



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**THE CASE FOR AFFIRMING DIVERSITY:  
REFLECTIVE RECRUITMENT THAT REPRESENTS  
THE COMMUNITY SERVED**

by

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March 2021

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**THE CASE FOR AFFIRMING DIVERSITY: REFLECTIVE RECRUITMENT  
THAT REPRESENTS THE COMMUNITY SERVED**

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**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

Fitchburg Fire Department's (FFD) membership today is not diverse, primarily because the department has experienced limited success in recruiting motivated, diverse firefighter candidates. This thesis poses the following research questions: What can be done to identify current barriers that discourage or hamper reflective recruitment in FFD? And what can be done to overcome recruitment obstacles? The research relied on a focus group composed of Fitchburg-area civic leaders who could share a historical perspective, discuss operational and systematic bias, and consider solutions through reflective recruitment and targeted community outreach. The group's recommendations were incorporated into a plan that involved short-, medium-, and long-term recruitment outreach and recruitment goals over a two-year timeline. The group identified potential school programs, racially centric groups, and current FFD membership that can positively influence prospective firefighter candidates. Recognizing that professional standards need not be compromised in the pursuit of a more representative workforce, the focus group recommended intentional acts of inclusion to stimulate occupational and organizational interest. This thesis finds that if FFD aims to recruit a workforce that resembles the community served, inclusivity will depend largely on targeted neighborhood outreach, a form of affirmative action.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

|      |                                                    |
|------|----------------------------------------------------|
| AA   | affirmative action                                 |
| CPSE | Center for Public Safety Excellence                |
| FFD  | Fitchburg Fire Department                          |
| HR   | human resource(s)                                  |
| ICMA | International City/County Management Association   |
| IRB  | Institutional Review Board                         |
| PFC  | Police and Fire Commission                         |
| RFES | Richmond Department of Fire and Emergency Services |
| RMS  | records management system                          |
| SOG  | standard operating guideline                       |
| STEM | science, technology, engineering, and math         |
| UL   | Underwriters Laboratories                          |

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Fitchburg Fire Department (FFD)'s membership today is not diverse. In other words, FFD remains whiter than the population it serves. The problem is that Fitchburg's initiatives to find motivated, diverse firefighter candidates and inspire reflective recruitment have experienced limited success. This thesis sought to answer the following questions: What can be done to identify current barriers that discourage or hamper reflective recruitment in FFD? Furthermore, what can be done to overcome recruitment obstacles?

The research identified that FFD's data collection for reflective recruitment needs improvement. Specifically, FFD has not gained actionable insights into the number of people attending community outreach events because involvement from targeted neighborhoods or select populations goes unreported, and the department does not evaluate participation to recognize progress or needed improvements. In 2021, FFD will be upgrading its records management system (RMS) and will evaluate the platform's capability of reporting outreach and reflective recruitment activities. Having a well-designed RMS in place will allow FFD to measure community involvement and the attendance of diverse populations.

This thesis relied on the participation of a focus group composed of Fitchburg-area civic leaders who shared a historical perspective, discussed operational and systematic bias, and supported FFD in developing recruitment solutions through the advancement of outreach and community networks. The group recommended in-station and out-of-station activities that would serve underrepresented populations. The activity planning involved short-, medium-, and long-term recruitment outreach and recruitment goals over a two-year timeline, identifying potential school programs, racially centric groups, and current FFD membership that could positively influence prospective firefighter candidates. In accordance with recommendations from the International City/County Management Association and the Center for Public Safety Excellence, the focus group recognized that professional standards need not be compromised in the pursuit of a more representative

workforce—promoting inclusivity in education will lead to the probability of employment through talent-based initiatives.<sup>1</sup>

An unintended outcome of this research involved using a form of affirmative action (AA), which FFD’s recruitment strategy tried to avoid. AA case law is regularly challenged in court, constantly changing due to legal decisions, and inconsistently enforced by a variety of state and federal courts.<sup>2</sup> Because critics perceive AA as a “race not merit” equity tool, the true efficacy of AA is lost in the distraction of a reverse-discrimination argument.<sup>3</sup> While the focus group agreed that no one wants to hire a firefighter that is not talented, group members redirected the conversation to include certain components of AA. Ultimately, they wanted to better understand how talent is defined and where a fire department finds talent. The focus group concluded that when FFD considers equal opportunity employment and AA, *all* talented candidates are considered in the recruitment process, and *all* have “a seat at the table.”

I asked focus group members about barriers associated with recruitment and for feedback on why they thought FFD has had limited success in recruiting diversity. The participants posed the following questions: What kind of active recruitment is happening in neighborhoods where the underrepresented populations live? How many direct contacts are made with potential candidates? How do you know they are interested? Or better yet, how do you know they are not interested? In the end, the focus group found that recruitment relies on community trust—trust involves an active effort from FFD to find and engage diverse populations. Moreover, intentional acts of inclusion stimulate occupational and organizational interest—inclusion influences career paths.<sup>4</sup> The reflective recruitment programs identified in this research require partnerships, advocacy, and engagement. If

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Public Safety Excellence, *21st Century Fire and Emergency Services* (Chantilly, VA: Center for Public Safety Excellence, 2020), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Martinez, “More History of Affirmative Action Policies from the 1960s,” American Association for Access, Equality and Diversity, accessed December 14, 2020, [https://www.aaed.org/aaed/History\\_of\\_Affirmative\\_Action.asp](https://www.aaed.org/aaed/History_of_Affirmative_Action.asp).

<sup>3</sup> Carl Cohen and James Sterba, *Affirmative Action and Racial Preference: A Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 199–200.

<sup>4</sup> Tiffany Jana and Michael Baran, *Subtle Acts of Exclusion* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2020), 155.

FFD aims to recruit a workforce that resembles the community served, inclusivity will depend on targeted neighborhood outreach. One focus group member reinforced this point by stating, “The trick is in the try. Do everything possible to affirm your interest in a well-represented, diverse fire department.”

I was encouraged to think of this situation through a hypothetical example. Imagine being at an event where you feel like the odd person out. You are skeptical to get involved because you think that all eyes are on you and that people are questioning your motives. Until someone comes over, shakes your hand, introduces himself and others, and shares the project at hand, do you feel welcome? Do you feel comfortable? Are you ready to take the first step? Now, imagine a kid standing on the front apron of the fire station, scared to take the first step because she is unsure whether she will be welcome. If a firefighter steps out of the station, smiles, shakes her hand, and provides an introduction, is that kid going to feel more comfortable? When FFD’s culture affirms diversity and its members appreciate the value of in-group influence during development, recruitment, and training, FFD will be a stronger fire department—*because* of the things that make us different.

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I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Center of Homeland Defense and Security at the Naval Postgraduate School. I value and appreciate your knowledge, guidance, dedication, and professionalism.

To the City of Fitchburg, Wisconsin (elected officials, employees, and citizens): Thank you for offering me the flexibility to pursue advanced education—in an effort to improve organizational leadership, personnel readiness, and community preparedness. I am particularly grateful to the members of Fitchburg Fire Department. I am only as good as the people who support our daily mission to Serve, Learn, Respect, and Lead. I am very fortunate to be a part of a forward-thinking organization.

To those who contributed to this effort by writing a letter of recommendation, offering words of encouragement (based on personal experience), or participating in a focus group: Thank you for investing your time and trust into this journey. I am optimistic that the outcomes of this research will positively serve Fitchburg and others who hope to implement reflective recruitment.

Finally, to my family: Going to graduate school required your tolerance, adjustment, and patience. Add a healthy dose of global pandemic, and it is safe to say that there was nothing convenient about this opportunity. Thankfully, I was able to rely on your assistance and understanding. I could not have done this without you.

I dedicate this thesis to my dad. He was proud of my acceptance into the CHDS master's program, but he died before I attended my first class. Throughout my lifetime, he shared that "anything worth anything is worth earning." His philosophy of hard work and perseverance proved instrumental in successfully completing this program. Thanks, Dad!

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The City of Fitchburg, Wisconsin, Fire Department aims to pioneer a process to achieve equitable recruitment. According to a mayoral initiative, all city departments, including the fire department, are required to “look for various, diverse viewpoints” and “take an active role in learning racial equity and social justice.”<sup>1</sup> As Vernā Myers explains it, “Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.”<sup>2</sup> A city of slightly more than 30,000, with Madison (the state’s capital) as its neighbor, Fitchburg represents the most diverse municipality per capita in Dane County—even more diverse than Madison.<sup>3</sup> Black residents account for 10 percent of Fitchburg’s population; Hispanic/Latino residents make up 17 percent; and white residents constitute 71 percent of the population, according to the 2018 estimated census.<sup>4</sup> This diversity is insufficiently represented in the fire department today, with 3 percent of Fitchburg Fire Department (FFD)’s workforce identifying as black; 4 percent as Hispanic; and 1 percent as “two or more” categories (see Appendix A). In other words, FFD remains whiter than the population it serves.

Specific data about community outreach and the participation of diverse populations is not available for FFD. The department’s 2019 annual report identifies prevention, education, and outreach activities conducted throughout the year, but the record does not provide any information about whether or how these interactive events touched a diverse audience. FFD’s open house is the fire department’s primary public relations event of the year, providing information about fire department response, membership recruitment, public education, and fire prevention. Observations from pictures taken of the 2019 annual open house reflect that the event does not have significant attendance by

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron Richardson, email message to author, July 24, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Laura Sherbin and Ripa Rashid, “Diversity Doesn’t Stick without Inclusion,” *Harvard Business Review*, February 1, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/02/diversity-doesnt-stick-without-inclusion>.

<sup>3</sup> “Quick Facts: Fitchburg City, Wisconsin; United States,” Census Bureau, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/fitchburgcitywisconsin,US/PST045219>.

<sup>4</sup> Census Bureau.

diverse populations.<sup>5</sup> According to Fitchburg's Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative, Fitchburg's highest-density black and Hispanic neighborhoods cluster close to the northern border of the city (see Figure 1).<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1. Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative Map<sup>7</sup>

When fire stations are based in residential neighborhoods, firefighters can interact with the community without leaving the station. None of FFD's fire stations, however, are within walking distance of neighborhoods with populations that would improve the diversity of its membership, as depicted in Figure 2. Recruitment activities must consider those residents who do not reside close to a firehouse and, thus, do not typically participate in outreach activities.

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<sup>5</sup> Fitchburg Fire Department, *Fitchburg Fire Department 2019 Annual Report* (Fitchburg, WI: City of Fitchburg, 2020), 9, <https://www.fitchburgwi.gov/DocumentCenter/View/14289/2019--FIRE-ANNUAL-REPORT?bidId=>.

<sup>6</sup> City of Fitchburg, *Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative* (Fitchburg, WI: City of Fitchburg, 2019), 3, <https://www.fitchburgwi.gov/DocumentCenter/View/18400/HNI-Strategic-Plan---ADOPTED?bidId=>.

<sup>7</sup> Source: City of Fitchburg, *Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative*, 3.



Figure 2. Fitchburg Neighborhood Map<sup>8</sup>

This thesis assumes that targeted recruitment, within diverse neighborhoods that reflect the population served by FFD, will require deliberate outreach and the planning of activities outside the fire station. To this end, this research aims to provide insight on the importance of reflective recruitment—inclusivity and accessibility in outreach, recruitment, and community service. Through reflective recruitment, FFD aims for diversity. Because inclusion drives profitability, innovation, and resiliency, diverse companies are more successful.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters maintains that an inclusive fire department is more effective because it understands the service demands of a diverse community.<sup>10</sup> Reflective recruitment builds on a virtuous cycle: inclusion promotes professionalism; professionalism promotes self-esteem; self-

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<sup>8</sup> Source: City of Fitchburg, *Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative*, 3; “City of Fitchburg Address Map,” City of Fitchburg Planning and Zoning Department, updated March 2017, <https://fitchburgwi.gov/DocumentCenter/View/235/Address-Map?bidId=>. The colorized section in Figure 2 depicts areas served by the City of Fitchburg’s Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative. Stars indicate the locations of Fitchburg fire stations.

<sup>9</sup> Tiffany Jana and Ashely Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias: How to Create Systematic Change for Organizational Inclusion* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2018), 82.

<sup>10</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, *Guide for Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department* (Fairfax, VA: International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2020), 6.

esteem promotes identity; identity feeds inclusion; and inclusion improves the recruitment of a qualified, diverse candidate pool.<sup>11</sup> The status quo of FFD’s present-day recruitment efforts, although well intended, has not resulted in a representative workforce, and finding a productive process remains an urgent priority.

#### **A. RESEARCH QUESTION**

In an effort to inspire reflective recruitment and find motivated, diverse firefighter candidates—more specifically, inclusivity through talent-driven initiatives—what can be done to identify current barriers that discourage or hamper reflective recruitment in FFD? Further, what can be done to overcome recruitment obstacles?

#### **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Fitchburg’s situation, of having a less-than-representative workforce, is quite common in the fire service. Most fire departments nationwide employ staff who do not mirror the communities they serve.<sup>12</sup> To understand the importance of a diverse workforce, I researched the impact of inclusive staffing within municipal government occupations. The literature referenced in this research provides insight about barriers that affect inclusion. Namely, research on institutional and structural biases helps to explain organizational behaviors and assumptions that negatively influence reflective recruitment. Because evaluating assumptions about equal opportunity measures and recruitment concepts is equally important, this section also examines the effectiveness—or failure—of different methods, concepts, and programs. Given that recruiting program implementation depends on organizational variables and community influence, this research targeted combination suburban/rural fire departments.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 169–70.

<sup>12</sup> Corinne Bendersky, “Making U.S. Fire Departments More Diverse and Inclusive,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 7, 2018, <https://hbr.org/2018/12/making-u-s-fire-departments-more-diverse-and-inclusive>.

<sup>13</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, *Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department*, 7; “Combination” fire departments are staffed with a combination of career, part-time, and volunteer firefighters.

This literature review considers a variety of sources. Local civic leaders, community organizations, and the City of Fitchburg resource librarian assisted in the development of this reading list. The sources covered herein consider the historical aspects of employment and community engagement along with methods to overcome the barriers to recruiting a reflective workforce.

## **1. Bias—Institutional and Structural**

Jana and Diaz Mejias define institutional and structural bias as a phenomenon that affords predominant groups an unfair advantage over other groups at the organizational level (as opposed to the individual level). Institutional biases pose a particular challenge to recruitment in the fire service—centered on negative community interactions and experiences that deter personnel from participating in fire department outreach activities.<sup>14</sup> For example, Fitchburg’s municipal employment data indicates that black candidates were the least-represented population in 2019’s hiring processes.<sup>15</sup> Although such information on its own does not indicate inequity, if the department does not evaluate and improve employment practices, the public may perceive FFD as institutionally and structurally biased.<sup>16</sup>

Jana and Baran claim that structural racism contributes to bias, discrimination, and exclusion. Structural racism is defined as exclusionary tactics that have been designed into laws and policies—creating a disproportionate number of criminal convictions and longer sentences for people of color.<sup>17</sup> Edelman’s observations suggest that justice and correctional systems have an effect on black candidates’ qualifications.<sup>18</sup> Overall, the black population represents 14 percent of all people in the United States yet 34 percent of

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<sup>14</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Olson, *Human Resources: Annual Report 2019* (Fitchburg, WI: City of Fitchburg, 2020), 12, <http://fitchburgwi.gov/DocumentCenter/View/20351/2019-HR-Annual-Report>.

<sup>16</sup> Carl Cohen and James Sterba, *Affirmative Action and Racial Preference: A Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 202.

<sup>17</sup> Tiffany Jana and Michael Baran, *Subtle Acts of Exclusion* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2020), 20–21.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Edelman, *Not a Crime to Be Poor* (New York: New Press, 2017), 106.

the correctional population, meaning that black citizens are five times more likely to be incarcerated.<sup>19</sup>

One form of institutional bias is “occupational,” which involves the pre-determination of job association based on image—typically involving race or gender biases.<sup>20</sup> Bendersky observes biases that manifest when firefighting reinforces stereotypes.<sup>21</sup> For example, in most situations, prioritizing strength over social and emotional attributes and skill allows the male candidate an advantage over a female candidate.<sup>22</sup> Tamme warns that the deep-seated beliefs and values of existing members create a distraction, decreasing the perceived value of what could be a well-trained, diverse workforce. The solution, according to Tamme, is a reflective workforce that features diversity with inclusion that highlights a variety of strengths and skillsets.<sup>23</sup> Bendersky has found that inclusion is more likely when employers consider a variety of non-traditional skill sets and qualifications. One recommendation is to highlight such traits as compassion over team and strength attributes—recognizing that firefighters use empathetic emergency medicine techniques and bedside manner more than brute strength.<sup>24</sup>

Segregated communities result from structural bias—affecting inclusion socially through disproportionate incarceration and poverty rates in racially divided neighborhoods.<sup>25</sup> In Wisconsin, Milwaukee and Madison have the most segregated neighborhoods.<sup>26</sup> As Diangelo contends, white communities that do not encounter communities of color regularly, especially in segregated areas, fail to recognize or discuss

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<sup>19</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias*, 56.

<sup>20</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, 29.

<sup>21</sup> Bendersky, “Making U.S. Fire Departments More Diverse,” para. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Bendersky, para. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Susan Tamme, “I Stands for Inclusion,” International Association of Fire Chiefs, November 2, 2018, para. 2, <https://www.iafc.org/iCHIEFS/iCHIEFS-article/i-stands-for-inclusion>.

<sup>24</sup> Bendersky, “Making U.S. Fire Departments More Diverse,” para. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias*, 114.

<sup>26</sup> Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together?*, 7.

the lack of diversity and its impact on people.<sup>27</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias assert that the unintended outcome of such separation is the marginalization of diverse communities and the hardening of institutional bias.<sup>28</sup>

Diangelo surmises that the perception of race drives behavior and, therefore, influences bias. If humans are biologically similar (other than outward appearance), then racism is socially constructed through an outsider's understanding of a person (or people), founded on a personal or mutual perspective and shared with a group of like-minded individuals.<sup>29</sup> Beasley reports that a lack of exposure to diversity cements the social construct of racism and contributes to the perception (real or not) that race influences opportunities, not the social environment.<sup>30</sup> Diangelo claims that white, middle-class communities often discount the need for intervention and thereby undermine purposeful dialogue to achieve greater understanding.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, assumptions without dialogue reinforce unconscious biases—which contribute to the concept that discrimination can be unintentional.<sup>32</sup>

Jana and Diaz Mejias recognize that income gaps, as a form of structural bias, still remain as increases in population are not proportional to wage increases; they assert the white population earns up to seven times more than the black population.<sup>33</sup> Jones attests that black unemployment rates are often double that of white unemployment rates.<sup>34</sup> Collins and Yeskel state that those living with a reduced income often make adjustments by working multiple jobs or accepting non-standard or contingent employment, meaning

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<sup>27</sup> Robin Diangelo, *White Fragility: Why Is It So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 65.

<sup>28</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Diangelo, *White Fragility*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Maya Beasley, *Opting Out: Losing the Potential of America's Young Black Elite* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 122.

<sup>31</sup> Diangelo, *White Fragility*, 43.

<sup>32</sup> Diangelo, 43.

<sup>33</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias*, 59.

<sup>34</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor* (New York: Norton, 1998), 372.

lower wages, fewer benefits, and less job security than standard or full-time work, and earnings below the poverty level.<sup>35</sup> Collins and Yeskel assert that structural bias is evident when diverse candidates do not participate in recruitment and hiring events—because contingent workers rely on multiple income streams, which limit their available time.<sup>36</sup>

Beasley's work identifies the economic reality in black communities and explains lifestyle differences that may affect the availability of potential candidates. Beasley contends that the black community has a higher probability of single-parent households and increased debt accompanying lower incomes.<sup>37</sup> Spiraling debt and family obligations, for example, diminish one's ability to accept additional training or responsibilities. Limited time then stifles the ability to prioritize school or otherwise increase the likelihood of participating in new, occupational, talent-driven opportunities.<sup>38</sup> With increased work schedules and disproportionate income, black optimism—that is, finding solutions to existing problems—has declined.<sup>39</sup>

Beasley addresses how bias affects educational experiences and scholastic institutions.<sup>40</sup> Scholars conclude that success in college and later careers requires exposure and preparation.<sup>41</sup> According to Morris, higher education has been portrayed as a means to achieve greater opportunity.<sup>42</sup> For this reason, he asserts that the black community identifies teachers as the gatekeepers to professional influence.<sup>43</sup> Institutional bias, according to Beasley, affects recommendations for professional pursuits and eventual career selection, intentionally or unintentionally limiting career options when students are

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<sup>35</sup> Chuck Collins and Felice Yeskel, *Economic Apartheid in America: A Primer on Economic Inequality & Insecurity* (New York: New Press, 2005), 107.

<sup>36</sup> Collins and Yeskel, 107.

<sup>37</sup> Beasley, *Opting Out*, 41.

<sup>38</sup> Beasley, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Beasley, 31.

<sup>40</sup> Beasley, 81.

<sup>41</sup> Beasley, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Monique Morris, *Black Stats: African Americans by the Numbers in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: New Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>43</sup> Morris, 5.

considering professional paths—thus reinforcing that bias.<sup>44</sup> Beasley recognizes that, in many situations, lack of exposure to career options prevents a broader consideration of potential professions. To make matters worse, first-generation college students are often overwhelmed when attempting to navigate the opportunities—not to mention the alien territory of the university setting.<sup>45</sup>

In many situations, recruitment does not begin early enough. The Urban League believes that discrimination in higher education appears in college preparation or vocational/technical training, too, by teaching children of color what they should have learned in the grades leading up to and through high school.<sup>46</sup> By the same token, Jones posits that a profession must understand that all observations of its workforce lead to impressions of institutional bias or inclusion. Beasley points out that biases are best understood by those who can empathize based on similar occurrences in their lifetime. When a new student experiences something for the first time, racially centric professional and social groups ensure the student feels included and participates.<sup>47</sup> For this reason, assimilation among student or social groups is encouraged—as those who feel included are likely to perform better.<sup>48</sup> Maslow’s hierarchy of needs illustrates that achieving self-esteem (ego), the highest level in his paradigm, is more likely when security and social needs are met.<sup>49</sup> Tatum emphasizes that perceptions of institutional bias affect self-worth, limit initiative, and depress enthusiasm in underrepresented occupational fields.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, Sherbin and Rashid advise that educators must act in the best interest of their students—to recognize academic achievement, cultural competence, and

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<sup>44</sup> Beasley, *Opting Out*, 81.

<sup>45</sup> Beasley, 81.

<sup>46</sup> Chanelle P. Hardy, ed., *One Nation Underemployed: Jobs Rebuild America* (Washington, DC: National Urban League, 2014), 144, <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/17979/17979.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Beasley, *Opting Out*, 81.

<sup>48</sup> Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together?*, 169.

<sup>49</sup> Neel Burton, “Our Hierarchy of Needs: True Freedom Is a Luxury of the Mind. Find out Why,” *Psychology Today* (blog), May 23, 2012, para. 2, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-seek/201205/our-hierarchy-needs>.

<sup>50</sup> Beasley, *Opting Out*, 122.

sociopolitical consciousness—avoiding institutional biases that exist in the selection of higher education and vocational/technical learning.<sup>51</sup> Bendersky correlates the inclusion and institutional biases experienced by new college students with those experienced by new public safety employees. For the benefit of new fire service employees, groups of underrepresented employees must also assimilate into the fraternal culture of a profession steeped in traditional values.<sup>52</sup>

Evidence of bias has raised concern in similar public safety recruitment initiatives and organizational evaluations. Bailey Martin examined the challenges of diversity in the Richmond Department of Fire and Emergency Services (RFES) in Virginia. His evaluation addresses the historical significance of institutional and structural issues that influence organizational culture and inclusive opportunities.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Anna Schermerhorn-Collins's work compares the professional bias against female firefighters to that of male nurses. She concludes that integrating policies that increase the rate of diversification minimizes (and possibly corrects) institutionalized biases.<sup>54</sup> Christine Elow addresses an organization's impact on community bias and the Cambridge, Massachusetts, Police Department's interaction with communities of color. She reasons that "radicalized policing erodes trust" and establishes a source of bias by oppressing and marginalizing black people.<sup>55</sup>

## **2. What Does Not Work?**

Cohen and Sterba assert that the perception of affirmative action, and the objections of its critics, confuses employers and slows progress.<sup>56</sup> In 1961, to address discrimination in federally contracted employment, President Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925,

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<sup>51</sup> Sherbin and Rashid, "Diversity Doesn't Stick without Inclusion."

<sup>52</sup> Bendersky, "Making U.S. Fire Departments More Diverse," para. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Bailey Martin, "Diversity in the Fire Service: Beyond Basic Demographics" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2019), 79.

<sup>54</sup> Anna Schermerhorn-Collins, "The Challenges to Gender Integration in the Career Fire Services: A Comparative Case Study of Men in Nursing" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2017), 74.

<sup>55</sup> Christine Elow, "Lived and Remembered Experiences: Policing to Improve Relations with Communities of Color" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2019), 29.

<sup>56</sup> Cohen and Sterba, *Affirmative Action and Racial Preference*, 200.

which first used the term, to address applicant equality regardless of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.<sup>57</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson continued this cause, eventually leading to the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Education Amendments and Title IX (Sex Discrimination) of 1972.<sup>58</sup> The 1980s and 1990s saw modified legislation to regulate state and local governments.<sup>59</sup> The Equal Employment Opportunity Act aimed to deter institutional exclusion and discrimination and promote what became known as affirmative action (AA).<sup>60</sup> Highlighting one opposing interpretation of affirmative action, that “race not merit” was its true intent, Cohen and Sterba maintain that critics of AA use this definition to distract from its efficacy. They contend that a more descriptive definition of AA is a practice that “favor [s] qualified women and minority candidates over qualified men or nonminority candidates.”<sup>61</sup> With this definition, Cohen and Sterba acknowledge that AA is outreach meant to limit discrimination, achieve diversity, and attain a racially and sexually just society.<sup>62</sup>

Mansky observes that parties regularly contest AA in court. While opposing parties may debate, interpret, and seek modifications to the implementation of AA, court decisions rarely address all of the variables of discrimination, making those decisions subject to the possibility of future changes—not to mention that relevant case law is frequently challenged and changed.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, making hiring decisions based solely on race is not an effective method for recruitment because such fields as the fire service require skills and training at the time of hire, and enforcing AA policies has proven difficult since the

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<sup>57</sup> Kathleen Martinez, “More History of Affirmative Action Policies From the 1960s,” American Association for Access, Equality and Diversity, accessed December 14, 2020, [https://www.aaed.org/aaed/History\\_of\\_Affirmative\\_Action.asp](https://www.aaed.org/aaed/History_of_Affirmative_Action.asp).

<sup>58</sup> Louis Menand, “The Changing Meaning of Affirmative Action,” *New Yorker*, January 20, 2020, 2–5.

<sup>59</sup> Beasley, *Opting Out*, 17.

<sup>60</sup> Cohen and Sterba, *Affirmative Action and Racial Preference*, 200.

<sup>61</sup> Cohen and Sterba, 199–200.

<sup>62</sup> Cohen and Sterba, 200.

<sup>63</sup> Jackie Mansky, “The Origins of the Term ‘Affirmative Action,’” *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 22, 2016, para. 1, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/learn-origins-term-affirmative-action-180959531/>.

inception of the concept.<sup>64</sup> Ultimately, in the form of preferential hiring for race or gender and not skill, AA is a distraction.

The American Association for Access, Equity, and Diversity outlines changes and court challenges over several presidencies (see Table 1). This overview provides a few examples of AA implementation and interpretation at the federal and state levels, highlighting the difficulty of relying on legislation for equity because of opposite rulings by the courts. This information reinforces the need for local fire chiefs and human resource (HR) directors to start evaluating equity through influence and personnel effort— independent of federal directives.<sup>65</sup>

Table 1. Affirmative Action Changes and Decisions<sup>66</sup>

| Year | President | Changes/Challenges                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1961 | Kennedy   | Introduced affirmative action                                                                                                                                                         |
| 1964 | Johnson   | Established Title VII Act and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission                                                                                                                 |
| 1967 | Johnson   | E.O. 11246: Included women in affirmative action                                                                                                                                      |
| 1972 | Nixon     | Education Amendments and Title IX                                                                                                                                                     |
| 1978 | Carter    | <i>University of California v. Bakke</i> : Upheld the use of race in the selection of candidates but ruled that it was unlawful for the medical school to reserve seats based on race |
| 1979 | Carter    | <i>United Steel Workers v. Weber</i> : Permitted race-conscious AA efforts to eliminate racial imbalance                                                                              |
| 1985 | Reagan    | Impeded administrative efforts to repeal E.O. 11246                                                                                                                                   |
| 1989 | Bush (41) | <i>City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.</i> : Identified Richmond’s minority contracting program as unconstitutional                                                                  |

<sup>64</sup> Cohen and Sterba, *Affirmative Action and Racial Preference*, 200.

<sup>65</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias*, 17.

<sup>66</sup> Adapted from Martinez, “More History of Affirmative Action.”

| Year | President | Changes/Challenges                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1995 | Clinton   | Senator Dole and Representative Canady introduced the Equal Opportunity Act to prohibit race- or gender-based AA.                                                                                                                                                               |
| 1995 | Clinton   | University of California voted to end affirmative action programs for graduate and undergraduate admissions.                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1996 | Clinton   | <i>Texas v. Hopwood</i> : U.S. Court of Appeals ruled against the University, stating that considering race during admissions was a violation of the Constitution's equal-protection guarantee.                                                                                 |
| 2000 | Clinton   | Florida's legislature passed "One Florida" plan banning AA.                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 2002 | Bush (43) | <i>Grutter v. Bollinger</i> : Sixth Circuit decided that race could be used in the selection of students to Michigan's law school.                                                                                                                                              |
| 2003 | Bush (43) | Supreme Court upheld Sixth Circuit decision in <i>Grutter v. Bollinger</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 2007 | Bush (43) | Proposal 2 enacted in Michigan banning preferential treatment of minorities in public college admissions, employment, education, and contracting.                                                                                                                               |
| 2008 | Bush (43) | Ballot measure banned AA in Nebraska. A similar measure was rejected in Colorado.                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 2009 | Obama     | <i>Ricci v. DeStefano</i> : U.S. Supreme Court overturned a City of New Haven, CT, decision to discriminate intentionally against white firefighters who placed higher in a promotional process. The city attempted to throw out results under the premise of racial disparity. |
| 2011 | Obama     | Arizona Proposition 107 banned preferential treatment of minorities in public employment, education, and contracting.                                                                                                                                                           |
| 2016 | Obama     | <i>Fisher v. University of Texas</i> : Upheld the school's use of AA to address student body diversity                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 2019 | Trump     | <i>Students for Fair Admission v. Harvard</i> : U.S. federal district court upheld Harvard's admission practices, stating that Harvard does not discriminate against Asian-Americans. This case is expected to go to the Supreme Court.                                         |

Rock, Grant, and Grey contend that diversity must be organizationally driven; when organizations understand the social obligations of diversity, the value of organizational creativity, and the importance of disagreement and debate, they are most likely to achieve success.<sup>67</sup> The Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters suggests that departments establish talent-driven recruitment through targeted community outreach rather than recruiting candidates based on the demographic they represent and the need for preference based on minority status. This outreach requires an active process but has the potential to yield intrinsically motivated candidates.<sup>68</sup> According to Bendersky, recruitment efforts must establish realistic explanations—potential candidates must appreciate what they are getting themselves into when they agree to actively participate.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, Tamme asserts existing firefighters must actively seek out model candidates because diverse organizations are more successful.<sup>70</sup> Conversely, Jana and Diaz Mejias point to the drawbacks of a fire department with an unrepresentative workforce as it is less efficient and effective than it should be, in keeping with other experts in this literature review.<sup>71</sup> The takeaway is that fire departments can find talent in diverse communities if recruiters know where to look and can explain what they are looking for.<sup>72</sup>

Rock, Grant, and Grey write that the interaction of homogenous teams may feel easier, but difficult discussions that address organizational, institutional, and governmental conflict improve performance. In other words, Rock and colleagues have determined that identifying intentional and unintentional discrimination is crucial in understanding obstacles to diversity in recruitment.<sup>73</sup> Diangelo contends that discrimination can be observed in unintentional statements. For example, when someone outside a minority group makes a statement about being “colorblind” to deny personal prejudice or says that

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<sup>67</sup> David Rock, Heidi Grant, and Jacqui Grey, “Diverse Teams Feel Less Comfortable—and That’s Why They Perform Better,” *Harvard Business Review*, September 22, 2016, para. 16.

<sup>68</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, *Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department*, 20.

<sup>69</sup> Bendersky, “Making U.S. Fire Departments More Diverse,” para. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Tamme, “I Stands for Inclusion,” para. 6.

<sup>71</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias*, 82.

<sup>72</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, *Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department*, 72.

<sup>73</sup> Rock, Grant, and Grey, “Diverse Teams Feel Less Comfortable,” para. 3.

“focusing on race is what divides us,” that person denies the necessary retrospection and reflection to understand the cause and effect of racism.<sup>74</sup> As Tatum describes it, “We all speak the language of the streets we live on.”<sup>75</sup> If leadership shies away from uncomfortable dialogues, it may foster an organizational culture that falsely assumes racism is not its problem. Furthermore, assumptions about educational interests and professional motivation limit one’s understanding and empathy.<sup>76</sup> Given this information, the fire service falters when seeking non-traditional candidates—thus limiting the organizational strength that comes with a diverse, reflective recruitment process.<sup>77</sup> Claiming that an organization welcomes diversity or has equal employment opportunities does not automatically create such access.<sup>78</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias further contend that people who cannot picture themselves in leadership positions may consider the job a dead-end career.<sup>79</sup>

In researching recruitment practices, Martin’s overview of RFES diversity highlights considerations and benefits of non-discriminatory practices in one metropolitan fire department. Martin’s research falls short of providing guidance to smaller, suburban fire departments that need to attract candidates with an existing skill set. Many smaller departments lack the ability to provide minimum skills training and certification in a timely manner. A lack of qualifications eliminates untrained candidates from the hiring process and limits immediate career opportunities. Although Martin recommends future research to address the effects of employee experience, the work fails to provide guidance to establish a program that brings untrained candidates into the fire station, attract such candidates to guide initiatives, or maintain candidates’ interest as they seek vocational and technical training.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together?*, 86.

<sup>75</sup> Tatum, 152.

<sup>76</sup> Tatum, 84.

<sup>77</sup> Rock, Grant, and Grey, “Diverse Teams Feel Less Comfortable,” para. 10.

<sup>78</sup> Jones, *American Work*, 392.

<sup>79</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias*, 83.

<sup>80</sup> Martin, “Diversity in the Fire Service,” 81.

Elow's work with the Cambridge Police Department provides an overview of discriminatory practices and unconscious bias that take place in society and the hesitancy of communities of color to consider employment in public safety.<sup>81</sup> Elow's research does not translate specifically to predominantly white, male fire departments, nor what those departments can do to re-evaluate outreach and employment qualification standards. Nor does it address what fire departments can do to positively influence life choices that contribute to consideration for future public safety employment options.

### **3. What Does Work?**

The Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters recognizes that recruitment outcomes are most successful when the recruiting agency understands how it identifies with the community it serves.<sup>82</sup> To address hiring gaps, Bernabei notes that institutional change requires a strategic approach.<sup>83</sup> Intentional recruitment accepts that actively pursuing candidates of multiple races and cultures minimizes the potential of discrimination—and profiling those candidates with the intent of recognizing prospective talent, excitement, and motivation improves the outcomes of focused community outreach.<sup>84</sup> The Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) suggest that fire departments need to remove economic, social, and non-validated physical-ability barriers. They go on to suggest the creation of pathways to prepare underrepresented candidates by providing opportunities for community engagement with firefighters.<sup>85</sup> Departments may achieve their goals if they develop a realistic timeframe.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Elow, "Lived and Remembered Experiences," 71.

<sup>82</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, *Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department*, 69.

<sup>83</sup> Erika Bernabei, *Racial Equity: Getting to Results* (New York: Government Alliance on Race Equity, 2017), 4, [https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/GARE\\_GettingtoEquity\\_July2017\\_PUBLISH.pdf](https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/GARE_GettingtoEquity_July2017_PUBLISH.pdf).

<sup>84</sup> Jana and Baran, *Subtle Acts of Exclusion*, 153–59.

<sup>85</sup> Center for Public Safety Excellence, *21st Century Fire and Emergency Services* (Chantilly, VA: Center for Public Safety Excellence, 2020), 27.

<sup>86</sup> Center for Public Safety Excellence, 27.

The Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race and Equity states that communicating the importance of a change helps to accelerate action and implement realistic recruitment concepts: “When we prioritize change and act with urgency, change is embraced and can occur quickly.”<sup>87</sup> However, Bendersky states that organizations must exercise caution in pushing too quickly, asserting that public safety employment requires professional skills and time to evaluate them. Bendersky also declares that sidestepping or dismissing physical, intellectual, social, and emotional training standards to accommodate diversity can set a candidate up for failure.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, recruitment must address mindsets, values, and beliefs to promote inclusion.<sup>89</sup> The Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters advocates the use of individual training plans to convey the importance of recruiting a diverse, qualified workforce and retaining competent members through career progression and promotion.<sup>90</sup> Professional standards need not be compromised in the pursuit of a more representative workforce, but fire departments should consider training options for potential candidates.<sup>91</sup>

In keeping with the requirements of public safety and the skills of a professional workforce, the Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters embraces diversity by actively recruiting underrepresented populations and perspectives—in other words, inviting them to the party.<sup>92</sup> Once interested candidates have been identified, they can experience active participation and inclusion through training and mentoring—asking them to dance.<sup>93</sup>

Beasley recognizes that although multicultural experiences are necessary in successful minority–majority experiences, black students commonly self-segregate into groups that offer support and mentorship. Typically, people who have been through similar experiences and who can help new students navigate through an unfamiliar environment

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<sup>87</sup> Bernabei, *Racial Equity*, 4–5.

<sup>88</sup> Bendersky, “Making U.S. Fire Departments More Diverse,” para. 6.

<sup>89</sup> Center for Public Safety Excellence, *21st Century Fire and Emergency Services*, 11.

<sup>90</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, *Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department*, 56.

<sup>91</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, 51.

<sup>92</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, 6.

<sup>93</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, 59.

make up these self-selected groups.<sup>94</sup> Tatum observes that voluntary, sometimes unconscious, segregation helps individuals develop positive coping strategies needed to manage the fallout of unfriendly groups and discrimination—through group think and assimilation.<sup>95</sup> Without support, Tatum states, stressors associated with higher education bring heightened perceptions of racism and the awareness of being “the only one” who has issues, and the belief that others do not typically experience or understand one’s perspective.<sup>96</sup> Professional alliances can answer questions and nurture interest—giving the impression of an inclusive, not exclusive, organization by embracing all identities.<sup>97</sup> Through intentional acts of inclusion, suggest Jana and Baran, an organization instills ownership through input and stimulates occupational and organizational interest by supporting those who influence career paths; in other words, inclusion combats discrimination.<sup>98</sup> Tatum suggests that acknowledging racial identity and providing role models that represent stigmatized groups are strategies for positively influencing success.<sup>99</sup>

According to Jana and Diaz Mejias, “We cannot affect a substantial, sustainable change . . . without like-minded people working toward a shared goal.”<sup>100</sup> Taking this cooperative effort a step further, they advise that potential candidates will observe the organizational hierarchy and make assumptions about organizational acceptance of diversity and inclusion as well as the membership’s acknowledgment of institutional bias. When fire department leadership resembles the population it serves, advancement equates to involvement. To the National Urban League, reliance on the community, parents, and mentors becomes a critical component in encouraging exposure and acquiring professional skills and personal accountability. Therefore, organizations that envision success in

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<sup>94</sup> Beasley, *Opting Out*, 81.

<sup>95</sup> Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together?*, 144.

<sup>96</sup> Tatum, 160.

<sup>97</sup> Tatum, 108.

<sup>98</sup> Jana and Baran, *Subtle Acts of Exclusion*, 155.

<sup>99</sup> Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together?*, 160.

<sup>100</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias*, 25.

diversity and recruitment need to be active in the community, understand the candidates' support network, and be prepared to have conversations with those who express interest at any age.<sup>101</sup>

In order to address organizational and community building, Marks, Callahan, and Grill suggest using a social resilience model involving stabilization skills through stress reduction. They propose using targeted recruitment initiatives that explain organizational expectations and communicate professional/educational support. Recruiters should develop trust through continued, empathetic community engagement that attracts a reflective, motivated candidate pool that has the courage to persevere in a new environment with a strong sense of purpose and belonging—promoting candidate inclusivity and recruiter understanding.<sup>102</sup> In connection with representative hiring for women, Byron addresses the biases associated with employing, training, and promoting women.<sup>103</sup> Looking beyond bias, his research finds that representative hiring provides breadth and depth to staffing qualifications.<sup>104</sup>

Previous research for the Center for Homeland Defense and Security has identified successes associated with recruitment and outreach. Martin has found that diversity in the RFES increased collaboration and creativity and improved public perception.<sup>105</sup> He recommends conducting regular organizational evaluations and considering promotional rates as equal measures of organizational diversity.<sup>106</sup> To ensure regularity of effort, Byron suggests following a planning cycle. Fire departments need to “analyze, plan, implement, and evaluate their recruiting and staffing.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Hardy, *One Nation Underemployed*, 144.

<sup>102</sup> Michael Marks, Phil Callahan, and Mike Grill, *A Community of One: Building Social Resilience* (Tulsa, OK: Penn Well Corporation, 2019), 123–26.

<sup>103</sup> Juan Byron, “Career Paramedic-Firefighter Staffing Problems: Is Recruiting Women Part of the Solution?” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), 19.

<sup>104</sup> Byron, 107.

<sup>105</sup> Martin, “Diversity in the Fire Service,” 79.

<sup>106</sup> Martin, 80.

<sup>107</sup> Byron, “Career Paramedic-Firefighter Staffing Problems,” 113.

To appreciate community challenges, Elow offers that “critical empathy” must be part of the organizational culture for all members to appreciate the history and trauma experienced in communities of color.<sup>108</sup> Elow acknowledges that societal prejudice contributes to addiction, poverty, and violence—understanding those influencing factors promotes a compassionate approach when interacting with the community.<sup>109</sup> Once trust is established, Schermerhorn-Collins suggests that a gentle push in the right direction will help with firefighter recruitment. She argues for the need to find teenagers with firefighter aspirations and nurture that interest before it fades into more “realistic” career pursuits.<sup>110</sup>

### C. RESEARCH DESIGN

Based on Bernabei’s observations, building an inclusive workforce requires the fire service to express a sense of urgency.<sup>111</sup> Bendersky affirms that a realistic timeline must consider existing organizational capabilities and maintain occupational competencies.<sup>112</sup> Firefighting skills and standards need not be compromised to recruit a diverse workforce.<sup>113</sup> Because organizational values, mission, and vision connect the dots between tasks and participation, they must be communicated to and understood by potential candidates.<sup>114</sup> Through FFD’s core values of “passion and professionalism” and the organization’s commitment “to learn” (see Appendix B), outcomes of this research should address the concerns of current members who want candidates to exhibit a determined approach to training and organizational pride. FFD has the capacity to evaluate tasks, skills, and processes. Follow-up research is needed to develop a method to evaluate and quantify pride, compassion, and intrinsic motivation.

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<sup>108</sup> Elow, “Lived and Remembered Experiences,” 55.

<sup>109</sup> Elow, 71.

<sup>110</sup> Schermerhorn-Collins, “Gender Integration in the Career Fire Services,” 2.

<sup>111</sup> Bernabei, *Racial Equity*, 4–5.

<sup>112</sup> Bendersky, “Making U.S. Fire Departments More Diverse,” para. 6.

<sup>113</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, *Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department*, 56.

<sup>114</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, 14.

The following steps were taken to answer the research question. I first met with the human resources director and the Police and Fire Commission in Fitchburg. Collectively, the decision was made to use a focus group. The next step was to write an engagement plan and draft a timeline (see Appendix C). I then solicited the help of civic leaders, cultural groups, and professional firefighter organizations with members of diverse populations that are underrepresented in FFD's current workforce. The next step was to convene two successive focus group meetings, both concentrated on productive dialogue with at least 10, but no more than 20, community representatives. The group grappled with the City of Fitchburg's recruitment problem—of recruiting a workforce that reflected the community. These meetings prompted the focus group participants to think about problems and solutions.

Next, I invited focus group participants based on their roles in the community. An engagement letter and email were sent on behalf of FFD (see Appendices D and E) to director-level representatives of the NAACP, the Urban League, Centro Hispano, faith-based organizations, the Boys and Girls Club, mass media outlets, and other predominant governmental and social leaders who resonate with selected, underrepresented populations in Fitchburg. Chief-level officers of the fire service who affiliate with minority populations were also invited to participate. The focus group received reminder emails one week before and the day before each scheduled focus group meeting (see Appendix F). I then sent the meeting agenda to all invited participants (see Appendix G) and moderated the focus group, hosted at the Fitchburg Fire Station. Some participants attended by video conference due to public assembly restrictions imposed by Public Health of Madison and Dane County or participant preference.

Specifically, this research model used two focus groups, that is, two meetings with the same people. During the first meeting of the focus group, I shared the information learned through the literature review, chief-level officer observations, and previous recruitment outcomes. The group discussed historical events that influenced (positively or negatively) the interest of certain populations in the fire service. Furthermore, the focus group shared realistic goals for recruitment and outreach. Three members of the fire department took notes, so I could listen actively to focus group members. A follow-up

email and a draft of the meeting minutes were sent to participants once all notes were consolidated (see Appendices H and I). One week separated the first meeting from the second, and each participant received a similar email reminder and an agenda beforehand (see Appendices J and K). The second meeting served as a proof of concept regarding the recommended recruitment events. The focus group provided direction regarding achievable recruitment goals that would best serve the City of Fitchburg and FFD, as well as address the diversity of the former's candidate pool. An appreciation email and a draft of the minutes from the second meeting were sent to invited participants (see Appendices L and M). Corrections and additions to the meeting minutes were solicited before they were finalized and used for reference in this thesis.

I sought an Institutional Review Board (IRB) determination for the focus groups, and on May 7, 2020, I received a finding that this research does not involve human subject research and does not require IRB and NPS president approval (determination 2020.0135-DD-N). Research for this thesis was limited by time; however, one- and two-year re-evaluations (after publication of this thesis) should identify the value of purposeful outreach. Furthermore, five-, ten-, and twenty-year trends should help establish how many participants graduated from technical programs, how many have been hired by fire departments, and how many have pursued promotion.

#### **D. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

This thesis continues with Chapter II, which provides information about focus group participation. Civic leaders assembled in person and online to troubleshoot problems and obstacles associated with recruitment. Through a historical perspective, the group shared information about operational and institutional barriers that may negatively influence participation from diverse candidates during recruitment activities. The group also participated in a brainstorming session that communicated considerations for future recruitment events and community education, particularly involving fire department participation.

Chapter III starts the problem-solving process by addressing FFD's plan to institute focus group input and overcome recruitment obstacles. It identifies prospective solutions

to identified problems and possible obstacles. Short-, medium-, and long-term outreach programs are identified for planned and spontaneous outreach, and internal and external advocates and partners are considered for program support and assistance. This chapter concludes with a program implementation timeline, which ought to keep the department on task and accountable for outreach. The timeline expresses realistic expectations—especially if there is interest from community groups.

Chapter IV identifies influences outside of the fire department’s control that require community partnerships and engagement. It outlines possible methods of engagement to keep candidates connected and limit the obstacles associated with recruitment. Likewise, the chapter outlines the discussions necessary with multiple networks to answer questions and instill trust. Finally, it details how to invite educators and outside, professional, assimilated groups to assist in career building and educational advancement.

Chapter V identifies methods of monitoring success. It presents how to use data for community engagement activities over the next year as well as five, ten, and twenty years from now. Such data would provide the needed information about recruitment contacts and the results of those contacts. In looking for data patterns, FFD will know whether recruitment efforts are working—because membership more closely reflects the community served—or more effort is needed in redesigning recruitment and outreach. Finally, the chapter establishes how data would measure FFD’s success in overcoming recruitment obstacles with diverse populations.

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## **II. FOCUS GROUP INPUT FROM REGIONAL CIVIC LEADERS**

When I became chief, I made diversity a top priority for FFD. However, to date, Fitchburg Fire Department continues to experience limited success in attracting diverse populations to fill vacancies. Addressing organizational resilience and the need for diversity, the department's community engagement has assisted with perspective by promoting empathy, inclusion, and understanding.<sup>115</sup> I contacted civic leaders from a variety of community organizations representing diverse communities to participate in a focus group for this thesis, asking them to share their experiences and known historical obstacles that may have contributed to the limited pool of diverse candidates from fire department recruitment and hiring events. The hope was that understanding the experiences and concerns of the focus group would help inform changes to the design and delivery of FFD's recruitment program.

Historical considerations of institutional and structural bias led the discussion. Participants shared recommendations and feedback about existing hiring processes. Furthermore, participants outlined how to identify candidates for reflective recruits, engage civic groups, and empower organizational change agents to overcome the obstacles associated with reflective recruitment. This chapter describes the results of focus group dialogue and outlines recommendations for recruitment efforts to engage a diverse candidate pool.

### **A. ORGANIZING THE FOCUS GROUP**

Initially, the human resources director and the Police and Fire Commission advised me on the scope and purpose of my recruitment proposal. The mayor-appointed Police and Fire Commission provides oversight of all public safety hiring processes, and this group recommended the following key recruitment goals: 1) identify structural and organization issues hampering diversity in FFD and 2) establish greater trust with targeted recruits. To accomplish these goals, the advisory group proposed a focus group research model and

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<sup>115</sup> Marks, Callahan, and Grill, *A Community of One*, 123–26.

recommended two sessions with no more than 20 participants each to provide adequate community input. Participants attending the first session were encouraged to attend the second session, so they could discuss and clarify identified action items before they reconvened to develop recruitment goals and recruiting events.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 and public health restrictions imposed on public assembly, no more than 10 participants could attend in person at a time. As a result, I modified the focus group's format to accommodate a virtual attendance option. In accordance with the IRB's approval, the focus group meetings were not recorded so that participants could speak candidly. Fire department staff memorialized meeting minutes, and participants received a draft copy of the minutes so that corrections could be made before I finalized the written record.

During the first meeting on August 4, 2020, 18 people participated, of which 14 participated in the second meeting along with an additional participant—for a total of 15 participants on August 12, 2020. The focus group reflected the community that FFD serves. A cross-section of private, public, faith-based, and non-profit organizational directors, administrators, board members, and commission-level personnel participated.

The information that follows reflects the various observations and opinions of focus group members. Unless otherwise noted, the information recorded in this research reflects the consensus of the focus group. Although the participants worked well together, they did not always agree. Opposing viewpoints voiced during the focus group meeting are noted.

## **B. SCOPE AND PERSPECTIVE**

I supplied the department's activity and staffing report to the group (see Appendix A). Although FFD hires people of color and ethnic culture, their numbers on the FFD workforce do not proportionally resemble the population that the department serves. The focus group acknowledged previous endeavors but advised that recruiting should be a conscious effort to make *all* people feel welcome and that the department must convey professionalism and respect. The focus group suggested that the culture of the fire service might make sense to existing members, but to some on the outside with no relationship to or knowledge of membership, the fire service might seem like an exclusive group.

The focus group agreed that an inclusive environment inspires diversity. To this end, the participants agreed that conversations with prospective candidates should be deliberate—firefighters should inquire about others’ cultures and express curiosity, not judgement.<sup>116</sup> Focus group members challenged the fire department—starting with the fire chief—to also begin an active dialogue with community members who resemble the underrepresented populations in the fire department’s membership. They stated that such dialogue would express interest and acceptance.

### **1. What about Affirmative Action?**

One of the first items discussed in great detail was the intended title of this thesis. The original working title was “Affirming Diversity Independent of Affirmative Action: Recruiting Firefighters Who Reflect the Community Served.” The intended research of this thesis aimed to limit the focus on affirmative action yet identify ways to attract, train, and empower diverse candidates, making talent the focus of their potential—without AA as either a means or the goal. The old title intentionally communicated the fire department’s *attempt to recruit* diverse candidates. The focus group participants instead understood that the fire department had an *obligation to hire* talented firefighters. They argued that the problem with oversimplifying AA is that it neglects the reasons the concept remains a valid concern. The group pointed out that AA works in the form of targeted engagement. For example, finding talent in diverse neighborhoods, providing training and education, and building skill sets can improve qualifications and drive candidate marketability and employability.

Specifically, focus group members disagreed with thinking of AA as finding qualified members of underrepresented groups and making them aware of an ongoing hiring process. In such a case, the only preferential treatment the potential candidate receives is in the targeted delivery of the job announcement. Without organizational knowledge, and without a direct invitation, diverse candidates may not be aware of training and employment opportunities and, therefore, miss application deadlines.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, *Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department*, 66.

<sup>117</sup> Menand, “The Changing Meaning of Affirmative Action.”

The group suggested that AA might have value in Fitchburg's recruitment effort. If recruitment is about finding talent, AA aims to ensure that talent in underrepresented populations knows about the opportunity and has a "seat at the table." The participants advised that AA is not all about recruiting underrepresented employees without skill and identified a variety of AA approaches that center on targeted outreach to find talent. Members who were concerned about AA recommended that I do more research before moving forward with the proposed title.

Other questions related to the title included "What does 'talented' mean? And how do interested candidates get to become 'talented'?" The focus group concurred, as noted in Chapter I, that a candidate's skill set identifies whether he *can* do the job, but his mindset determines whether he *will* do the job. And his motivation addresses the question of *why* he will do the job.<sup>118</sup> Focus group members who read my thesis proposal pointed out the literature review acknowledged that recruiters find the most successful candidates have the right mindset, attitude, and behaviors, but skills can be taught.<sup>119</sup> They agreed that AA is one way of valuing all of the candidate's attributes and affirming diversity through recruitment.

With focus group input and concerns about addressing recruitment "independent of affirmative action," I asked the focus group to consider an alternative title. With some brainstorming, members contributed to changes that determined the current title: "The Case for Affirming Diversity: Reflective Recruitment That Represents the Community Served." The revised title asserts that regardless of required skills, by affirming diversity, everyone has the same opportunity to be at the table, and *all* qualifications are considered when selecting the most appropriate candidate. AA is substantively central to actively looking for diverse candidates and evaluating all qualifications essential to finding the right person for the job.

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<sup>118</sup> Steve Lowisz, *Recruiting Sucks* (Austin, TX: Lioncrest Publishers, 2019), 19.

<sup>119</sup> Lowisz, 18–21.

## **2. Human Resources: Processes for Recruiting a Diverse Workforce**

The focus group asked the City of Fitchburg's HR director to clarify some of the administrative and clerical aspects of the employment cycle. She was available during focus group meetings to answer questions about the city's hiring process and equal opportunity efforts. She shared some of the projects she had been working on to advertise and promote municipal employment within diverse communities. HR's employment practices and priorities involved eliminating application and candidate bias.

Members of the focus group questioned the degree of candidate anonymity: Do the initial stages of the application and review process remove the possibility of candidate bias—especially for underrepresented populations? The HR director described one of the changes that have been put in place since her appointment: the removal of personal data from the application during the initial review. Candidates selected for interviews meet a set of pre-determined benchmarks and required qualifications. In the first review, the reviewer does not know the applicant's name, gender identity, race, age, or address. All applications are scored using a rubric that identifies organizational and operational priorities. Based on the scoring of all applicants, the top applicants move on to the interview process. Once the candidate makes it to the interview, the candidate's personal data is revealed.

The HR director also explained that her department had implemented the initiative known as "Ban the Box," which removed questions about arrests and convictions from the hiring application. The initiative's aim is to ensure that candidates do not eliminate themselves from the hiring process at this early stage. Some arrests and convictions are not significant enough to exclude a candidate from moving to the qualification assessment, interview, and background investigation stages. Instead, the background investigation identifies arrest and conviction records that disqualify candidates from employment. At this later point in the hiring process, candidates who are eliminated typically lack essential job qualifications—as identified in the job description—or have a disqualifying arrest and conviction record. The benefit of elimination at a late stage in the process is the ability to provide candidates with the reasons for their disqualification.

The HR director also shared that the City of Fitchburg no longer administers a written test for firefighter applicants. Candidates seeking full-time employment (known as career firefighters) must demonstrate a minimum of skills to proceed in the process. State-certified firefighters have already passed a written and physical evaluation. The group inquired about the weight each firefighting certificate has in the process, expressing concern about a system in which “the candidate with the most certificates wins.” They also questioned how FFD credits other life experiences during the hiring process, for example being bilingual. Other than the minimum training requirements mandated by the state, I acknowledged that the weight of non-traditional skills and abilities required further research. I noted that FFD and HR must address new assessment variables with the next career firefighter posting by evaluating best practices of successful recruitment programs.

The focus group asked how well the HR director’s improvements have worked for the City of Fitchburg since implementation in 2017, using the most recent firefighter hiring process as an example. In 2019, FFD advertised for two career firefighter vacancies. Table 2 reflects that out of 98 total applicants, only 9 were people of color, of which only 2 proceeded to the interview stage. The fact that FFD hired one person of color is a promising step that suggests the fire department is committed to staffing a reflective workforce. Nevertheless, the focus group also voiced concerns about the low number of female applicants. Only six women applied, and none proceeded to the interview stage. Thus, HR is working with the fire department to understand recruitment and outreach opportunities for women.

Table 2. 2019 Firefighter Candidate Data

|                                               |          |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>Total career firefighter vacancies</b>     | <b>2</b> |
| Total applicants                              | 98       |
| Total female applicants                       | 6        |
| Total people of color applicants              | 9        |
| Total applicants invited to interview         | 24       |
| Total female applicants invited to interview  | 0        |
| Total people of color invited to interview    | 2        |
| Total applicants invited to chief's interview | 10       |
| Total women hired                             | 0        |
| Total people of color hired                   | 1        |

Furthermore, HR is reviewing the short-answer portion of the application for any unintentional bias and subtle acts of racial exclusion, for example, in instructions that may prevent applicants from answering questions from their perspective. Recognizing HR's ongoing effort to improve the city's hiring process, the focus group concluded that HR follows best practices and that advancements are continually refined to deliver a fair process.

The Police and Fire Commission (PFC) must approve the candidate that the fire chief recommends before a conditional offer can be extended to the applicant. As such, the focus group also inquired about the diversity of the PFC. HR shared Fitchburg's five-member PFC make-up: three white males, one Hispanic female, and one black male. The latter two PFC members participated in the focus group, which recognized the diversity of the commission and asked no additional questions about the PFC.

Fitchburg's HR department can provide applicant trend analysis for all job postings in all city municipal departments. Analyzing the demographics of candidate participation can offer insight about process improvements or identify needed corrections. When asked about community outreach, FFD could not provide the same insight for fire

department-sponsored public relations, education, and recruitment events. The focus group recommended keeping better track of individual attendees so that recruitment initiatives could better target underrepresented populations. The focus group recognized CPSE and ICMA's recommendations, as highlighted in the literature review, for robust use of data to provide insight into operational priorities and trends.<sup>120</sup>

### **C. REFLECTIVE RECRUITMENT**

The focus group emphasized that FFD does more than fight fires. Group participants asked the following questions: What other specialties does the community need that people who are not certified firefighters could provide? Can those who are not trained to fight fires integrate within the fire department and instill trust throughout the community? The focus group offered creative ways to introduce diversity into the fire department. Some examples include

- Hiring diverse educators, providing them with fire department uniforms, and sending them to interact with school children. Assimilation could provide immediate exposure until diverse firefighters are hired.
- Conducting outreach through sports programs using adult athletes from diverse backgrounds.
- Considering diversity in all positions within the fire service: fire inspection/code enforcement, fire prevention and investigation, science-based learning, technology, and the future of firefighting.

One participant of the focus group discussed her responsibility for promoting vocational/technical education to high school students—for the purpose of advancing trade labor. She affirmed that intentionality in recruitment is vital, and reflective recruitment is manifest in a diverse workforce. Community members and potential candidates recognize that an inclusive organization conveys a message of acceptance and makes it easier for potential candidates to approach the organization with questions about how they can get

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<sup>120</sup> Center for Public Safety Excellence, *21st Century Fire and Emergency Services*, 13.

started. That first step allows the fire department to have an active conversation about available resources and assistance.

### **1. Prioritization of Effort—the Greatest Benefit for the Most People**

Members of the focus group who associate with social workers and community assistance providers expressed that the overall need for diversity should be better understood. They initially opined that FFD must first recognize what level of underrepresentation exists within the organization and determine some of the factors that contribute to it. They asked the following questions: Can the community served by the fire department influence the make-up of its membership? Does department leadership assume that its members understand what diversity looks like? Does the department have the ability to accommodate the needs of an underrepresented candidate?

The focus group suggested that recruitment depends on the following factors:

- Age groups—How is recruitment targeted? Are recruitment efforts tailored to the specific needs and influences of kids without transportation, families with latchkey kids, school/grade appropriate interaction, and high school graduate programs? Does the fire department have a method for encouraging non-high school graduates to earn their diplomas?
- Stage-of-life responsibilities—Does the fire department know how to address families that are working multiple jobs? What if a potential candidate wants to change careers and needs information about workforce development assistance? Is childcare an option during training?
- Outside organization cooperation—Have governmental and private organizations been consulted about available programs to assist in career development? Does the fire department know the organizations and resources available in the Fitchburg area?
- Available programs, training opportunities, and mentors—What fire service-specific training can the FFD provide? How quickly can programs be implemented? What is a realistic timeline?

- Vacancies and available positions—Does the FFD have enough full-time employment positions available if candidates express interest?
- Municipal support in respect to funding programs and personnel—What monies can the City of Fitchburg realistically provide to promote jobs that earn a living wage?

As recruitment activities formalize, the focus group’s inquiries and insight must be researched in greater detail to adequately address the concerns it raised.

## **2. Organizational Change Agents—Who Are They? Where Are They?**

Focus group participants recommended that FFD involve younger members in recruitment and outreach. Involving firefighters who belong to underrepresented populations must be considered—they should be encouraged to share personal experiences and provide professional direction as mentors. For this reason, mentors should be prepared to learn from their mentees. Additionally, many of the life experiences that new candidates and diverse firefighters bring to the station can translate into better community service through an empathetic approach to community awareness. Finally, the stories of Fitchburg’s current workforce should be shared with those who have a sliver of interest. What motivates firefighters? Why do they do what they do? How did they get started? If the candidate can relate to current members—based on shared experiences and an empathetic approach—such exposure would be ideal.

## **D. FOCUS GROUP—SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?**

In reflection on the contributions of the focus group, I hear questions that have reverberated through the history and culture of my organization: “So what? Now what?” If I share with FFD leadership that the organization lacks diversity, I anticipate the questions: “So what does that mean, and how does that affect us?” In order for this research to influence organizational behavior positively for the long term, members of the organization need to understand diversity and its benefits.

While FFD’s recruitment activities might experience limited participation from underrepresented populations, CPSE and ICMA note that a lack of participation is not the

best indicator of interest level. They maintain that removing economic, social, and non-validated physical-ability barriers creates pathways for candidates who are concerned about capability, inclusion, and rejection.<sup>121</sup> Affirmative action does not have to enable employment without talent, but it must provide a pathway for training options and professional pursuits for interested candidates who do not possess the required training.<sup>122</sup>

The focus group posed other questions: So what is FFD doing about it, and what does the future of FFD membership look like? What are the target age groups? What assistance can Fitchburg provide for those currently working other jobs? Which community organizations can assist? What training exists, and who can assist? Is municipal support and funding available? Focus group members agreed that a basic historical understanding of recruitment obstacles and the significant impact these obstacles have had on potential candidates is a necessary first step in developing outreach that positively influences community participation.

Finding solutions to recruitment obstacles through candid discussions proved beneficial to organizational introspection and the assessment of FFD's outreach philosophies. Priority of effort, mentoring and motivation, and organizational change agents are considerations that reflect the needs of the community served—in other words, reflective recruitment. Reflective recruitment builds on the framework already established through HR. Furthermore, the focus group offered insight into the benefits of AA. In sum, considering the counterpoint is a perfect example of how listening works and how the conversations must continue.

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<sup>121</sup> Center for Public Safety Excellence, 27.

<sup>122</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, *Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department*, 51.

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### **III. FFD’S PLAN TO APPLY FOCUS GROUP INPUT TO RECRUITING**

Inspired by focus group participation, FFD developed a plan to address obstacles and implement potential solutions with its outreach and recruitment. Focus group members emphasized that it would be unrealistic to expect diverse candidates to walk into the fire station to request information about career opportunities. The focus group recommended community engagement options to pique the interest of prospective candidates and encourage them to come back for more information. The group advised that firefighters should not assume that all people feel welcome in the fire station and suggested that each visit to the firehouse increase a potential candidate’s interest in the fire service, establish organizational trust, and improve the possibility of participation and membership. Focus group members endorsed the concepts of outreach and recruitment goals shared in this chapter.

The focus group reinforced the need for a collective effort to outreach and recruitment and understood that members of the fire department must prioritize the recruitment process and communicate the need for diversity.<sup>123</sup> Because change creates discomfort and resistance, it would be imperative to identify firefighters who know what a diverse workforce accomplishes—and who are energetic about motivating people to action.<sup>124</sup> The group acknowledged the importance of this effort, in asking for help and looking for people with specific skill sets, interpersonal strengths, and organizational pride.

This chapter provides a description of short-, medium-, and long-term outreach and recruitment programs that can attract a diverse candidate pool. Each section of this chapter considers focus group recommendations, as well as what FFD is implementing and why. It outlines implementation procedures to weigh financial and logistical expectations realistically. This chapter ultimately evaluates the pros and cons of implementing a new diversity recruiting initiative.

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<sup>123</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, *Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department*, 73.

<sup>124</sup> Council for Future Volunteer Firefighters, 73.

## **A. SHORT-TERM OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT**

Members of the focus group suggested that FFD need not wait to institute the perfect recruitment program. Instead, they suggested that FFD engage with the community immediately. Focus group members much preferred a genuine, personal, less-than-perfect delivery over a polished program that would take more preparation and a longer timeframe to deliver. Instituting a program sooner would allow community engagement; adjustments could always be made based on the community's input and reaction. Community input would enable ownership and a better program in the long term.

### **1. What Can Be Done in the Station?**

It is not uncommon for adults to bring children to the fire house for a tour. Sometimes these tours are pre-arranged, and sometimes they are spontaneous. Based on information received from focus group members and observations of those who attend fire station tours, the adults are equally (if not more) interested in the visit. Thus, a new standard operating guideline (SOG) was written to address all visits and tours (see Appendix N). When possible, firehouse visits and tours will be accompanied by at least two firefighters: one who pays attention to the kids and their questions and one who answers questions from the accompanying adults. If these adults become prospective candidates because they show signs of interest in membership, one of the firefighters providing the tour will follow up with a 30-second "elevator speech" and a business card in case the candidate has further questions.

Firefighter selection for this assignment depends on duty status and people skills. It is in FFD's best interest to find and select firefighters who have proven talent in public education and fire prevention activities. Anyone can host a tour—but some are better at it. The company officer in charge will select the tour hosts because FFD's first-line supervisors know the strengths of their crews. Station tours typically share information that the firefighters already know—a "show and tell" of tools, equipment, vehicles, and facilities. The 30-second elevator speech consists of why that firefighter became interested in the fire service and one or two things that he likes about FFD. If the host is uncomfortable following up with a prospective candidate, the candidate will receive the fire chief's

business card. At the end of the tour, and with adult permission, a digital picture of the kids and/or adults will be taken with the on-duty firefighters in front of the fire engine. These pictures will be posted to the fire department's social media platforms, and a digital copy will be offered to those in the picture.

Little to no cost accompanies this activity, and such events require minimal preparation. Unfortunately, the nature of emergency response makes the ability to conduct these activities unpredictable. The visits may be cut short or firefighters may be called away from the station when spontaneous guests arrive. Recently, fire stations have been closed to visitors due to the global pandemic and the nature of restrictions in public buildings, which have posed further challenges. These restrictions are temporary, however. Now is the perfect time to plan and prepare for the eventual return of in-station activities and outreach.

## **2. What Can Be Done Outside of the Station?**

As indicated earlier, Fitchburg's diverse populations exist in neighborhoods that are far beyond walking distance of the fire station. One recommended approach from the focus group was to "take the show on the road." They asked FFD to consider sending uniformed firefighters in a fire engine to a park located in a diverse neighborhood and eat a bagged lunch as a crew. Spending 30 minutes in a park when kids are around might encourage interaction. Fire truck tours similar to those provided in the station could be given in the park and digital pictures offered and posted on social media—with parental permission, of course.

Focus group members encouraged FFD to take advantage of neighborhood requests for firefighter visits, for example, during block parties, back-to-school events, festivals, holiday gatherings, and parades, among others. Fire department personnel must be given the latitude to take equipment out of the station and drive through neighborhoods in their district—especially those neighborhoods beyond walking distance of a fire station. Opportunities to interact with the general public should be exercised as frequently as possible by on-duty firefighters and supported by fire department administration. The focus group reinforced the impact of community presence, suggesting that regular visits would

build trust with the community. Group members also understood that firefighters have other duties and that emergency response is a firefighter's first priority; however, a 15-minute visit to shake hands and talk with community members is an opportunity to demonstrate the inclusivity of service and membership. With little to no additional cost associated with daily operations, pursuing this recommendation makes economic sense. The benefits identified by the focus group far surpass the investment.

The focus group also embraced the concept of an existing community engagement program—"Operation Lemonade Stand"—and encouraged Fitchburg firefighters to continue its participation in this effort. Operation Lemonade Stand is an informal program that asks firefighters to seek out, stop at, and purchase from kids' lemonade stands in town. Pictures of the fire department supporting Fitchburg's up-and-coming entrepreneurs are then posted on social media. The unwritten rule is that FFD *never* passes a lemonade stand—unless responding to an emergency. (Crews do not have to drink it—not all lemonade stands have strong quality-control standards.) Every year, I provide a bag of quarters in the cab of the fire engines as start-up cash, the intent being for firefighters to interact positively with kids throughout the city and reward them for their hard work and determination—especially if they are raising money to help someone else. It is also important to note that firefighters stay within their response district so that an emergency response is not compromised by well-intended community outreach. The annual program cost of \$100–\$200 is supported personally by the fire chief; it is not a tax-dollar-supported program; details about firefighters contributing to the cost are unknown. Members of the focus group called this a "feel good" program that shows that the fire department is making an effort to interact with the community.

FFD has not collected data on how many lemonade stand visits the fire department has conducted over the last five years. Indeed, FFD has little to no data on the effect this interaction has within the greater community. Some benefit is demonstrated through social media comments and the occasional thank-you note received at the fire station from the lemonade stand proprietors. Although this program was suspended amid the global pandemic, last summer, plans were in place with the Fitchburg Police Department to share

lemonade stand locations throughout the community to ensure that police officers and firefighters were equally represented in this effort.



Figure 3. Operation Lemonade Stand

Another option for short-term outreach would involve cul-de-sac training activities. Every month, all department members come together for training on practical skills, for example, fire attacks, searches, vehicle operations, ground ladder operations, and technical rescues. FFD engages the community regularly when people stop and watch in-house training activity. FFD might anticipate similar interactions when training takes place in neighborhood cul-de-sacs. Instead of conducting the training session at the fire station, training could take place in neighborhoods that are not within walking distance of the fire stations. These training sessions would not only improve firefighter skills through repetition-based training but also provide professional exposure to those who may want to consider becoming a firefighter. During remote drills, FFD could take advantage of any opportunity to discuss membership, firefighting training, and professional development. Cul-de-sac training would not add any hours to a firefighter's monthly commitment—the training venue would be the only variable that changes.

Community-located training would require minimal additional costs. The only additional element that would need staffing is a safety team. In an effort to minimize risk and municipal liability, training activities would need to follow department standard

procedures, and the immediate training area would need to be secured so that untrained and unprotected people remain at a safe distance. One issue with outdoor training is weather. Rainy, extremely hot, and extremely cold weather would limit community outreach activities—although firefighters train in these environments, community observers are less likely to endure the elements.

This activity would be a change to FFD’s typical training operation. As with any change, it requires communication with FFD’s membership—as it would be affected by the change. Prior to instituting this activity, I would present membership with the intent of community-based training venues and address the following questions:

- Why is recruitment necessary?
- Should diverse audiences be considered? Why?
- What does a professional image mean to you?
- Does anyone have any concerns about remote training?

These issues are important because there is a high probability that someone will question the intent of outreach. Sharing information in advance and communicating program intent to employees allow leadership to provide the facts up front—thus shaping perceptions and discussions in the firehouse. It is equally important for membership to understand that the chief does not have all the answers and that firefighter feedback will provide a better result.

## **B. MEDIUM-TERM OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT**

The focus group emphasized the need for starting positive interaction and community building sooner rather than later. Focus group participants confirmed that successful programs involve input through the entire communication and comprehension process. As with internal communication methods, external communications are similarly suited for closed-loop communication. When brainstorming closed-loop communication with some of the focus group members, discussion considered the following concepts:

- Sender—The sender’s observations of the receiver and the receiver’s observations of the sender.

- Message—What message did the sender attempt to send? What message did the receiver receive?
- Interference—What distractions were present during the delivery?
- Receiver—Was this the appropriate audience?
- Feedback—Was there ample time for questions and answers?
- Acknowledgment—Do any concerns need to be addressed?

The focus group had difficulty providing input about conceptual programs—not knowing how the nuances of program implementation would relate to community variables. They suggested testing projected program objectives by presenting something to the general public before the program was perfected. This approach to program implementation was reminiscent of the “prepare, execute, and analyze” phase of developing a minimum viable product in consumer goods.<sup>125</sup> During this process, FFD would prepare a program, present content, and analyze feedback.<sup>126</sup> At the end of every deliverable, it would analyze inputs and outcomes. Thus, the FFD could make modifications and corrections to program components, and the consumer (community) would end up with a better product (program) to address its needs.

The focus group agreed that several aspects of outreach have existed in FFD’s programming. However, to attract a more diverse audience, modifications were needed. If done correctly, these programs could provide a foundation for other outreach programs and recruitment activities. Due to the time required for organizational planning, these programs have been identified as medium-term outreach and recruitment events. Focus group input suggested the following recommendations for consideration.

### **1. Preparing for Spur-of-the-Moment Events**

Focus group discussion incorrectly identified that the fire department cannot prepare for spur-of-the-moment community engagements. Although the timing of these events is unpredictable, intended outcomes can be planned and engagement details

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<sup>125</sup> David Bland and Alex Osterwalder, *Testing Business Ideas* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020), 240.

<sup>126</sup> Bland and Osterwalder, 241.

prepared. The only aspect of “spur-of-the-moment” should be the timing component of this interaction; everything else can be set in place.

The fire department must make time for unscheduled visits. Every attempt should be made to solicit contact information up front. Then, in the event that the interlude is interrupted because the station is dispatched to an emergency, the firefighter who was addressing the potential candidate can reach out later and offer another meeting. When a potential candidate walks into the station and asks about firefighting, the firefighter who greets the visitor should observe her body language and level of interest. The firefighter who talks with the prospective candidate should take notes about the candidate’s excitement and such non-verbal communication as eye contact and verbal tone. Non-verbal communication can provide information that suggests whether a candidate wants to learn more. The speed of follow-through can cement interest and nurture a potential connection.

The times in which this type of activity happens may be accidental or incidental, but the visit should be deliberate, professional, and pre-planned. After careful consideration of focus group input, FFD has made it policy to have at least five recruitment folders always available at all FFD fire stations. The folders should be given out to interested candidates and will include

- a contact information sheet
- department values, mission, and vision overview
- typical training requirements and expected completion timeline
- ride-along information
- the name of an assigned mentor (if the candidate intends to pursue employment)

These items can be prepared quickly and made available for short-term recruitment efforts. Costs are limited to the office supplies used to assemble these folders. The only hurdle identified during the initial brainstorming session was ensuring that someone would be responsible for keeping folders in the station and the information in the folder current.

The focus group made note of materials used for recruitment in the past and described them as conveying a message of a selective, minimally diverse fire department.

As FFD implements changes to public relations material, I will anticipate costs in professionally printed material and video production. If these items are the first impression future members have of FFD, they must look professional, and the messaging must be audience appropriate. The following focus group recommendations will take some time to develop, authorize through HR and the city attorney, produce, and deliver:

- Brochure or pamphlet that reflects the intended outcome of recruiting a diverse workforce
- Video that features department members who represent diverse communities
- An SOG that provides existing members with a standardized approach to known recruitment interactions

Following a standardized approach, the fire department can prepare for an unscheduled visit. The SOG can assist members who do not participate in recruitment activities regularly and remind them of the needed steps for effective recruitment follow-through. Because not all Fitchburg firefighters can act as the best spokesperson for the fire department, the SOG should also identify department members who can be contacted to lead the recruitment effort. If a recruitment specialist is not in quarters or is off duty at the moment of interaction, potential candidates can be invited for another meeting when an identified recruitment specialist is at the station.

## **2. Identify and Schedule an Annual Off-Site Event**

Every year, FFD hosts an open house during Fire Prevention Week. Historically, open houses have taken place at the headquarters firehouse, Station #1, located in the center of the city. Open house attendance has not been representative of Fitchburg's diverse populations. When I asked the focus group why open house attendance from diverse communities was low and what could be done to improve attendance, the response was concerning. The group stated that there may be nothing the fire department can do to improve significantly attendance numbers of underrepresented populations. FFD fire stations are not within walking distance of select neighborhoods, and bus routes do not have stops close to the firehouse. The current location of the annual open house remains at the central station because it offers one major attraction: fire truck rides. Due to traffic

concerns, FFD's central firehouse is the only fire department facility that can accommodate safe transport. The group requested that the fire department come up with other venue options. They maintained that although it sounded entertaining, fire truck rides would not make or break the event because other exciting options like firefighting or rescue demonstrations could be developed.

To improve the attendance of open house-style activities, FFD can work with apartment management companies and non-profit organizations located in the city's Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative areas. These are neighborhoods that have residents with known transportation barriers. The fire department would set up in parking lots and playgrounds for show-and-tell events. Although the fire station would not be available to tour, fire apparatus, tools, and equipment would be on display. Residents could speak to fire department staff and a demonstration and education area could be set up to share fire safety and prevention messages. Such an event would prioritize community relations through access, exposure, and education. Topics like kitchen safety could be selected to make information useful for citizens who reside in apartments.

Funding this event should cost no more than \$2,500, and this investment would cover staff time, fire-safety handouts, and snacks. FFD would ask for donations from local businesses for non-personnel costs to offset expenses; however, FFD would commit to this effort regardless of fundraising success. One anticipated hurdle involves the cooperation of other youth-centered organizations. In the past, FFD attempted to plan outreach in underrepresented neighborhoods with a partnering organization, but those plans never materialized. Program success should not depend on help from sponsoring and partnering organizations. Discussions with focus group members reinforced that non-profits are struggling to maintain staff and meet service demands. Remote outreach will be better received if the fire department does not place additional demands on non-fire department organizations that are stretched thin with an already limited staff.

### **C. LONG-TERM OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT**

The long-term outreach programs listed in this section have never been offered in Fitchburg before and will require more time to coordinate, development, and secure

municipal approvals and organizational partnerships. Still, the focus group anticipates significant career influence through middle school introductions and recruitment opportunities through high school and college exposure. Because these events would be offered through the school districts that serve Fitchburg, it is anticipated that programs will positively forge connections in diverse communities.

### **1. Soliciting Help—Partnerships**

The group recommended that FFD establish a partnership with Fitchburg-area youth development organizations like Operation Fresh Start and Briarpatch. The beneficiaries of these programs are typically teenaged kids and young adults who may have run away, are homeless, or have other life experiences that have prevented them from participating in or affording advanced education. Furthermore, focus group participants mentioned that high school guidance counselors require more information about educational opportunities available through the fire service. Not all high school seniors want to go to a four-year undergraduate program—so those who prefer a hands-on, technical education may do very well in the fire service.

Another recommendation addressed the potential to target recruitment of high school and college athletes. Potential candidates who are athletically minded, team driven, personally motivated problem-solvers may be a natural match for the fire service. I acknowledged that the fire service shares many of the same values as team sports. Because most high school athletes will not make it to college sports, and most college athletes will not make it to professional sports, that leaves a space for the fire service to fill—especially for those who strive for a dynamic, adrenalin-laden work environment.

### **2. Middle School STEM Outreach Initiative**

Seventh and eighth grade students are already considering career options.<sup>127</sup> With that in mind, fire department-sponsored outreach must consider bringing firefighters into intermediate and middle school settings to discuss fire science and fire service-related

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<sup>127</sup> Schermerhorn-Collins, “Gender Integration in the Career Fire Services,” 2.

professions—hopefully building on fire safety and prevention messages that elementary school-aged students receive.

FFD is exploring a science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)–based curriculum that fits into the school district’s annual academic requirements—specifically, incorporating the Underwriters Laboratories’ (UL) Xplorlabs STEM program, which uses firefighters to instruct fire behavior modules.<sup>128</sup> The program reinforces the importance of bridging the gap between students and the fire service through STEM-based programs. One noted benefit to the Xplorlabs program is that firefighters deliver the curriculum. For example, in Cobb County, Georgia, firefighters use Xplorlabs to introduce potential careers in the fire service and other related fields that supplement and support fire departments. The Cobb County Fire Department attests that this exposure inspires participation from the county’s diverse populations.<sup>129</sup>

Partnering with an accredited program like UL and communicating learning objectives in advance of the school year would allow Xplorlabs’ curriculum to be developed in accordance with Wisconsin’s standardized learning objectives. Preliminary research into curriculum requirements revealed that the Wisconsin Standards for Science are based on Next Generation Science Standards, which align with Xplorlabs’ curriculum.<sup>130</sup> Each module has a list of standards that are covered—respective to the national standard.<sup>131</sup> Thus, the curriculum should work for the school districts that serve Fitchburg, align with educational standards, and provide enough flexibility for local application and implementation.

Once this initiative piques a candidate’s interest in the fire service, firefighters who deliver the curriculum will recommend scheduling a fire station or department tour. The candidate will be paired with a firefighter who will share information about the station and equipment. That firefighter will also field questions from the candidate—providing first-hand

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<sup>128</sup> “Fire Forensics: Claims and Evidence,” Xplorlabs, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://ulxplorlabs.org/fire-forensics-claims-and-evidence/>.

<sup>129</sup> Dennis Avelar, “Xplorlabs Partners with Cobb County, Georgia,” Xplorlabs, December 17, 2019, <https://ulxplorlabs.org/xplorlabs-partners-with-cobb-county-georgia/>.

<sup>130</sup> “Wisconsin’s Standards for Science and Implementation Resources,” Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://dpi.wi.gov/science/standards>.

<sup>131</sup> “About Xplorlabs,” Xplorlabs, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://ulxplorlabs.org/ul-xplorlabs/>.

knowledge of a firefighter's responsibilities and skills. Such a tour will last no more than two hours.

Overall concerns about this program involve personnel costs. The fire department cannot commit to program delivery using on-duty firefighters. Off-duty firefighters will be used to deliver this program—to ensure that curriculum is not interrupted by emergency responses. Additional information is also required about the costs associated with program supplies and initial instructor training. Although not immediately available at the time of this thesis, costs associated with funding this initiative will have to be added to FFD's public education account—or existing outreach programs will have to be reprioritized.

### **3. Going from Middle School to High School**

Focus group participants acknowledged two existing FFD programs that must be marketed to diverse participants. After middle school, high school-aged youth who remain interested in fire service-related career fields have more options for career exposure. For example, FFD has an Explorer program, whereby participants attend monthly training and observe regularly scheduled department-wide training. For candidates who are certain of their career path into the fire service, the Explorer post provides professional insight that better prepares the high school student for the next step of training progression.

FFD also has an internship program for which selection entails a competitive application and interview process that takes place during the candidate's senior year of high school. Those intern candidates who have already participated in FFD's Explorer program or have attended some firefighter certification training through a local technical school have an advantage in this process. If offered a position in the program, interns spend two years living in the fire station, earn their associate's degree (and other certifications and licensures), train regularly with fire department personnel, and are assigned to a shift—all aspects provide experiential learning. At the end of the two-year commitment, interns graduate with their associate's degree, fire service certifications, emergency medical licensure, and no college debt. If accepted into a third-year option, interns train with the local emergency medical service provider to earn their paramedic certification/license. FFD interns have a 95 percent placement rate in the profession and have been employed by fire departments throughout the

United States. FFD has a limited number of career firefighter positions available; however, with a degree, fire certifications, emergency medical licensure, and professional experience, FFD interns are highly marketable and employable throughout the country.

#### **4. High School and College Athletics**

At the end of the first focus group meeting, one participant commented on evaluating options for leveraging high school and college athletics. Focus group members discussed similarities between team sports and firefighting and the reality of professional sports as a career option. Considering the physical fitness, personal readiness, routine training, teamwork, and adrenaline of the job, firefighting is comparable to being a professional athlete—outside of sports.<sup>132</sup> How could FFD use this comparison to its advantage?

Before the focus group convened, FFD considered a summer workout program. Initially, it was thought that the workout program would primarily serve the current members of the fire department. A discussion led to brainstorming and interest in incorporating a high school athletic workout with a fire department recruitment program. However, operational priorities prevented implementation, so nothing materialized, no policies or lesson plans were written, and the suggestion remained idle. When the focus group asked about tapping into athletic programs for recruitment, the discussions about the workout initiative resurfaced.

Bringing a workout program into the fire station would serve multiple purposes. It would build a relationship between high school students and the fire department. Contact, exposure, and dialogue would establish trust within the community. It would physically prepare high school athletes for fall sports and encourage students to be active during summer break. Personal interaction and teamwork could be nurtured through this group activity. And, subtly, the fire station would always be in the background—providing constant, gentle exposure to the career option of working at FFD. One of the comments heard during focus group sessions was that potential candidates might feel they are imposing or not welcome at the fire station because they do not belong to the organization. One of the priorities of this activity would be to break down some of those obstacles.

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<sup>132</sup> Kyle Matousek, “The Sport of Firefighting,” *Illinois Peer Support Team* (blog), March 18, 2016, <https://www.ilffps.org/the-sport-of-firefighting/>.

These workouts would resemble typical firefighter workouts (see Figure 4). As a means for recruitment, firefighters will work out alongside student athletes.



Figure 4. Firefighter/Fire Station Workouts

Social cohesion models identify the building of positive bonds and acceptance through shared activities. A sense of group belonging can be realized through cohesion, emotion, trust, and mutual interests.<sup>133</sup> Perhaps through common personal goals, sharing an experience with potential firefighter candidates who do not typically feel included in the fire station, FFD could build this connection.

These recruitment programs will be offered over the summer on weekend mornings. Attendance will be unpredictable at first, and personnel assistance will depend on availability during the vacation season. Initial costs for personnel and equipment are estimated at less than \$2,500 for four one-and-a-half-hour workouts. That cost may be lower if firefighters donate time to participate while off duty. The most significant concerns with this activity involve injury liability and the reliance on professional partners (athletic trainers and sports psychologists). Working with trainers facilitates workouts that are designed for athletic

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<sup>133</sup> Henri Tajfel, ed., *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 16.

capabilities and fire service similarities. Working with psychologists ensures workouts motivate participants instead of excluding them.

#### **D. FFD’S PLAN TO APPLY FOCUS GROUP INPUT TO RECRUITING—SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?**

What does recruitment mean for FFD? It means looking for and finding talent, and not relying on interested candidates from diverse communities to take the first step. It means establishing trust in the community and acknowledging unconscious biases that have contributed to hesitance to participate in recruitment within Fitchburg’s diverse communities.<sup>134</sup> It means looking for alternatives to outreach and providing professional exposure at younger ages.<sup>135</sup> FFD must look “outside the box” when considering the legitimacy of skills and non-traditional qualifications.<sup>136</sup> Because first-generation firefighters have a limited understanding of required first steps, they will not likely possess as many certifications as those who are fortunate to live with or around advisers with institutional knowledge. With that in mind, recognizing non-traditional qualifications will be especially important.

This chapter explored the variety of recommendations and insights provided by the focus group in an effort to plan for reflective recruitment activities within and outside the Fitchburg’s fire stations. Short-term programs that require polishing, medium-term programs that require additional components, and long-term programs that have never been delivered were discussed to remove barriers that may prevent the participation of diverse populations. Considering the value of trust and intentionality, the next chapter identifies how FFD can cement interest by providing intrinsically motivated candidates with the support needed to pursue professional goals within FFD.

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<sup>134</sup> Elow, “Lived and Remembered Experiences,” 71.

<sup>135</sup> Jones, *American Work*, 392.

<sup>136</sup> Bendersky, “Making U.S. Fire Departments More Diverse,” para. 22.

## **IV. SUSTAINING REFLECTIVE RECRUITMENT**

To institute solutions and identify recruitment obstacles, this chapter answers how to turn the interest of a potential candidate into a successful recruitment outcome. With the focus group's assistance, FFD's recruitment considers who is best served through these initiatives. It further identifies how reflective recruitment can benefit from support networks and community advocates.

Those who already work in the fire service understand, or take for granted, the culture of the profession. This concept was not lost on the focus group. For all intents and purposes, when attempting to improve the recruitment of underrepresented populations, it is important to recognize that new cultures are being introduced to an existing one. Tajfel's work on social identity resembles interpersonal considerations that need to be understood when recruiting diverse firefighter candidates. FFD's recruitment effort must recognize the questions, concerns, and expectations of the underrepresented community.<sup>137</sup> Intergroup communication that involves feedback and follow-through will improve the results of such a recruitment effort. The focus group stated that acknowledging and accepting differing cultures without unconsciously eliminating existing culture will provide the best possible outcomes in recruitment.

### **A. OUTSIDE GROUPS USED TO IMPROVE RECRUITMENT OUTCOMES**

As FFD builds its workforce to be more reflective of the community it serves, reaching out to organizations that represent the underrepresented populations targeted has a high value. In the Madison, Wisconsin, area, a couple of organizations were recognized for their ability to reach diverse networks. These organizations not only have staff or members who can assist in the recruitment and orientation process; they also provide mentoring and peer support. Some organizations also have scholarships and financial aid that can be extended to people attending college or technical school or making a career change. Although these organizations are helpful, they cannot be depended on to initiate

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<sup>137</sup> Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, 175.

or manage recruitment programs—it is the fire department’s job to identify candidates and make connections with outside organizations. These organizations were identified during the focus group sessions:

- Sable Flames “recognizes the importance of hiring, recruitment, promotion, and retention of African Americans and other persons of color.”<sup>138</sup>
- Centro Hispano of Dane County “provide [s] services to Latinos . . . facilitating career planning and information about advanced careers.”<sup>139</sup>
- United Way HIRE Initiative works “together to help people find jobs, and businesses find talent.”<sup>140</sup>
- Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership Center of Excellence “meets the needs of employers/unions looking to hire a diverse set of qualified candidates, as well as those of community partners seeking to place their clients in family-supporting jobs.”<sup>141</sup>
- Badger Rock Neighborhood Center “offers a wide variety of resident-driven programming and youth development.”<sup>142</sup>
- Briarpatch Youth Services “offers a broad array of services to run away, homeless, and at-risk youth.”<sup>143</sup>
- Boys and Girls Clubs of Dane County provides internship experiences based on the work of local companies and organizations.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> “About Us,” Sable Flames, accessed December 14, 2020, para. 3, <https://www.sableflames.org/about-us.html>.

<sup>139</sup> “Centro Hispano Escalera,” Centro Hispano of Dane County, accessed December 14, 2020, para. 1, <https://www.micentro.org/escalera-high-school.html>.

<sup>140</sup> “HIRE Initiative,” United Way of Dane County, accessed December 14, 2020, para. 1, <https://www.unitedwaydanecounty.org/hireindane/>.

<sup>141</sup> “About W RTP,” Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, accessed December 14, 2020, para. 2, <https://wrtp.org/about/>.

<sup>142</sup> “Badger Rock Center: Education,” Center for Resilient Cities, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://www.resilientcities.org/projects-programs/badger-rock-center/education/>.

<sup>143</sup> “About Us,” Briarpatch Youth Services, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://youthsos.org/about-us>.

<sup>144</sup> “Career Development,” Boys and Girls Clubs of Dane County, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://www.bgcddc.org/programs/career-development>.

One thought experiment reinforces the power of assimilation and outreach. A focus group member asked me how I would feel if I went alone to a predominantly black church without notice and sat in the front row. I was asked whether I would be self-conscious about my environment and the impression of other churchgoers. Then I was asked to consider the experiences of a lone black individual walking into a predominantly white fire station without notice. Are the experiences that different?

The next component of this focus group member's inquiry was to think about somebody from that church shaking my hand, inviting me to the church, and sitting next to me during the service. Although I might not look like the majority of the congregation, I would likely feel more comfortable if I knew that I was not imposing and that I was welcome. Those same outreach methods work with underrepresented candidates who are interested in learning more about FFD's predominantly white work environment.

Connections maintained out of genuine interest and cultivated over frequent and prolonged contacts are a form of outreach and trust building. The concentration of this action centers on the interpersonal aspects of direct conversation—versus the consequences of non-verbal communication in the form of perception, opinion, and judgement.

## **B. RECRUITMENT TIMELINE**

In 2020, as part of the research for this thesis, FFD intended to participate in community-focused outreach and training events. Concerns about COVID-19 transmission adjusted all community outreach and associated public gatherings. As a result, the potential for FFD “show and tell” and “cul-de-sac training” events will be revisited in 2021. Once normalized operations resume, focused community events will be scheduled throughout the year and will be concentrated in Fitchburg's Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative—designated neighborhoods.

Table 3 depicts a timeline for the remainder of the 2020–2021 school year. Time will be used to identify school district personnel who are best suited for developing outreach programs that cater to state-mandated K-12 curriculum. Establishing connections with UL's Xplorlabs and school district STEM advisers will be prioritized in order of the planning and lead time required for new educational initiatives.

During the fourth quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021, FFD will contact high school guidance counselors to discuss vocation/technical options for high school seniors. The department will share information about school-to-work programs offered through Madison College and the State of Wisconsin's firefighter certification program to better prepare graduating high school students for internships and other training opportunities. Additional information will be shared about FFD's intern program and how school-to-work and internships benefit perspective firefighting candidates.

Table 3. 2020–2021 School Year Timeline

| 2020-2021 School Year Timeline |     |     |     |     |         |           |      |      |          |     |     |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|-----------|------|------|----------|-----|-----|-----|
| ACTIVITY                       | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC     | JAN       | FEB  | MAR  | APR      | MAY | JUN | JUL |
| Thesis                         |     |     |     |     | Finish  |           |      |      |          |     |     |     |
| Recruitment Info               |     |     |     |     | Update  |           |      |      |          |     |     |     |
| Remote Activity                |     |     |     |     |         |           |      | Plan | Schedule |     |     |     |
| K-12 STEM                      |     |     |     |     | Connect |           | Plan |      |          |     |     |     |
| High School Guidance           |     |     |     |     | Connect | Influence |      |      |          |     |     |     |
| Summer Workout                 |     |     |     |     |         | Plan      |      |      |          |     |     |     |

The 2021–2022 school year will be used to market the benefits of a summer workout program at the fire station (see Table 4). To be successful, athletic trainers, sports psychologists, school athletic directors, and fire department staff will help plan a demanding yet achievable workout program. An additional discussion will further explore the similarities of high school/college athletics and firefighting—and how exposure to FFD might set up athletes for a rewarding career as a firefighter, for which they are well suited.

Table 4. 2021–2022 School Year Timeline

| 2021-2022 School Year Timeline |      |     |     |         |         |           |     |      |          |         |     |     |
|--------------------------------|------|-----|-----|---------|---------|-----------|-----|------|----------|---------|-----|-----|
| ACTIVITY                       | AUG  | SEP | OCT | NOV     | DEC     | JAN       | FEB | MAR  | APR      | MAY     | JUN | JUL |
| Recruitment Info               |      |     |     |         | Update  |           |     |      |          |         |     |     |
| Remote Activity                |      |     | FPW |         |         |           |     | Plan | Schedule |         |     |     |
| K-12 STEM                      | Plan |     |     | Deliver |         |           |     |      |          | Deliver |     |     |
| High School Guidance           |      |     |     |         | Connect | Influence |     |      |          |         |     |     |
| Summer Workout                 |      |     |     |         |         |           |     |      | Plan     |         |     |     |

### C. EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND RECRUITMENT

Some members of the focus group expressed concern about the consideration of skilled trades and technical education when high school students are looking into career

options. The impression was that many high school students are being directed toward four-year undergraduate degrees, even when their major has not been selected. From a recruitment standpoint, especially when it involves having conversations with diverse student populations, FFD would benefit from the insight and cooperation of school guidance counselors, who help students identify educational and career paths, and district staff, who develop curriculum.

Options shared in the focus group considered how FFD and its firefighters could be used to assist in the mentoring of future firefighter candidates. The group also discussed elementary and middle school programs that may instill trust and plant seeds for future career consideration as those children get older and recall interactions of interest.

### **1. The Role of School Counselors in Fire Department Recruitment**

Graduating high school seniors can become involved in job-placement programs immediately following graduation. However, if the graduating senior is not aware of the program before graduating high school, the opportunity may no longer be available. When the student is a senior, he or she needs to apply (and be accepted) into the fire science program through the regional technical school. Acceptance into the fire science program allows prospective candidates to apply for FFD internships. Many intern candidates apply because they are made aware of the program through family, friends, or other acquaintances. First-generation firefighters often miss out on this opportunity due to the lack of familiarity.

### **2. Benefits of Vocational or Technical College Education before High School Graduation**

In Dane County, Madison College offers school-to-work programs. High school seniors can attend technical school and receive elective high school credit and earn vocational certifications. Typically, these programs provide insight into other training and employment programs. This “insider” knowledge offers participants an advantage over other candidates who start their certification programs after they graduate from high school. Because these school-to-work programs allow participants to earn certifications before

graduating from high school, upon graduation they can quickly transition to earning their associate's degree and emergency medical certifications/licensure.

Very few of FFD's prospective high school candidates reside in Fitchburg. Two of the three school districts that serve Fitchburg do not take advantage of the school-to-work program. The school district that does offer the technical school option has the least diversity—compared to the other two (non-participating) school districts.

If new firefighting candidates apply for membership and have already earned their firefighter certifications, FFD can employ them much sooner than those who have yet to attend state-certified training. Moreover, the retention of new firefighters is more likely; the sooner they are allowed to participate in firefighting activities, the better.

#### **D. KEEPING THE INTEREST BURNING**

Congratulations! A candidate has expressed interest in becoming a firefighter. Attracting intrinsically motivated candidates is a major recruitment victory. So what? That does not mean the candidate will be a good firefighter. Now what? The fire department has a lot more work to do to keep the candidate engaged in team activities, focused on education, and motivated to continue with organizational requirements.

When identifying current barriers that discourage or hamper reflective recruitment and instituting potential solutions that overcome recruitment obstacles, community partnerships and support organizations have programs and tools necessary to identify potential candidates and encourage their interest in fire service professions.<sup>145</sup> The fire department can take advantage of these community advocates who build professional relationships and reinforce personal trust.<sup>146</sup> Conversations are easier after the first handshake and a proper introduction. Discussions concentrating on curiosity, excitement, and professional support help diminish perceived obstacles that are manifest when interaction is limited.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Center for Public Safety Excellence, *21st Century Fire and Emergency Services*, 27.

<sup>146</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias*, 25.

<sup>147</sup> Schermerhorn-Collins, "Gender Integration in the Career Fire Services," 2.

This chapter laid out the “friends and family” plan for recruitment—by involving the community in the recruitment of a reflective workforce. Showing genuine interest in potential candidates involves active listening, attention to questions, acceptance of obstacles, and reliable feedback. Moreover, continual engagement will contribute positively to recruitment outcomes.<sup>148</sup> Knowing what programs exist and who will likely benefit from them is a key component to progressive recruitment. Finding advocates and partners in the community allows the fire department to “cast a wider net” and instills program validation. Success in finding the right candidates and the sustainability of recruitment programs rely on community participation—and realizing that community networks may influence fire service recruitment more than the fire department can on its own.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Lowisz, *Recruiting Sucks*, 88–89.

<sup>149</sup> Hardy, *One Nation Underemployed*, 144.

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## **V. REFLECTIVE RECRUITMENT RESULTS**

The focus group acknowledged that FFD is moving in the right direction—based on the results of recent hiring practices. However, for the best outcome, FFD has more work to do in outreach and recruitment of underrepresented populations. Reflective recruitment involves identifying potential firefighter candidates in diverse neighborhoods—so that our workforce resembles the community that we served. This chapter considers what is needed to monitor recruitment outcomes and candidate success.

### **A. OUTCOMES AND SUCCESS**

Through this thesis, FFD has developed short-, medium-, and long-term recruitment program goals and guidelines. Some programs can be implemented immediately. Others will require more time to plan resources and assistance. By collecting data, the FFD will have a better appreciation of program success. Data-driven results and trend analysis will substantiate improvements or identify needed corrections.

#### **1. Measured Results**

More work will be required to understand whether recruitment efforts for diverse populations have been successful. CPSE and ICMA encourage the use of robust data to help determine where recruitment efforts are needed, and FFD will need to keep track of program participation.<sup>150</sup> Multiple datasets will need to be considered:

- How many people participated in the event?
- How many potential candidates were identified at the event?
- How many people followed up with the fire department?
- Does the next hiring process positively reflect a more diverse candidate pool?

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<sup>150</sup> Center for Public Safety Excellence, *21st Century Fire and Emergency Services*, 13.

## **2. Ongoing Effort—Sustainability**

The focus group cautioned that many equal opportunity plans reflect “lip service” not sustained with commitment. They expressed that only actions will develop community trust. It is not enough to say that a plan is needed or that a plan has been developed. Sustainability will be measured by the organization’s ability to keep the initiative going. FFD is not a large fire department, and many daily activities fill the department’s work schedule. No single firefighter or fire chief can accomplish all of the tasks of this initiative. Many members—in various specialty areas of the organization—will need to share this effort. The department must also consider what partnerships can be used and what non-traditional fire department roles can be instituted to ensure recruitment is successful—especially when it pertains to energizing candidates and personnel.

More planning and data will be needed when establishing medium- and long-term recruitment activities and monitoring their results:

- Event projection: The department should develop an annual outreach schedule, identify lead personnel, evaluate previous activities for relevancy, make needed changes, and develop lesson plans.
- Is participation in recruitment activities improving or deteriorating? A trend analysis of attendance data will allow for the evaluation of program impact. The department should record known demographic information to better understand whether outreach is effective in diverse neighborhoods.
- Of those who attend recruitment activities, how many participate in FFD employment opportunities? The data derived will help identify how many diverse candidates learned of training and employment opportunities from community outreach.

## **3. Success—Long-Term Trends**

True program success will be measured in longer-term trends—of five, ten, or even twenty years after the program’s outset.<sup>151</sup> Are diverse candidates set up for success? Have

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<sup>151</sup> Center for Public Safety Excellence, 13.

realistic expectations been communicated? Where have candidates taken their education? Are participants graduating from technical programs?

When a candidate graduates from a technical program/career training, the fire service measures success in recruitment because the certifying agency acknowledges the candidate has passed minimum standards and is prepared to operate as a firefighter. Further research through a feedback instrument can determine whether such candidates

1. Knew what was expected of them (prior to commitment);
2. Had the appropriate tools, equipment, and training;
3. Had access to adequate support;
4. Think they are ready.

Are participants being hired as career firefighters? Success in education, exposure, and experience is reinforced when a firefighter is hired as a career firefighter. Firefighting employment is competitive. If offered a position with a fire department, at a bare minimum, the candidate has successfully communicated his or her capabilities and spoken to occupational priorities. Further research through a feedback instrument can determine whether candidates at this stage

1. Feel able to exhibit talents through a competitive process;
2. Are motivated intrinsically (through improvement) or extrinsically (through benefits);
3. Feel able to make a living wage through firefighting;
4. Know what the next steps look like (promotion).

Are participants pursuing (and being selected for) progressive levels of leadership/promotion? When an organization has diverse members in positions of leadership, that organization is telling perspective candidates that the department is inclusive—all the way to the top of the organization. Thus, promotion becomes a recruitment and retention tool

for diverse communities.<sup>152</sup> Further research through a feedback instrument can address this career retrospectively. Research can determine whether candidates

1. Went as far as they wanted to go in their careers;
2. Would have done anything different (professionally);
3. Wish the department would have provided additional guidance (organizationally).

## **B. CONCLUSION**

To address the need for a more reflective workforce in Fitchburg Fire Department's membership, this thesis analyzed FFD's outreach, recruitment, and community involvement. The status quo of FFD's present-day recruitment efforts has not resulted in a workforce that resembles the community served. Looking at organizational and professional norms has allowed an introspective evaluation of factors that contribute to the hesitancy of diverse candidates. Creating opportunities through targeted outreach enhances professional exposure within diverse neighborhoods—FFD needs recruitment activities that inspire diverse firefighter candidates. Barriers that discourage or hamper reflective recruitment—recruiting firefighters that reflect the community served—need to be identified and solutions instituted to overcome those obstacles.

Through this research, reflective recruitment has become a topic of active conversation between the fire department, city hall, and civic leaders. Barriers were described as unconscious operational concepts that instill a perception of bias and exclusivity—when a potential candidate is already hesitant about asking membership questions. Even well-intended actions can create hesitation. If not identified, explained, or corrected, current firehouse activities could create in-group/out-group barriers that diminish recruitment potential. Deep-seated beliefs and values of existing members that form fire department culture need better explanation to first-generation firefighters.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias*, 83.

<sup>153</sup> Tamme, "I Stands for Inclusion," para. 2.

Through focus group discussions and by listening to the experiences of underrepresented populations, I learned about the need for a revised approach to fire department recruitment. The Madison and Fitchburg, Wisconsin, areas are segregated communities. Separation marginalizes diverse communities and reinforces institutional bias.<sup>154</sup> Intentionality through targeted outreach is needed in these areas. White, middle-class communities often discount the need for intervention and affirmative action. These assumptions, without dialogue, contribute to bias and portray hiring practices as discriminatory.<sup>155</sup> As fire chief, I see FFD as a welcoming organization that strives for inclusivity and diverse membership. My concern about current fire department recruitment practices is whether the “outsider” perspective mirrors the “insider” intent.

One word that came up often during the literature review and the focus group is *trust*. Early outreach, involvement in diverse neighborhoods, a better understanding of socio-economic contributors—including disproportionate wages and incarceration—and optimism are some things that contribute to an empathetic recruitment approach.<sup>156</sup> Trust does not suggest that all parties have to agree; indeed, research suggests that disagreement is healthy and that difficult discussions improve organizational performance.<sup>157</sup> The important part of dialogue is to acknowledge the counterpoint. A member of the focus group shared an interesting point about discourse and decorum—pointing out that during the two sessions, the focus group did not always agree on the correct approach to equal opportunity, affirmative action, and recruitment. However, avoiding the counterpoint might have caused resentment or delayed resolution. To quote a portion of that exchange, “The trick is in the try.” To paraphrase the rest, show people that you are doing all that you can to create an inclusive department. If you make a mistake, forgiveness is almost certain if you learn from it and continue to recruit using an empathetic approach. Trust is highly probable when intent is understood and outcomes back up recruitment objectives.

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<sup>154</sup> Jana and Diaz Mejias, *Erasing Institutional Bias*, 5.

<sup>155</sup> Diangelo, *White Fragility*, 43.

<sup>156</sup> Beasley, *Opting Out*, 31.

<sup>157</sup> Rock, Grant, and Grey, “Diverse Teams Feel Less Comfortable,” para. 3.

As FFD implements its recruitment concepts—to identify, approach, and invite diverse candidates—more work is needed. School counselor involvement is essential to sharing educational opportunities with interested middle and high school students. The programs identified in this thesis require partnerships and administrator advocacy. It will take time for engagement, so these initiatives necessitate urgency in outreach. Furthermore, documentation of program success and efficacy entails analysis of data trends. FFD must emphasize a more concentrated effort to document outreach demographics.

The need for a workforce that resembles the community is imperative. If inclusivity and diversity are incorporated into daily activities and accepted into its culture, FFD will be a stronger department—*because* of the things that make us different.

## APPENDIX A. FFD ACTIVITY REPORT

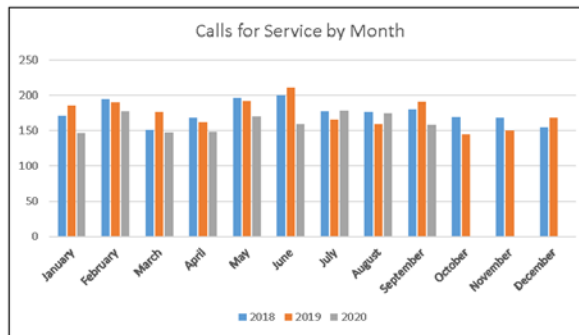


**Fitchburg Fire Department**  
 Chief Joe Pulvermacher  
 5791 Lacy Road Fitchburg, WI 53711  
 Station: 608-278-2980 Fax: 608-278-2985  
 www.fitchburgwi.gov/fire

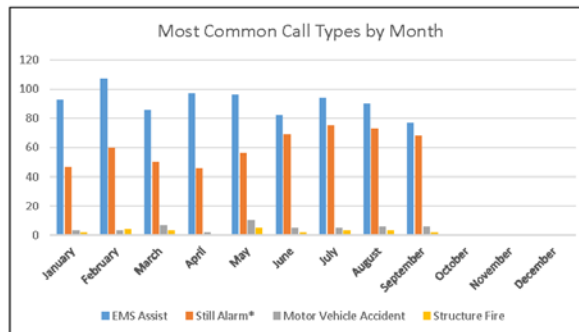


### Fire Department Activity Report As of September 30, 2020

| Calls for Service by Month |      |      |      |        |
|----------------------------|------|------|------|--------|
| Month                      | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | Change |
| January                    | 171  | 186  | 146  | -22%   |
| February                   | 194  | 189  | 177  | -6%    |
| March                      | 151  | 176  | 147  | -16%   |
| April                      | 168  | 162  | 148  | -9%    |
| May                        | 196  | 191  | 170  | -11%   |
| June                       | 200  | 211  | 159  | -25%   |
| July                       | 177  | 165  | 178  | 8%     |
| August                     | 176  | 159  | 174  | 9%     |
| September                  | 180  | 190  | 158  | -17%   |
| October                    | 169  | 144  |      |        |
| November                   | 168  | 150  |      |        |
| December                   | 155  | 168  |      |        |
| Total                      | 2105 | 2091 | 1457 |        |
| Projection                 |      |      | 1943 | -7%    |

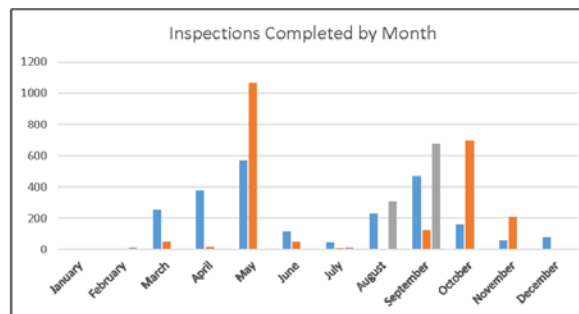


| Most Common Call Types by Month |            |              |                        |                |
|---------------------------------|------------|--------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Month                           | EMS Assist | Still Alarm* | Motor Vehicle Accident | Structure Fire |
| January                         | 93         | 47           | 3                      | 2              |
| February                        | 107        | 60           | 3                      | 4              |
| March                           | 86         | 50           | 7                      | 3              |
| April                           | 97         | 46           | 2                      | 0              |
| May                             | 96         | 56           | 10                     | 5              |
| June                            | 82         | 69           | 5                      | 2              |
| July                            | 94         | 75           | 5                      | 3              |
| August                          | 90         | 73           | 6                      | 3              |
| September                       | 77         | 68           | 6                      | 2              |
| October                         |            |              |                        |                |
| November                        |            |              |                        |                |
| December                        |            |              |                        |                |



\*Still Alarms include: Alarm Sounding, Car Fires, Odor Investigations

| Inspections Completed by Month |      |      |      |
|--------------------------------|------|------|------|
| Month                          | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
| January                        | 3    | 2    | 1    |
| February                       | 2    | 1    | 13   |
| March                          | 253  | 46   | 0    |
| April                          | 379  | 18   | 1    |
| May                            | 569  | 1063 | 0    |
| June                           | 111  | 46   | 2    |
| July                           | 44   | 10   | 13   |
| August                         | 229  | 6    | 308  |
| September                      | 467  | 122  | 677  |
| October                        | 160  | 696  |      |
| November                       | 55   | 210  |      |
| December                       | 77   | 1    |      |
| Total                          | 2349 | 2221 | 1015 |





**Fitchburg Fire Department**  
 Chief Joe Pulvermacher  
 5791 Lacy Road Fitchburg, WI 53711  
 Station: 608-270-7070 Fax: 608-270-7041  
 www.fitchburgwi.gov/fire



### STAFFING REPORT - As of September 30, 2020

|                 | Authorized<br>Headcount | Regular<br>Members | Probationary<br>Members | Light Duty /<br>On Leave | TOTAL     | +/- Headcount | M/F           | Black    | Hispanic | Two or<br>More |
|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|----------|----------|----------------|
| Career Staff    |                         |                    |                         |                          |           |               |               |          |          |                |
| Chiefs          | 2                       | 2                  | 0                       | 0                        | 2         | 0             | 2 / 0         | 0        | 0        | 0              |
| Lieutenants     | 6                       | 3                  | 0                       | 0                        | 3         | -3            | 3 / 0         | 0        | 0        | 0              |
| Firefighters    | 6                       | 7                  | 2                       | 0                        | 9         | 3             | 9 / 0         | 0        | 1        | 0              |
| Intern Staff    | 6                       | 0                  | 5                       | 0                        | 5         | -1            | 4 / 1         | 2        | 0        | 0              |
| Part-Time Staff | 60                      | 33                 | 13                      | 3                        | 46        | -14           | 47 / 5        | 0        | 1        | 1              |
| Support Staff   | 7                       | 11                 | 1                       | 1                        | 12        | 5             | 9 / 2         | 0        | 1        | 0              |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>87</b>               | <b>56</b>          | <b>21</b>               | <b>4</b>                 | <b>77</b> | <b>-10</b>    | <b>74 / 8</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>1</b>       |

#### PERSONNEL NOTES

- Currently addressing coaching and mentoring training for personnel who will assist with onboarding/communicating with new members
- Held the first group Coaching & Mentoring Zoom call on Sept 23; second call is scheduled for Oct 21

#### RECRUITMENT

Fire Service Recruitment Focus Group has met twice to start identifying how the City can be more intentional and effective about its recruitment of a more diverse work force for the Fire Department

#### MAY TRAINING TOPICS

- Department Drill - October Department drill has been canceled, due to the amendment to Phase 2 of Forward Dane
- Platoon Training - Online training options being used to minimize need for personnel to be in close proximity
- EMS Drill/FitchRona - Online training options being used to minimize need for personnel to be in close proximity
- EMS Platoon - Online training options being used to minimize need for personnel to be in close proximity

#### 2020 ANNUAL WORK PLAN TIMELINE

| Projects                            | Jan                                             | Feb | Mar        | Apr                         | May         | Jun                   | Jul | Aug       | Sep            | Oct       | Nov         | Dec |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----|------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|-----|-----------|----------------|-----------|-------------|-----|
| SOG/SOG Reformat/Revision           | Revision/Implementation                         |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| Officer Develop Training Adjustment | Evaluation                                      |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| Emergency Operations Plan           | Finalize                                        |     |            | Train/Familiarize/Implement |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| Recruitment                         |                                                 |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| • Interns                           | Development                                     |     |            | Selection                   |             | Residency/On-Boarding |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| • Youth Development/Outreach        | Development                                     |     |            | Event Promo                 |             | Program               |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| • POX                               |                                                 |     | Open House |                             | Orientation |                       |     |           | Open House     |           | Orientation |     |
| Retention                           |                                                 |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| • Awards/Pinning                    | Process/Procedure                               |     |            |                             | Selection   |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| • Promotion                         | Address Selection and Process (per ELA)         |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| Budget Assignments/Priorities       | Intro Implementation                            |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| PTSD/CISD/Chaplaincy Initiative     | Evaluation/Feedback and Re-Assessment           |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| Prevention/Inspection Ordinance     | Draft Changes                                   |     |            | Amend                       |             | Finalize              |     | Implement |                |           |             |     |
| Fire Inspections                    | First Half                                      |     |            |                             |             | Second Half           |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| CIP                                 |                                                 |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| • Squad Re-Chassis (2020)           | Present                                         |     | Que        |                             |             |                       |     |           | Rebuild        |           |             |     |
| • Staff Vehicle Spec (2021)         | Spec/Quote                                      |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| • Lacy Road Firehouse Remodel       | Construction                                    |     |            | Orient and Occupy           |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| • East Fire Station                 | Monitor for Warranty Issues                     |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| Major Training Initiatives          |                                                 |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| • RIT                               | Training and Roll Out                           |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                | Implement |             |     |
| • Rescue Task Force                 | Refresher and Training                          |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           | Large Scale    |           |             |     |
| • EMR                               | Refresher/Continuing Education                  |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |
| • Rope Rescue / Tech Rescue         | Dept and Batt Training (Awareness & Ops Levels) |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           | Implementation |           |             |     |
| • Vehicle Inspection                | Implementation                                  |     |            |                             |             |                       |     |           |                |           |             |     |

## APPENDIX B. FFD CORE VALUES, MISSION, VISION



### CORE VALUES

Honesty & Integrity  
Pride & Ownership  
Passion & Professionalism

### MISSION STATEMENT

The Fitchburg Fire Department strives:

#### To Serve

by providing care through a dedicated and dependable response

#### To Learn

by exercising readiness through repetition and vigilance. We will train to our limits... (not afraid of failure in a training environment) as we work toward competence and confidence

#### To Respect

by exhibiting teamwork, honor, and accountability at all levels – continually treating others in a way that we would want to be treated

#### To Lead

through initiative and service excellence, we are committed to be an example in our profession and in our community

### VISION

For those we are sworn to protect...  
For those with whom we serve...  
For all who live in, work in, or visit the City of Fitchburg,  
*We envision our optimal future:*

**We know our "Why,"**  
*Regardless of our forward momentum, we will never forget why we do what we do... compassion, respect, professionalism.*

**We value our "What,"**  
*Our accomplishments provide a significant amount of pride for active members and those who identify with our history*

**We will constantly strive to improve our "How,"**  
*Through research, planning, training, and a progressive mindset.*

**While working toward our "WOW!"**  
*We are standard bearers in our profession... an example for others to follow.*

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## APPENDIX C. FOCUS GROUP ENGAGEMENT PROCESS



FIRE DEPARTMENT  
5791 Lacy Road Fitchburg, WI 53711  
Phone: (608) 270-7070 Fax: (608) 270-7041  
www.fitchburgwi.gov/fire



### RECRUITMENT FOCUS GROUP ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

| Task                                                     | Year  |  | 2020 |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------|--|------|---|---|---|-----|---|---|---|------|---|---|---|-----|---|--|--|
|                                                          | Month |  | Jul  |   |   |   | Aug |   |   |   | Sept |   |   |   | Oct |   |  |  |
|                                                          | Week  |  | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1   | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1   | 2 |  |  |
| Engagement Letter Municipal Proof and Approval           |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Develop Contact List                                     |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Send Out Engagement Letter (Initial Invites)             |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Send Email Invite with Dates                             |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Send Reminder Email                                      |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Develop Agenda for First Meeting                         |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Send Meeting Information (Agenda and Virtual Link)       |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Conduct First Focus Group Meeting                        |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Send Draft of Minutes from First Meeting                 |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Develop Agenda for Second Meeting                        |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Send Meeting Information (Agenda, Minutes, Virtual Link) |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Conduct Second Focus Group Meeting                       |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Send Draft of Minutes from Second Meeting                |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Follow Up on Recommendations of Focus Group              |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Write First Draft of Thesis/ Research                    |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |
| Thesis Lab                                               |       |  |      |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |   |     |   |  |  |

#### Invitation:

An engagement letter will go out to civic leaders that are directly associated with diverse communities in the City of Fitchburg. City Administration and Human Relations will proof and approve the letter before it goes out to potential focus group members. The engagement letter will solicit availability and attempt to coordinate schedules so focus group meetings can take place during the first and second weeks of August, 2020. The thesis proposal and literature review will be sent to participants (once participants are identified).

#### Reminders:

Once dates are selected, reminder emails will be sent out to the entire contact list. Reminders will be sent the week before and week of the scheduled meeting dates. Reminders will be sent out for both focus group meetings.

#### Contact List:

Two, successive focus group meetings will be scheduled with at least 10, but no more than 20, community representatives. Focus group participants will be selected based on their role in the community. Participants will be asked about problems and solutions. We will reach out to predominant governmental, organizational, and social leaders that resonate in selected, underrepresented population groups.

**Agenda:**

The agenda for both sessions will be sent out in advance of each meeting. Participants will have the opportunity to review topics prior to the meeting. They will also have the ability to request additions and/or changes to the agenda.

**Meeting and Venue:**

Information discussed in the second focus group meeting will be influenced by information received in the first focus group meeting. Those participants that attend the first focus group are highly encouraged to attend the second meeting.

The meeting will be hosted at Fitchburg Fire Station #1 (5791 Lacy Road). This station houses the emergency operation center (EOC) and will provide enough room for over 20 people.

**Notes/Minutes:**

Fitchburg Fire Department personnel and Fitchburg's Human Relations Department will take notes during the meeting. The meeting will not be recorded (video or audio) so that participants can speak candidly. After the meeting all notes will be collected and consolidated. A draft of the meeting minutes will be sent out to all meeting participants so that missing information can be added and misrepresented discussions can be corrected.

**Contact Information/ Continued Dialogue:**

After the second focus group meeting, no additional meetings are planned. Focus group members are encouraged to share contact information and provide additional input as material becomes available- especially opportunities for outreach. The Fire Chief will send out a copy of the thesis before final submission. Although some immediate benefits will be implemented, developments and outcomes will be appreciated overtime and will likely encourage additional outreach. Coordinated efforts that require event planning and collaboration may take time to develop- outreach and recruitment will be a continual work-in-progress.

**Contingencies: \***

Due to COVID-19, in-person attendance was limited to 10 participants. An online, video conference option was provided for focus group members who preferred to attend virtually. Those attending in-person needed to wear a face mask, needed to be COVID-19 symptom free, and agree to allow a no-contact body temperature screen. The room could not be set up conference (round table) style. All in-person participants sat by themselves at a table (classroom style) and were no closer than 6 feet to any other participant.

Due to public unrest associated with police-involved shooting incidents, many focus group members were involved in other outreach activities. Additional phone calls and follow-up were required in certain situations to determine that the focus group meeting did not conflict with other scheduled events.

\* Process contingencies were added after the initial plan was developed. Extra effort was required in order to fulfill the requirements of the thesis proposal and research design.

## APPENDIX D. FOCUS GROUP ENGAGEMENT LETTER



FIRE DEPARTMENT  
5791 Lacy Road Fitchburg, WI 53711  
Phone: (608) 270-7070 Fax: (608) 270-7041  
[www.fitchburgwi.gov/fire](http://www.fitchburgwi.gov/fire)



July 10, 2020

Civic Leaders  
Greater Fitchburg Area

Community Leader:

Since my appointment as the City of Fitchburg Fire Chief, The Fitchburg Fire Department has been actively recruiting a workforce that resembles the community we serve. We have been able to celebrate some success over the past couple years, but we are still challenged by a limited candidate pool when job opportunities are posted.

Over the past year, I have been attending the Naval Postgraduate School's Master Degree Program through the Center for Homeland Defense and Security. In 2019, my thesis topic and research method was approved. The focus of my thesis addresses the diversity of our workforce. I truly believe that public safety and homeland security will be positively affected when our firefighters can relate well with the community, and when the community trusts its public safety personnel. Inclusion drives innovation and resiliency.

The thesis title is: *Affirming Diversity Independent of Affirmative Action: Recruiting Firefighters Who Reflect the Community Served*. If interested, I can offer you a copy of my thesis proposal to provide some information about the initial direction of my research.

In an effort to develop a recruitment program that will attract the attention of our diverse populations, I need more information. I need to appreciate the perspective of the community and understand its perception and attitude toward local public safety. I am asking civic leaders to participate in a focus group that will meet twice to examine the following questions:

- Historical events that influenced fire service interest (or lack of interest) in certain population groups.
- What are realistic goals for recruitment?
- How do we identify potential youth and/or adult candidates?
- Who can help convey the needed recruitment message of trust?
- Who can convey the need for education and participation prior to career placement?
- Conclusion with an open forum (question/answer, hot topics, discussion of missed observations).
- Summary and noted follow-up (points that influence the agenda for the second meeting)

After the first meeting, I will develop a theoretical recruitment event (or events). Then, during the second meeting, I can share those ideas and solicit feedback from the group. Together, we can brainstorm an effective method to inform, train, and recruit future firefighters.

I would like to conduct these focus group sessions before the end of summer. Preferably:

- One evening (after 6 p.m.) during the first week of August (initial, fact finding)
- One evening (after 6 p.m.) during the second week of August (follow-up and feedback)

I am asking those civic leaders that received this invite to consider sharing their schedule over the course of those two weeks—so I can schedule the focus group meetings.

- Dates are flexible.
- I intend to convene a 10 – 20 person focus group, so I will attempt to coordinate meeting dates based on the availability of respondents.
- For the continuity of research and comments, attendance from the same people (at both sessions) is requested.

Please let me know if you would be interested in investing time in this initiative. If you cannot participate, a representative that could speak on behalf of your organization would be greatly appreciated (my thesis may quote participants). Representatives should be comfortable with candid conversation—in order to provide the best possible recruitment objectives and outcomes.

My thesis will be accessible to public safety organizations throughout the United States. The work we do will positively impact recruitment in the fire service, law enforcement, and emergency medical services. Thank you so much for considering participation in this effort. If you have any questions about this recruitment initiative, please call my cell number: (808) 327-9449.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Pulvermacher", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joe Pulvermacher  
Fire Chief

## APPENDIX E. OUTREACH EMAIL

**Joe Pulvermacher**

---

**From:** Joe Pulvermacher  
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 14, 2020 12:44 PM  
**To:**   
**Subject:** Fire Service Recruitment Focus Group  
**Attachments:** Focus Group Engagement Letter 2020 07 09.pdf



I am emailing to discuss fire service recruitment. I am working on a graduate-level thesis for the Center of Homeland Defense and Security (through the Naval Postgraduate School). The intent of my thesis is to understand the motivation of our community-so that I can effectively reach out to those who may not be aware of employment and/or training opportunities. One of the first steps is to convene a focus group that will provide input and influence into a recruitment event (or events) that serves all communities in Fitchburg.

With the assistance of  (Fitchburg Police and Fire Commissioner), I am reaching out to civic leaders that can provide the best impression of our community and what is needed to inform and educate. I have attached a letter explaining this in greater detail.

My contact information is provided (below)... feel free to reach out anytime. Thanks,

**JOE PULVERMACHER, EFO, CFO**  
Fire Chief/Emergency Management Director

**FITCHBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT**  
5791 Lacy Road  
Fitchburg, Wisconsin 53711

W: (608) 270-7070  
C: (608) 327-9449  
[Joe.Pulvermacher@fitchburgwi.gov](mailto:Joe.Pulvermacher@fitchburgwi.gov)  
[www.fitchburgwi.gov](http://www.fitchburgwi.gov)



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## APPENDIX F. FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

**Joe Pulvermacher**

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**From:** Joe Pulvermacher  
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 21, 2020 10:25 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Fire Service Recruitment Focus Group  
**Attachments:** Focus Group Engagement Letter 2020 07 21.pdf

Thank you so much to those who have already responded to my invitation. This focus group is, no doubt, the needed representation of our community- you are leaders who want to positively influence generations to come. I am attaching the original letter that I sent late last week- some changes and additions have been made to the Contact List (based on replies and recommendations).

I am trying to be conscientious of the time required to make scheduling arrangements. To address the interests of panel members that have responded and to avoid other meetings in the City, I am aiming for the following meeting dates.

- Tuesday, August 4<sup>th</sup> @ 6 pm
- Wednesday, August 12<sup>th</sup> @ 6 pm

At present, I am working on a hybrid approach to the focus group. I would like to accommodate as many panel members as I can for an in-person meeting. In addition, we will simultaneously provide video conferencing options (for those who prefer to avoid public meetings due to COVID-19). The video will not be broadcast beyond those who have RSVP'd as panel members. Further, the video will not be recorded- to allow for candid comments from panel members.

Because of public meeting restrictions and protection measures, please RSVP and let me know which platform you would prefer. That will help me insure that I am reserving the appropriate venue. Those that choose to participate by video conference will be provided a meeting link in a follow-up email.

If you can think of anyone else that would be interested in this initiative, please let me know. I will send additional invitations to those not on my original list.

Thanks again for your assistance and consideration,  
Joe

**JOE PULVERMACHER, EFO, CFO**

Fire Chief/Emergency Management Director

**FITCHBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT**

5791 Lacy Road  
Fitchburg, Wisconsin 53711

W: (608) 270-7070

C: (608) 327-9449

[Joe.Pulvermacher@fitchburgwi.gov](mailto:Joe.Pulvermacher@fitchburgwi.gov)

[www.fitchburgwi.gov](http://www.fitchburgwi.gov)

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## APPENDIX G. MEETING 1 AGENDA



FIRE DEPARTMENT  
5791 Lacy Road Fitchburg, WI 53711  
Phone: (608) 278-2980 Fax: (608) 278-2985  
www.fitchburgwi.gov/fire



### RECRUITMENT FOCUS GROUP MEETING No. 1 AGENDA Tuesday, August 4, 2020 6:00 pm

**PLACE:** Fitchburg Fire Station #1  
Emergency Operations Center  
5791 Lacy Road  
Fitchburg, WI 53711  
(608) 270-7070

**VIRTUAL OPTION:** Zoom Meeting, Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android:

[Join from your computer](#)

Or Telephone, Dial:

[\(608\) 278-2980](#)

[Join from your mobile phone](#)

#### AGENDA:

##### 1) Chief's Welcome

- Facilities/Restrooms
- Fire Exits
- Refreshments

##### 2) Ground Rules

- Interactive (Online and In Person)
- Members of the Focus Group have no obligation to the City of Fitchburg (voluntary)
- For the purposes of this research, no member of the Focus Group will be in a subordinate position to the Fire Chief (participating fire department members will be able to speak freely to the Chief without fear of retribution or reprisal)
- Focus Group members are requested to participate in both sessions (the second session is scheduled for Wednesday, August 12, 2020 @ 6 pm).
- Mutual respect to reach common goals: opportunity, professionalism, education, talent.

##### 3) Introductions

- Participant's Name
- Participant's Organization(s)

**4) Preliminary Work- Prior to Focus Group (Research Design)**

- Chief-Level Officer Observation
- Literature Review/ Initial Research
  - What other Research Information is recommended?
- Previous Recruitment Outcomes- Intern Program Success Rate
- City of Fitchburg historical employment data (number of applications returned)

**5) Historical Understanding**

- Local/Regional experiences Civic Leaders
  - Interaction with Fire Department and Public Safety
  - Impressions about employment opportunities for diverse communities

**6) Potential Outreach**

- Where is the need?
- Who are the groups we need to focus on- for maximum result?
- Who are the change agents in our organizations/profession now?

**7) A Plan to Pursue Youth Outreach**

- What events can be conducted in the station?
- What on-site community events will have the greatest return on investment and effort?
- How much lead time is needed?

**8) A Plan to Pursue Promise**

- How do we identify a potential candidate?
- What conversations need to happen to identify interest?
- What support already exists within the firehouse?

**9) Open-Ended Discussion**

- Continuing the conversation... at the direction of Civic Leaders
- What are we missing? What else needs to be said?
- Is there any homework for the Fire Chief? What needs to be evaluated before the next meeting?

**10) Adjourn**

- The Fire Chief is available for additional conversation
  - Cell
  - Email
  - In-Person

**Next Meeting**

Wednesday, August 12, 2020 @ 6 pm

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## APPENDIX H. MEETING 1 FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

**Joe Pulvermacher**

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**From:** Joe Pulvermacher  
**Sent:** Friday, August 7, 2020 3:09 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RE: Fire Service Recruitment Focus Group- Meeting #1 Minutes  
**Attachments:** Recruitment Focus Group Meeting Minutes 8-4-2020.pdf; FSRFG 8-4-2020 Attendance.pdf

Thank you Focus Group:

I have attached a draft of the minutes from our first focus group meeting. They are in draft form because I am requesting that you read through them and identify anything that was missed or misrepresented. I will make corrections and additions and send out a revised copy on Monday evening.

I enjoyed the conversation and critical thought that went into our discussion. If there is something that we didn't address in the meeting, please add that to your comments. I will address new items (not previously discussed) in the foot notes.

I have already started to work on my homework (as discussed by the group). I will be able to share some of the outreach that is being considered for the short, medium, and long term. Those ideas will be shared with the group on Wednesday night.

As you can probably guess, the Affirmative Action component of my assignment has a well-intended foundation- and a variety of interpretations that address implementation and efficacy. For example, one book referenced was written by two lawyers (one that supports the Act and one that interprets the intention differently). I will be more informed (and may be more confused at the same time). My initial, over-simplified approach to this point is "you don't have to be right, to do the right thing." This will be a work in progress and I fear that my thesis will not be long enough to provide enough clarification into the interpretations of written and case law- That will not prevent me from understanding Affirmative Action better than I have. And it will not prevent us from doing the right thing.

The Fitchburg Fire Department is invested in this initiative. We know the value of a represented workforce. Some of our previous efforts have worked and others have fallen flat. That is why I am extremely grateful for the time and attention you have provided to this effort. We all stand to benefit from a deliberate effort to involve our community in the recruitment of diverse, excited, well-educated, conscientious firefighters.

Next Meeting will be Wednesday, August 12, 2020 @ 6:00 p.m. The same in-person and virtual arrangements will be made (The Zoom link information may change... I will address that in the agenda that I send out on Monday night.

Thanks again for your assistance,  
Joe

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## APPENDIX I. MEETING 1 MINUTES



FIRE DEPARTMENT  
5791 Lacy Road Fitchburg, WI 53711  
Phone: (608) 278-2980 Fax: (608) 278-2985  
www.fitchburgwi.gov/fire



### RECRUITMENT FOCUS GROUP MEETING No. 1 MINUTES Tuesday, August 4, 2020 6:00 pm

how do you motivate young people? Biases – how do you recognize them and then what do you do? Don't throw away what has been done so far, **but need to do something totally different going forward. Achieve diversity in relation to qualifications and hiring practices.**

**affirmative action clarification**; bring in a more diverse pool to hear from, not simply selecting the POC between two people with the same qualifications. Affirmative Action (AA) exists because of under-representation for POC's. Title – represents an "impossibility"; **AA is more than just race**

Thesis title turned her off. **Impression was that it was against AA.**

Joe – goal is to address the value of education and skills- Address the means of providing access to talented applicants/individuals with diverse backgrounds. Providing exposure and experience to interested, excited candidates. Prioritizing professionalism and mentoring to those looking to establish themselves at the entry level; **not trying to minimize the importance of AA- working to minimize the reliance on it to attract a diverse candidate pool.**

AA doesn't mean you're not qualified; it means you get an opportunity to compete; **gets the foot in the door to participate equally**

Echoed Rosa's comments about the thesis title. Sometimes feels like she is "the AA hire" especially since she has an accent. Thinks the title sounds "kind of off"; would remove the Affirmative Action part. **Don't want to give the impression that we're hiring POC to fill a spot based simply on skin color**

immigrants are already **bringing skills to the table**; when he moved to the US for his graduate degree he already had responsibility with **The intent of AA is make sure everyone has an opportunity to come into the hall, once they're there it's up to them to prove themselves, the same as everyone else.** People use the word "minority" is a function of where you are geographically. Should be mindful of the use of this term as it may not apply as well as you think. Nobody is scared of competition; **qualifications still prove who is the correct person for a position.**

Joe – title may be misplaced but feels it has created a dialogue that may not have happened otherwise; not saying the title must stay, but maybe it required more explanation.

**affirmative diversity independent of affirmative action**

goal is to **make sure the pool of applicants in the room represent the diversity of the community**; once it's possible for all of them to be there, the process can begin to start making selections

#### Reference Wiscjobs - The Diversity Zone

need to understand that POC don't have a safe zone in regard to introduction to the trades. **Should be "selling" all the other activities performed by FFs (specialties)**, beyond the firefighting efforts; increase interest in those other activities. Helping people, performing first aid, lots of ways that FFs are helping the community without fighting fires. "beyond putting out fires"

need to consider nepotism and the "good old boys" system. **Historically, access into PD and FD and other trades was based on whom you knew**. AA allowed equal access into these areas.

Joe – for too many years success was based on letters behind your name and the number of years spent in a university (4-year institution). The Vocation Technical System is in need of a resurgence- The fire service would benefit.

**what else do intern applicants bring to the table** beyond straight-forward FF skills?

words have a lot of meaning to them, have been embedded. Had no skills, experience, certifications, but he looked at the application and said there wasn't anything on there that he couldn't do. **What does "talent" mean? What does "humble" mean?** Concerned with the competencies specified as part of the interview process. You have to want to address diversity and to be okay with what that means. **A person shouldn't have to prove himself (more than anyone else needs to) worthy because of skin color or an accent**. When POC look at a department, they don't see themselves represented so they wonder if they're really wanted, and **what will the environment be like once they're there?**

It isn't just what we can do for recruitment, it's also **what the tech system can do for recruitment**. Starting in middle school, planting the seeds to start considering different possible career choices.

It's not enough to recruit a diverse pool, **need to make sure the environment is able to accept and encourage**

once people get involved in programs similar to an explorer program it's **important that they have representative mentorship to encourage them and provide guidance to succeed**. Not everyone wants to evolve and it's important to allow for growth

– when you become mentor you are also learning from the mentee and it's important to be open to that change and growth. **Intentionality in recruitment is key; fliers and promo material must reflect the people you're working to recruit**. Recruitment is important but intention is even bigger

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 **What is the target audience we're trying to recruit?**

Joe – taking the message into the community rather than just focusing the open house at station 1; "show & tell" in the community in targeted neighborhoods; block parties; taking the training away from the station and into the neighborhoods; passive ways to start introducing the many aspects of the fire service to the community

 **understand what level of under-representation you have among minorities.** What is the makeup of the community you're representing and what does that translate to in the department? **What does a diverse workforce look like?**

 does the fire station have a **presence in programs** like Operation Fresh Start, Briar Patch, etc. Targeting specific places where individuals are less likely to be going into a 4-year degree program

 **Know the community** you're trying to reach. How do you work with individuals who don't have the push from home? **How do you build on a little interest and keep it going?**

**Chief's Homework:**

More research on affirmative action; having a clearer understanding on what it meant. Provide history of the FFD, how is diversity addressed now, what is different in the process today versus years ago, what is done in the stations to create a welcoming environment for our diverse members? Investigate an avenue with athletes.

Talk to     to find out what the work culture truly is; find out how welcoming it is. Also contact ?

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## APPENDIX J. MEETING 2 REMINDER EMAIL

**Joe Pulvermacher**

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**From:** Joe Pulvermacher  
**Sent:** Monday, August 10, 2020 9:58 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RE: Fire Service Recruitment Focus Group- Meeting #2

Wanted to send out a quick reminder that we will be meeting again on Wednesday, August 12, 2020 @ 6:00 pm.

The same meeting arrangements will apply. Those who would prefer to meet in person, I will be conducting the meeting at Station #1. Those who prefer a virtual setting, I will be sending out a Zoom link tomorrow night or Wednesday morning.

I was going to send out the final draft of the meeting minutes and a draft of the agenda, but I was asked to hold off until tomorrow. I am expecting some more information (as it pertains to Affirmative Action and how I can address the importance of "having a place at the table" while honoring the talent that candidates already bring to the table. I am still working that out based on input received from the first meeting.

Taking a sneak peek at the agenda, we will discuss the following:

1. Homework- Chief's report
2. Note review... questions about comments
3. Literature Review: any new resources?
4. Short term (minimal effort) outreach goals
5. Mid-term (some effort) outreach goals
6. Sustaining, Long term (significant effort) outreach goals
7. Reporting and follow-through/ follow-up.

I am very grateful for your assistance. If you have questions or if there is anything you need to address before the meeting, please feel free to contact me at the phone numbers provided below.

Thank you!

**JOE PULVERMACHER, EFO, CFO**  
Fire Chief/Emergency Management Director

**FITCHBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT**  
5791 Lacy Road  
Fitchburg, Wisconsin 53711

W: (608) 270-7070  
C: (608) 327-9449  
[Joe.Pulvermacher@fitchburgwi.gov](mailto:Joe.Pulvermacher@fitchburgwi.gov)

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## APPENDIX K. MEETING 2 AGENDA



FIRE DEPARTMENT  
5791 Lacy Road Fitchburg, WI 53711  
Phone: (608) 278-2980 Fax: (608) 278-2985  
www.fitchburgwi.gov/fire



### RECRUITMENT FOCUS GROUP MEETING No. 2 AGENDA Wednesday, August 12, 2020 6:00 pm

**PLACE:** Fitchburg Fire Station #1  
Emergency Operations Center  
5791 Lacy Road  
Fitchburg, WI 53711  
(608) 270-7070

**VIRTUAL OPTION:** Zoom Meeting, Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android:  
Or Telephone, Dial:



#### AGENDA:

##### 1) Chief's Report

- Clear(er) Understanding of Affirmative Action (synopsis)
- History of Fire Department Diversity
  1. What is different?
  2. How is the environment welcoming?
- What can be done with area athletes/athletics?
- Fire Department Culture
  1. How are we involving existing members/interns?
  2. What else can be done?

##### 2) Review Meeting #1 Minutes

- Major topics, points of interest.
- Any additions or corrections?

##### 3) Literature Review

- Bibliography- Sources Considered
- Recommended Sources

**4) Outreach Goals**

- Short Term
- Medium Term
- Long Term- Sustaining effort

**5) A Plan to Pursue Promise (carried over from meeting #1)**

- How do we identify a potential candidate?
- What conversations need to happen to identify interest?
- What support already exists within the firehouse?

**6) Timeline**

- Thesis Delivery
- Program Delivery
- Follow through, Follow Up

**7) Accountability**

- Thesis Review
- Community/Professional Partners
- Program Assessment- Grading Matrix

**8) Open-Ended Discussion**

- Continuing the conversation... at the direction of Civic Leaders
- What are we missing? What else needs to be said?
- Is there any homework for the Fire Chief? What needs to be evaluated before the next meeting?

**10) Adjourn**

- The Fire Chief is available for additional conversation
  - 608-327-9449
  - [joe.pulvermacher@fitchburgwi.gov](mailto:joe.pulvermacher@fitchburgwi.gov)
  - In-Person (you pick the place)

**Next Meeting**

Will follow-up in person with topics of interest (specific to the requesting focus group member).

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## APPENDIX L. MEETING 2 FOLLOW-UP EMAIL/APPRECIATION

**Joe Pulvermacher**

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**From:** Joe Pulvermacher  
**Sent:** Monday, August 17, 2020 6:23 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RE: Fire Service Recruitment Focus Group- Meeting #2  
**Attachments:** Recruitment Focus Group Meeting Minutes 8-12-2020.pdf

I want to thank everyone for their contributions to this focus group. Prior to moving forward with additional research, planning, and writing, I am forwarding the consolidated notes from our session on Wednesday, August 12. **These notes are in draft form...** So if there is something that I recorded incorrectly, or missed a point that is important to you, please reply to this email with your additions/corrections.

I am pretty excited about the potential of our fire department and our ability to do good things with reflective recruitment. I seriously could not have done it without your assistance and your perspective.

Thanks again. Please feel free to contact me if there are other ways we can improve our service to the City of Fitchburg.

**JOE PULVERMACHER, EFO, CFO**  
Fire Chief/Emergency Management Director

**FITCHBURG FIRE DEPARTMENT**  
5791 Lacy Road  
Fitchburg, Wisconsin 53711

W: (608) 270-7070  
C: (608) 327-9449  
[Joe.Pulvermacher@fitchburgwi.gov](mailto:Joe.Pulvermacher@fitchburgwi.gov)

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## APPENDIX M. MEETING 2 MINUTES



FIRE DEPARTMENT  
5791 Lacy Road Fitchburg, WI 53711  
Phone: (608) 278-2980 Fax: (608) 278-2985  
www.fitchburgwi.gov/fire



### RECRUITMENT FOCUS GROUP MEETING No. 2 MINUTES Wednesday, August 12, 2020 6:00 pm

Joe P – As of this meeting, the title of the thesis hasn't changed- yet. Making sure we're not addressing AA independent of talent and skills. **Diversity must be addressed in retention and promotion, not just recruitment.**

(Chief addressed historical overview of AA and EEOC)

To address anonymity of applicant, names are removed from the initial application process. In an effort to address implicit bias, when applications are initially provided by HR, each applicant is assigned a number - to ensure that the initial review is based strictly on skills and relevant background.

 Asked how effective the **anonymous process** has worked

Joe P – Provided brief overview of history of females, POC, and Hispanic individuals being involved with the department, up to current day. **In the past 5 years, personnel hired by FFD have reflected diverse backgrounds (more than previous years, but not enough to reflect community percentages)**

 Confirmed that **when we first get the candidates at the fire department, no demographics are known**

 (Shared the application process) HR receives applications, initial review takes place **without any demographics** and based on pre-determined benchmarks/required qualifications; **applications are scored and top scores go on to the interview process.**

 Asked if we know why an individual didn't make it through to the interview.

Joe P – Following up with unsuccessful applicants has not been part of the formal process. Agreed there could be more **follow-up with those individuals to discuss why they didn't make it to the interview and identify if there is a way that can be addressed/overcome.**

 expressed concern that **candidates who could be excellent** firefighters may not be getting a chance because of limitations or obstacles they encounter.

 When interviews are conducted, **what is the makeup of the panel?**

 Always work to **keep a balance on the interview panel** to represent civilians from the community, people of color, men/women; **bias training is provided to all interview panel members at all stages of the process**

commented that Sarah mentioned it was "the goal" but asked **how often that goal was achieved**. Suggested that it should be required to always have a balanced panel at every stage of the process

Is confident that the diverse individuals are able to be tapped into; sometimes it's difficult to coordinate schedules which can impact a given interview panel

— Discussed the term "color-blind" and what it means and why **it's important to simply say what you want to achieve**: A workforce that reflects the diversity of the community. **Mentioning that the process is color blind may be denying the candidate to convey pride in their ancestry.**

Asked if she could share, of the people who didn't make it to the interview, how many people are people of color, Hispanic.

98 applicants – 6 females, 9 POC, 2 POC passed min qualifications requirement. 24 were invited to interview; 2 POC; 10 moved on to Chief interview – 1 POC was hired  
Thinks it's a good idea to review the short answer questions for possible unintentional bias

Asked about any test that is administered, such as Civil Service Exam

Joe P – **A written test is no longer administered during our application process**. Explained that because we're already requiring FFI certification they already have those basic skills

How are candidates scored then if everyone already has FF training?

Explained the format of the short answer questions that are part of the application and how those answers/responses are scored, along with certifications/skills

Asked about the **diversity of the PFC**

Asked to go more through the step by step process

Joe P – Asked to give his perspective on the FT firefighter application process as he experienced it

Explained that the **application process for the FT position was quite rigorous** and he needed to take him time completing it. Explained that without some certifications, he was still eligible because successful applicants are allowed a window of time to achieve them. Described the interview panel; 10-15 mins prior to interview time given the questions; additional cut after first round; top candidates (number depends on number of positions)

Joe P – Explained that the **top candidates come in for a ride-along to get a better idea of the department, and the department has a better chance of getting to know them**. This happens in line with the Chief's interview. Explained that he's willing to accept a call from any existing member or outside applicant looking for tips on how to approach the interview

Asked about min requirements for intern

Joe P – Provided min requirements needed for an intern- **some interns are receiving introductory classes at the high school level (not all high schools provide this benefit)**.

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 asked about ability to apply for a FT position without any certifications

Joe P – Explained that FFI/II is required as a minimum for FT, but mentioned there are other ways, through sponsorship, where individuals can be assisted with achieving the minimum requirements

Joe P – AA is not just hiring a diverse workforce; it is also outreach and awareness level to identify how the workforce can represent diversity and the community

Joe P – When he first started with FFD, we were finalizing the plans for the Marketplace Dr fire station. Addressed the original plan of a men's and women's locker room; all 3 stations now have gender neutral bathrooms and locker room facilities. No need to worry about whether an individual will be uncomfortable about the facilities they should use; also addresses the fact that we don't know today what the makeup of the department will be years into the future.

Joe P – Mentoring and coaching is a program that will hopefully begin before the year's end; training individuals to be mentors to potential members in a similar situation or background. Also interested in extending the program to past members

 Once we provide the training, are members required to stay on the department for a certain amount of time?

Joe P – No, because of the nature of the workforce is too unpredictable, with many members having numerous other activities, including family and primary jobs, that also require attention and their lives outside the FFD can change frequently and suddenly

 Asked for clarification about paid-on-call members/different statuses of firefighters

Joe P – Every member is paid, at different levels, for their participation

Additional discussion between  regarding the difference between FT and Paid-onCall firefighters and how individuals are used and trained.

Joe P – Explained mutual aid and auto aid contracts, as well as Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS)

 Asked for clarification on recruitment process for intern and FT versus that for paid-on-call

Joe P – Shared the current intern brochure and a few updates that are planned, including the inclusion of photos that reflect the current workforce. Create videos that can be shared with guidance counselors to be shared with interested students. Also addressing website updates Establishing points of contact with community organizations to create opportunities to engage with a larger segment of the workforce.

 Expressed concerns about the annual open house and the overall issue of inaccessibility. Consider ways to create a regional or national event around emergency responders to create more interest

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Joe P – Be aware of last minute/same day outreach opportunities. While driving in the community, watching for ways to stop and engage with residents

 Expressed importance of keeping the current focus group together and in communication to keep the conversation going and to help make the connections that will promote the efforts

Joe P – Revamping Open House to more neighborhood-focused show & tell events; connect with the neighborhoods that may have transportation issues with a single Open House event. Working in conjunction with MFD at B&GC

 Asked about the impact of the annexation of the Town of Madison to the department's current efforts

Joe P – Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative is already looking at adding the Southdale (Town of Madison) neighborhood.

 Suggested considering Badger Rock Middle School and Briar Patch as opportunities within the town of Madison acquisition. BRMS normally conducts community activities; could be a good opportunity to get involved with those residents

Joe P – Asked for a little more about Briar Patch

 BP provides services for homeless and runaway youth; some school-based programming but main purpose is to provide a safe space for youth who don't have a home. A lifeline is needed to help them work toward independence; may be a lot of work to begin with in regard to individuals having a history of trauma but starting to build the relationships could help overcome some of those blocks

Joe P – Medium Term Goals – Cul-de-sac training to include pre-event communication as notification and information about the training itself.

 Mentioned importance of getting the parents involved, particularly with younger kids through the Explorer Program

Joe P – sometimes the parental exposure isn't always consistent, so looking at ways to be a resource to the parents and kids

 Important to consider the messaging and the perspective of where it's coming from

Joe P – Need to consider the true impact of criminal records

 Discussed the fact that there is usually a small group of youths who typically cycle through the system regularly; county programs do exist to help provide support and mentorship to help them step out of the cycle. Suggested that he can help with connections to individuals who can help

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 – Consider the reality of already being at risk of dying just by being a young black male, and now the possibility of being a FF is intentionally increasing that risk of death, her son chose to remove himself from the process with Cincinnati FD. Additional concern was affiliation and working with the police. Important to be aware and understanding of how systemic racism impacts decision-making and the experience once on a department.

Joe P – Asked  to share his experience and how he became interested in the fire service.

 born & raised in Milwaukee; has been interested in firefighting since 12 YO, and even before. Started on North Shore as a cadet; learned what to do, what not to do; was only minority associated with the department. Wanted to beat the odds of all the stereotypes. Found a few “bad apples” but also found mentors who wanted to help young members coming up. Made the decision to be bold in some of his decisions, which made a few enemies but also solidified some positive relationships. Experience with Fitchburg – more welcoming than other departments where he had experience. Diversity was welcoming and he feels like he’s considered a valued member.

- Asked about cultural competency training for members. How is the experience differ for others who present differently; maybe with dreadlocks or not as driven and excited of a personality.

Joe P – Goal is to set people up for success; a realistic expectation needs to be set forth from day one regarding the fire service in general and the FFD specifically. Training is provided to different level members for anti-harassment and implicit bias on an annual/bi-annual basis.

- In 2020 budget, HR is proposing monies for diversity & inclusion training for all city staff.

Joe P – emphasized that they cannot be “check the box” programs; they need to be on-going programming and training

Underwriters Labs STEAM program – incorporate into a school program

 Asked what the roadblock was in regard to get into the schools

- son belong to black student union at West High School; asked about Joe P speaking to the students and they came back and stated they want to hear from someone of color

Joe – Long Term goals – UL STEAM program as a possible curriculum addition to schools. Reaching out to student athletes; take advantage of the athletically-minded individuals who don’t have the ability to be a professional athlete but are still interested in having those program qualities to continue to be involved with.

 Identify a timeline for the medium and long term goals to have a plan to work toward without becoming frustrated over slow movement

 Offered a modification to thesis title: “The Case for Affirming Diversity Independent of Affirmative Action.”

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 Doesn't want AA excluded completely. Suggested that members of this group may be able to assist with the connection to guidance counselors and the importance of getting to interested students

 Biggest concern is obstacles related to the certification requirements

 All three groups (interns (explorers), FT, paid-on-call) need to be addressed from a diversity standpoint

 Asked if the PFC ever diverts from the chief's recommendation(s) for candidates

Joe P – In his experience the PFC has always agreed with his recommendation(s). However, prior to candidates ever being presented and recommended to PFC, the individual has already been vetted through HR and numerous panels to ensure the most appropriate choice. The hiring process is approved by the PFC and we know what questions are going to be asked- candidates need to reflect the PFC's priorities for equal and ethical placement.

 asked about PFC members being involved somehow in the interview process, either as part of the panel or sitting in and listening/watching.

 Members of the PFC who are approving the final decision can't participate in an interview panel to keep the steps separate

Joe P – This was the second of two focus group sessions. Even though we are not scheduled for a third, the Chief is available for additional conversations and dialogue. Contact information was shared.

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## APPENDIX N. FFD RECRUITMENT SOG

|                                                                                   |                                                               |                |                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|
|  | <b>Fitchburg Fire Department Standard Operating Guideline</b> |                |                                       |
|                                                                                   | Number:                                                       | <b>204.001</b> | Title: <b>Recruitment Initiatives</b> |

|              |                            |                |    |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------------|----|
| Section:     | 200 General Administration |                |    |
| Issue Date:  | 11/01/2020                 | Revision Date: | NA |
| Approved By: | Joe Pulvermacher           |                |    |

### SCOPE:

All Fitchburg Fire Department Personnel

### PURPOSE:

To provide a comprehensive overview to community outreach and potential recruitment activities. Guidance is intended to provide current members with direction when addressing potential firefighter candidates- especially when interest in membership has been shared by the potential candidate.

### GUIDELINE:

During fire department sponsored events, or during a spontaneous station visit, be prepared to talk about the fire department and membership. If you are not comfortable talking about the fire department and/or recruitment, try to find someone who is.

Introduce yourself and your position with the department. Ask them if they have any questions and if you can help them.

If they express interest in membership, share your story, "why you became a firefighter?" and "what you like best about the Fitchburg Fire Department."

Fitchburg Fire will have recruitment folders available at all stations and on department apparatus during public relations events. If anyone expresses (even remote) interest in department membership, share the recruitment folder.

The folder will contain:

1. Fitchburg Fire Department Core Values, Mission Statement, and Vision.
2. Information about available training (including internship and sponsorship)
3. Membership expectations for interested candidates
4. Fitchburg Fire Department annual training schedule
5. Fire department contact information
6. Ride –Along policy and indemnification waiver

The folder will also contain the following form that will be retained by the Fitchburg Fire Department and will be turned over to the Administrative Services Manager so the fire department can follow-up with the potential candidate during recruitment activities:

- Recruitment contact sheet (204.001.01)

Fire Department mentors will be assigned to candidates who want more information about the fire department or if interest is expressed about ride-along participation.

Regardless of recruitment success, the folder will serve as a public relations tool.



# Fitchburg Fire Department Standard Operating Guideline

Number: 204.001.01

Title: Recruitment Contact Sheet

Name:

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Email:

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Telephone:

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Previous Firefighting Experience:

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Questions?

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Date of Contact:

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## **INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST**

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Naval Postgraduate School  
Monterey, California