



KING COUNTY FIRE  
CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

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# STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

**UPDATED FEBRUARY 2021**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background

The following report was created for the King County Fire Chiefs Association to support the work of the Diversity Subcommittee whose mission is “to increase diversity in the fire service applicant pool and work force, and bridge the gap by allowing equitable and equal opportunities for all candidates.” This report summarizes the literature on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the fire service, interviews with representatives from fire associations, fire training programs, and academia, and a survey of six national fire departments that have made progress in this area.

The fire service has historically been and continues to be a predominantly white, male organization, with the national data showing 95% of firefighters are male and 83% identify as white. A myriad of structural barriers have contributed to the stark contrast between the demographics of the fire service and the greater population. The accessibility of the hiring process is hindered by an overreliance on word of mouth advertising, the intergenerational nature of the fire service, and the lack of diversity in departments that makes it hard for people from underrepresented groups to see themselves in the role or to feel welcome.

The process of getting hired creates a number of obstacles, including the potentially prohibitive costs of taking the required tests and applying to departments, the written and physical tests themselves which have proved to have disparate results for women and people of color, the number of requirements needed to get hired, and implicit bias in the selection process. The culture of the fire service can be unsupportive, isolating, or even hostile for individuals who do not “fit in” and there is a long history of harassment and discrimination toward individuals from underrepresented groups.

While fire departments struggle with these issues, the need for diversity in the fire service is clear. Increasing diversity leads to a more effective and responsive workforce that is better able to serve their community due to greater understanding, respect, and trust, and begins to address the history of exclusion and discrimination by creating equitable access to opportunities and power.

## Leadership and Planning

The literature clearly points to commitment from top leadership as one of the most critical components in changing the culture of an organization and attracting and supporting individuals from underrepresented groups. Having diverse representation at the leadership level, and allowing leaders to be their authentic selves within the workplace, promotes equity as decisions will more likely consider the needs of all groups. Leaders can demonstrate their commitment by identifying and addressing their own internal biases, communicating their values through both internal and external messaging, and dedicating the resources needed to make these changes. Departments should enlist a diverse group of individuals including employees of different ranks who have an interest in making the department more equitable to create a plan.

The department's mission, vision, values, and strategic plan should also reflect their commitment and include specific DEI goals that are measured over time. Leaders will need to hold themselves

and their employees accountable to these goals. Finally, department leadership should be upfront with their staff that this change will be difficult and uncomfortable, but if they can confront the challenges and remain steadfast, their efforts will lead to a more equitable workplace.

## Outreach and Recruiting

Fire departments should design a comprehensive recruiting plan, developed by a team of individuals with a strong interest in diversifying the department. The literature suggests the most effective recruiting efforts use a variety of methods. Advertising should specifically target individuals from underrepresented groups both in message and in placement. The ubiquity of social media, especially for younger generations, makes it an effective tool for reaching multiple communities and communicating the department's values.

Job descriptions should not only have Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) language but a message about the value of inclusion within the department and should have clear salary and benefit information as well as job requirements. By incorporating all aspects of the job and the traits needed in the job description, more individuals from underrepresented groups may see themselves in the role.

Departments should be visible in the community by attending community events and develop trusted, mutually beneficial relationships with community groups. Partnerships with elementary schools, high schools, and colleges and career exploration programs can help to educate children and young adults about careers in the fire service and develop an early interest. Many fire departments have enlisted liaisons to recruit in their respective communities to help increase their visibility and attract community members to the fire service who may not have otherwise considered it. If departments are asking current employees to assist with recruiting efforts, they should be compensated for their time.

## Hiring

When creating a hiring process, it is essential that all efforts are taken to ensure a fair, unbiased, objective process. Applications should only require the minimum educational and professional experience necessary to be a successful firefighter. Departments should review their physical tests to ensure they only include job-related skills and also look at how the test is administered and weighted. If possible, departments could eliminate financial barriers by paying for the physical tests rather than placing that burden on the applicant. Written tests are known to have an adverse impact on equity in departments and fire leaders should weigh the value of the written test to the hiring process. If a written test is required, it should be written at the educational level necessary and should focus on the basic skills required for the job, as well as personal characteristics and values to determine who the applicant is as a person.

Making contact with candidates during the recruitment process can be very helpful. Departments should consider providing in-house training for women to prepare for the physical test as well as tutoring or coaching for candidates on the written exam.

For the oral boards, departments should have a diverse group of interviewers who have been trained in implicit bias. Many departments invite community members to serve on the panel. Questions that ask more about the candidate's character and values, rather than knowing the specifics of the job, can be beneficial in advancing more women and people of color.

Once a candidate makes it through the hiring process, they typically go through several mentally and physically challenging weeks of fire academy. It is important that each recruit is held to the same standard and those standards are necessary to perform the job. Leaders may need to adapt their training practices as they recruit a more diverse workforce who may be coming in with different skillsets. Departments should take an equitable approach to academy, ensuring each person is getting the help they need to meet the standards and be successful.

## Retention and Inclusion

Solely focusing on recruitment to make changes to the diversity of the fire department is short-sighted and ineffective. If fire departments do not do the difficult work of changing the culture of their department to be supportive and inclusive of all individuals, they will not see real change.

Promoting the physical and mental health of all employees within the department can help reduce the stress and trauma of a career in fire and emergency services. This includes inclusive health practices, such as pregnancy and maternity leave and addressing mental health needs through comprehensive programs and resources and reducing the stigma around asking for help.

Anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies, procedures, and training are imperative in creating a safe workplace. Policies should define harassment and harassing behavior and make it clear that such behavior won't be tolerated. Departments should provide a clear and confidential step-by-step process that allows multiple avenues for reporting. When incidents are reported, they need to be taken seriously and proactively addressed and the department must ensure that the person reporting does not face retaliation. The EEOC recommends holding regular trainings that are tailored to the specific workplace and use realistic examples. Trainings should outline the department's policies and procedures but also focus on prevention through creating a respectful culture and encouraging employees to step in when they observe harassing behavior.

Departments must be proactive in reducing inequities in the advancement process and be open to different ways of thinking and leadership styles. Departments should mitigate bias in who is selected for opportunities that could help advance a person's career, such as training, station assignments, and specialty teams. Mentoring programs can contribute to a more inclusive workplace and improve advancement opportunities for individuals from underrepresented groups. Individual development plans provide a roadmap for all firefighters to achieve their long-term goals and employee performance reviews are an opportunity for individuals to discuss these goals, make plans for professional development, and receive valuable feedback. Like entry-level hiring practices, the promotional process should be carefully reviewed to eliminate bias. Job openings should be posted and promotional decisions based on a structured process using job-related criteria and include a diverse panel trained in implicit bias.

Departments can advance inclusion in the workplace by having a clear code of conduct and workplace norms that promote respect for all employees. Departments should ensure they are using inclusive language, have properly fitting equipment for all firefighters, and individual bathrooms and separate sleeping facilities in their stations. Affinity groups, which provide a space for employees with shared backgrounds to build relationships, can reduce feelings of isolation and employee engagement surveys can give employees a voice and help leadership understand and address issues within their workplace. Finally, an ongoing DEI training program and conflict resolution training can build the understanding and skills to strengthen employee relations.

# I. BACKGROUND

This report was created for the King County Fire Chiefs Association (KCFCA) and King County Emergency Medical Services Division to support the work being done by the KCFCA Diversity subcommittee whose mission is “to increase diversity in the fire service applicant pool and work force, and bridge the gap by allowing equitable and equal opportunities for all candidates.”

This report summarizes the literature on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the fire service, interviews with representatives from fire associations, fire training programs, academics, and consultants, and the work of a select group of fire departments that have been actively working towards the goal of creating a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workspace. Data from the surveys and interviews are interspersed throughout the report.

The background section provides additional details on report methods as well as demographics of the fire and emergency services workforce. It also provides an overview of the systemic barriers faced by individuals from underrepresented groups in pursuing, maintaining, and thriving in a career in fire and emergency services.

## Definition of terms used in this report:

**Diversity** - There are many kinds of diversity, based on race, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, country of origin, education, religion, geography, physical, or cognitive abilities. Valuing diversity means recognizing differences between people, acknowledging that these differences are a valued asset, and striving for diverse representation as a critical step towards equity (Race Forward, 2015)

**Equity** – Equity means fairness and justice and focuses on outcomes that are most appropriate for a given group, recognizing different challenges, needs, and histories. It is different than equality, or “same treatment,” which doesn’t take differing needs or disparate outcomes into account. (Race Forward, 2015)

**Inclusion** – A set of behaviors (culture) that encourages employees to feel valued for their unique qualities and experience a sense of belonging (USOPM, 2016)

**Progressive recruitment** - Recruiting that specifically targets and directly engages candidates from underrepresented groups (Gist & Garrett, 2017)

**Underrepresented group** - A group that is less represented in one subset than in the general population.

# RESEARCH METHODS

The research for this report included three different parts. First, we reviewed literature on diversity and inclusion within the fire service as well as other industries that have struggled in this area, such as police, military, and the tech industry. We also looked to more general literature on diversity, equity, and inclusion practices.

Next, we interviewed individuals with knowledge and expertise on the issue, including Chief Amy Hanifan, President of Women in Fire, Dr. Manuel Fonseca, President of the National Association of Hispanic Firefighters, Captain Ricky Walsh, Vice President of the International Association of Fire Fighters 7th District, Chief Bruce Bouyer, Northwest Regional Director of the International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters, Chief David Coatney, Agency Director of the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Services, and Dr. Corinne Bendersky, UCLA professor and consultant.

Finally, we sent a survey invitation to a group 22 fire departments, of varying size and geographic location, that were highlighted in the literature or by others in the field as making progress in creating a more equitable and inclusive workplace or using innovative strategies toward this goal. Six departments completed the online survey. Those that completed the survey skewed toward the larger departments. The tables below show the departments surveyed and their demographics. We want to note that the demographics of each of the departments' service areas vary widely and therefore are not including race/ethnicity data for comparison but rather for context.

## Number and gender of uniformed personnel in departments that completed the survey

Department	Number of uniformed personnel	% Women	% Men
Atlanta Fire Rescue Department	918	5%	95%
Dallas Fire-Rescue Department	1,989	6%	94%
Los Angeles City Fire Department	3,519	4%	96%
City of Madison Fire Department	386	11%	89%
San Francisco Fire Department	1,724	15%	85%
Tacoma Fire Department	383	12%	88%

## Race and ethnicity of uniformed personnel in departments that completed the survey

Department <sup>1</sup>	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races	Other
Atlanta Fire Rescue Department	0%	1%	57%	3%	0%	36%	1%	2%
Dallas Fire-Rescue Department	1%	1%	20%	20%	0%	57%	0%	1%
Los Angeles City Fire Department	1%	6%	12%	31%	0%	49%	0%	2%
City of Madison Fire Department	1%	1%	11%	4%	2%	82%	0%	0%
Tacoma Fire Department	1%	2%	6%	3%	3%	75%	10%	0%

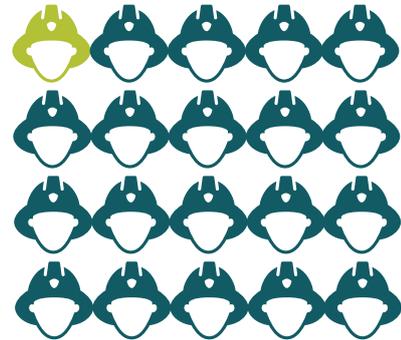
<sup>1</sup> San Francisco did not submit race/ethnicity data

# FIRE SERVICE DEMOGRAPHICS

## Fire service data

The fire service has historically been and continues to be a predominantly white, male organization. Nationally 95% of career firefighters are male and 83% of firefighters are white (NFPA, 2020). While women in general are grossly underrepresented in the fire service, Hulett et al (2008) found that "underrepresentation is about double among women of color compared to white women" (p. 2).

Little data is available for other groups, such as the LGBTQ community and immigrant and refugees, but it is widely known that they are also considerably underrepresented in the fire service.



**19 out of 20 firefighters  
are men**

**Percentage of Career Firefighters by  
Race/Ethnicity (2014-2018)**

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
Asian	1%
Black or African American	8%
Hispanic or Latino	8%
White	83%

Data taken from NFPA US Fire Department Profile - 2018 Supporting Tables. Data was only provided for the race/ethnicity groups listed above.

## Comparison to other industries

The demographics of the fire department stand in stark contrast to the overall working population in the US, which is 77% white, 12% Black or African American, 7% Asian, 18% Hispanic or Latino, and 47% female (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). The fire service has also lagged behind other industries in creating a more diverse workforce, including the military and police. In comparison, eighty-five percent of sworn police officers in the US are male and 72% are white (Hyland & Davis, 2019) and 84% of the Department of Defense Force are male and 69% are white (DOD, 2019).

# BARRIERS TO ENTRY & ADVANCEMENT

Individuals from underrepresented groups face a myriad of structural barriers in the process of becoming a firefighter. We are defining an underrepresented group as a group of people that is less represented in one subset (in this case the fire service) than in the general population. This includes people of color, women, immigrants, refugees, and members of the LGBTQ community, among others. Those individuals who do make it into the fire service face additional barriers in being fully accepted in the workplace and in advancing through the ranks. In this section, we list some of these barriers:

## Access to information

The barriers begin with the very awareness of the opportunity for a career in the fire service. The fire service is described as inter-generational and many seeking to be hired have family or friends who are firefighters and can help guide them through the process (Russo, 2013). And much recruitment is done by informal word of mouth which perpetuates the current demographics of the department (Fox et al., 2006; EEOC). This lack of representation in fire departments contributes to women and people of color not seeing the fire service as a viable career opportunity. The fire service is then seen as unwelcoming or not valuing underrepresented groups (Russo, 2013).

## Cost and time

The cost and time associated with applying to the fire service can be prohibitive. Individuals interested in applying for a career in the fire service need to take a physical test, which most departments require them to pay for themselves. The cost of the CPAT ranges from about \$129 to \$150 and is typically only valid for 6 months (Public Safety Testing, 2020; National Testing Network, 2020). Captain Ricky Walsh, Vice President of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) 7th District, sees the cost of the CPAT as almost reversing any progress that is being made in attracting candidates from underrepresented groups who may not have the resources to take the test multiple times, like their more privileged peers, to improve their score (personal communication, October 30, 2020). Potential candidates may also have to pay for a written exam and for the cost to send test scores to multiple fire departments, much like college standardized tests. These prices can range from \$49 to \$109 depending on the number of departments you choose (Public Safety Testing, 2020; National Testing Network, 2020). These requirements also demand a significant amount of time both in travel and in completing the physical exam, written exam, and subsequent oral boards. Additionally, the overall process of getting hired for the fire department can take months or even years, depending on when fire departments are taking new applicants and when a person gets chosen for the academy.

## Testing

According to Riccucci and Riccardelli (2015), “the continued use of written exams has served as a major obstacle to the attainment of social equity based on race in these uniformed services” (p. 352). They argue that while most departments rely on a written test for hiring, these tests are not required by law in most states and there is no evidence of correlation with job qualifications.

In “A National Report Card on Women in Firefighting”, the authors found a disparity in the pass rate on the physical test between men (84%) and women (47%) in departments they surveyed. While they found the pass rate for women in departments using the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT) was higher (68%) than in departments using other physical tests (49%), there was still a disparity between men and women (Hulett et al., 2008). Hulett et al. and others have questioned the ability of the CPAT and other physical tests to predict on-the-job performance (Russo, 2013; Hulett et al., 2008).



## Fire service culture

The fire service has a very distinct culture and with crews spending so much time together in a station, eating dinner, cleaning, and running calls, they are often described as a family. While these tight-knit groups have many positive benefits for those that are included, those that do not fit in are often isolated from the group and can face backlash as an outsider (Akabas, 2010; Yoder & Berendsen, 2001). As Sheila Akabas of Columbia University stated after assessing the New York Fire Department in the 1980s, “we realized that the strong culture within the department was a positive in that it shields and nurtures most of its members, but it does so at the price of making entry difficult for groups that are different from the race, ethnicity, religion or gender of the majority” (2010, p. 84).

The culture of the fire service can be unsupportive and even hostile to individuals from underrepresented groups, which plays out in many different ways (Jahnke et al., 2019; Hulett et al., 2008; Griffith et al., 2016; Yoder & Berendsen, 2001). In “A National Report Card on Women in Firefighting”, 51% of women surveyed said they had experienced shunning or social isolation (Hulett et al., 2008). In a survey conducted by Jahnke et al. (2019), 44% of women surveyed said they are watched more closely than their male counterparts and 41% said they frequently have to “work twice as hard to receive the same treatment” (p. 6). In a study by Yoder and Berendsen (2001), they report both white and Black women experience “insufficient instruction, hostility, silence, hyper-supervision, lack of support, and stereotyping” (p 27). While some of these experiences eased over time for white women as they “proved themselves” in the department, they persisted for Black women (p. 31). This can be especially difficult as women of color in the fire service are often not fully embraced by employee groups for women or people of color and therefore lack the support others receive from these groups (Hulett et al., 2008).

Fire stations are known for having a very informal, playful culture that can cross the line into incivility. As Griffith et al. (2016) states, “norms in the workplace can serve to normalize, justify and perpetuate inappropriate behaviors” (p. 36). In Jahnke et al.’s study of 1,773 female firefighters, over a third of those surveyed said they frequently hear their co-workers make slurs about gays/lesbians, women, and people of color (2019). In “A National Report Card on Women in Firefighting”, nearly a third of respondents said they had experienced incidents involving pornography and 18% had experienced issues with hostile cartoons, notes, or other material (Hulett et al., 2008).

Women also experience an unsupportive workplace both in the equipment they are issued and with the physical space of the fire station. Hulett et al. (2008) reported 80% of women surveyed had issues with ill-fitting equipment. When this study was replicated in 2016 by Griffith et al., there was no change in the percentage of women facing this issue. Many women still face issues with privacy in the fire station. Hulett et al. (2008) found 46% of women surveyed faced these issues when showering, changing clothes, or in their dormitory.

## Harassment and discrimination

As noted by Riccucci and Riccardelli (2014), “[t]here is a long history of discrimination by police and fire departments against women and people of color in the United States” (p. 353). For decades, departments across the country have been found to have discriminatory practices, some of which have led to consent decree agreements with the Department of Justice.

In “A National Report Card on Women in Firefighting”, the authors described a workplace characterized by sexual harassment, bias, and discrimination. When survey participants were asked if they were treated differently because of their gender, 85% of female firefighters said they were compared to only 12% of male firefighters. In addition, 43% reported verbal harassment and 30% experienced sexual harassment in the workplace (Hulett et al., 2008). Griffith et al. (2016) replicated the survey from “A National Report Card on Women in Firefighting” with similar findings. Although this study was conducted eight years later, they found 79% of women felt they were treated differently due to their gender. Similarly, in a study conducted by Janke et al. in 2019, the authors found 38% of female firefighters reported verbal harassment and 37% reported sexual advances.

Exacerbating or underlying the harassment and discrimination, Hulett et al. (2008) found 65% of female respondents were not aware of a procedure for addressing discrimination grievances. Griffith et al. (2016) found 41% of women they surveyed were unaware of a department procedure for addressing discrimination complaints and nearly a third of women reported that when gender-related incidents are brought to the attention of their supervisor, they are not addressed.

## Advancement

Women and people of color face obstacles in rising through the ranks of the fire service and this is evident in the lack of diversity in leadership roles (Russo, 2013; Riccucci & Saldivar, 2014). Both Russo and Hulett et al. found there was a cap on promotions for women at the company officer or captain level (Russo, 2013; Hulett et al., 2008). According to Hulett et al. (2008), in departments they surveyed, women made up 5.7% of entry level firefighters compared to 4.5% of intermediate supervisors, which include company officer or battalion, assistant, or deputy chief, and 2.6% of department chiefs. Griffith et al. (2016) found 44% of female firefighters believed “gender was a barrier to their career development” compared to 5% of male firefighters (p. 41). Forty-one percent of women felt promotional decisions were unfair compared to 16% of men (Griffith et al., 2016). A report from the AFL-CIO found that women and people of color identified racism, sexism, unequal or disparate access to information, and lack of training as barriers that make it difficult for people of color to obtain leadership positions in unions (AFL-CIO, 2005). Similar factors are identified by women and people of color attempting to promote to leadership roles within the fire service (Griffith et al., 2016; Riccucci & Saldivar, 2014).

## Firefighter prototype

The image of a firefighter remains one of physical strength, masculinity, and courage. However, research shows the role of a firefighter is much more complex, with the majority of firefighter calls requesting medical assistance and only a small percentage, about 3.6%, addressing fire suppression (NFPA, 2018). While physical strength and courage are undoubtedly a necessity of the job, they are made prominent while other qualities, such as medical knowledge, team orientation, empathy, and compassion are downplayed (Hulett et al., 2008; Bendersky, 2018). As stated by Hulett et al. (2008), “the shifting balance between fire calls and medical calls brings to prominence skills and abilities which the traditional occupational self-image ignores” (p. 11). Bendersky (2018) states, “firefighters also need the intellectual, social, and emotional skills required to deliver medical emergency aid, support each other through traumatic experiences, and engage intimately with the communities they serve” (para. 6).

A study of gender diversity within California fire departments found that female firefighters improve patient care for women and children as well as the efficacy of public education because people respond differently to men and women in certain situations. This study also found that women tend to have superior leadership and conflict resolution skills, which are particularly useful when engaging with the public and with crew members who spend a lot of time together on shift (Waters, 2003). However, the current narrow definition of a firefighter does not highlight these traits and greatly limits both who is attracted to the field and who is considered effective in the role.



# NEED FOR DIVERSITY

“There are many kinds of diversity, based on race, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, country of origin, education, religion, geography, physical, or cognitive abilities. Valuing diversity means recognizing differences between people, acknowledging that these differences are a valued asset, and striving for diverse representation as a critical step towards equity” (Race Forward, 2015). A diverse workforce benefits both fire and emergency services and greater society. Some of these benefits include:

“*When we recognize differences, we can learn to communicate and work as a team. This encourages different types of leaders and improves productivity, morale, innovation, customer service, safety and the organization as a whole.*

- IAFC, 2016

## Community trust and legitimacy

For fire departments to adequately serve their communities, firefighters need to understand and reflect them (Stretcher, 2015). While the demographics of our country have changed dramatically over time, the fire service has failed to follow. Language barriers is one obstacle that impacts fire and emergency services as identified in the “Multicultural Health and Safety Research Project”, which held focus groups with both Seattle firefighters and community groups (Fire 20/20, 2007). A lack of cultural awareness is another barrier to community trust that can impact service. According to the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), “diversity and inclusion offer the chance to be perceptive and aware of both our workforce and the [residents] we serve. They give us an advantage when it comes to acting as advocates and sensing their needs” (IAFC, 2016, para. 10). As Ralph Terrazas, Chief of the Los Angeles Fire Department states, “[we] will provide a higher level of service to the communities we serve when the people of that department respect the culture, language and beliefs of the people within that community” (as cited in Bendersky, 2018, para. 2).

## Business Case

Research shows that groups comprised of individuals who are socially different make better decisions than homogenous groups (Sommers, S. R., 2006; Phillips, 2014). While this is partly explained by the different perspectives brought to the group, one study found members of diverse groups are forced to anticipate multiple viewpoints, prepare better, and work harder to gain consensus (Phillips, 2014). In a study by Lorenzo et al. (2018) of over 1,700 companies in eight countries, they found companies with more diverse management teams had higher levels of innovation. Overall, greater diversity leads to a more effective and responsive workforce.

## Equity

Beyond the benefits of increased community trust and a more effective workplace, increasing diversity in the fire service would begin to address the decades of discrimination endured by underrepresented groups in this country. It would provide access to opportunities and power that have been systemically denied by the fire department. As Miller et al. (2016) state, “the potential benefits of increasing diversity and moving toward greater representation could also provide more secure and rewarding employment opportunities to historically underrepresented populations, thus having implications for local economic and workforce development” (p. 1). The notion of diversifying public organizations “. . . is crucial to ensuring active representation that leads to equal access to power, the reflection of community preferences, and public willingness to cooperate with organizations” (Morabito & Shelley, 2015, p. 346).



# III. STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

This section includes a summary of the strategies for increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the fire service as outlined in the literature, as well as through our interviews and surveys. While recruiting is often the sole focus of diversity efforts, it is clear that fire leaders must address equity over the full lifespan of a fire career in order to make lasting, meaningful change within their department.

The section starts with leadership and planning as commitment from the top and comprehensive, inclusive planning efforts are the foundation of this work. It is followed by outreach and recruiting, which identifies a multi-faceted approach to attracting and engaging new candidates through progressive recruitment. The hiring segment outlines strategies to reduce bias and increase equity within the process and the retention and inclusion segment provides approaches to create a safer and more supportive workplace where all employees are valued.

# LEADERSHIP & PLANNING

The literature clearly points to commitment from top leadership as one of the most critical components in changing the culture of an organization and attracting and supporting individuals from underrepresented groups (Fox et al., 2006; Hulett et al., 2008; Krentz et al., 2019). Leadership should work with stakeholders both within and outside of their fire department to institutionalize these values of diversity, equity, and inclusion through a comprehensive and strategic approach (Miller et al., 2016). According to L.A. Fire Commissioner Rebecca Ninberg “changing the culture requires a long-term commitment to integrate it into the DNA of the department” (as cited in Bendersky, 2018, para. 24).

“

*Diversity goal messaging from the fire chief, consistent training, engagement of key department stakeholder groups, and the use of ongoing measurements of progress are critical.*

- LAFD Chief Terrazas, 2018

”

## Addressing internal bias

In order for fire leadership to address issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia in their fire department, they must first identify them within themselves. Self-education is an important part of this effort as anyone who was raised in this society has been influenced by its messages. If leaders are unaware of their own biases, they will not be able to see the biases present in their workplace or the urgency in removing them. As McNeil (2008) states:

*“Many leaders of America’s fire service grew up in segregated communities and had limited opportunity to interact with different cultures or peoples. Many have internalized all the stereotypical beliefs about race, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality that exist in society and the organizations. The leaders themselves are part of the challenge and are not properly prepared to address the issues that might exist in a diverse workforce in fire service organizations in the future....Fire service leaders must embrace diversity and recognize its importance. They should assess their attitudes, assumptions, and feelings about people who differ from them and the effect of these beliefs on their effectiveness as leaders. They must work to change any negative attitudes, theirs and others” (para. 11).*

## Diversity in leadership

Departments should commit to diversity among leadership (Miller et al., 2016). As Russo writes, “until women have an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities in leadership roles, challenges to their place in the fire service will likely continue” (p. 7). This is true of all underrepresented groups who have not had equal access to power in the fire service. Having diverse representation at the leadership level promotes equity in the workplace as decisions will more likely consider the needs of all groups.

This, however, is contingent on the culture of the fire department. Merely promoting individuals from underrepresented groups and then expecting them to conform to the established norms, styles, and mindset of the dominant group will likely lead to dissatisfaction within the role and a missed opportunity to learn from their unique perspective. True representation not only brings people into leadership roles but allows them to be their authentic selves within the workplace. As Bruce Bouyer, Northwest Regional Director of the International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters (IABPFF) and Assistant Chief of Tacoma Fire Department explains, increasing representation in leadership requires current leaders to be thinking about diversity and be open to a different way of thinking when appointing individuals to the highest leadership roles (personal communication, November 7, 2020).

## Stakeholder involvement

Leaders, especially those who have never experienced bias or discrimination in the workplace, may be ill equipped to undergo planning in creating a more diverse, equitable and supportive workplace. A study by the Boston Consulting Group found that “most company leaders—primarily white, heterosexual males—still underestimate the challenges diverse employees face” (Krentz et al., 2019, para. 6). Department leaders should include a diverse group of individuals in planning efforts, including employees of different ranks in the department who have a deeper understanding of how these dynamics play out in recruitment, hiring, and retention and an interest in making changes within the department. Creating a committee to undergo this work can be effective as it makes a group accountable for change within the organization and can increase buy-in (Miller et al., 2016, Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Captain Ricky Walsh, with the IAFF 7th District, recommends creating Human Relations Committees within departments that include a representative from the local IAFF executive board to ensure the department has the resources they need to prevent discrimination and implement inclusive strategies (personal communication, October 30, 2020). While this process will take longer, it will result in a better plan and more buy-in from the group.

The City of Madison created an Equity Committee and a Women’s Equity Committee to undergo planning and conducted listening sessions with women in their department to better understand the issues. In response to the George Floyd protests and the Movement for Black Lives, Texas A&M Engineering Extension Services (TEEX) convened a 42-member Respect, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. The committee has workgroups focused on different areas of the organization, including communications, education and training, recruiting and staffing, marketing and advertising, and measurement (David Coatney, personal communication, October 20, 2020).

## Dedicated resources

Department leadership needs to allocate sufficient resources to make these organizational changes (Miller et al., 2016; Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013). Increasing resources dedicated to recruiting and programs to promote inclusion will improve their efficacy and show the department is making a real commitment to these efforts. While smaller departments might not have the capacity to implement some of these strategies on their own, they could collaborate with other departments in their area. These partnerships could allow for resource sharing, ranging from sharing templates to creating a shared services type model for recruiting or training. Many departments are struggling in the same areas and could better leverage resources by partnering.

## Strategic planning

The strategic planning process includes developing or updating a department's mission, vision, and values statements as well as a strategic plan. The strategic planning process should involve internal and external stakeholders, including community members (IAFC, 2020). Including individuals from the community in planning work will provide an opportunity for the department to learn from their perspectives, gain knowledge of their needs, and be held accountable to their goals. Departments that already have mission, vision, and values statements may want to take the time to review them to ensure they are reflective of their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Departments will need to define what each of these terms mean in relation to their department to create a shared understanding of their mission, vision, and goals across the department (Manuel Fonseca, personal communication, August 26, 2020).

According to the "Guide for Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department", a strategic plan can help departments implement their mission and vision, manage change, and stay focused on their long-term goals (IAFC, 2020). Departments should ensure their goals around diversity, equity, and inclusion are clearly stated in their strategic plans with measurable metrics to evaluate their progress in this area (Miller et al, Krentz et al., 2019). The strategic plan should be available to the public and well communicated within the department to ensure department personnel understand how tasks align with the overarching goals and how progress will be measured (IAFC, 2020).

## Communication and messaging

Fox et al. (2006) state "the strongest and most statistically significant correlations in the data are with having a strong diversity and inclusion message and internal commitment" (p. 20). The case for diversity should be well-defined and used by leadership to build support (Krentz et al., 2019). Leadership commitment should be communicated clearly, consistently, and at all levels of the department. Departments should consider creating a committee to oversee internal and external communications to ensure messaging is factual, inclusive, and supportive of underrepresented groups (Akabas, 2010). Fox et al. (2006) recommends diversity goals and statements be in every station and reinforced in internal and external documents. For most departments, this will be a cultural shift that will take constant reinforcing, through internal communication, to have a lasting impact.

## Accountability

Once the department's goals around diversity, equity, and inclusion are made clear at all levels of the organization, mid-level leaders need to be held accountable to them (ORC Worldwide, 2008; Hulett et al. 2008; Miller et al., 2016; USFA, 2019b). This means that it is part of their job and, therefore, included in their performance reviews. Those who are contributing to the goal are rewarded and those who are not must make corrective actions or face consequences (Hulett et al., 2008).

## Measurement

Department leadership should be informed of their department's demographic data throughout the ranks of the fire department and how it compares to their community overall. As changes are made within the organization, data should be tracked at each step, which will help the department know what is working and make improvements as needed (Fox et al., 2006). As part of the strategic planning process, measurable goals should be set for improvement and tracked regularly (Krentz et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2016). In addition, this data should be available throughout the department and to the public for transparency and accountability (Krentz et al., 2019).

Departments should also collect data, disaggregated by race and gender, at each step of the hiring process to assess for inequitable impact and areas where practices could be improved. Los Angeles Fire Department uses data throughout the recruitment and hiring process to measure their progress, including data from recruiting events, candidate pool, and training academy.

## Sustainability

Equity and inclusion need to be integrated into all aspects of the department for these changes to take hold and cannot be dependent on one leader's dedication. Change will not be seen overnight and departments need to be persistent and consistent to effect real culture change over time. "Significant culture change in a complex, long-established workplace may require deliberate effort over 3 to 5 years or longer" (Hulett et al., 2008, p.12). Department leadership should be upfront with their staff that this change will be difficult and uncomfortable, take time, and may "seem to get worse before it gets better" (IAFC, 2020, p. 73). However, if departments can confront the challenges, work through the discomfort, and remain steadfast, their work will lead to a more equitable workplace (IAFC, 2020).

# OUTREACH & RECRUITING

Fire departments should design a comprehensive recruitment plan, developed by a team of individuals with a strong interest in diversifying the department, to help lay the groundwork for reaching underrepresented groups (Miller et al., 2016; Williams, 2012). The literature suggests the most effective recruiting efforts use a variety of methods, including innovative approaches, to reach communities (Garrett, 2017; Fox et al., 2006). These methods have been recommended in the literature:

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*While we've made significant strides to improve diversity and inclusion in the fire and Emergency Medical Service, we still have a significant amount of work left to do. Today, we are in a completely different atmosphere and environment, and it is imperative that the profession reflects the diverse fabric of the communities we serve.*

-US Fire Administrator G. Keith Bryant, 2019

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## Advertising

Advertising should specifically target individuals from underrepresented groups both in message and in placement (Miller et al., 2016; Fox et al., 2006; Garrett, 2017; Stecher, 2015; Hulett et al., 2008). Departments should seek out media sources used by women and people of color as well as immigrant and LGBTQ communities (Fox et al., 2006). Word of mouth should be used as one of many sources of recruitment as a planned approach that focuses on bringing in people from underrepresented groups (Fox et al., 2006). The ubiquity of social media, especially for younger generations, makes it an effective tool for reaching multiple communities and communicating the department's values (DOJ, 2016; Hatt, 2017). A communications person who is fluent in the different social media platforms can create a targeted social media campaign.

## Job descriptions

Job descriptions should not only have Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) language but a message about the value of inclusion within the department and should have clear salary and benefit information as well as job requirements (Fox et al., 2006).

Taking steps to balance the “prototype” of a firefighter could have serious implications for increasing the credibility and advancement of women in firefighting. Danbold and Bendersky conducted a study in which they had a trusted male leader in a fire department list the traits needed to be a good firefighter. When a stereotypically feminine trait, in this instance compassion, was listed first followed by team orientation and physical strength, it increased viewers' perceptions of female firefighters' abilities and even their support for “gender diversification policies”. They found the ordering of the traits, with the “feminine” trait first, to be important in counterweighting past messages, and by including the stereotypical male trait as well, they did not have any backlash from male firefighters (Danbold & Bendersky, 2019). This could be important in thinking about how job descriptions are written as well as how the job of a firefighter is discussed internally. By incorporating all aspects of the job and the traits needed,

more individuals from underrepresented groups could see themselves in the role and departments could take steps toward a holistic definition of what a firefighter is.

## School partnerships

Partnerships with elementary schools, high schools, and colleges serving students from underrepresented groups can help to educate children and young adults about careers in the fire service and help to develop an early interest in the field (Miller et al., 2016; Fox et al., 2006; Hulett et al., 2008). Examples include partnering with elementary schools to read stories or teach fire safety to children, supporting vocational training programs in high schools, and partnering to provide internships and fire programs with local community colleges. According to Bruce Bouyer, Northwest Regional

Director of the International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters and Assistant Chief of Tacoma Fire Department, for recruitment “the biggest thing is catch them when they’re young – junior high or high school – you have to plant that seed early” (personal communication, November 7, 2020).



## Career exploration programs

Programs such as fire cadets, camps, explorer programs, and internships in the fire department can provide young people from underrepresented groups a chance to explore a career in the fire service (Garrett, 2017; Fox et al., 2006; Hulett et al., 2008). As Miller et al. (2016) states, these programs “serve as both direct and indirect recruiting methods...particularly among previously underrepresented populations in the professions, who can then see themselves in these positions” (p. 2).

Many departments, including the Los Angeles City Fire Department, Dallas Fire-Rescue, and Atlanta Fire Rescue have explorer or cadets programs for young members of the community, generally 14 to 20 years of age, who are interested in learning more about a career in the fire service. The programs give them a chance to work alongside firefighters, learn basic firefighting competencies, and develop their leadership skills. Fire camps for teenage girls are also popular, generally last one day to one week, and teach girls the basics of firefighting. Examples include Dallas Fire-Rescue’s Camp L.A.D.D.E.R., Los Angeles City Fire Department’s Girls Camp, Atlanta Fire-Rescue’s Camp Ignite, and Camp Blaze in the Pacific Northwest.

## Community engagement

In the “Multicultural Health and Safety Research Project”, community leaders who took part in focus groups expressed a desire to build partnerships with the fire department and identified the mutual benefits these partnerships could have, including increasing fire safety and expanding recruitment (Fire 20/20, 2007). Attending community events such as festivals, parades, meetings, and youth programs will make the department more visible and help to forge new partnerships. It’s important that these partnerships are collaborative and mutually beneficial, with the department investing time in listening and responding to the needs of the community.

As Fox et al. points out, going to events occasionally or doing one-off presentations is less effective than developing long-term relationships with organizations (2006). Chief Bruce Bouyer believes the most important recruitment strategy is to be out in the community and be seen because “people of color and women don’t gravitate to this job” (personal communication, November 7, 2020). The San Francisco Fire Department holds monthly information nights at community centers throughout the city (Miller et al., 2016) and the City of Madison Fire Department holds “Friday Nights at the Y” at area YMCA centers.

## Community liaisons

Many fire departments have enlisted liaisons to recruit in their respective communities (Fox et al., 2006). Liaisons are individuals from underrepresented groups who are hired, or current firefighters who are given additional job duties, to implement recruitment strategies. Hiring population-specific or community liaisons can help increase the visibility of employees from underrepresented groups in the department, potentially attracting community members to the fire service who may not have otherwise considered it (DOJ, 2016).

Firefighters from underrepresented communities who are not in the role of community liaison may informally be recruiting through word of mouth. Employee resource groups or affinity groups may also be a natural source of recruitment. However, there should not be an expectation that employees or groups recruit for the department for free and they should not be constantly asked to represent the department at public events. If individuals are doing recruitment for the department, they should be compensated for their time. Tacoma Fire Department has a diverse team of around 50 employees who get paid overtime to do recruitment and Atlanta Fire Rescue created a LGBTQ liaison role in their department.



LAFD Volunteer Photographer Program

# HIRING

When creating a hiring process, it is essential that all efforts are taken to ensure a fair, unbiased, objective process. Departments must take instinct out of the hiring process to assure that those making the decisions on who will be hired are using an unbiased process. The fire service hiring process typically has many more applicants than it has positions to fill. To lower the number of applicants, departments require candidates to go through several steps. The first step is usually an application process which is used to determine if applicants have the basic requirements for the job. Some departments also require proof of passing a physical fitness test along with the application.

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*When you hold all department members accountable to excellence along the full spectrum of traits associated with being a successful firefighter, you help firefighters that don't fit the straight, white, male archetype and create more equal opportunities and inclusion.*

- Bendersky, 2018

If an applicant meets all the minimum requirements for the job and passes the physical fitness test, applicants are typically invited to complete a written test, followed by multiple rounds of interviews. Departments should take a close look at each step of the hiring process to assess for job-relatedness and eliminate bias.

## Application process

Applications should only require the minimum educational and professional experience necessary to be a successful firefighter (Fox et al., 2006). It is important to minimize the number of certifications required for the job if the department plans to provide the training to all new hires. Fox et al. (2006) recommend offering incentives for EMS certification instead of requiring it, as this was found to be beneficial for hiring more women and people of color. It is also recommended that departments “be as inclusive as possible in the first stages of the process in order to learn more about more of [the] candidates” (p. 11). Miller et al. (2016) emphasizes the importance of offering “financial incentives to staff who speak multiple languages, which better positions them for communicating directly with community members” (p. 3). This demonstrates the importance of inclusion and a diverse workforce for meeting the needs of the community.

Atlanta Fire Rescue Department created a nine-step hiring process that does not require any experience, training, or certification in fire or emergency services. Similarly, Tacoma Fire Department removed EMT and CPAT requirements, which are now a part of academy.

## Physical testing

Departments should review their physical tests to ensure they only include job-related skills and should also look at how the test is administered and weighted (Hulett et al., 2008; Russo, 2013). Women in Fire recommends the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT) (Amy Hanifan, personal communication, September 1, 2020). Departments can eliminate financial barriers by paying for the physical tests rather than placing that burden on the applicant. “By releasing students from any financial responsibility—including cost of books, equipment, facilities, testing, etc.—more

non-White cadets can be trained to enter the pool of qualified candidates in the profession” (Miller et al, 2016, p. 44). Providing physical training for candidates has also proved to increase pass rates.

## Written testing

According to Riccucci and Riccardelli, the reliance on written tests is known to have an adverse impact on equity in departments and fire leaders should weigh the "added value" of the written test to the hiring process (2015, p. 363). If there is a written test required for the job, it should be written at the educational level necessary for the job and should focus on the basic skills required such as mapping, reading, and basic math (Fox et al., 2006), as well as personal characteristics and values to determine who the applicant is as a person (Kimbrough, 2019). “Tests that do not measure a wide range of appropriate and important skills and characteristics will screen out quality and diversity” (Fox et al., 2006, p. 58). Some of these skills and characteristics are often overlooked, such as the ability to work in a team and cultural competence, as these are both needed to effectively serve the community (Akabas, 2010). And tests that focus on how well applicants know the system and the job tend to favor those who make up the overwhelming majority of the fire service workforce, white men (Kimbrough, 2019). Fire service academies and recruit schools teach recruits the system and the job that they were hired to complete. Ideally, tests should also be validated by outside experts to ensure that they are unbiased and job related (Hardison et al., 2015).

The City of Madison Fire Department examined their testing process and decided to switch to video testing (Kimbrough, 2019). A study by the Rand Corporation on improving recruitment and hiring at the Los Angeles Fire Department suggested using a random sampling or stratified sampling approach rather than a written test when narrowing down the applicant pool to potentially reduce adverse impacts on underrepresented groups (Hardison et al., 2015).

## Candidate mentoring/preparation programs

Fox et al. found that making contact with candidates during the recruitment process is “very helpful”, including preparation programs, as long as they are targeting individuals from underrepresented groups (2006). Departments should consider providing in-house training for women to prepare for the physical test (Riccucci & Saldivar, 2014; Akabas, 2010; Waters, 2003). Hulett et al. found that departments that provide training had a pass rate of 53% for women compared to 35% in departments that do not (2008). Riccucci and Saldivar (2012) also recommend providing tutoring or coaching to assist candidates with preparation for written exams. According to Dave Gillotte, LA County Fire Department Captain, departments should “integrate recruitment and mentoring of women and people of color into subsequent stages of the hiring process” (as cited in Bendersky, 2018, para. 15).

Dallas Fire-Rescue provides CPAT mentorship targeted towards women and “applicants who are not familiar with the fire service physical requirements.” Tacoma Fire Department holds hiring workshops and matches candidates with a member of their recruitment team.

## Oral boards

Hiring panels must be willing to move away from approaches that emphasize an overconfidence

in their instinct, expertise, and experience to hire the “right” candidate (Bohnet, 2016). The inclination toward “replicating ourselves in hiring contributes to the prevalent gender [and racial ethnic] segregation of jobs” (Bohnet, 2016). Departments should have a diverse group of interviewers who have been trained in implicit bias. Many departments invite community members to serve on the interview panel, which helps to provide another perspective and gives voice to the community. According to Kimbrough, questions that ask more about the candidate’s character and values, rather than knowing the ins and outs of the job, can be beneficial in advancing more women and people of color. Questions that rely heavily on knowledge of firefighting can be biased in favor of candidates who have connections or knowledge of fire and emergency services already through family members or friends (2019).

According to Dante James who worked with the Portland police department in revamping their hiring process, the department changed their interview to focus “more on the person as a holistic individual, understanding their role in society, cultural understanding of others, etc.” (as cited in Kimbrough, 2019). The Tacoma Fire Department did an overhaul of their hiring process and removed any questions that asked about prior experience or training in firefighting and now focus more on “character and a desire to serve.”

## Academy

Once a candidate is hired, they typically go through several mentally and physically challenging weeks of fire academy. New recruits are put through intensive training and are expected to show their ability to perform the job during this period. It can be an extremely stressful time if a recruit enters each day of academy with the fear of being fired before even getting on shift. It is important that each recruit is held to the same standard and the standards put in place are necessary to perform the job (Corinne Bendersky, personal communication, August 25, 2020). Departments may need to take a closer look and adapt their training practices as they recruit a more diverse workforce. As Dr. Corinne Bendersky stated, “as departments diversify...people will come in with different sets of competencies and skills and baseline knowledge and that can be an advantage to the fire department if they choose to leverage it” (personal communication, August 25, 2020). Departments should take an equitable approach to academy, ensuring each person is getting the help they need to meet the standards and be successful. Captain Ricky Walsh states, “I was a training officer during my 31 years in the fire service and I am convinced after doing that and being a company officer that 85% of all human beings can be a firefighter with proper supervision and guidance and making sure that they know what the expectations of themselves are” (personal communication, October 30, 2020). If an individual is not able to meet the standards set by the department, it should not come as a surprise when they fail as they received the support needed to pass, just like their peers (Corinne Bendersky, personal communication, August 25, 2020).

Tacoma Fire Department found that they were losing recruits during the EMT portion of academy. If a recruit failed a test, they were able to re-test the following day. If they failed a second time, they were fired. In response, the department looked at who was failing, which were the recruits that were not already EMTs, and what the issue was. They realized they were not giving those who failed the extra support they needed. The department decided to bring in the recruits who failed after the the first test and give them an hour of training with the instructor and an extra day to study. Once they implemented this change, they have not had to fire another recruit during EMT (Bruce Bouyer, personal communication, November 6, 2020).

# RETENTION & INCLUSION

Solely focusing on recruitment to make changes to the diversity of the fire department is short-sighted and ineffective. Departments do a disservice to employees from underrepresented groups when they do not take the necessary steps to increase equity and inclusion within the workplace. Inclusion is defined by the United States Office of Personnel Management as “a set of behaviors (culture) that encourages employees to feel valued for their unique qualities and experience a sense of belonging” (US OPM, 2016). This feeling of being included, of having a voice in your workplace, of being supported by your leadership, is what every person desires.

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*Many leaders believe that the recruiting phase presents the biggest obstacles—particularly for women and racial and ethnic minorities. It is not, however, that simple. Hiring people from diverse groups is easier than successfully addressing the deep-rooted cultural and organizational issues that those groups face in their day-to-day work experience.*

- Krentz et al., 2019

If fire departments do not do the difficult work of changing the culture of their department to be supportive and inclusive of all individuals, they will not see real change.

## Anti-discrimination and anti-harassment training

While anti-harassment and anti-discrimination training is often viewed as a check-the-box activity, when done well it is an important tool to inform employees of their rights and promote civility in the workplace. Varone (2019) recommends training be held in-person on an annual basis and clearly outline the department’s policies and procedures around reporting and responding to harassment and discrimination. Training should also define what constitutes harassment, bullying, hazing, and discrimination (USFA, 2019b). A task force on the study of harassment in the workplace convened by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 2015 recommends holding regular trainings that are tailored to the specific workplace and use realistic examples.

Anti-harassment training often focuses solely on legal liability and less on creating a respectful workplace culture. The EEOC task force also stresses using training as a prevention tool. To that end, they recommend including “civility training” that focuses on cultivating a respectful culture and “bystander intervention training” that encourages employees to step in when they observe harassing behavior in the workplace (Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016).

Officers should receive separate training to ensure they understand their responsibility in reporting violations and preventing retaliation. Officer trainings should also use real life examples to help officers develop strategies to identify and address harassing behavior before it escalates and know how to use their position of authority responsibly (Varone, 2019). Like the general training, officer training should be interactive and focus on ways to create a respectful work environment that can prevent harassment (Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016).

## Anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies and procedure

To create a safe environment within the fire station, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies must be implemented and enforced (Hulett et al., 2008; Krentz et al., 2019; Varone, 2019; Griffith et al., 2015; USFA, 2019b). Allowing incidents to go unaddressed sends a clear message that these actions are acceptable (Jahnke et al., 2019; Varone, 2019). Hulett et al. (2008) state “our interviews confirmed a direct relationship between harassment in a department and tolerance for it by the department’s senior managers” (p. 201). If it is not made clear by senior leadership that discrimination and harassment will not be tolerated, it will persist.

The policy should define what constitutes not only harassment but also “harassing behavior” (Varone, 2019, para. 3). This lets employees know what is acceptable behavior and also gives the department recourse to discipline individuals who act inappropriately before it escalates into harassment (Varone, 2019). While much of the literature on anti-harassment policies in the fire service call for a zero tolerance policy (Hulett et al., 2008; USFA, 2019b; Griffith et al., 2016), the EEOC task force report cautions against the use of zero tolerance as it can be misconstrued as a “one-size-fits-all approach” and actually lead to underreporting (Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016, p. 40). They instead recommend that “discipline for harassment be proportionate to the offensiveness of the conduct” (Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016, p. 40).

Departments should provide a “confidential, step-by-step process to file complaints” that is clear to all staff within the department (USFA, 2019b). This process should have “multiple avenues offered by the employer to report 'unwelcome conduct' based on protected characteristic, regardless of whether the individual might or might not describe the conduct as ‘harassment’” (Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016, p. 50). Managers should be trained to receive complaints and departments may want to consider using an independent third party as one of their avenues for reporting (Zachary Florent, EEOC, personal communication, October 26, 2020). When incidents are reported, they should be taken seriously and proactively addressed across the board (Project Include, n.d.a). Reports should be investigated and followed up on promptly and the department must ensure that the person reporting does not face retaliation (Varone, 2019; USFA, 2019b; Project Include, n.d.a). If individuals in a workplace fear retaliation, incidents will go unreported and leadership may not be aware of serious issues within the department (Project Include, n.d.a).

## Affinity groups

Miller et al. (2016) define an affinity group as “a group with no departmental or government oversight in which employees may voluntarily join to build relationships with other employees having similar interests or experiences such as race, gender, gender identity, etc.” (p. 3). Affinity groups, also known as employee resource groups, provide a space to share experiences, advice, and mentorship and can reduce feelings of isolation. Many departments also find affinity groups to be a great source for recruiting members of their community to the fire service (Hatt, 2017; Fox et al., 2006).

Former LAFD Assistant Chief Kwame Cooper attributes the representation of Black firefighters throughout the ranks of their department to a promotional program developed by the Stentorians, LAFD’s Black affinity group, in the 1990s (as cited by Bendersky, 2018). The San Francisco Fire Department has eight different affinity groups including groups for women, Asian, Black, Hispanic, LGBTQ and military veteran firefighters.

## Mentoring

The literature points to mentoring programs as a way to develop a more inclusive workplace, increase job retention, and improve advancement opportunities for individuals from underrepresented groups (Russo, 2018; Bendersky, 2018; Miller et al., 2016; Fox et al., 2006; IAFC, 2016; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Women and people of color have less access to networks and relationships that can help foster their career and formal mentorship programs can support the creation of these networks (Project Include, n.d.b; Fox et al., 2006). In Russo's survey of 224 female firefighters, 93% felt mentoring was important or very important for women to rise in the ranks of the fire service and those that had been promoted were more likely to have been mentored. The respondents also noted the challenge in finding mentors when there are so few women in the fire service, especially in leadership roles (2018).

According to the AFL-CIO (2005) report, *Overcoming Barriers to People of Color in Union Leadership*, mentoring and support from networks were key. The report recommends creating a mentoring program that ensures the transfer of skills and the development of future leadership, inclusion of people of color in all aspects of the union's work, and creation of an inclusive atmosphere by committing time, resources and infrastructures that support diversity. These same recommendations can also be applied to the fire service's efforts to increase diversity and inclusion among new hires and promotions.

While informal mentoring may support many employees in the workplace, it can also exclude people from underrepresented groups who face more barriers in developing informal mentoring relationships (Fox et al., 2006; Dinolfo & Nugent, 2010). Leaders often choose people who look like them or share similar characteristics when choosing a mentee, which perpetuates homogeneity in leadership roles. Therefore, departments may want to allocate the necessary resources to implement a mentoring program that is universally available and assess its impact over time (Dinolfo & Nugent, 2010).

## Employee performance review/individual development plan

According to the IAFC, individual development plans (IDPs) provide a roadmap for firefighters to achieve their long-term goals that is aligned with the department's mission, vision, and goals. An IDP can help all personnel be aware of the training required to be successful in their current position and to be prepared for advancement opportunities (2020).

Employee performance reviews provide the opportunity for individuals to discuss these goals, make plans for professional development, and receive valuable feedback on their performance. When all employees are receiving regular formal and informal feedback on their job performance and planning for their professional development, decisions around training, development, and advancement opportunities can be perceived as fairer (IAFC, 2020). Employee performance reviews are also a good way to hold leaders accountable for goals around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Atlanta Fire Rescue holds annual performance evaluation training for managers which are followed by annual reviews between managers and employees. They also conduct quarterly progress sessions and require performance improvement plans for those employees who are rated as needing improvement.

## Promotional processes

In addition to the promotional process itself, departments should mitigate bias in who is selected for opportunities that could help advance a person's career, such as training, station assignments during probation, and involvement in specialty teams (Russo, 2013). Access to these opportunities can have a huge impact on a person's advancement. Like entry-level hiring practices, the promotional process should be carefully reviewed to eliminate bias. Job openings should be posted, and each step of the process assessed to ensure fairness and validated for job-relatedness (Hulett et al., 2008; Riccucci & Saldivar, 2014). Riccucci and Riccardelli (2015) found that even though civil service laws in most jurisdictions do not require a written exam to be a component of the promotional process, most departments weigh them heavily in promotional decisions. While written exams are known to be inequitable, assessment centers can positively impact diversity goals. Departments could consider weighting oral exams, computer simulations, or group exercises more heavily than written exams (Riccucci & Saldivar, 2014).

Individuals involved in the promotional process should be trained in conducting a bias-free process. Having a structured process using job-related criteria to assess candidates can reduce the amount of bias (Hulett et al., 2008). Panels involved in promotional decisions should include a diverse group trained in implicit bias.

The City of Madison Fire Department implemented a benchmarking system where employees can earn points toward career advancement and eliminated as much subjective decision making as possible in the process.

## Employee engagement

In addition to tracking demographic data throughout the hiring process and ranks of the department, implementing a workplace culture or employee engagement survey can help leadership to know and address issues with their organization's culture. Results should be tracked by demographic group to identify and address differences in perception and treatment while maintaining respondents' confidentiality (Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013). The survey should include specific questions around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## Workplace culture

While training, education, and enforcement of anti-discrimination and harassment policies can help to prevent and address formal complaints, fire departments should also acknowledge the parts of their culture that may contribute to an unsupportive or even hostile workplace. Departments should look at the language they use in their policies and messaging to ensure it is inclusive, opting for gender neutral terms such as family, rather than brothers or brotherhood and terms such as community members or residents rather than citizens, which excludes individuals without legal status. Information from the department should be provided in the languages spoken in the community and the department website and events should be ADA accessible. Departments should also have a clear code of conduct or ethics that is modeled by leadership, reinforced through workplace norms and does not allow for disrespectful treatment of other employees, such as hazing of newer members or racist, homophobic, or sexist jokes or remarks (Gasior, 2018).

## Equipment and space

Departments should ensure they have properly fitting equipment for all firefighters, which includes equipment specifically designed for women's bodies (Hulett et al., 2008; Griffith et al., 2016). In addition, stations should have individual bathrooms and separate sleeping facilities to ensure privacy (Hulett et al., 2008; Griffith et al., 2016; USFA, 2019b). Leadership should consult female firefighters to understand where there are gaps and not assume what is needed. Departments should ensure their facilities are ADA accessible.

## Mental and physical health

Promoting physical and mental health for all employees within the department can help reduce the stress and trauma of a career in fire and emergency services. Leadership should stress the importance of physical activity, healthy eating, and rest (USFA, 2019b). Departments should also have inclusive healthcare practices, including pregnancy and maternity/paternity leave and lactation policies (Amy Hanifan, personal communication, September 1, 2020) as well as policies that support employees who are transitioning in the workplace.

Behavioral health should be as high of a priority as physical health. In a field like fire and emergency services, there is both the reality of dealing with high stress and, at times, traumatic situations and the stigma around being vulnerable or admitting to needing help. Departments should ensure they have a program that provides education and resources at all levels of the department and reduces the stigma around asking for help (USFA, 2019b). Departments should also be aware that underrepresented firefighters may be facing compounding stress both from the job itself and from feelings of isolation or mistreatment that they may be experiencing (Jahnke et al., 2019).

Dallas Fire-Rescue created a comprehensive behavioral health program after one of their members died by suicide. The new program includes resiliency training for new recruits, ongoing wellness training and development, peer counselors, professional support, and a crisis response system. It also has a specific focus on shifting the culture of the department to be more aware and open to discussing mental health needs (Coatney et al., 2019). According to Coatney et al. (2019):

“Creating an environment where it is considered acceptable and appropriate to not only admit you are having difficulty with a particular issue...helps not only the individual, but can also help propel a cultural shift within the organization. This can ultimately serve to decrease if not remove the stigma often associated with behavioral health issues” (para. 35)

## Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training

Training is often seen as a panacea for issues of equity in the workplace. While it is an important piece, it needs to be incorporated into a larger program of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the department (Project Include, n.d.c; Bezrukova et al., 2015). Training should not be considered a one-time endeavor but rather an ongoing development program and each training should include an evaluation at the end to help inform future trainings. According to Chief Amy Hanifan, President of Women in Fire, “DEI training is just as important as getting out and doing your fire ground skills. It takes leadership recognizing the importance of well-rounded training...” (personal communication, September 1, 2020).

DEI training for leadership is imperative, especially for newly promoted individuals. Training should ensure leaders understand the departments' DEI goals and code of conduct, so they are comfortable having discussions and reinforcing these values in their daily work (Project Include, n.d.c).

Departments should provide training for all employees as each person contributes to the culture of the organization (Hulett et al., 2008). It is important to have an assessment of your department's culture before implementing diversity training (Kupietz 2010). In bringing employees together to discuss and learn, it is crucial to have a skilled trainer who is aware of how power dynamics and past trauma can impact the efficacy of the training and can mitigate these risks.

Krentz et al. recommend training start with the underlying fact that all individuals have biases, some they may not even be aware of, and that these biases can do real harm to other individuals. Training should incorporate strategies for reducing the impact of bias and include facilitator-led discussions (2019). Hulett et al. (2008) found "the most effective training uses real-life examples drawn from the specific workplace and provides tools for dealing with practical situations, such as 'scripts' for alternative behavior" (p. 12). A meta-analysis on 40 years of diversity training evaluations found that the most effective trainings incorporate a variety of teaching methods, such as lecture, group activity, and exercises (Bezrukova et al., 2015).

In addition to DEI trainings, educational trainings that increase knowledge and understanding of other cultures as well as mental health, disability, and LGBTQ healthcare could improve relationships within the firehouse as well as interactions with the community.

The Los Angeles Fire Department implemented a workplace sensitivity training for all its members. Tacoma firefighters complete an Equity 101 training, San Francisco Fire Department conducts implicit bias training, and Atlanta Fire-Rescue requires its leaders to attend diversity training annually.

## **Conflict resolution**

Conflicts are a normal part of any workplace and the close working and living quarters of fire and emergency services personnel can lead to more opportunities for disputes to occur. Ricky Walsh, Vice President of the IAFF 7th District, recommends all firefighters, especially leadership, be trained in conflict resolution (Ricky Walsh, personal communication, October 30, 2020). Some departments employ mediation services to help deal with conflicts that arise in the fire station as the Los Angeles Fire Department recently did (Schweighofer, 2018). Other departments have developed peer dispute resolution teams (Willing, 2017). Having different options for handling disputes in the workplace could help to resolve conflicts before they become unmanageable.

# NEXT STEPS

The research from this report combined with data from a survey of King County fire departments will be used to create a toolkit for the departments in the King County Fire Chiefs Association. Using the strategies outlined in this document and information from the survey on where gaps exist and what support is needed in King County departments, the toolkit will provide a practical and scalable guide to implementing these approaches within departments of all sizes.



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# APPENDIX

## I. National fire department survey

### Department Background

- 1) Department Name:\*
- 2) Name of person(s) completing the survey:
- 3) How many total uniformed personnel are employed by your department?
- 4) Please complete the table below with the number of employees in your department who are represented in the following gender categories.

*If possible, we would like to know the number of all uniformed personnel in each gender category as well as within each of the ranks.*

	All uniformed personnel	Firefighter (EMT)	Paramedic	Lieutenant	Captain	Chief
Women						
Men						
Non-binary						

5) Please complete the table below with the number of employees in your department who are represented in the following racial/ethnic groups.

*If possible, we would like to know the number of all uniformed personnel in each racial/ethnic group as well as within each of the ranks.*

	All uniformed personnel	Firefighter (EMT)	Paramedic	Lieutenant	Captain	Chief
American Indian or Alaska Native						
Asian						
Black or African American						
Hispanic or Latino						
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander						
White						
Two or More Races						
<u>Other group</u> (not listed)						

6) Does your department have any of the following (check all that apply and provide a brief description of each):

- Career exploration program: \_\_\_\_\_
- Preparation assistance for individuals from underrepresented groups: \_\_\_\_\_
- Formal recruitment plan: \_\_\_\_\_
- Dedicated recruitment staff: \_\_\_\_\_
- Mentoring program: \_\_\_\_\_
- Affinity groups or Employee Resource Groups: \_\_\_\_\_
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion trainings: \_\_\_\_\_
- Employee engagement or workplace culture survey: \_\_\_\_\_
- Employee performance reviews: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Successes and Challenges**

- 7) How has your department's leadership shown your commitment to equity in your department?
- 8) How has your department targeted recruitment efforts to underrepresented groups?
- 9) How has your department reduced bias in your hiring process?
- 10) How has your department reduced bias in your academy?
- 11) How has your department reduced barriers to advancement for individuals from underrepresented groups?
- 12) How has your department dealt with sexist, homophobic, and/or racist behavior from firefighters, such as using racial slurs, making inappropriate jokes, etc.?
- 13) Which programs or strategies have had the most impact on increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in your department?
- 14) What are the biggest barriers you have faced in making these changes in your department and how have you overcome them?
- 15) How do you know that your efforts to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in your department are working?
- 16) Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience advancing equity and inclusion in your department?
- 17) If we have follow-up questions, would you be willing to have a short (30 minute) phone conversation?
- 18) Please provide the email address where you would like to be contacted.

**Thank You!**

## II. Interview Questions

### Questions for Dr. Corinne Bendersky (UCLA Anderson School of Management):

1. We are wondering how your research on the firefighter prototype can or has been applied in fire departments to expand the definition of a firefighter.
2. Can you describe the training you have been doing with the Los Angeles Fire Department (and other departments)?
  - a. What do you think the impact of this training has been?
  - b. How was the training received by the departments?
3. Do you have examples of a firefighter job description that balances the firefighter prototype?
4. Is there any other advice you would give to departments who are trying to create a more equitable and inclusive workplace?
5. Is there anything else you want to share or we should know?

### Questions for Chief Amy Hanifan (Women in Fire):

1. What strategies do you think are most effective in increasing the number of female firefighters in the fire service?
2. How do you think departments can better support female firefighters?
3. Are there certain departments that you think are doing a good job in this area?
4. Are there certain departments that are using innovative approaches in this area?
5. What do you think is the biggest obstacle in creating an equitable fire department?
6. What do you see as the biggest obstacles in increasing female representation in leadership?
  - a. What strategies have you seen implemented that have had an impact in this area?
7. How does Women in Fire interact with individual departments?
8. Is there anything else you want to share or we should know?

### Questions for Dr. Manuel Fonseca (National Association of Hispanic Firefighters):

1. What strategies do you think are most effective in increasing the number of Hispanic/Latino firefighters in the fire service?
2. How do you think departments can better support Hispanic/Latino firefighters?
3. Are there certain departments that you think are doing a good job in this area?
4. Are there certain departments that are using innovative approaches in this area?
5. What do you think is the biggest obstacle in creating an equitable fire department?
6. What do you see as the biggest obstacles in increasing Hispanic representation in leadership?
  - a. What strategies have you seen implemented that have had an impact in this area?
7. How does the National Association of Hispanic Firefighters interact with individual departments?
8. Is there anything else you want to share or we should know?

### Questions for Captain Ricky Walsh (International Association of Firefighters 7th District):

1. Can you tell us a little bit about what you do as Vice President of International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) District 7 and, more specifically, how your role impacts the equity and inclusion working being done at the state, region and international level?

2. Obviously a lot has happened this year with the uprising and movement for Black lives. It seems like at the state level there is some sense of urgency to start to address diversity from a hiring standpoint. Can you talk about the Washington State Council of Firefighters (WSCFF) resolution and the workgroup?
  - a. What, if anything is being done to improve culture within fire departments as it pertains to gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and immigration status discrimination?
  - b. What power does the workgroup, the IAFF, and the WSCFF have to push departments to make improvements in this area?
3. What strategies do you think are most effective in increasing the number of firefighters in the fire service who come from underrepresented groups?
4. How do you think departments can better support firefighters from underrepresented groups?
5. What do you think is the biggest obstacle in creating an equitable fire department?
6. How does District 7, the IAFF and WSCFF interact with individual departments?
7. Are there certain departments in this area that you think are making progress?
8. Is there anything else you want to share or we should know?

**Questions for Chief David Coatney (Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service):**

1. Can you tell us a little bit about your fire programming? We are specifically interested in your candidate exploration/preparation programs (Recruit Fire Academy) and your leadership development program (Leadership Development/Fire Officer program).
2. What kind of outreach and recruitment do you do for your Recruit Fire Academy?
3. Do you have an idea of what the demographics are for students attending academy?
4. Is there a pipeline for students who finish the Recruit Fire Academy to get hired at a department?
5. What strategies do you think are most effective in increasing the number of firefighters in the fire service who come from underrepresented groups?
  - a. What, if any of these strategies have you implemented in your program?
6. Do you do outreach for your leadership development courses?
7. Do you know the demographics of students in your leadership development courses?
8. What do you see as the biggest obstacles in increasing individuals from underrepresented groups in leadership?
  - a. What strategies have you seen implemented that have had an impact in this area?
9. Is there anything else you want to share or we should know?

**Questions for Chief Bruce Bouyer (International Association of Black Professional Firefighters Northwest Region):**

1. What strategies do you think are most effective in increasing the number of Black firefighters in the fire service?
2. How do you think departments can better support Black firefighters?
3. What do you think is the biggest obstacle in creating an equitable fire department?
4. What do you see as the biggest obstacles in increasing Black representation in leadership?
  - a. What strategies have you seen implemented that have had an impact in this area?
5. How does the IABPFF interact with individual departments?
6. Is there anything else you want to share or we should know?