



## IMPROVING RECRUIT RETENTION THROUGH VIDEO-BASED ASSESSMENT

Located in California's Central Valley, the Stockton (CA) Fire Department protects a city of 310,000 with a force of 190 firefighters. The SFD has been using Lexipol's EVALS mobile skills assessment solution since 2015.

### THE CHALLENGE

Training recruits to become firefighters produces a lot of records, all of which may be needed for future reference. Without a system for electronically managing all this paper, it can quickly become cumbersome, potentially leading to legal issues down the road.

This was the situation in which Division Chief Ken Johnson found himself in 2015. The SFD runs a large recruit academy, training firefighters for several neighboring cities. "All our training documentation was done on paper," Chief Johnson says. "We would scan the records to PDF, but they were difficult to manage and retrieve. We needed a secure way to keep records and validate credentials."

Another big challenge the SFD faced: lowering academy attrition rates. "It costs a lot of money just to get recruits into the academy," Chief Johnson says. "If they leave halfway through, you've lost that investment."

### THE SOLUTION

Chief Johnson's first interest in the EVALS mobile skills assessment solution was around records management—EVALS provides a secure, cloud-based system to deliver training and store documentation. But other EVALS features quickly became indispensable.

"We realized a big benefit as far as transparency," Chief Johnson says. "We train firefighters from other cities as well, and I can give those instructors access to their firefighters' records, so they can see the firefighters' progress."

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EVALS also allowed SFD instructors to embrace the concept of *flipping the classroom*. "We're hiring millennials and Gen Z, and the way they learn in high school and college involves a lot of online and video-based learning," Chief Johnson says. "Using EVALS, we preload the student with information prior to instruction. They can review documents, and watch videos of previous recruits drilling on evolutions. So they know what to expect before they even get here."



The message board feature has also proven useful. "I use the message board almost every day to warn students about adverse conditions such as high heat or high winds or even flu season," Chief Johnson says. "Anything we can do to reduce injuries or illness in the academy is important. And I have a record to show we're doing everything we can do to keep recruits safe."

To date, the SFD has used EVALS in eight recruit academies. Instructors film videos of students performing skills assessments—something that can be done in the field without an internet connection. The system is also used to assign and manage digital taskbooks, skill sheets and exams.

## THE RESULTS

EVALS has transformed the SFD's approach to managing training records, but the benefits go further. Recruits are now better prepared to start at the academy and quicker to master skills.

"Every recruit that's gone through the academies we've done with EVALS has mentioned they like that they can see in real time where they stand, both academically and

manipulatively," Chief Johnson says. "They like seeing the videos of them performing, and it helps them learn. When we're shouting instructions at them the drill ground, they don't always absorb it. But when they look at the videos later, it hits home."

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This combination of records management, pre-academy prep and enhancing skills mastery has created valuable two-way accountability. "Because we now have a video-based manipulative component to the training record, if I have an underperforming recruit we need to separate, it makes it easy because it's validated; we have the video," Chief Johnson says. "If a case was to be brought against us, the records would protect the academy. At the same time, it allows me to hold my instructors accountable for treating everyone fair."

All this has helped the SFD significantly improve retention in its academy, which leads to cost savings. "We reduced the failure rate in our academy from 36% to 19%—I attribute a lot of that to EVALS," Chief Johnson says. "We invest about \$25,000 in each recruit, not counting their salary. That's a good return on investment!"