

# Strengthening and Modernizing Fire Services in Nova Scotia

FSANS CONFERENCE

APRIL 2026

SANDRA MCKENZIE, DEPUTY MINISTER

DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY  
MANAGEMENT (DEM)



# Today's Agenda

- Our Why
- Where We've Been
- What We've Learned
- Where We're Going
- How You Can Get Involved
- Question & Answer

# Why We Embarked on this Journey

- ▶ The Province is taking action to provide oversight and leadership of fire safety and services that is long overdue.
- ▶ This work is shaped by input from hundreds of fire service leaders to tackle long-standing challenges:
  - declining volunteer numbers
  - increased climate emergencies
  - inconsistent access to training and equipment
  - uneven service levels and funding models
- ▶ Responds directly to calls from FSANS members for unified legislation and a strategic home in government.

# Our Vision

Every Nova Scotian has access to reliable, evidence-based fire services—no matter where they live.

Every firefighter has access to the training and equipment needed to stay safe while serving their communities.



# Who We've Engaged

## We listened to diverse stakeholders in the fire services

More than **1,770** fire service and municipal leaders (2025 and 2026) FSANS Review, NSFS Value for Money Audit, and Fire Service Modernization Planning Sessions.

## We heard from people across the province

Engagement happened online and in communities, with **48 sessions** held across Nova Scotia.

## What we heard shaped our work

Feedback directly informed fire service modernization priorities and how FSANS recommendations are being put into action.

# What We We've Learned



## **Strong support for common standards:**

Clear roles, stable funding, and consistent training aligned to NFPA standards across the province, with better access through regional and mobile options.



## **Concern for people and capacity:**

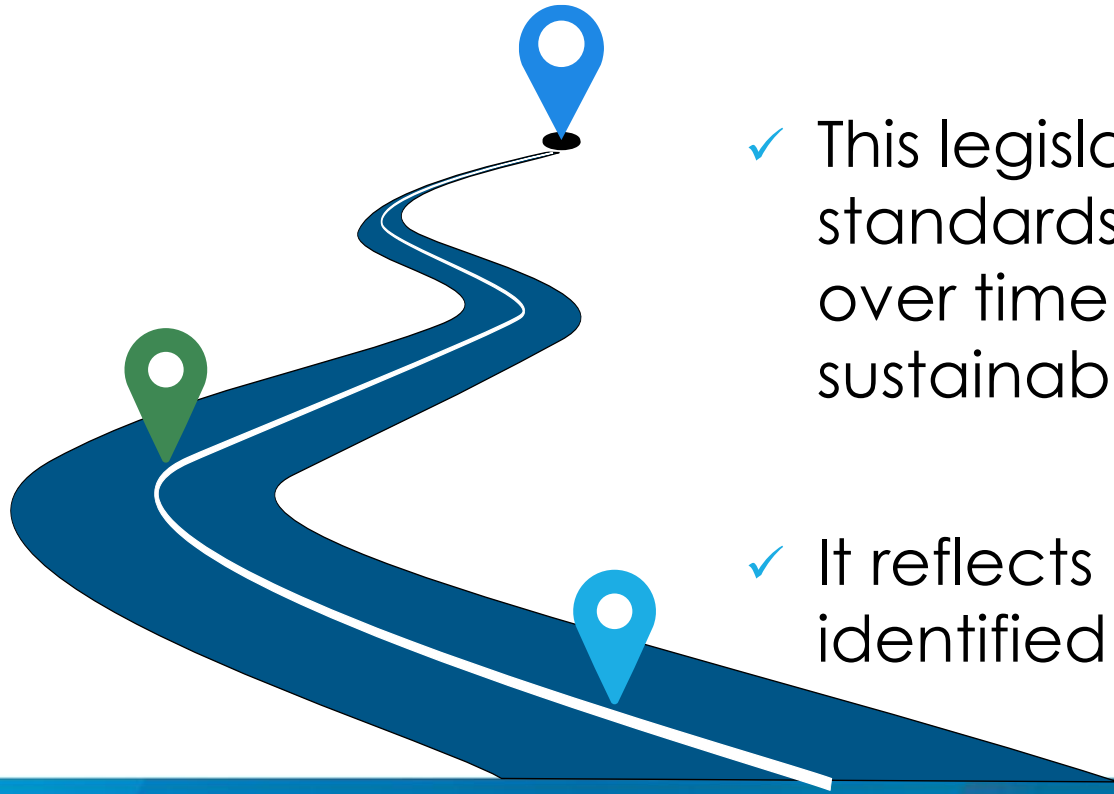
Firefighters highlighted burnout, volunteer shortages, paperwork pressures, and uneven access to equipment and supports.



## **Interest in what comes next:**

While views differ on governance, there is shared interest in predictable funding, stronger oversight, and ongoing engagement to guide decisions.

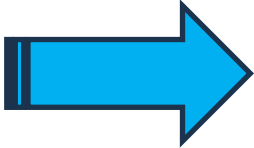
# Where We're Going



- ✓ On February 23, the Province introduced new legislation to strengthen fire services across Nova Scotia.
- ✓ This legislation sets a clear path for changes (e.g., standards, fire services reviews) to be phased in over time in practical, achievable, and sustainable ways.
- ✓ It reflects key FSANS Governance Review priorities identified by the fire service sector.

# Alignment with FSANS Governance Review

FSANS Recommendation Themes	Integrated in Bill 186
Governance & Legislation	✓
Administration & Coordination	✓
Dispatch & Communications	✓
Professional Standards & Training	✓
Health, Safety & Wellness	✓
	✓
	✓
Data, Reporting & KPIs	✓
Risk-Based Planning	✓
	✓
Implementation Roadmap	✓



## New Legislation that Focuses On:

- Clear leadership and better coordination
- Consistent standards that support firefighter safety
- Risk-based planning that reflects local needs
- Phased change, guided by engagement and feedback

# New Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC)

- ▶ The new Act establishes the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) as the new provincial home for leadership, oversight, and coordination of fire safety and services.
- ▶ Fire Commissioner will set provincial PPE standards and support departments interested in transitioning to a municipal model.
- ▶ Builds on existing work of the Office of the Fire Marshal, by focusing on an expanded mandate for:
  - ▶ Investigations and compliance
  - ▶ Training and certification
  - ▶ Legislation, policy, and municipal relations

# Key Changes Introduced by the Legislation

- ▶ Oversight for fire safety and services moves to DEM
- ▶ *Fire Safety Act* and *Rural Fire District Act* transfer to DEM
- ▶ Fire Commissioner given clear authority over accredited training programs



# New Responsibilities

- ▶ The Act creates new responsibilities for all municipalities and fire service providers including fire commissions and brigades in order to strengthen fire safety for all Nova Scotians.
- ▶ These new responsibilities are to:
  - ▶ Conduct a fire service review using a risk-based assessment
  - ▶ Create a fire service plan informed by the review
  - ▶ Ensure local competencies and PPE meet provincial standards
  - ▶ Participate in a common fire service management system

# What Is Not Changing

- ▶ The vital role of firefighters and fire service leaders is not changing.
- ▶ Municipalities are not required to provide fire services: Existing authority under the *Municipal Government Act* remains the same.
- ▶ **Current fire service organizations remain in place: Fire departments, brigades, commissions, and associations are not being restructured at this time.**
- ▶ The Province will continue working collaboratively with municipalities and fire service providers to support a gradual move toward a service delivery model led by municipalities, where appropriate.

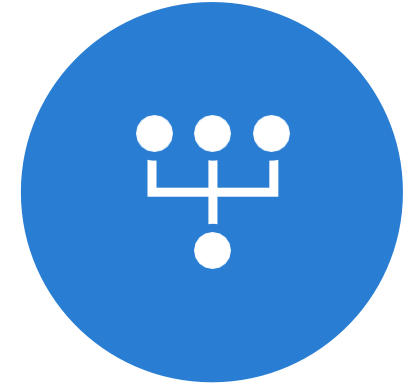
# What is a Municipal Service Delivery Model?



A municipal service delivery model would **integrate fire services into municipal operations**: delivered either directly by municipal staff or through agreements and regional collaborations.



**Provincial support for those interested in transitioning:** If a municipality and a fire service provider(s) decide to transition to this model, the new OFC will provide support.



Where a municipality opts in, Councils would **govern and oversee fire services** by setting **budgets and service levels**. Decisions will be informed by standards, expert advice, and risk assessments.

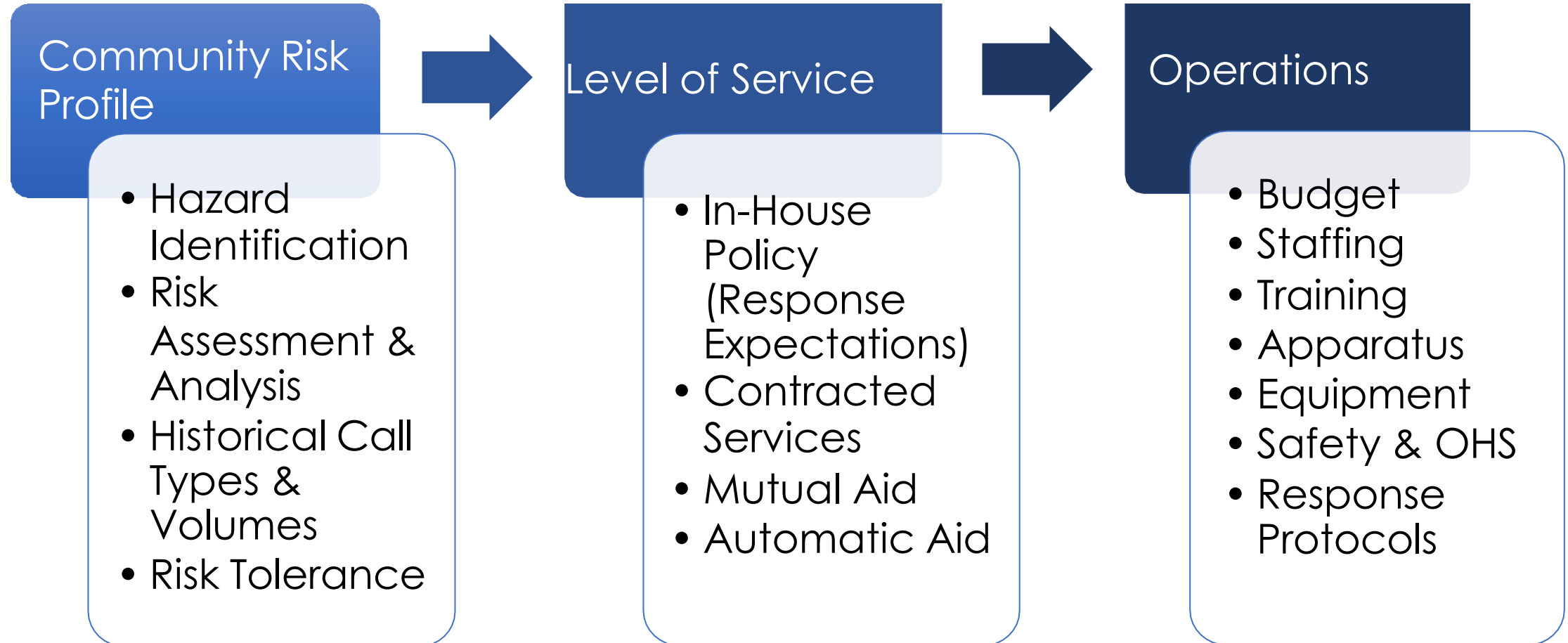
# What Are the Benefits of Municipal Model?

- Integration within municipal operations would:
  - Bring greater consistency to the level of fire service in the region
  - Create new opportunities for collaboration and strategic decisions among stations within a municipality
  - Leverage municipal systems and expertise
  - Reduce costs through group purchasing and broader tax base
  - Address volunteer HR, wellness, recruitment, and retention challenges
- Improve local accountability and oversight for fire governance, funding, and service delivery.
- Increase connection between residents and elected decision-makers by integrating fire into the municipal democratic process.

# Fire Commissioner Priorities (Short-Term)

- ▶ Stand up the Office of the Fire Commissioner.
- ▶ Roll-out province-wide training and build regional training capacity.
- ▶ Develop new standards and regulations in consultation with the sector.
- ▶ Build capacity for modernization through:
  - Shared services such as procurement and insurance
  - Fire service maps and service agreement templates
  - Uniform risk assessment tools to help inform fire service reviews and service planning
  - Roll out of Fire Records Management System

# Fire Service Planning Informed by Risk-Based Assessment



# Community Risk Assessment

Specific profiles are reviewed to determine risk landscape



Geographic



Demographic



Economic



Heavy Industry



Building Stock



Critical Infrastructure



Public Safety Response



Transportation



Natural Occurring Emergencies



Human-Caused Emergencies

# Sample View – Nova Scotia Risk Assessment Tool – User Questions

## Agreements

The most common Agreements are Fire Service Agreements, Mutual Aid Agreements and Automatic Aid Agreements. Agreements may be in place for all service levels or only for specialized services, such as HazMat or technical rescue(s). Agreements may be in place with neighbouring fire services, heavy industry, provincial resources such as the Department of Natural Resources and Emergency Medical Services and others. All fire service staff should be aware of the agreements they are part of to better understand their scope of practice.

What, if any, formal agreements do you have in place in your fire service?

- Mutual Aid - Neighbouring Fire Departments
- Automatic Aid - Neighbouring Fire Departments
- Mutual Aid -Industry
- Mutual Aid -Airports
- Nova Scotia Emergency Health Services (EHS)
- RCMP / Municipal Police Service
- Department of Natural Resources (Forestry)
- Canadian Coast Guard
- Third Party Contract
- Other
- Not Applicable - The fire department does not currently have any Service Agreements in place

Next

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23 / 23 Risk Factors

**Nova Scotia Fire Services Risk Assessment Tool**

KH Kerri Holmes  
Fire-Chief

Home Resources Highlights Analytics Support Admin Panel

**My Dashboard**  
Completed Surveys & Statistics [+ Start new survey](#)

**SURVEY COMPLETION**  
100%  
Completed: 1 / 1 Uncompleted: 0

**EQUIPMENT ITEMS**  
0  
Across all surveys

**TOTAL SURVEYS**  
1  
Records in your account

**My Surveys**  
Overview of your entries

Accreditation: All Analysis Type: All Status: All Search Name: Enter name...

Last updated: 3/10/2026, 10:08:33 AM

Responses: 0  
Equipment Items: 0  
Accreditation: 0  
Assessment: Please Select

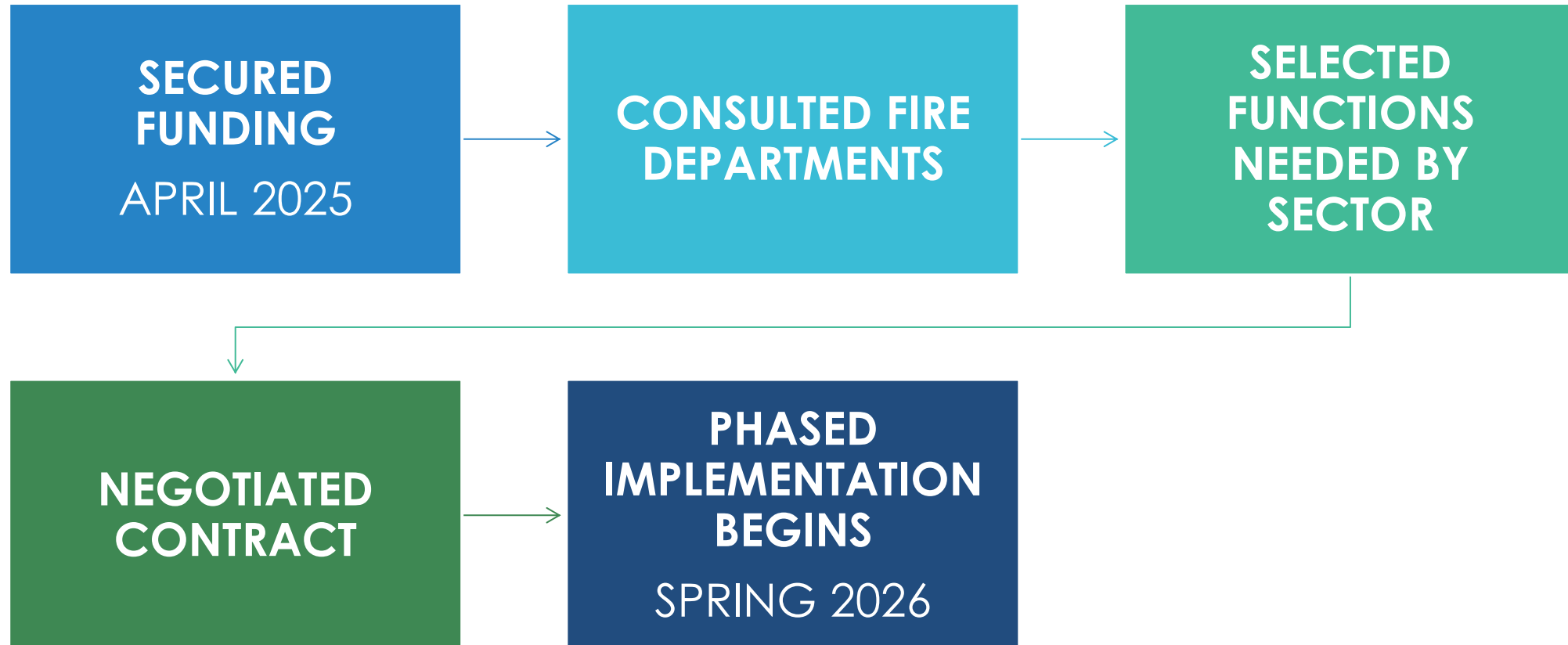
Created by: Kerri Holmes — Fire-Chief

# Training & Standards Aligned with Level of Service

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- ▶ Training will match the level of service identified through risk-based reviews.
- ▶ Departments offering the same services will train to common standards.
- ▶ Shared standards will improve regional and provincewide training access.

# Fire Records Management System (FRMS)



# System Functions That Build Capacity in the Sector

## Communications:

- Messenger
- Mobile Responder

## Prevention:

- Inspections
- Permitting
- Invoicing

## Reporting:

- Multi-Agency Reporting
- Advanced Analytics

## Integration:

- Data transfer and integration between systems

## Incident:

- Incident Reporting
- Command
- Occupancy Management
- Pre-Incident Planning
- Investigations
- Hydrant Management

## Administration:

- Basic Training
- Health & Wellness
- Personnel Management
- Scheduling
- Assets & Inventory

# FRMS Roll-Out Plan

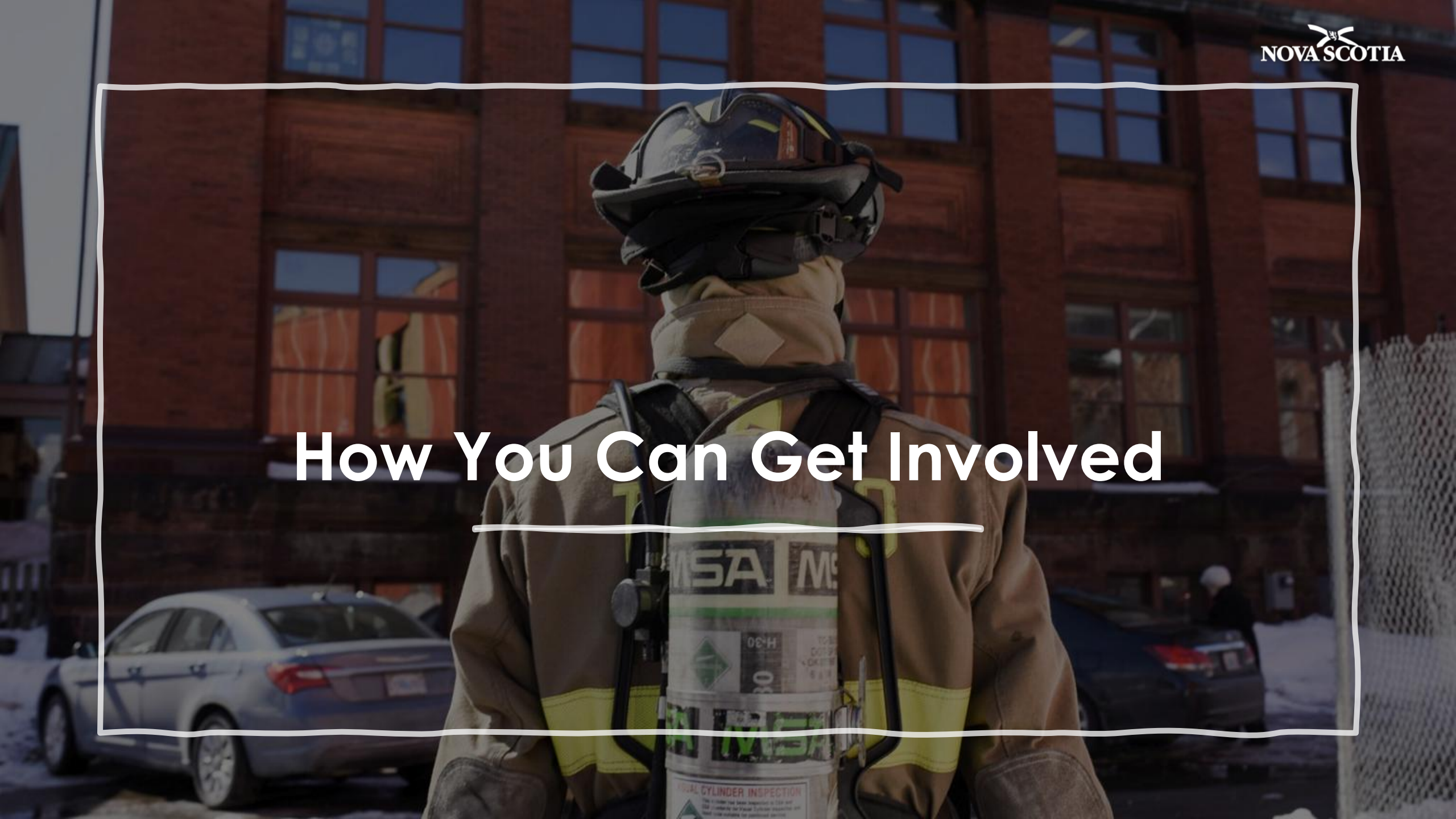
Operational Group	Apr - Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr - Jun	Jul-Sep
<b>Office of the Fire Marshal</b>						
<b>Large fire service providers</b> (HRM, CBRM, Composite Depts, High Vol. VFDs)						
<b>Municipal Fire Inspection Units</b>						
<b>Broad roll-out to all fire service providers</b> (Smaller VFDs; commissions, brigades )						

# Building Regional Training Capacity

- ▶ Providing over **\$400,000** in grant funding to support local delivery of Level 1 firefighter training .
- ▶ Reducing travel costs for municipalities and fire service providers while increasing access to training equipment with:
  - ▶ **2 new mobile burn units**
  - ▶ **4 new propane fueled training props**



# How You Can Get Involved



# Moving Forward, Together

- ▶ We look forward to continuing this work with FSANS, municipalities, and the fire service sector.
- ▶ Your feedback is important. Please email [firemodernization@novascotia.ca](mailto:firemodernization@novascotia.ca) with questions or ideas.



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## Question & Answer