2022 Urban Fire Forum Position Statement

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Fire & Rescue Service: A Roadmap for Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (DEI FIRE)

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Introduction

Changing Demographics

Desire for a more inclusive industry

2021 National Fire Service Research Agenda
FIRST Center Involvement

– 2021 May Metro meeting @ FRI
  – Risk assessment (survey)
    – 70% felt their department had a strong climate for inclusion
    – 50% felt their department was ready to make a change toward DEI

– 2022 May Metro Fire Chiefs Conference, Memphis, TN
Challenges...

- Uncertainty about communicating DEI issues
- A lack of viewpoints from underrepresented groups
- Conflicts between personal and organizational values
- Demands of the job that make DEI a lower priority
Departments lacked...

- common language around DEI
- access to evidence-based DEI practices and training
- inadequate financial and human resources to implement and sustain DEI
Great promise...

- DEI acceptance can be a learned and malleable trait
- Tailored tools and a DEI Roadmap can make DEI possible
Business Case
Financial Loss

- DEI initiatives may also reduce the risk of future litigation.
  - Litigation due to racial/ethnic, gender, or SOGI discrimination can cost departments millions of dollars.
Personnel Loss

• Research in male-dominated fields shows that diverse workforces can improve work performance and productivity (Pichler et al., 2017; Flabbi et al., 2019) and reduce turnover.
  • Employee turnover costs roughly 30% of the employee’s annual salary. Overall, voluntary turnovers in the US cost over $630 billion in 2019 (Work Institute, 2020).
  • Specifically, in a study of EMS, 10% of established EMS positions turned over annually (Patterson et al., 2016)
Emotional Case
Serving Community

- a diverse healthcare workforce helps to bridge cultural gaps between providers and patients, which improves quality of care (Rotenstein et al. 2021; Jackson et al., 2014).

- When the demographic of a fire department resembles the community it serves, they are more likely to be able to provide effective services. The Benefits and Importance of Diversity in the Fire Service- Columbia Southern University
Serving Ourselves

– An IAFC report found that “More than half of the respondents have had personal experience with discrimination, bullying and/or hazing in their department

– Many departments surveyed by the IAFC shared that “they do not feel their department’s initiatives are effective”
Serving Ourselves

- Why is There a Lack of Diversity in the Fire Service?
  - Representation in recruitment materials
  - Non-inclusive physical standards
  - Undervaluing non-physical skills.
Cost-Benefit
Fire departments and organizations that use the DEI toolkit should see:

1. more creative and better decisions resulting because varied perspectives in the ranks are included
2. higher levels of support and buy-in demonstrated by stakeholders at all levels
3. more successful recruitment efforts due to the development of more inclusive work environments
4. better retention and therefore higher engagement among firefighters
5. higher morale
6. stronger commitment to department initiatives because decision-making procedures are perceived to be fair
7. lower stress and burnout because the right people are in the right positions and roles
8. the emergence of inclusive environments that attract greater diversity
The NFFF 2021 Research Agenda identified the following questions:

1. What is the financial impact of a lack of diversity and inclusion in an organization?

2. What is the financial impact of having a diverse and inclusive organization?

3. What are the impacts on an organization’s personnel (e.g., behavioral health, productivity, belongingness, job satisfaction), organization (e.g., equity in service delivery, community satisfaction), and culture related to DEI efforts?
FEMA FP&S DEI Toolkit Proposal

- create a DEI dictionary so that language is standardized in fire & rescue service trainings and best practices
- assess DEI receptivity in fire departments and fire service organizations using off-the-shelf validated tools to measure attitudes and progress
- develop the fire service DEI Roadmap, inclusive of best practices, trainings, and policies, and make resources freely available to all
- develop a fire service-specific DEI business case
DEI Roadmap components and goals

Development of DEI Infrastructure
1. DEI Mission Statements
2. DEI Policies
3. Cultural Competency Plans

Annual Anonymous DEI Climate Survey
- Use of anonymous climate survey to determine overall organizational experience of staff
- Increase in employee responses in support of DEI experiences over time

Recruitment/Outreach
- Increase percentage of diverse candidates in the applicant pool by ethnicity, gender, age, etc., in comparison to baseline data, for new hires and promotional recruitments

Workforce Representation
- Percentage of diverse safety staff out of total workforce representation
- Percentage of diverse staff in leadership positions
Evaluation
1) What are the common set of DEI metrics for the fire service to allow for comparisons across and between populations?

2) What DEI metrics should be designed within a framework that is easily usable and implementable by fire organizations?

3) What DEI benchmarks can be used to compare the fire service with other occupational groups?
Assess the degree to which we:

1) Determined the baseline educational needs and concepts necessary to effectively promote DEI in the fire service

2) Determined how DEI concepts can be integrated into training, and how they relate to measurable performance benchmarks, and how the benchmarks can be operationalized

3) Selected DEI best approaches to include in leadership training, company officer training, and recruit school
Assess the degree to which we:

1) Identified emerging practices that are most effective related to promoting DEI
2) Modified best practices from other occupational groups to the fire service
Assess the degree to which we:

1) Identified barriers to DEI within different department demographics (e.g., type of department, size of department, etc.), and how can these challenges be approached

2) Identified effective methods, messaging, and training models that can be used within the fire service to promote DEI efforts
DEI Roadmap Outcomes

**DEI Trainings**

- % of senior managers and other leaders taking part in DEI trainings
- % of employees taking part in DEI trainings
- % of leaders implementing DEI initiatives
- # of DEI trainings and topics provided to staff annually
DEI Roadmap Outcomes

**DEI Community Programs/Activities**

- Identify and evaluate DEI programs and activities, like the camps, high school and college fire cadet programs, that create pathways to employment for diverse groups.
- Increase in education programs/workshops at the station level focused on DEI topics reflective of the community experience in each city.
DEI Committee/Task Force

• Creation of a DEI committee/task force comprised of key stakeholders to address DEI issues across the organization in the areas of:
  • Policies and Practices (i.e., Marketing and Communications)
  • DEI Trainings, Programs, & Metrics
  • Outreach and Recruitment Efforts
  • Promotional/Internal Hiring Processes
Grant Partners
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– Kwame Cooper (LA City FD, Kwame Cooper & Associates)
– Virginia Department of Fire Programs
– The NVFC and the IAFC VCOS
– Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA)
– Drexel University: Office of Equity and Diversity and Teaching and Learning Center.
– Drexel University’s Dr. Randall Sell and Dr. Casper Voyles
– The Center for Fire, Rescue & EMS Health Research at the National Development & Research Institutes - USA. Dr. Sara Jahnke
– The FIRST Center’s Advisory Board
– DEI Diplomats and Subject Matter Experts from:
  – International Association of Black Professional Firefighters,
  – National Association of Hispanic Firefighters,
  – International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Service
DEI Diplomat Core

– **DEI Diplomats:** fire service leaders who are trained and competent in DEI.
– **IDEA Fellows:** Drexel fellowship program for doctoral and masters students (Inclusion Diversity Equity and Anti-racism, IDEA) for those who share an interest in diversity and social justice programming and education.
– Two IDEA fellows and 4 fire service mentors will create the **DEI Diplomat Core**.
– The Core will recruit **subject matter experts**
Call for Commitment
Call for Commitment

- Participate in continued assessment of DEI needs through climate surveys, interviews, and focus groups at all organizational/departmental levels.

- Integrate the recommended communication, training, and resources as prescribed by the DEI Roadmap tailored to the fire service into standard operating procedures.

- Ensure transparent dissemination of all results and resources to fire service members at all levels and in all fire service organizations.

- Participate in continuous quality assurance to ensure optimal fit and applicability of materials for all departments (paid, volunteer, urban, rural, etc.), and fire service organizations.
Discussion Points
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– Does this proposal align with Metro DEI priorities post-Memphis 2022 meeting (DEI working group)?
– Who is missing among the partners?
Discussion Points

- With its partners, can the Metro participate in and encourage continued assessment of DEI needs through climate surveys, interviews, and focus groups at all organizational/departmental levels?
- With its partners, can the Metro encourage the integration of the recommended communication, training, and resources as prescribed by the DEI Roadmap into standard operating procedures?
Discussion Points

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– With its partners, can the Metro participate in continuous quality assurance to ensure optimal fit and applicability of materials for all departments (paid, volunteer, urban, rural, etc.), and fire service organizations?
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Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue
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