

## How This Public Safety Agency Hires Trustworthy Fire Fighters



*"EyeDetect is one of the tools we implemented to help us shore things up moving forward, and it's been spectacular so far. This system has proven itself to me."*

**Norman K. "Brad" Bradley III**  
Fire Chief,  
Northwest Fire  
District



### BACKGROUND

[Northwest Fire District](#) (NWFD) is Arizona's largest fire district. Established in the early 1980s, it has 11 fire stations serving over 122,000 residents and 3,500 businesses in a 151-square-mile area. NWFD has nearly 270 employees, of which 220 are uniformed firefighters. Because fire service is very well respected and trusted by the public, NWFD must do everything to ensure employees are trustworthy.



### CHALLENGE

Hiring events have sometimes drawn thousands of applicants. NWFD first started capping hiring events at 1,000 applicants, and then later at 500 applicants — and that would still max out the organization's ability to effectively identify the best candidates. NWFD found it was almost entirely reliant on a panel of staff trying to determine, "Are these people who they really say they are?"

Applicants must pass a mandatory criminal background check and a drug test. Typically, the agency never had enough time or resources to also check professional references. Unfortunately, sometimes those with disqualifying past activities were hired. In 2017, an applicant made it to a final interview with Fire Chief Norman K. "Brad" Bradley III. Even though the applicant did extremely well up to that point, something just didn't feel right to the Chief. So, he called the applicant's prior supervisor — who strongly recommended *not* hiring that person. The Chief learned the applicant was a paramedic who had stolen and used drugs from the agency's drug box. That drug use would not have been included in a criminal background check. NWFD doesn't have time to call former employers for every applicant. Chief Bradley realized he needed a way to prevent such people from applying in the first place and to verify who they really are.

### EYEDETECT IMPLEMENTED

Chief Bradley concluded that applicants would self-select out if they see credibility assessment as part of the application process — thus saving the organization substantial time and expenses. Prior to becoming fire chief in 2018, he learned about [EyeDetect](#) from a Converus Service Partner, Margo Darris. EyeDetect's unbiased objectivity sold him. Once promoted to fire chief, he required EyeDetect as part of the backend screening process, but then found it was more effective at the beginning.

### RESULTS

By using EyeDetect as an initial screening tool, NWFD has found that applicants essentially self-select-out. "A guilty applicant, such as one with a drug history, looks at it and thinks, 'I'm not going to pass. So, I'm not going to even apply.'" The word has gotten out that if you want to work for Northwest Fire, you have to be stellar," said Chief Bradley.

### RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The savings by discovering disqualifying activities upfront (and not after an individual is hired):

- Initial investment of \$35,000 to train a firefighter for 16 weeks.
- Pay and benefits.
- Hundreds of thousands of dollars eventually invested in an employee through additional training and education over the course of a 10- to 20-year career.