Three cities.
One shared purpose.





Lead with Purpose.
Unite Through Service.
Shape the Future.

HEARTLAND FIRE RESCUE DEPT
EST 2010

FIRE CHIEF

Serving the Cities of El Cajon, La Mesa, and Lemon Grove

BOB MURRAY & ASSOCIATES
EXPERTS IN EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Heartland Fire & Rescue (HFR) seeks a leader who can unite people around a common purpose, build and sustain trust, and lead with both humility and conviction. The successful candidate will be approachable without avoiding difficult conversations, collaborative without compromising sound judgment, and decisive without losing sight of the value of others' perspectives. This individual will inspire confidence, advance the organization's strategic priorities, and help HFR realize the full potential of its regional partnership.



THE COMMUNITY

Located in East County San Diego, HFR serves the vibrant and diverse communities of El Cajon, La Mesa, and Lemon Grove. Each city brings its own distinct character, neighborhoods, and community traditions, creating a dynamic region where residents, businesses, and visitors benefit from a strong sense of local identity and connection. From established residential neighborhoods and thriving commercial districts to community gathering places and expanding development, the three cities represent a varied service environment that calls for responsive leadership, thoughtful planning, and a deep commitment to public safety. The region's proximity to the broader San Diego metropolitan area offers residents access to a wide range of employment, educational, recreational, and cultural opportunities.

HFR plays an essential role in protecting the people, property, and quality of life that make these communities special, working every day to build safer, stronger, and more resilient communities.

> ***For a leader who believes public safety begins with community trust, HFR offers an opportunity to make a meaningful and lasting difference across three connected cities.***

THE ORGANIZATION

A Regional Partnership. A Shared Commitment to Excellence.

HFR is a collaborative regional fire and emergency services organization established in 2010 through a joint exercise of powers agreement among the Cities of El Cajon, La Mesa, and Lemon Grove. By bringing fire protection, fire prevention, emergency medical services, and emergency preparedness under a shared organizational structure, the three cities have created a partnership designed to promote operational effectiveness, resource coordination, and high-quality service while preserving each city's local governance and culture.

HOW HFR IS STRUCTURED

Heartland Fire & Rescue is not a separate legal entity; its personnel, including the Fire Chief, are employed by one of the member cities.

The organization delivers a comprehensive range of services across its three-city service area, supported by eight fire stations and a dedicated team of career professionals. Its responsibilities extend well beyond emergency response to include fire prevention and code enforcement, emergency medical services, technical rescue, public education, disaster preparedness, and collaboration with neighboring agencies. HFR also benefits from regional partnerships that support coordinated emergency response, training, communications, and mutual aid.

Guided by its mission to provide safe communities through exceptional, professional service, HFR emphasizes trustworthiness, innovation, resourcefulness, compassion, diversity, respect, community citizenship, and a commitment to excellence. These values reflect an organizational culture grounded in professionalism, accountability, teamwork, and service to others. The organization continues to invest in its people, capabilities, and future readiness. Recent priorities have included succession planning, professional development, recruitment, strategic planning, and maintaining the highest standards of operational performance.

This is an opportunity to lead a respected regional organization, build on a strong foundation of service, and shape the future of a collaborative fire and rescue system committed to the safety and well-being of the communities it serves.

THE POSITION

Reporting to the City Managers of El Cajon, La Mesa, and Lemon Grove, the Fire Chief provides executive leadership and strategic direction for the regional organization's comprehensive fire and emergency services, including fire suppression, fire prevention, emergency medical response, hazardous materials response, disaster preparedness, and related public safety programs.

2010	3	8	ISO CLASS 1
ESTABLISHED	MEMBER CITIES	FIRE STATIONS	Recertified in 2025, reflecting HFR's commitment to excellence in fire protection

The Fire Chief will play a pivotal role in advancing HFR's strategic plan, continuing its organizational effectiveness, and further integrating the regional partnership into a cohesive, unified organization.

The Fire Chief is responsible for ensuring the effective delivery of emergency services across all three member cities while advancing shared organizational priorities, strengthening operational readiness, and maintaining the highest standards of public and firefighter safety.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Strategic and operational planning
- Policy development
- Personnel leadership
- Budget administration and resource allocation
- Oversight of fire apparatus, equipment, and facilities

The Chief will evaluate service delivery, anticipate emerging needs, and implement strategies that support organizational effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

The successful candidate will work collaboratively with the City Managers from El Cajon, La Mesa, and Lemon Grove, department personnel, elected officials, regional fire agencies, emergency service partners, and community stakeholders to promote coordinated service delivery, regional preparedness, and public confidence. The Chief will represent HFR in interagency partnerships, professional organizations, public meetings, and community engagements, communicating organizational priorities and addressing complex or sensitive issues with sound judgment and transparency.

The Fire Chief will also be expected to regularly attend City Council meetings in each of the three member cities to provide updates, respond to questions, and communicate departmental priorities, initiatives, and operational matters. This responsibility requires a strong public presence, excellent presentation skills, and the ability to build trust and maintain productive relationships with each City Council while advancing the shared goals of the regional organization.

The previous Fire Chief retired after three years in the chief role and 28 years as an employee of the Fire Department.

THE FIRE CHIEF DIRECTLY SUPERVISES

Deputy Chief • Two Division Chiefs • Fire Marshal • Emergency Preparedness Coordinator • Management Analyst • Senior Management Analyst • Administrative Assistant

SERVES ON THE BOARDS OF CHIEFS FOR

Heartland Communications Facility Authority • Heartland Training Facility

PARTICIPATES WITH

Zone Chiefs • San Diego County Fire Chiefs • Unified Disaster Council

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

HFR is seeking a collaborative, strategic, and forward-thinking fire service leader who can effectively manage three member cities, foster strong regional partnerships, and champion a shared vision for exceptional fire and emergency services. The ideal candidate will be an accomplished fire service executive who combines strong leadership abilities, sound operational judgment, and strategic vision with an approachable, collaborative, and trustworthy leadership style.

A relationship-oriented leader, the successful candidate will be friendly, accessible, and open to suggestions and new ideas. They will listen carefully, invite diverse perspectives, communicate candidly, and create an environment where employees and organizational partners feel respected and comfortable sharing their concerns. At the same time, they will demonstrate the conviction to establish clear expectations, address challenges directly, and respectfully push back when circumstances call for a different perspective or course of action. Above all, they will lead with integrity, consistency, and transparency, earning the trust and confidence of employees, city leadership, and regional partners.

The next Fire Chief must be a strategic and collaborative leader who can translate HFR's strategic plan into tangible progress. They will establish clear priorities, provide clear direction, engage employees and stakeholders in implementation, hold themselves and others accountable for results, and maintain momentum toward long-term organizational goals. They will recognize opportunities to improve operations, strengthen employee development, and enhance service delivery while balancing immediate demands with the organization's future needs.

The successful candidate will understand the complexities of a joint exercise of powers agreement and demonstrate the ability to bring together differing perspectives, build alignment among the member cities, and foster a shared organizational identity. They will balance the needs and interests of individual jurisdictions with the broader interests of the regional organization, building productive relationships and establishing a common vision for the future. Success will require diplomacy, political awareness, persistence, and the ability to navigate disagreements while keeping the partnership focused on its collective mission.

The ideal candidate will also bring strong administrative and financial acumen, experience managing personnel and resources, and a commitment to firefighter safety and employee well-being. They will cultivate a culture of accountability, professionalism, continuous improvement, and mutual respect while encouraging innovation and developing the next generation of fire service leaders.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

Education – A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university, with major coursework in fire science, public administration, or a related field. A master's degree is desirable.

Professional Experience – At least ten years of increasingly responsible experience in firefighting and fire prevention, including a minimum of three years of management and administrative responsibility at the rank of Captain or above.

Leadership and Management – Demonstrated experience overseeing personnel, developing and implementing organizational goals and policies, administering budgets, managing resources, and evaluating operational effectiveness.

Technical Knowledge – A comprehensive understanding of fire suppression, fire prevention, emergency medical response, hazardous materials operations, disaster preparedness and recovery, and applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Regional Collaboration – The ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with municipal departments, regional fire and emergency service agencies, public safety partners, and community stakeholders.

Licensure and Certification – Possession of, or the ability to obtain, an appropriate and valid driver's license. Chief Officer certification is highly desirable.

The strongest candidates will complement these qualifications with demonstrated success in strategic planning, organizational development, emergency management, employee engagement, public communication, and the delivery of responsive, high-quality public safety services.

COMPENSATION

If an external candidate is selected, the individual will become an employee of the City of La Mesa and will receive the full benefits package provided to La Mesa Management employees. If an internal candidate from La Mesa, El Cajon, or Lemon Grove is selected, they will remain an employee of their home agency and will continue to receive applicable home agency salary and benefits for the Fire Chief position.

ANNUAL SALARY RANGE

$209,497.60 – $254,454.40

For an external candidate. The starting salary will be determined based on the selected candidate's qualifications and experience, consistent with the City of La Mesa's compensation practices.

In addition, the City of La Mesa offers an attractive benefits package including:

Retirement – California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS) Classic members hired on or after January 1, 2013 will be enrolled in the 3% @ 55 benefit formula with single highest year (9% employee contribution plus 1% cost sharing). New Members to CalPERS fall under a 2.7% @ 57 (14% employee contribution) benefit formula with 3-year final average compensation. Safety employees do not contribute to Social Security.

Health Insurance – Medical, dental, and vision insurance is provided. Medical plans are offered through the CalPERS Health Program, giving employees a range of HMO and PPO options. A cafeteria plan of 90% of the average of the Sharp and Kaiser health plans is used to pay for health coverage. In 2027, the City pays up to $2,347 per month for "Employee + 2 or More" coverage.

Vacation, Holidays and Leave – 11 paid holidays and three floating holidays per year; 110 – 230 hours of vacation accrual per year (depending on tenure); and 80 hours of administrative leave per calendar year.

Sick Leave – 96 hours per year.

Group Life Insurance – Life insurance up to $250,000.

Short- and Long-Term Disability – Short- and long-term disability insurance for management.

Deferred Compensation – Participation in the Section 457 deferred compensation program or the post-tax 457 Roth deferred compensation program includes up to $1,500 in annual employer matching contribution per calendar year.

Work Schedule – 4/10 work schedule.

Other Benefits – Take-home Vehicle, Sick Leave Conversion and Vacation Buy-Back Programs.

For the complete list of Management Benefits for external candidates, please visit the City of La Mesa's website.

TO APPLY

If you are interested in this outstanding opportunity, please apply online at:

www.bobmurrayassoc.com

FILING DEADLINE

December 6, 2026

Following the closing date, resumes will be screened according to the qualifications outlined above. The most qualified candidates will be invited to personal interviews with Bob Murray & Associates. A select group of candidates will be asked to provide references once it is anticipated that they may be recommended as finalists. References will be contacted only following candidate approval. Finalist interviews will be held with representatives of the three member cities. Candidates will be advised of the status of the recruitment following selection of the Fire Chief.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call:

Mr. Mike Ishii
(916) 784-9080

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