid response.” – Type 3 IC*

### The Value of Type 3 IMOs: Rapid Response and Local Knowledge

Overall, the people interviewed seem to feel that the value of Type 3 incident management organizations (IMO) lay in their ability to respond rapidly and bring their local knowledge and experience to bear.

Successful Type 3 IMOs have found that the sooner they can arrive at their assigned incident, the sooner they can get organized, and the sooner they can positively influence the incident by establishing organizational structure, control, and resource tracking. This is best accomplished by serving a defined, local or regional geographic area. In this way, a Type 3 IMO brings qualified command and fireline supervision, common communications, and dedicated safety oversight to the scene in a very short time, taking much of the confusion out of rapidly developing extended attack incidents.

Though their roles and responsibilities differ, the teams interviewed for this effort strive to arrive at their assigned incident with all equipment and personnel in timeframes ranging from one to twelve hours. This rapid response enables these teams to exert their influence on emerging incidents when firefighter and public safety concerns are often critical. Rapid mobilization also represents a significant factor in achieving successful incident containment and control at the Type 3 management level.

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### Type 3 IMOs Need Agency-Level Support (On Both the Team and User Ends)

Type 3 IMOs succeed when they are supported at the agency level, both by the agency or agencies organizing the IMO and by the receiving agencies. The Information Collection Team (ICT) found that Type 3 IMOs need the following support from the agencies that organize them:

- A relationship with a key agency that provided vision, leadership, training and funding
- High-level managers who took a personal interest in developing a Type 3 IMO
- Support at the state, regional and/or compact level
- Training opportunities and an emphasis on training Type 3 IMO members
- Support for mobilizations outside primary response area as training/experience opportunities
- Cooperation and encouragement from dispatch and coordination centers
- Agencies that made potential team members available and encouraged their participation
- Collaborative interagency relationships and a multi-agency approach spanning jurisdictions

- Knowing the administrators of potential receiving agencies in the primary response area

The Information Collection Team (ICT) found that Type 3 IMOs need the following support from agencies that expect to receive their services:

- The ability to demonstrate that a Type 3 IMO has a niche and can be helpful and successful
- Support of local line officers who are familiar with and accept a Type 3 IMO
- Fire managers in the primary response area that are familiar with the IMO and eager to use it
- Dispatch center cooperation that enables quality support and the ability for the team to succeed

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### **Type 3 IMOs Succeed Because of the Commitment of Their Team Members**

The ICT heard quite clearly that the Type 3 IMOs interviewed succeeded because of the commitment of their team members, both their individual commitment to the team, as a team, and their commitment to team availability. Their team members have shown considerable commitment to attending training, getting qualified, and maintaining their qualifications. Personal commitment that finds members willing to put things aside to be available for team mobilization proves essential. In one example, when hiring employees the Texas Forest Service makes participation on a Type 3 IMO part of the employee's duties, and asks interview questions focused on the ability to be away from home.

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### **Ability to Receive Needed/Valuable Training**

It is clear that training remains critical to the success of Type 3 IMOs and critical that Type 3 IMOs are able to obtain training they need. However, success requires more than simply providing access to the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) curriculum. Many Type 3 IMOs depend on the participation of personnel from agencies of local and state government, agencies without primary wildland fire missions, and even private sector organizations. These are often smaller agencies without much discretionary funding in their budgets. The ICT heard repeatedly that training for Type 3 IMO members must be based on legitimate needs, make an economical use of people's time, and require as little distant travel as possible. There exists a need to make concessions to the target audience, particularly in regard to the 200 and 300 level training.

The success of a Type 3 IMO frequently depends on a capability and performance approach to team member recruitment and selection. The key is to allow and facilitate the participation of effective and capable team members, by allowing some judicial flexibility in the training and qualification requirements. Several teams indicated that a rigid approach to NWCG qualification hinders Type 3 IMO development.

Two of the teams that the ICT interviewed had attended the Complex Incident Management Course (CIMC) and found this training to be enormously beneficial. This training is essentially a command and general staff exercise, like S-420 Command and General Staff or S-520 Advanced Incident Management, for Type 3 IMOs.

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## **Mentoring Within the Team**

Type 3 IMOs succeed, in part, because members of the team mentor new members and up-and-coming team members. Mentoring brings new members into the team and aligns their interests with the philosophy of team.

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## **Philosophy of Service and Assistance**

Clearly, the teams interviewed by the ICT succeed because they guide their behavior with a team philosophy of service and assistance. Most often these teams assist agencies of local government or local units of larger agencies, often operating on private property. Given that operating environment, these teams succeed because they strive to remain operationally compatible with local resources and local landowners. Their philosophy can best be described as *working with* the locals, rather than *taking the incident from* them. One Type 3 IMO member described this philosophy well when they said “We don’t take the incident, but help the local unit with their incident.”

At the bottom line, these teams know their customer well, serve their customers well, and understand local issues, local politics, and the social and economic impacts of fire suppression in the local community. Often, team members come from agencies of local government or local units of larger agencies. Some successful Type 3 IMOs mobilize in phases, putting emphasis on getting operations and safety personnel quickly to the incident sooner than other team personnel, so that they can interact with initial attack personnel, explain alternatives to landowners, and involve both local fire personnel and landowners in the decision-making process.

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## **Experience of Team Members**

The Type 3 IMOs that the ICT interviewed succeed, in part, because of the amount and quality of experience on the team. Their team capability is very high and the individual strengths of team members contribute to the success of the team.

Often, these teams have several members with more than 20 years of experience. Many Type 3 IMO members, including some entire teams, are qualified in their position at the Type 2 level. They often have team members who have significant experience working with regional and national teams in some capacity. Consequently, they are not easily overwhelmed by incident complexity. There are those who say that for a person qualified as a unit leader to function as a Type 3 section chief, they must have experience in the tasks of different sections within their function.

Often, team members because of personal or professional obligations cannot be out for long periods of time and the Type 3 IMO allows them to participate without the long time commitment associated with other teams.

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## **High Standards and Expectations for Team Members**

The Type 3 IMOs interviewed for this effort maintain high standards for their teams and team members. New team members feel challenged and strive to work up to the team's level of expectation. They want to prove themselves worthy of team membership. These teams require qualifications for membership that promote professionalism. Some teams started out with relatively loose qualifications, a very flexible approach to ICS qualifications and a "pick-up team" approach. However, experience shows that the most successful Type 3 IMOs evolve beyond that point to require training standards and qualifications and require potential team members to go through an application process. However, despite having training standards and qualifications, most of these teams also expressed concern that rigid training regimens represent a detriment, stifling the development of Type 3 IMOs.

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## **Team Members are Flexible and Work across Functions**

Typically, team members on Type 3 IMOs are flexible in both skills and attitude. Key personnel are cross-trained and team members work across functions. The members of successful Type 3 IMOs share in tasks and responsibilities beyond their assigned function. For this to work, collaboration and cooperation must transcend turf, the team must break down distinctions or walls between functions, and an attitude, or team philosophy, that no task is beneath any other team member is required.

The teams that do this especially well include team members who are cross-trained or cross-functional and can perform in several roles as required. Several teams interviewed by the ICT had cross-functionality in the Command and General Staff; for example a Logistics Section Chief (LOSC) who is also an Operations Section Chief 2 (OSC2) and an OSC who is a Safety Officer (SOFR) and vice versa.

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## **A Type 3 IMO Needs Opportunity to Practice Their Skills Together**

Type 3 IMOs succeed because they receive an adequate number and frequency of mobilizations to develop their skills, work together, and develop as a team. Successful teams mobilize to incidents more than one time per year and most teams interviewed by the ICT are good, in part, because they have managed numerous incidents and a diverse range of incidents. The more Type 3 IMOs get to practice their craft the better they are. The opportunity to work on a variety of incidents also improves both their skills and their teamwork. Several of the teams interviewed by the ICT seek opportunities to practice, such as managing prescribed burns; going out on non-fire assignments; running training academies; as well as supporting community festivals, and events and other activities. Quite often they seek opportunities to learn in situations other than fire assignments.

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### **Successful Type 3 IMOs Have Team Unity and Identity (Unit Cohesion)**

Judging from the teams interviewed by the ICT, Type 3 IMOs succeed because they achieve a level of unit cohesion. Some say they succeed either because their members think alike, or if they do not think alike, they respect one another's ideas. Others say their team is effective because they have kept it small and fun while still getting the job done. Others credit the interaction of individuals and their ability to work together for success. In all cases, team members are comfortable with one another, have learned to trust each other, and allow skilled people to do their jobs.

The importance of interpersonal relationships represents a significant aspect of this success factor. All the teams recognize that they have succeeded, in part, because the team members know each other well and work together well. Some say their team members are comfortable with each other and enjoy working together. Others describe a camaraderie that is like family and that the team members want to be together. In most cases the team members have significant history with one another, often having worked together for years both in and outside the team environment.

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### **Type 3 IMOs Need to Achieve a Level of Success and a Positive Reputation**

The teams that the ICT interviewed have all developed a reputation for performance and built trust and confidence that has enabled agency administrators and line officers to support the team. Several had transforming experiences that built their reputation. For example, one team was assigned, by their GACC, to fires that normally would have been assigned to Type 2 teams during a busy fire year. Successful experience built the reputation of this team and they are now available for Type 2 assignments when needed. They have been dispatched to out-of-state assignments as well.

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### **Successful Type 3 IMOs Schedule Team Participation and Membership**

The successful Type 3 IMOs interviewed for this effort have predictable, scheduled membership. This is not to say that pooled teams that assemble as the need arises cannot succeed. However, all the teams interviewed for this effort take a more formal approach and credit their success to it.

Most of the teams interviewed maintain standing, rostered teams and credit that approach when discussing their success. From the perspective of one of these teams, having a standing team represented a critical success factor. The team's members have learned a lot about their role as a team over a period of years, and they find that they can be very effective right from the beginning of an incident. They understand how to interact with other team members and are familiar with the details of how the team operates. In addition, the interpersonal relationships that the team has established over time have contributed to their success.

However, one team participating in this information collection effort employs a fairly sophisticated pool concept that works well for them. The team employs a pool that requires scheduled team participation. In other words, the team does not include moonlighters or freelancers. In this circumstance, a team is scheduled and rostered each week from a pool of 100 qualified and pre-selected participants.

It is likely that a variety of systems can work and that unique circumstances will produce unique approaches that prove effective. However, it appears that successful Type 3 IMOs, whether

working as a standing team or from a pool, schedule their team participation and membership and strive to avoid an ad-hoc, “get whoever you can,” approach.

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### **Frequent Intra-team Contact and Communication**

Type 3 IMO teams succeed when they engage in frequent intra-team contact and communication. The teams interviewed for this effort all regard yearly maintenance of the team as critical and as a minimal requirement. More often than not these teams are communicating all year. The section chiefs update the rest of the team during the year as they go to training or receive updated information of importance to the team. Most of these teams meet physically multiple times per year and one team even meets monthly.

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### **Type 3 IMOs Benefit From Interdisciplinary Participation and Diverse Skill-sets**

While extensive fire experience contributes to Type 3 IMO success, so does a multi-disciplinary (and multi-agency) make-up of the team. By crossing disciplinary and jurisdictional lines Type 3 IMOs benefit from diversity in the backgrounds and skill-sets of the team’s members. Quite often Type 3 IMOs succeed because they have people on the team who exercise influence in their “day jobs;” people such as District Managers, County Emergency Managers, and Chief Officers. Some teams have members with strong law enforcement, emergency medical, structural and industrial, emergency management, and private sector logistics backgrounds. This diversity enables Type 3 IMOs to relate to a wide variety of people that the team interacts with at their incident and take advantage of their unique contacts, networks, and working relationships.

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### **Type 3 IMOs Often Need a Champion**

Nearly all the teams interviewed by the ICT began as grassroots efforts and have succeeded because of the energy and commitment of either an individual champion or a core group of people who were committed to making the team a reality. These teams had people who advocated for the team, found funding, obtained training, got the team assignments and provided substantial support and vigor.

Developing Type 3 IMOs need leaders on the team or in the team system who are willing to go beyond their team role to play more of a steering role and advocate for the team.

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### **Strong Interagency Working Relationships**

Most teams interviewed by the ICT have benefited from strong interagency working relationships that involve several aspects. First, these teams benefited from a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency make-up of the team. Second, they were effective because they crossed jurisdictional lines, and knew the agency administrators in their primary response area. Finally, the teams that benefited most from interagency relationships worked collaboratively with multiple agencies and involved people who exercised influence in their “day jobs” (County Emergency Manager, Division of Forestry District Manager, a Fire Chief who also served as President of County Fire Chiefs Association and a Vice President of State Chiefs’ Association).

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## **Lessons Learned: Sustaining Success as a Type 3 Incident Management Organization**

*“Recognition and support by the agencies is going to be critical to continued success.” – Type 3 IC*

*“Success requires long-term, strategic thinking; a Type 3 IMO is not something you’re going to build in a year. You have to commit to a strategic plan.” - Logistics Section Chief*

*“We need a pool of people involved so that the team has alternates for key positions and so we can develop depth. Currently, if one key player is unavailable, the team is unavailable.” – Safety Officer*

### **Support from Both Participating Agencies and Receiving Agencies**

A number of the Type 3 incident management organizations (IMO) interviewed by the ICT started out as grassroots efforts with little formal agency support. These teams tended to work on a shoestring budget and met with considerable resistance from potential host agencies. However, they succeeded, often through sheer effort, perseverance, and demonstrated performance. From their experience we know that when new teams are forming they need support from the top, down and that to sustain their success they will need:

- An entity to take the lead
- Trust, confidence and support from receiving agencies and the ability to overcome resistance. ICT members heard several accounts about how a team or the idea of using Type 3 teams “broke through” when local line officers began to support and champion the team
- Agency support in the form of making people available for assignments, training, trainee assignments, team meetings and other team activities
- Financial support. Monetary support is key, not just for team start-up, but also for team development and maintenance. Not just grants, but budgeted funds
- Commitment to sustaining the team, including funding for recruitment, training and retention from all participating agencies.
- Attention to individual pay issues (especially for local government personnel), such as compensation for on-call time. For example, in Florida, team members are not reimbursed for on-call time but team members are expected to be on-call for a week at a time which limits their off duty activities
- A commitment to train new members to fill team positions as people move on
- Financial support to reimburse participating agencies when their resources respond out of area (otherwise the practice is hard to justify to taxpayers)
- Outreach or marketing to county commissioners and other local elected officials regarding the importance, value and benefit of the team to local taxpayers to ensure support for fire department and local agency participation
- Recognition of team and team members (for their participation, performance and success)
- Coordination on home units, particularly backfilling for team members.

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## **Team Members Need Support from Their Employers**

Many Type 3 IMO's depend heavily on the participation of people from small agencies, local government agencies, volunteer firefighters, and persons from the private sector. Team members can struggle to balance their primary means of making a living and their team responsibilities, and employer cooperation and support can prove problematic to the point of making key individuals and whole classes of team members unavailable for team participation.

Many local government personnel want to be team members, but lack incentives from their employer that would allow them to participate. To sustain success Type 3 IMO's will require enablers such as:

- Marketing to local communities that helps the community understand the participation of their local agencies
- Legislation that affords Type 3 IMO personnel similar employer requirements and incentives as those afforded to members of the National Guard and Reserve
- Financial support to compensate local government agencies for allowing their personnel to respond. The Texas Forest Service benefits from legislation supporting such a practice. In 2007 the Texas legislature passed statewide mutual aid legislation that facilitates reimbursement to agencies of local government when their personnel respond outside their jurisdiction. The legislation provides liability relief as well.

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## **Teams Need a Sufficient Number of People Interested in Participating**

To sustain success a Type 3 IMO needs enough people interested in being on the team to assure that all positions can be filled, that the team has sufficient depth in each position and that there are people "in the pipeline" to move up into team positions as existing team members move on. The most successful teams constantly strive to bring new people onto the team and are very eager to bring trainees on assignments to develop people for key positions.

Effective recruitment and retention represents a critically important aspect of this success factor. The recruitment and training for team members is very important to sustained success, particularly developing the core group of the future. This requires:

- Recruiting young people.
  - Mentoring young firefighters and others onto the team and aligning their interests with the philosophy and work practices of the team.
  - Allowing and enabling young firefighters to participate.
  - Providing financial incentives that allow or encourage young people to participate.
  - Using recruitment tools that appeal to and motivate Generations X and Y.
  - Recruiting, mentoring and continuously developing the pool to keep the pipeline filled.
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## **Keeping the Team Member Pipeline Full and Developing Depth**

Continued success of a Type 3 IMO requires sufficient depth in key positions, particularly the Command and General staff. To be effective, a Type 3 IMO must be available when needed. Being available when needed frequently requires having depth in key positions; in other words, the team has sufficient alternates who can fill key roles when primary members are unavailable because of personal or professional commitments. Teams that will succeed over the long term need to continuously look for, find and develop new team members, particularly in an operating environment where there are fewer experienced people available, new teams forming all the time, and competition for team members is intense.

Effective recruitment and training for team members proves critically important. Teams that maintain sufficient depth constantly strive to bring new people onto the team and are constantly developing depth in their core group.

These teams understand that it takes time to get someone trained to either the unit leader or section chief level. For Type 3 IMOs having enough people trained to the unit leader level represents a critical depth issue because it is people who are unit leader qualified that form the foundation of a Type 3 team. Successful teams have concentrated on creating a path to get people trained to be unit leaders, bring them up to section chiefs and then mentoring them into Command and General Staff roles.

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### **Need to Recruit the Right People**

To sustain their success Type 3 IMOs will need to recruit the right people; specifically people who can multi-task, work across functions and who can make the dedicated commitment required of team members from successful teams. The key is having the commitment of team members within the operating zone.

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### **Have a Strategy to Assure the Longevity of the Team**

To assure continued success a Type 3 IMO would need a strategy to guide efforts to sustain the team and assure its longevity. A number of the teams interviewed by the ICT have succeeded because of the energy and commitment of their members, including those that arrange their own training, purchase equipment with their personal funds, find their own assignments and advocate for the team with local agency administrators. Some teams exist because the team members make them exist, not because their agencies are making them exist. While one must admire their commitment and passion, there is a downside. Many of these members are of the Baby Boom generation and are approaching their retirement.

To succeed, teams must represent a system that is institutionalized and mature enough to continue when these founding members retire or move on. The goal is to maintain a good quality team that does not depend on the participation of particular people and this requires a strategy. Recruiting and retaining members represents one of the most important elements of this success factor.

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## **Equal Support from Dispatch System**

The wildland fire community keeps hearing that we should expect a growing need for and use of Type 3 IMO's. If this is to be true, the support system, particularly the dispatch system, will need to embrace the Type 3 concept. This will enable Type 3 IMO's to be equal players in the dispatch system and to be able to obtain appropriate types and quantities of personnel and resources.

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## Lessons Learned: Effective Practices of Type 3 Incident Management Organizations

*"We meet monthly, enabling us to keep in contact, get comfortable with each other, and develop as a team." – Safety Officer*

*"Philosophically, we consider ourselves an extension of the local organization and focus on helping and a service orientation." – Operations Section Chief*

*"Everyone pitches in cross functionally." – Safety Officer, Division Supervisor and Type 3 IC Trainee*

### Rapid Response

The teams interviewed for this effort credited their success to their ability to respond rapidly and bring their local knowledge and experience to bear. These teams focus on mobilizing quickly, arriving at their assigned incident as soon as possible, being organized, and positively influencing the incident quickly. Most teams accomplish this, in part, by serving a defined, local or regional geographic area.

Teams interviewed for this effort, which serve a local area, strive to arrive at their assigned incident with all their equipment and personnel in an hour or two. Teams serving broader regional jurisdictions strive to arrive in less than twelve hours. This rapid response enables these teams to positively influence emerging incidents when firefighter and public safety concerns are paramount. Rapid mobilization also represents a significant factor in containing and controlling incidents at the Type 3 management level. To achieve rapid dispatch, mobilization and arrival successful IMOs:

- Serve a defined, local or regional geographic area and keep it to a size that enables rapid response.
- Maintain a high level of organization and readiness. Doing so requires considerable commitment from the team's members.
- Deploy early in the incident. To do so, requires the team to work with agency administrators within their assigned response area and their dispatch organization to encourage early, proactive mobilization of the Type 3 IMO. A precautionary mobilization is desirable even if it ultimately turns out that the IMO is not needed.
- Arrive early and do a reconnaissance (aerial or otherwise) before dark, establish a plan for the night operations and get to work on a written incident action plan (IAP) for the following morning.
- Accept a verbal delegation of authority for the initial operational period.
- Keep their team small and the mobilization system simple. It is far easier moving 6-10 people using a direct mobilization system than it is to move the 40-50 people associated with other teams, through the traditional coordination system.
- Stage the team.
- Mobilize in phases by getting operations and safety personnel to the incident as quickly as possible.

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## Using ICS as the Basic Organizing Principle

All the Type 3 IMO's interviewed for this effort use the Incident Command System (ICS) as their basic organizing principle and credit this practice with their success. In practice, Type 3 IMO's often find themselves teaching the ICS to local government fire departments with whom they frequently work and also depend on for team members. Type 3 IMO's often work closely with local resources that are sometimes unfamiliar with how a team can manage an incident in a coordinated effort. This presents teams with a challenge to rapidly form a coordinated and organized effort. A working knowledge of incident management and ICS proves critical in these circumstances.

While some teams and team members argue that if a team is comprised of people very adept at working with ICS, then the team can successfully manage a wide variety of incidents. However, in reality these successful teams understand that one approach to ICS does not fit all incidents. When working non-fire incidents, such as floods, HAZMAT incidents, space shuttle recovery, etc., they adjust their practice and also bring in operational specialists.

Teams interviewed by the ICT had attended the Complex Incident Management Course (CIMC), in a partnership between the National Association of State Foresters and the National Advanced Fire and Resource Institute, and found the training invaluable. The intent of CIMC is to provide a national incident management training program addressing multi-jurisdictional and all-hazard issues, including wildfire, that confront state emergency responders. The course trains people in command and general staff positions to function on qualified state incident management teams that will assist their state forestry organizations and state emergency management agencies with management of large or highly complex wildfires and incidents involving other hazards. The focus of the course is to better prepare team members to address the unique and challenging management needs associated with these kinds of incidents.

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## Customer Service Orientation and a Philosophy of Assistance

It is very clear that Type 3 IMO's succeed when they consciously adopt a team philosophy of service and assistance and use that philosophy to guide the actions of the team and the behavior of individual team members. In practice, this philosophy can be seen in large and small ways, such as:

- Developing a team philosophy and mission to *assist*, communicating that core value to team members and mentoring newer team members to actualize that value.
- Dispatching operations and safety personnel ahead of the rest of the team, so that they may confer with local resources on the ground, consult affected landowners and get both involved in the planning and decision-making.
- Stressing that the team *works with* local agencies or *helps local agencies with their incident*, rather than *taking the incident* from them.
- Remaining sensitive to the economic impacts of fire suppression on the local community, avoiding the attitude that "it's just grass."

- Avoiding arrival as an overwhelming force, particularly when community leaders do not know you are coming or are not familiar with you or your organization. In this situation, send an advance team with one or two Command and General staff members to meet with the mayor and/or other community leaders. Zero in on one to three items that are really tough for them and articulate how the team can help them. Offer expertise that the community may not have.
- Seeking feedback from host units (Maine)
- Establishing and enforcing standards for public relations. On one Type 3 IMO the team has a standing Incident Information - Landowner and Media Relations Plan and the Incident Commander (IC) has prepared remarks about the team's standards for working with the locals. The team briefs incoming resources during check-in, provides a briefing form, puts the information in the IAP, and the Operations Section also briefs the resources. This team will demobilize resources if they are unable or unwilling to adhere to the team's standards as articulated in the plan and by the IC.
- Naming things appropriately. For example "Mobile Assistance Unit" vs. "Mobile Command Post."

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### **Mentoring New Team Members**

Successful Type 3 IMOs achieve the team philosophies, values and practices discussed in this report by mentoring new members as they come on the team. People quickly learn "how we do business around here." Most engage some sort of apprentice or mentoring program in which existing team members are mentoring new or up-and-coming members. In some cases, each and every team member is mentoring at least one person and the trainees are scheduled, in advance to respond with their mentor to the incident. A mentoring system can prove difficult and there are logistical challenges. Several teams interviewed for this effort believe that having one is critical to their success.

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### **Develop Cross-functionality**

Type 3 IMOs succeed because their members are typically flexible, in both skills and attitude, key personnel are cross-trained, and team members work across functions. However, these teams do not expect this to simply happen, but consciously cultivate this practice by:

Letting people do their jobs, but knowing everyone will pitch in cross-functionally. This is done by working across functional lines and adopting practices that allow people to work in other functional areas consistent with their level of competence. For example, on one team, the Finance Section Chief handles check-in and equipment inspections because she knows how and does not have a big workload in the earlier stages of the incident. The Planning Section Chief has much to do to prepare the first IAP. On this same team, nearly all members of the Command and General Staff serve food in the chow line both morning and evening. On another team, nearly the entire Command and General Staff participates in getting the first IAP out. Working across functions fosters a sense of teamwork and camaraderie.

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## **Simplicity and Low Maintenance Practice**

The teams interviewed by the ICT succeed because they strive for simplicity and low maintenance practice. These teams try hard not to add complexity to the incident or the incident organization and make a conscious effort not to adversely affect the host agency. They do so by keeping their organization and operations simple and low maintenance.

Logistically these Type 3 IMO's typically have no standing orders, or they minimize their standing orders. Typically they try to operate with what they bring or place orders only after they have arrived on site and understand their needs. Those that use standing orders strive to keep those orders from having much of an effect on the dispatch center and cache. Since many incidents served by Type 3 IMO's last only 3 to 5 days, several do not order shower units and avoid commercial caterers, preferring to use kitchens provided by state agencies and other organizations. Several teams interviewed for this effort cited these kinds of practices as contributing significantly to their cost effectiveness.

Several Type 3 teams also try to minimize their information technology to that which is essential only.

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## **Expect Team Members To Be Resilient**

Judging from the experience of the Type 3 IMO's interviewed for this effort, teams succeed when they institutionalize flexibility and expect their team members to be resilient. They contain unanticipated events when they occur, minimize the impacts of unanticipated events on incident operations, and quickly bounce back from adversity. Teams interviewed for this effort indicated that they expect all functions and sections, as standard operating procedure, to remain flexible when it comes to the need to change strategy or tactics. Some go as far as to say that if team members cannot live by this principle then they are not really welcome as a team member.

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## **Intense Involvement in Practical Training Exercises and Training Academies**

Several of the teams interviewed by the ICT maintain an intense involvement in practical training exercises and training academies. This practice benefits both the team and the people they serve. The team benefits from an opportunity to work together as a team in a setting that might help the team "knock the rust off." Others benefit from well-conducted and supported training put on by master performers. Some examples include:

- In Montana the County Assistance Team (CAT) hosts the annual CAT Camp. The team conducts a field-based engine academy in an incident setting that trains personnel from the very cooperators that the team will likely support during fire season. During the weekend camp trainees work with a State helicopter and conduct live burns. Line officers are also invited to attend and receive training in their role.
- In Maine the people in development for positions on the Type 3 IMO run the Maine State Wildfire Academy. They set up as an incident using actual equipment, an ICP and a base camp for 50 to 60 personnel. Maine personnel report that besides providing quality training the Academy serves as a good opportunity for team trainees to gain additional experience as a team. Members of the Maine Type 3 IMO also put on other training in the state as well.
- In Texas, the Texas Forest Service (TFS) is engaged in training every one to two months and Type 3 team members are involved in teaching I-300 Intermediate ICS and I-400

Advanced ICS. Team members also teach, coach and evaluate at two Texas Wildfire Academies per year. At these academies the team members practice working in the ICS, and working as a team filling their ICS organization down to the unit level. They involve trainees, including those from local government agencies. The team holds briefings every morning and completes the ICS 215 Operational Planning Worksheet, and ICS 215A Incident Action Plan Safety Analysis. Safety Officers oversee the S212 Chainsaw Operations classes when students are practicing with chainsaws.

- In Wyoming, the Type 3 IMO will join with the Wyoming Interagency Hotshots in a simulated training exercise over a three-day weekend. This simulation will be for all functions at the unit level.

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### **Leave Door Open to Diversity**

By crossing disciplinary and jurisdictional lines Type 3 IMOs benefit from diversity in the backgrounds and skill-sets of the team's members. In practice, this means leaving the door open to retirees, volunteer firefighters, personnel from agencies of local, state and federal government, nearby personnel from other states, and capable personnel from non-emergency services agencies. This practice results in a diverse team with members from a variety of disciplines, from different agencies, with a variety of field experience. This maintains a mix of skills that allows the team to solve a wide-range of problems and be very self contained and self-sufficient.

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### **Have a Training Plan for Team**

For the success and longevity of Type 3 IMOs it is important to develop team members and team depth. It seems essential for Type 3 IMOs to prepare and maintain a training plan for the team for the purpose of establishing priorities to develop the team and the people coming up who will join the team. Most often teams help manage the training development of their own members and teams need to systematically manage their training to keep developing the team members they need.

The team's training plan must address the critical need for getting trainees out on assignment, a practice that fills the pipeline for alternates and future team members. Teams must understand that in an increasingly complex fire environment managing trainees is also becoming increasingly complex. Teams may find that for operations trainees it nearly takes two fully qualified operations people to train and oversee a trainee. This must be planned for in advance.

Given that many Type 3 IMO personnel struggle to get to training outside their local area, teams may want to focus their training plan on getting training to the local area. This practice that has proven beneficial for several teams participating in this information collection effort.

One team has established a shadowing relationship with a Type 2 incident management team (IMT). They shadow this team on assignment once per year often taking the incident from the Type 2 IMT when ready. This has been a great learning experience for this team.

In Texas, the Texas Forest Service (TFS) used a \$500,000 grant from the Governor's office to hire a full time incident management team (IMT) coordinator to manage new Type 3 IMTs. The TFS recently trained fifty team members and will continue to hold regional courses in three

locations around the state. The training is designed to be like the Complex Incident Management Course with whole teams taking the training together.

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### **Get Computerized**

Some teams minimize their information technology to keep their operations simple and low maintenance. Several teams found out, often “the hard way,” that they have had to catch up with technology. Several teams have received I-Suite training and are bringing laptop computers (and sometimes a server) loaded with the I-Suite program with them. While these teams have recognized the need to use I-Suite, this practice has also created an issue as none of these teams travel with dedicated IT expertise. Other teams have found that traveling with laptop computers facilitates completion of Incident Action Plans (IAP) and enables them to have the same systems as the Type 1 and Type 2 IMTs, which greatly facilitates transition from team to team.

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### **Liaison Function**

The teams that the ICT interviewed all recognize the value of the liaison function. However, that does not mean that all successful Type 3 IMOs include a Liaison Officer. In fact, some teams interviewed for this effort systematically keep their organization lean and specifically mentioned that they do not include a Liaison Officer or Public Information Officer. However, all recognize the importance of the liaison function. This fact reflects the operational environment in which Type 3 IMOs frequently support agencies of local government and/or work on private property. In these circumstances it is critical to keep county commissioners and other local officials informed, handle landowner conflicts with sensitivity and to talk fire with local landowners.

Several teams really value their Liaison Officer. One experienced IC strongly recommends including this position on any new Type 3 IMO starting out and having depth/backfill for this position. When using a Liaison Officer, they should have both a fire background and a background in local government. When not carrying a Liaison Officer, one option is to recruit a county commissioner or other local official to serve in the role.

Recognizing the critical value of the liaison function, one team includes a Liaison Officer, but also adopts the policy that everyone on the team is a Liaison Officer, reflecting the importance of the function.

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## **Work Hard to Anticipate Events**

Several teams interviewed by the ICT indicate that they succeed, in part because they are preoccupied with preventing failure, work hard to anticipate events, and team members test themselves to avoid organizational blind spots. Teams address this need through a variety of practices including:

- Holding multiple planning meetings
- Systematically documenting major decisions made in planning meetings on a major decisions log. A major decisions log used by the County Assistance Team (CAT) in Montana is attached to this report as an appendix.
- Being sensitive to weak signals that indicate impending problems and “huddling” when something does not feel right. One team empowers all team members to call a huddle.

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## **Physically Meet Often**

The Type 3 IMO's interviewed by the ICT organize well and achieve good unit cohesion. This appears to be, in part, because they physically meet often. All these teams consider an annual meeting as essential. These meetings provide an opportunity to confirm readiness, discuss topics of importance, share experiences, conduct training, and learn from one another.

Several teams interviewed for this effort feel that an annual meeting is a minimal requirement and just a place to start. One team meets and networks twice per year. Another meets quarterly and one team meets monthly. When teams are locally based and meet often their members are able to see each other often, interact in a variety of settings, get comfortable with one another and develop as a team. All of these factors build camaraderie and unit cohesion.

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## **Stay in Local Area Geographically**

For a variety of reasons, most teams interviewed by the ICT regard staying in a local or regional geographic area as an effective practice. Some recommend keeping it locally based so that people see each other often and in different settings, which builds camaraderie and cohesion. Others say a Type 3 IMO needs to stay in their local area to maintain and benefit from their local knowledge and experience. By using local personnel who know the area, the resources available and each other, the team can respond quickly and can eliminate many political challenges. In the words of one team member “Staying in the local area is a big advantage for us, we know the area in which we respond very well, we know each other and we hit the ground running with very little lag time.”

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## Lessons Learned: Training and Development Challenges

*"It takes less time to become a brain surgeon than to become an IC." –Type 3 IMO Member*

*"Volunteers use all their vacation time for training and then don't have any vacation for going on fires." – Type 3 IMO Member*

### **Assignments: You Need Mobilizations to Build a Team**

Type 3 Incident Management Organizations (IMO) need adequate mobilizations, both in number and frequency, to develop their skills, learn to work together well and develop as a team. The activity level must be high for a team to be cohesive. One team said that ideally they would receive one assignment in state, one outside their local response area, and one non-fire assignment per year.

A sufficient number of assignments also generates interest and keeps people interested. Some teams are experiencing high turnover and difficulty keeping their pipeline of personnel full, which is impacting their availability because they have an insufficient level of activity.

Assignments are also particularly important for developing unit leaders, who need trainee assignments to complete their position task book (PTB). Training assignments are also critical for young people. Unfortunately it is proving very difficult to get people out as trainees.

According to one member of a Type 3 IMO, they have found that once they bring people on assignments they see first hand that Type 3 Teams are effective and quite frankly more fun than Type 1 and 2 teams and they usually want to participate on a Type 3 Team.

It is important for a Type 3 IMO to develop people to the Strike Team Leader level. A flaw in the 310-1, Wildland Fire Qualification Systems Guide has lots of people stuck at the crew boss level. This situation has only gotten worse as agencies send very few crews out any more and crews have become the domain of contractors.

People are having a very hard time completing the PTB either because of lack of training assignments or because it is too hard to strike a balance between team assignments and their primary job.

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## Developing and Maintaining Team Depth

A Type 3 IMO, like any other team, needs enough people “in the pipeline” to assure that all positions can be filled, that the team has sufficient depth in each position and that there are enough people in the pipeline to move up into team positions as existing team members move on. While this is a recruitment and retention issue, it is also a critically important training issue and challenge for Type 3 IMOs. Training challenges relating to team depth include:

- Many key team members are of the Baby Boom generation approaching retirement. There will soon be a growing need to replace key members of existing teams. With fewer experienced people available, and more teams forming all the time, the competition for team members is growing intense.
- Type 3 IMOs get raided. Type 3 IMOs have had some team members going to Type 2 incident management teams (IMT). Some people view Type 3 IMOs as little more than a training pipeline for Type 2 teams and this is a mistake.
- Developing section chiefs requires moving people through subordinate positions. This can prove exceedingly difficult for agencies that typically provide the core of Type 3 IMOs who cannot afford to support the required training. Compacts and other cooperative organizations can help, but they often provide only limited opportunities. Team members can, of course, attend national training, but out-of-state travel restrictions for state and local agencies can present a significant challenge.
- The typing of teams can hamper a Type 3 IMO when they attempt to recruit young (Generation X and Y) people. Some will prefer the status of being on a Type 1 or 2 IMT.

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## Training Funding

Training funding represents a significant challenge to Type 3 IMO success, particularly funding for training to develop new members. Much of the training for Type 3 IMOs has been funded through Rural Fire Assistance (RFA) and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) funding, which has been up and down and appears to be on its way down and out. Consequently, much of the development training for these teams has been dependent on unbudgeted funds, which are now jeopardized.

Some teams interviewed for this effort attended the Complex Incident Management Course (CIMC), and report that it represents an excellent training and development opportunity for Type 3 IMOs. However, the cost to send the Command and General Staff of a small team is approximately \$20,000. There exists a need for funding sources (perhaps through grants) to pay for advanced training such as this.

Several of the teams interviewed for this effort maintain an intense involvement in practical training exercises and academies in their response areas, a practice that has proven very beneficial for both them and the agencies they serve. However, academies are expensive and frequently funded through special, often unbudgeted sources. For example, one academy hosted by a team interviewed by the ICT costs approximately \$15,000 per year to put on, funded from grants rather than base funding.

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## **NIMS Integration Complicates Matters**

In 2004, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released the National Incident Management System (NIMS) as required by Homeland Security Presidential Directives. DHS also established the National Integration Center (NIC) Incident Management Systems Division and designated it as the lead federal entity to coordinate NIMS compliance.

Unfortunately, with DHS involvement comes a degree of formalization and new requirements that appear to exacerbate, rather than solve, problems that Type 3 IMO members face. For example, NIC policy requires team members to take Type 3 IMO training before taking specific position training, a policy that experienced Type 3 IMO members find essentially backwards.

Until now, Type 3 IMOs have succeeded because there have been relatively few formal training requirements, which enabled capable people with needed skills to participate, contribute and learn on the job. The teams interviewed by the ICT would all agree that additional training requirements, particularly within a system that is too formalized, will dry-up participation and make it very difficult to fill key Type 3 IMO positions.

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### **Barriers to Obtaining Needed Training**

Type 3 IMOs frequently depend on the participation of personnel from smaller agencies including local fire departments, both volunteer and career and state natural resource agencies. It seems that all Type 3 IMOs struggle to get their personnel to the training they need. Smaller agencies face several barriers to receiving needed training. Most notably, the cost of training, the scheduling of training, travel associated with training and the lack of timely training availability.

Cost always becomes an issue as many Type 3 IMOs have no training budget and rely on the discretionary financial assistance of the members' (often cash-strapped) home agency. Cost seems to be a particular issue for advanced level training that requires travel. Building the depth of existing teams and expanding the number of teams both represent necessary actions, but ones that will also exacerbate this problem.

Scheduling training becomes a problem for a number of reasons. Chief among them is the fact that Type 3 IMOs include:

- Shift firefighters
- People from a variety of agencies
- Volunteers who make their living outside the emergency services
- People who cannot spend extended periods of time away from work

Travel associated with advanced training represents a serious barrier to members of Type 3 IMOs meeting their training needs. Many state and local governments restrict out of state travel. While these restrictions frequently center on funding, they can also be political. Teams interviewed by the ICT acknowledged that most restrictions are imposed at the state level, but also those imposed by individual agencies have become so severe that their members have been unable to travel to needed training without intervention at a high level in their agencies. Whether due to funding crises or politics, out of state travel for training receives a great deal of scrutiny. Some agencies contributing Type 3 IMO members have gotten around out of state

travel restrictions by bringing needed training into their state, but have struggled to get all the training they need brought to their local area.

Members of Type 3 IMOs struggle to find the training they need when they need it, primarily for three reasons. First, the training is not available for a time that is conducive for team members to attend or when team members need the training. Second, too few seats are available at geographic area coordinating center (GACC) level training to allow members of Type 3 teams to attend. Finally, too few qualified instructors exist to conduct needed position training on a localized or regionalized basis.

Operations courses often lack enough seats to allow members of Type 3 IMOs to attend. Non-operations courses frequently get cancelled and it can take three to four years for finance section personnel to complete their required training. Some teams report a lack of trainers to conduct position training for members of Type 3 IMOs, even though new mandates by the DHS require certain positions like Planning Section Chief (PSC) and Logistics Section Chief (LSC.)

At the bottom line, regardless of the nature of the challenge, there exists a need for reliable sources of funding for training and new, innovative delivery mechanisms.

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### **Prerequisites and Qualifications Must Be Limited and Flexible**

It appears that the Type 3 IMOs interviewed by the ICT have succeeded, in part, because there have been relatively few formal training and qualification requirements and because those that did exist included a degree of flexibility. The limited requirements have enabled competent and skilled people to jump in and contribute.

Even given these advantages the qualifications system and the prerequisite requirements have presented an ongoing challenge. Particular challenges include:

- The system is oriented to people who will serve at a Type 2 level
- People serving at the Type 3 level need access to some of the same training (command and general staff positions) that Type 2 qualification requires but prerequisites for these courses keep Type 3 personnel from participating. In addition, when a Type 3 team member applies to attend an NWCG courses the training providers give priority to personnel meeting all prerequisites. Consequently, Type 3 team members often find that they cannot get into the training they need. Then, even when they can get into an NWCG course, without completing all the prerequisites, they do not receive a course completion certificate for the course they successfully completed.
- Time frames for completing position task books (PTB) are often very short. Consequently, a trainee may need a training assignment or assignments almost immediately – often an unrealistic expectation.
- A training system that is too formalized and includes too many training requirements will dry-up participation, making it hard to fill the critical positions of a Type 3 IMO.

## **Long, Slow Qualifications and Certification Process**

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Wildland Fire Qualifications System has become a long, slow process. It is taking too long time for people to complete a position task book (PTB) and achieve NWCG qualification. The system is too complicated and too slow, and a deterrent to participation, particularly for young people who lose interest.

The slowness of the system represents a serious development issue for Type 3 IMOs. Without training there is no PTB. Without a PTB there are no training assignments. Without training assignments there are no people in the development pipeline to build team depth or prepare people to move into team positions as current members retire or otherwise move on.

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## **Lessons Learned: Roles Government Assistance Plays in the Success of a Type 3 IMO**

*“Local state and federal agencies have been supportive of the idea of the IMO but have not contributed greatly in any material way. Our equipment was obtained mostly through surplus channels.” – Type 3 IC*

*“A combination of funding and opportunities are what state and federal government are providing.” – Safety Officer*

### **Need State, Federal and Local Government Participation and Support**

The information collection team (ICT) asked the teams they interviewed what role states had played in their success and also what role the federal government played. This topic was one area where the teams interviewed differed significantly. Some felt they had succeeded without any federal support. Others felt federal support had been critical. However, in the end, the ICT concluded that what really matters is that a Type 3 IMO has both participation and support from as many agencies as possible from their assigned response area and from all three levels of government; federal, state and local.

In many locations, without the participation of federal, state, and local government personnel, the agencies could not even effectively fight fire, let alone field an effective Type 3 IMO. Several people interviewed for this effort, stressed that the interagency working relationship is paramount to the success of their IMO. They point out that in today’s environment few local agencies can manage a Type 3 incident on their own.

State agencies often put emphasis on training and can contribute in this area. Federal agencies can assist by providing mobilization opportunities. While it appears that Type 3 IMOs succeed best when they serve a relatively local geographic area, the reality is that in some areas of the country, a Type 3 IMO can not get enough activity to practice their craft, and need the occasional out-of-area assignment to hone their skills.

For some teams, high-level liaison with federal agencies, often between the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) and/or their state compact has proven instrumental in getting out-of-area assignments. These assignments provide two benefits to the team. First of all, these assignments provide opportunities to function as a team and gain valuable experience. In addition, these assignments provide recognition that the team is a resource of value, which, in turn, attracts young people to the team to help build depth and sustainability.

For example, a team from Maine was able to shadow a Type 2 incident management team on a wildfire in Central Oregon, and then take the fire from them. This proved to be a very valuable experience for the team and one that was enabled by high-level liaison between the State of Maine, the U.S. Forest Service, the NASF and the Northeast Forest Fire Compact. Type 3 personnel from Texas were able to complete a similar shadowing opportunity in Georgia.

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## **A Key Agency to Provide The Vision, Leadership, Training And Funding**

Even though the ICT concluded that a successful Type 3 IMO requires both participation and support from as many agencies as possible from their assigned response area, and from all three levels of government, the teams interviewed also made it clear that success requires a key or lead agency to provide the vision, leadership, training and funding necessary.

Nearly all found that they succeeded because a person or persons in one key agency advocated for the need for the team; acted as a sponsor to them; provided guidance, training, and technical assistance, often at little or no cost; and mentored the team's members. Teams credit these sponsors and mentors with keeping them focused. At start-up training funds proved essential and the key sponsoring agency often provided these funds.

Often, the key agency provides the personnel who make-up the core of the team. The support of a key administrator or administrators from the sponsor agency helped find incident assignments for teams that proved key to their experience, development and credibility.

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## **Agreements or Arrangements with State Emergency Management Agencies**

Some teams interviewed by the ICT are cooperating closely with their state emergency management agency (EMA). This provides opportunities to work together with county agencies, train with cooperating agencies, provide and receive instructors for training, and to be available year around for non-fire incidents, such as weather related emergencies.

In some cases, partnership with the state EMA brought training to the team and local government, which would have been impossible without the partnership.

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## **Direct Federal Support to Type 3 IMOs**

Most teams interviewed by the ICT indicated that the agencies of the federal government could best support their teams in three ways: 1) by allowing, enabling and encouraging their personnel to participate on their local Type 3 IMO, 2) by providing funding for training and 3) federal agencies can assist by providing equipment for teams.

Successful teams are including federal employees from non-fire agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Unfortunately, employees of non-fire agencies often find their supervisors less than supportive.

Teams that are participating in the DHS domestic security strategy are benefiting from DHS grant money (administered through their state natural resources agency), typically "Ready Reserve" training money. However, other sources of federal funding for Type 3 IMO training are needed.

Several teams interviewed availed themselves of Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) and FEMA equipment to outfit their teams.

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## Unresolved Issues Regarding Type 3 IMOs

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*“We constantly strive to bring new people onto the teams. We are very eager to bring trainees on assignments so we can develop new Finance, Plans, and Logistics people. Once we bring people on assignments and they see, first hand, that Type 3 Teams are effective and quite frankly more fun than Type 1 & 2 teams they usually want to participate on a Type 3 Team.” – Type 3 IC*

*“People don’t have eight years to become Strike Team Leader”. – Operations Section Chief*

### **Filling the Finance, Plans, and Logistics functions**

Finding people to fill positions in the Finance, Plans, and Logistics functions represents a very big issue for Type 3 incident management organizations (IMO). Not only are Type 3 IMOs struggling to find people to function as their Finance Chief or Logistics Section Chief (and to provide some depth in those positions), but they also struggle to develop enough people to fill subordinate positions who support Type 3 operations, as well as provide the pool from which people move up to take team positions.

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### **Strategy and Sustainability**

The ICT members met some incredibly dedicated people who had expended impressive amounts of time, energy and personal resources to make their teams a success. While their commitment and dedication deserves high praise, the situation also is cause for concern. A significant percentage of these people are of the Baby Boom Generation and are nearing retirement. Some teams have multiple Command and General Staff members leaving soon, and are struggling to find replacements despite considerable effort. Continued recruitment and retention of members will continue to represent the greatest challenge for the future. This issue represents a serious problem at all incident management team levels as the pool seems to shrink, but is most serious for Type 3 IMOs, who must also compete for members with Type 1 and 2 teams.

The system needs to be mature enough to continue on when the current founding players retire or move-on. In other words, to succeed into the future, these Type 3 IMOs must be institutionalized. The intent should be to maintain a good, quality and dedicated team.

It seems that one key to success will be to convince local government boards and agency administrators that team participation is in their interest and that they will receive benefits in return.

Type 3 IMOs must also tap into the financial strategic plans of their participating agencies at all levels of government to sustain the team. The intent should be to secure a sustainable funding stream that provides predictable, stable funding.

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## **Participation and Interest**

Generating interest and participation in Type 3 IMO membership represents a very big issue and one that is related to other critical issues, such as the need to develop sufficient depth and keeping the recruitment and development pipeline full. Many successful Type 3 IMOs strive to maintain a membership that includes a mix of personnel including members from federal, state and local government and some include people from the private sector. Consequently, several aspects of this issue exist.

Teams are struggling to interest younger personnel. Teams of all sorts, but particularly Type 3 IMOs need to get younger people in the development pipeline if they are to maintain sufficient depth. At the bottom line, Type 3 IMOs need to seek out as many training opportunities for junior employees as possible, and keep them interested and active. To do these things requires a long-term recruitment plan as part of an overall strategy for a team.

The biggest challenge is giving agency personnel or private sector time to participate. National level legislation to support “backfill pay” for private sector folks working fires is definitely needed.

Managing team commitments against normal workloads seems to represent one of the biggest barriers to team participation.

Only one team interviewed by the ICT had significant participation by personnel of federal agencies. There exists a need for federal wildland fire agencies, which tend to focus their energy on Type 1 and 2 teams, to encourage their personnel to participate on Type 3 IMOs.

Teams that are dependent on the personnel of local government agencies must be able to address the overtime backfill issues to maintain the interest and participation of these agencies.

Most of the teams that the ICT interviewed currently include key members who are simply overqualified and capable of doing more than would be expected of them. While this has been enormously beneficial to these teams, it probably cannot and should not become an expectation. Consequently, Type 3 IMOs would be wise to clearly define positions and expectations.

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## **Still a Challenge to Receive Resources at a Type 3 Incident**

It remains a challenge to receive resources at a Type 3 incident when resources are being held for initial attack or when the Type 3 IMO is competing with Type 1 or Type 2 teams for available resources. The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center (LLC) has heard from numerous sources when working on a variety of issues, that there will be a growing need for, and use of, Type 3 IMOs. They will become an important part of future fire management strategies. However, it appears that these teams struggle to compete within the existing system.

Tracking individual member status also presents a challenge. Teams are using phone trees and conference calls to track team member status and availability and/or employing Resource Ordering Status System (ROSS) workarounds to get mobilized. In addition, to perform as required, Type 3 IMOs need to get to their incidents quickly, and ROSS cannot slow up the process. Consequently, Type 3 IMOs currently need to plan for ROSS workarounds. To succeed as people are envisioning, Type 3 IMOs will need to be treated as equal players in both the dispatch and support systems. To accomplish this, however, will require overcoming considerable organizational inertia.

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## All Hazard Response

All hazard response has become a perennial issue for wildland fire agencies, and one that will intensify with the growing need for Type 3 IMOs. Some Type 3 IMOs with significant local government agency participation are already operationally qualified for many hazards. Some teams started as wildland fire teams and evolved to manage other incidents. Some remain strictly wildland fire teams but most feel that they can support nearly any incident even if they are not operationally qualified. Relationships with state emergency agencies and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) – Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will intensify this discussion but many questions about the merits and demerits of mission expansion still remain.

Team members interviewed by the ICT expressed some concern about working with the DHS and state emergency management agencies (EMA) and the desire to use wildland fire teams to meet state requirements for DHS mandated Type 3 IMOs. Where this has already occurred, some teams have found that the formalization and rigidity, that comes with DHS and state EMA involvement, are over-complicating the team concept, providing disincentives, removing flexibility and limiting players or participants. There exists a concern that involvement with DHS and state EMAs will disrupt a good thing and some have gone so far as to suggest a need to separate Type 3 IMOs from DHS mandated Type 3 IMT.

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## Fire Complexity and Assignment Complexity

It is quite clear that fire complexity is increasing and will continue to do so for some time. Type 3 IMOs are handling incidents that no one would have conceived of 10 or 15 years ago. While this seems to have proven positive for the wildland fire community on the whole, this trend is also making it much more difficult to fill slots with trainees or to have trainees assigned because the trainers have their hands full, consequently exacerbating the problem of developing team personnel. The teams interviewed by the ICT made it quite clear that Type 3 IMOs must be conscientious and careful about what assignments they accept. It is possible that there also exists a need for a clear cohesive system for determining the complexity of incidents and assigning teams appropriately.

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## Training

Several training issues represent a barrier to Type 3 IMO success and training can present a burden to host agencies when it comes to meeting an IMO's training needs.

First, access issues exist. Often smaller agencies (that many Type 3 IMOs depend on) struggle to get their people to conferences, workshops and advanced training. In addition, too often, needed training is simply unavailable at times or locations that are convenient to team members. Some Type 3 IMO members would say that centralized training is the problem. Others would say that there exists a need for more trainers and training. Still others say that agencies need to put on almost all training locally and providing local training represents a critical need. A Type 3 IMO or its participating agencies must be able to provide and sustain local training, including convenient training locations with easy access, to have an effective team or program.

The qualification and certification system itself presents considerable hurdles. Most notably, some organizations have some really sharp young people who want to participate, but struggle to get them through the training and position task book (PTB) process.

Formalization and mandated qualifications also represent a concern and the teams interviewed expressed considerable resistance to a standardized approach to training, certification and qualifications. Of particular concern are training and qualification mandates or rigid standards. Issues include:

- Recognition of prior learning
- “Cross-walking” structural fire and wildland fire qualifications
- The time it takes to achieve National Wildland Fire Coordination Group (NWCG) qualifications
- Disconnects between needed skills and PTBs
- A training and qualifications system that is not suited for volunteers personnel from agencies of local government
- Rigidity (coming with formalization) that is a disincentive to participation

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### **Liability Issues Faced By Teams and Team Members**

Teams identified by the ICT perceive liability issues faced by individuals and teams as very real. In fact, some teams went so far as to question whether they would want to accept an assignment of U.S. Forest Service jurisdiction in the future. While federal agencies have addressed this issue, in part, by sharing the cost of personal liability insurance for their personnel, local and state personnel are not able to obtain that same insurance.

Concerns about liability are negatively impacting recruitment for some teams and appears to be feeding the need for increasing qualifications and position training. Team members interviewed by the ICT made it clear that there exists a need to continuing support (both financially and otherwise) for obtaining liability protection and expanding that support beyond federal employees. In addition, some people interviewed by the ICT suggested pursuing memorandums of understanding (MOU), covering all states, enabling reimbursement for liability insurance.

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### **Struggling With Role: Where to Fit In Nationally**

Type 3 IMO's succeed best when they serve a defined, local or regional jurisdiction to which they can respond quickly and in which they can bring their local knowledge, experience and connections to bear. However, the fact remains that not all Type 3 IMO's will get enough activity, and therefore experience, to build their team in their local response area alone. Consequently, these teams need the occasional assignment outside their local area to hone their skills and build their team. However, those teams struggle to understand their role outside their usual jurisdiction and how they might fit in nationally.

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## Summary and Conclusion

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*“This ICT report needs to reach local line officers. We are receiving agency support and the trust, confidence and support from agency administrators. However, we need to encourage them to call us sooner, moving the trigger point up to extended attack, because this is where a Type 3 IMO can make the most difference. We could also pre-position and enhance our move-up.” – Type 3 Incident Commander*

This initial impressions report identifies lessons learned, effective practices, training recommendations and unresolved issues that generally fall within ten broad themes. First of all, the value of Type 3 IMOs lays in rapid response and local knowledge. Successful Type 3 IMOs find that the sooner they arrive at their assigned incident, the sooner they can organize and positively influence the incident by establishing organizational structure, command, common communications, and dedicated safety oversight. When they arrive quickly, a Type 3 IMO can take much of the confusion out of rapidly developing extended attack incidents. This is best accomplished by serving a defined, local or regional geographic area.

Second, Type 3 IMOs succeed when they are well supported by the agency or agencies organizing the IMO, by agencies that will potentially receive the IMO’s services, and by the employers of individual team members. In addition, nearly all the teams interviewed by the ICT succeeded because of they benefited from the energy and commitment of either an individual champion or a core group of people who were committed to making the team a reality.

Type 3 IMOs succeed because they benefit from the commitment and experience of their current team members. Ironically, these success factors can also present agencies with a paradox as they consider expanding the Type 3 IMO concept. While the commitment and experience of team members undeniably contributes to the success of Type 3 IMOs, one must consider whether agencies can duplicate these success factors given the demographics and changing expectations of their workforces.

A fourth theme pertains to the value of both experience and teamwork. To be good, a team needs opportunity to exercise their skills, and Type 3 IMOs succeed because they receive an adequate number of mobilizations frequently enough to develop their skills, and develop as a team. The more Type 3 IMOs get to practice their craft the better they are, and the opportunity to work on a variety of incidents also improves both their skills and their teamwork.

It seems clear that, in today’s operating environment, successful Type 3 IMOs require strong interagency working relationships. Type 3 IMOs benefit from strong interagency working relationships in a variety of ways. First, they benefit from a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency team make-up. Second, they prove effective when they cross jurisdictional lines, and know the agency administrators in their primary response area. Finally, they work well when they work collaboratively with multiple agencies.

It also seems clear that the success of a Type 3 IMO requires sufficient depth in key positions, particularly the Command and General staff. Assuring that an IMO is available when needed requires that the team maintain sufficient alternates who can fill key roles when primary members are unavailable because of personal or professional commitments. In addition, to sustain its success a Type 3 IMO needs enough people interested in being on the team to “keep the pipeline full” so that people can move up into team positions as existing team members move on. It is obvious that effective recruitment and retention represents a critically important

aspect of Type 3 IMO success, particularly developing the core group of the future, and this must be managed strategically.

A seventh theme relates to a customer service orientation and philosophy of assistance that many Type 3 IMOs use to guide their behavior. These teams strive to remain operationally compatible with local resources and local landowners. These teams know their customer well, serve their customers well, and understand local issues, local politics, and the social and economic impacts of fire suppression in the local community.

Typically, members of Type 3 IMOs are flexible in both skills and attitude, key personnel are cross-trained, and team members work across functions. At the bottom line, the members of successful Type 3 IMOs share in tasks and responsibilities beyond their assigned function. For this to work, collaboration and cooperation must surpass turf, the team must break down barriers between functions, and a team philosophy that no task is beneath any other team member must prevail.

A ninth theme indicates that training, as well as the NWCG Qualification and Certification System have proven critical, and will continue to prove critical, for the success of Type 3 IMOs. Type 3 IMOs must be able to obtain the training they need, but success requires more than simply providing access to the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) curriculum. It seems that nearly all Type 3 IMOs struggle to get their personnel to the training they need, and face several barriers to receiving needed training. Most notably, the nature of the delivery system, cost of training, scheduling of training, travel associated with training and the lack of timely training availability. Several teams indicated that a rigid approach to NWCG qualification hinders Type 3 IMO development.

Finally, judging from the teams interviewed by the ICT, successful Type 3 IMOs understand the importance of being a team and understand that successful teamwork takes determined effort.

The authors wish to reiterate that the purpose of this report is neither to criticize or promote, but to describe and document lessons learned, effective practices, training recommendations and unresolved issues pertaining to type 3 Incident Management Organizations that existed at the time this report was written. The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center can best serve the fire community by getting these initial impressions before the agencies and people considering the development or expansions of Type 3 IMOs, so that they may consider the information provided here, and address the elements of this report requiring their attention. The first priority of the Center is to get information into the hands of the people that make policy, conduct training and lead people. This report can help the wildland fire community learn from experience, capture and spread knowledge, share information and purposefully modify both policy and action on the ground in ways that reflect the experience of successful Type 3 IMOs.

## Appendix: Links to Additional Resources

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[Form: Montana County Assistance Team \(CAT\) Major Decisions Log](#)

[Guideline: \(Colorado\) DRC IMT3 Guidelines](#)

[Guidebook: Maine IMT Guidebook](#)

Introductory Presentation: Montana County Assistance Team (CAT) PowerPoint (coming soon!)

[Statewide Emergency Support Plan: Florida Fire Chief's Association](#)

[Standard Operating Guidelines: Lee County Fire Chiefs \(Florida\)](#)

[Standard Operating Guidelines: Emergency Operations Center Area Commanders \(Lee County\)](#)

[Standard Operating Guidelines: All Hazard \(Caloosahatchee, Florida\)](#)

[Communications Plan: Lee County \(Florida\)](#)

[Sample Team Organization: Lee County \(Florida\)](#)

[Sample IMO Schedule/Rotation: Lee County \(Florida\)](#)

[IMT Application: Lee County \(Florida\)](#)

[Sample Policy: Incident Command System \(Lee County Florida\)](#)

### Available Elsewhere

Florida Incident Field Operations Guide: All Hazard Approach to Incident Management (January 2006) Available from the Florida Fire Chiefs Association 880 Airport Road, Suite 110, Ormond Beach, FL 32174. [www.ffca.org](http://www.ffca.org)

NIMS Incident Command System Field Guide. Available from the business [www.InformedGuides.com](http://www.InformedGuides.com).