



PROMISING PRACTICES FOR Increasing Diversity Among First Responders

Prepared for U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office

SITE PROFILE
San Francisco Fire Department

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Site Visit Findings

First responder fields serve a crucial role in the safety and well-being of communities around the country. Public citizens and officials have placed a renewed focus on improving both the representativeness of first responders in relation to the populations they serve, and the agencies' relations with their local communities. The assumption underlying this focus is that a more representative first responder workforce will lead to better community relations and fairer treatment of the public served. *Promising Practices for Increasing Diversity Among First Responders*, conducted by Coffey Consulting, LLC on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor Chief Evaluation Office in 2016, was an exploratory study that involved five in-depth site visits and a literature review to identify promising practices that first responder agencies and organizations can leverage to increase the diversity of their workforces.

The following site profile is one of five available for the first responder departments and training providers that were selected for this study, based on both the extent to which their first responder workforce is representative of the local population, and their use of practices that align with the human resources literature as being effective for developing a diverse workforce:

- Atlanta Police Department (APD)
- BAY EMT, Oakland, CA
- Camp Fully Involved (CFI), Concord, NH
- Dallas Police Department (DPD)

- **San Francisco Fire Department (SFFD)**

The full study (available at <https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/CompletedStudies.htm>) details a number of common practices along the employment pipeline, from outreach and recruitment to the retention and advancement among those hired. In addition to promising practices, a number of challenges were identified to further diversifying first responders, including a negative public image of first responders in the community, low pay, and restrictive selection and hiring processes.

San Francisco Fire Department

Background

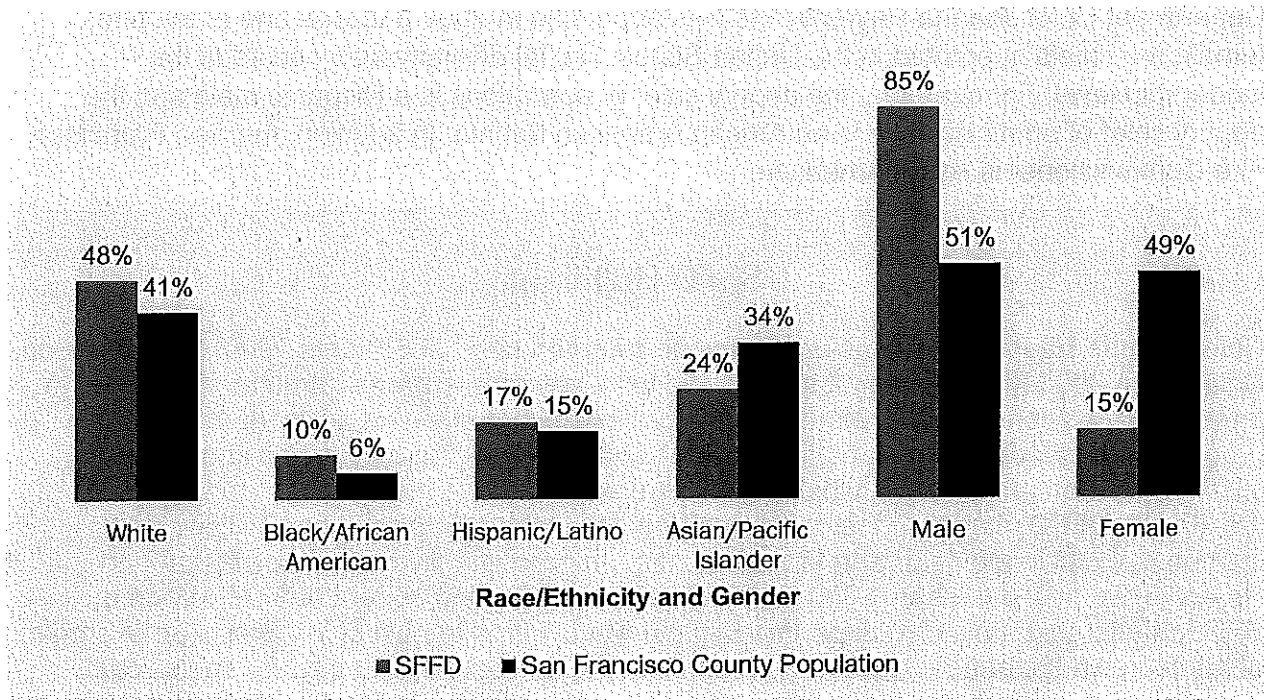
The San Francisco Fire Department (SFFD) was selected to participate in the study due to its notable diversity statistics after managing a near decade-long consent decree. The study team conducted interviews with 17 staff of various positions and involvement in diversity efforts, including the Chief, Deputy Chiefs, Fire Commissioner, Director of Human Resources, representatives of population-specific employee groups, Neighborhood Emergency Response Team (NERT) Program Coordinator, Compliance Officer, union representatives, Director of the Firefighters and Safety Education program, and other command and line staff. Interviews were either conducted one-on-one or in small groups to accommodate SFFD staff schedules and availability. The SFFD site visit occurred in April, 2016.

The SFFD is one of the top five departments in the nation when it comes to diversity and has had a female chief since 2004. The department has several employee groups to represent and support specific underrepresented groups in fire service, including women; African American; Asian; Hispanic; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer; and military veteran staff. The SFFD partners with the California Firefighter Joint Apprenticeship Committee (CFFJAC) to provide paid apprenticeships and also partners with local public schools. The SFFD also offers a neighborhood emergency response program provided at several locations throughout the city in English, Spanish, and Cantonese to support participation of all types of individuals. Benefits and compensation offered to department staff and the investment in employees is reported to be an excellent cause for retention.

Targeted efforts to increase diversity began in 1987 when a consent decree with the U.S. Department of Justice was implemented and required the department to dramatically increase its representation of staff from underrepresented groups and female staff, and it is now one of the most diverse fire departments in the country. The consent decree contained a court order to change the department's hiring, promotional, and management policies after the U.S. Department of Justice cited the City and County of San Francisco for unlawful discrimination. Although the ruling called for new hires to consist of 40 percent underrepresented groups and 10 percent women, SFFD surpassed the requirement by hiring 60 percent underrepresented groups and 20 percent female staff between 1988 and 1998. After termination of the consent decree in 1998, departmental leaders and staff maintained and continue to build on that diversity. Staff are also 15 percent female, with 7 percent of female staff in leadership positions as either chiefs or captains.¹ Figure 1 displays the race/ethnicity of staff relative to the local population, and Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of staff before and five years following the consent decree.

¹ Percentages were obtained from the SFFD Human Resources department on April 1, 2016. Percentages may sum to more than 100 due to rounding.

Figure 1. Percentage Distribution of SFFD Full-Time Sworn Personnel vs. San Francisco County General Population by Race/Ethnicity and Gender



Sources: SFFD 2016; U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2010 to 2014. Note that ACS general population data reflect the total population, including all ages, of the city and county of San Francisco, California. White, Black/African American, and Asian/Pacific Islander categories exclude those of Hispanic or Latino origins and those reporting more than one race.

Table 1. SFFD Full-Time Sworn Personnel by Percentage Race/Ethnicity and Gender, Pre-Consent Decree, Five Years Intra-Consent Decree, and 19 Years Post-Consent Decree

	Pre-Consent Decree: 1988	Intra-Consent Decree: 1993	Post-Consent Decree: 2016
Total	100%	100%	100%
Race/Ethnicity			
White	83%	72%	48%
Black/African American	7%	9%	10%
Hispanic	7%	10%	17%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3%	9%	24%
Gender			
Women	0%	4%	15%
Men	100%	96%	85%

Source: SFFD 2016

Leadership

Department Chief Joanna Hayes-White was appointed in 2004 and was one of the first female fire chiefs appointed in the United States. Racial diversity also occurs at the leadership level. For example, the deputy chief of operations is a Hispanic male and the deputy chief of administration is an African American female. In addition, the San Francisco Fire Commissioner is Asian American.

SFFD Highlight

Chief Joanne Hayes-White was one of the first women hired at SFFD in 1990, and has been Chief since 2004. When she first started, the work environment was "structured for men" in terms of the station facilities, with one large bathroom and sleeping dorm. In 1992, a proposition passed that provided funding for separate changing rooms and showering facilities for men and women, which "helped tremendously." Chief Hayes-White is "proud of the strides [SFFD] made" to foster a comfortable working environment that allowed for women to excel in the field. San Francisco has "embraced a diversified workforce" and Hayes-White now oversees 1,600 members and an operating budget of \$375 Million at SFFD, the largest urban fire department in the world with a female chief. She is an example of homegrown talent being invested in representing and serving her city. As she said, it "remains a huge honor for me to serve as Chief of department in the city of my birth...the city I love."

Unique Practices

SFFD uses school outreach at the elementary through college levels to bring awareness about the profession and attract diverse applicants. At the lower level, initiatives are focused on teaching children basic fire safety and increasing visibility to demonstrate that individuals of different backgrounds can become firefighters. At the postsecondary level, SFFD partners with the City College fire science program to offer internships to selected students to gain on-the-job experience. In addition, since 2012, SFFD has offered a three-year apprenticeship through the CFFJAC which emphasizes the value of recruiting well-trained and qualified firefighting personnel from the ranks of underrepresented and target groups. Over 500 individuals have participated in the program since it started. The SFFD has multiple employee groups to represent and supports employees with shared characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, military experience). Employee groups are intended to provide a source of support and ensure equal opportunities for all employees, as well as serve as a recruitment tool for maintaining and increasing diversity within the department. Figure 2 shows where promising practices identified at SFFD fall along the employment pipeline.

Figure 2. Overview of Diversity Efforts Along Key Points in the Employment Pipeline at SFFD

