EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED FEMALES

Executive Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This research project analyzed the problem with the Honolulu Fire Department’s (HFD) desire to increase recruitment and retention of women within its ranks. Thus, the purpose was to determine if there were ways the HFD could improve its efforts to assure that qualified females are recruited and retained. Historical research methodology was used to answer the following questions: (a) What female recruitment strategies were being utilized in private industry? (b) What female recruitment strategies were being utilized by comparable fire departments? (c) What female recruitment strategies were currently being utilized by the HFD? (d) What measures should be undertaken to ensure that female candidates succeed once they have been recruited and selected?

A collection and review of all available written of documents and reference materials relating to this subject was conducted. Interviews were conducted with individuals possessing knowledge of the HFD’s recruitment practices and with members of comparable fire departments. Data collected was then analyzed, organized, and synthesized. From there, conclusions were drawn and recommendations made for the future.

The major findings were although the HFD in conjunction with the City’s Department of Human Resources (DHR) had strategies in place, a more collaborated, cohesive and directed effort must be employed. There are also lessons to be learned from other fire departments and private agencies that have initiated successful programs.

The recommendations include: (a) securing a commitment from the Executive Chief Officers in the HFD, and from (b) the elected officials; (c) policy development and documentation; (d) initiating a partnership with the DHR; (e) conducting in depth research into
the successful practices of identified fire departments; and to (f) adopt and practice the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity model.
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INTRODUCTION

The fire service has experienced many changes in the past decade. Some important issues have been resolved, and new ones have moved into the limelight. One such issue concerns women in the fire service. It has been more than 25 years since the first woman entered the fire service and now more than 4,500 women hold fire suppression positions in nearly a thousand fire departments in the United States. Many thousands of other women work in the fire service in non-suppression roles such as fire prevention, inspection, arson investigation, communications and public education. Currently, the number of women working as career firefighters and officers has increased tenfold; some fire departments’ suppression forces are now ten percent female or even higher. Several fire departments have employed women firefighters for more than two decades, and many have promoted women upwards through the ranks to fire chief positions. Other departments, even large ones, have yet to hire their first women firefighters.

The problem is that the Honolulu Fire Department (HFD) desires to increase recruitment and retention of women within its ranks. Thus, the purpose of this research is to determine if there are ways the HFD could improve its efforts to assure that qualified females are recruited and retained for the position of entry-level fire fighter.

Historical research methodology was used to answer the following questions:

1. What female recruitment strategies are being utilized in private industry?
2. What female recruitment strategies are being utilized by comparable fire departments?
3. What female recruitment strategies are currently being utilized by the HFD?
4. What measures should be undertaken to ensure that female candidates succeed once they have been recruited and selected?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Honolulu Fire Department has provided fire suppression and other emergency services on the island of Oahu for the past 151 years. Although the department was named after the city of Honolulu when it was founded, today it serves the county of Honolulu, which includes not only the city but also the entire island. The island of O‘ahu covers 604 square miles and includes many residential communities, business districts, industrial complexes, agricultural areas, wild lands, and the resort area of Waikiki.

The operational and administrative functions of the Honolulu Fire Department are mandated in the Revised Charter of the City and County of Honolulu and directed by the Fire Chief who oversees a force of 1,036 uniformed fire fighters, four of whom are women of permanent status, and 45 civilian employees. The Department is organized into five operational battalions and four bureaus (Administrative Services Bureau, Training and Research Bureau, Fire Prevention Bureau, and Fire Communication Center). The operational battalions include 44 stations that house 42 engine companies, 14 ladder companies, one snorkel company, two rescue companies, two hazardous materials companies, one helicopter, one fireboat, and six tankers (Honolulu Fire Department, 2000).

The first female fire fighter entered in 1987 and the HFD now has a total four women out of 1036 uniformed firefighters. This represents less than ½ of one percent. While nation-wide only about two percent of fire fighters are women, many career departments’ percentages are three or four times that, and a few departments’ ranks are 10-15% female (Federal Emergency Management Agency, n.d.).
As of 1992, the suppression forces of several sizeable fire departments were over or approaching ten percent women: Madison, Wisconsin (42 women out of 284 total firefighters); Montgomery County, Maryland (92 of 900); San Diego (76 of 900). Some smaller departments have even higher percentages: Boulder, Colorado (14 of 72); Davis, California (5 of 40); and Littleton, Colorado (10 of 80) (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1996, January).

In May of 1998, 4,119 candidates had the necessary minimum qualifications to apply for HFD’s written examination that was administered in August of 1998. On that date, 2,843 male applicants took the exam. Of these, 553 or 19.5% passed and were eligible to proceed to the next phase of the hiring process. Ninety-five women attended the same exam with 12 women having a passing score representing a 12.6% passing rate. Thus, males were 54% more successful than women in passing the written exam.

Candidates then proceed through the hiring process based upon their score on the written examination. From the current written test, five recruit classes (81st through 85th Class) were filled with candidates scoring 89% or better. Of these 257 new employees, four were women. As of the date of this research, only two women remain. Both are currently in recruit training and will not be eligible for permanent status until October 2002 (D. Matsukawa, personal communication, 10/24/01).

The susceptibility to charges of discrimination on the basis of sex may present an unwelcome liability for the department. The hiring of women is significant. In the years from 1993 to 1999 approximately 4 million dollars were paid from the City of Los Angeles in settlements to women who filed cases of wrongful hiring practices. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 began to force agencies to address issues of equality. It took an additional 10 years
for the first woman to become a career firefighter. It wasn’t until June of 1977 that the first federal consent decree was established addressing hiring goals for women (Mathis, 1999).

Unit 2 of the National Fire Academy’s Executive Leadership course included discussion on transactional and transformational leadership and leadership behaviors. Some characteristics of a transformational leader include his or her ability to consider how specific plans of action might be extended to benefit others and the importance of concentrating on clear short as well as long term goals (U.S. Fire Administration, 2000). This review of female recruitment and retention strategies utilized by the fire service and private entities will assist the HFD in identifying successful strategies that it can employ to resolve the under representation of females within its ranks.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Recruiting women fire fighters**

Jennifer J. Laabs (1991) states that planning and organization is vital to the success of a minority female recruitment program. She emphasizes that job seekers want to be thought of as qualified candidates and not necessarily as minority candidates. If in fact the organization emphasizes minority, she feels that candidates may wonder what the goal of the organization is—to hire qualified individuals or just minorities and females. She explains that in the next decade the ethnic makeup of the work force will drastically change. Twenty-nine percent of new employees will be non-white/female and emphasis will be on the recruitment of qualified employees regardless of ethnic or gender characteristics. Laabs recommends that a game plan be developed prior to the commencement of recruitment efforts. Recruiters should identify the make up of the work force, define the target groups, identify strategies and resources, and
prepare job announcements. Laabs further emphasizes that the recruitment team should be made up of incumbent protected classes and that they should be role models for the community.

Successful recruitment methods suggested include: Job information workshops in targeted communities (provide a captive audience), contact with professional organizations, and high school mentorship programs. Targeted female publication advertising should emphasize job requirements and project a positive image of the organization. Gender need not be mentioned. She states that it is important during career fairs to be open to all candidates.

FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency, n.d.) also recommends that departments develop and maintain good working relationships with high school guidance counselors and with career placement personnel and vocational counselors at the colleges and universities in their area. Explorer post, job shadow programs, high school cadet programs, ride-alongs for community members, and resident student programs can all be productive ways for recruiting new fire fighters who, by the time they complete the program, will be familiar with a department’s operations and personnel. Make sure women are fully included in these programs and are encouraged to participate.

William C. Bybam (1998) emphasizes the importance of training for recruiters. He feels that good interviewing skills can assist in the identification of qualified candidates and create a positive atmosphere that will enhance recruitment efforts and public relations for the organization. Bybam offers the following tips:

1. Plan the interview session; provide an agenda.
2. Provide a good atmosphere.
3. Provide a tour of the organization.
4. Keep the candidate informed; assign someone to keep in touch with the candidate.
Allan Halcrow (1991) reported on a panel discussion of four business experts that focused on hiring issues facing employers today. One theme that surfaced in this article was that recruitment should be ongoing. Training for recruiters was encouraged. It was recommended that all recruiters deliver the same message and that all information delivered to candidates be accurate.

The recruiter selected must be enthusiastic, dedicated, motivated, and sold on the product. A casual attitude towards recruitment will not achieve the results needed. One of the first things that a recruiter should do is to train other members of the organization how to recognize an opportunity to recruit and to follow through with recruitment opportunities. The assignment of a dedicated recruiter is vital to the overall success of the mission (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1995).

A fire department’s real recruiting effort, like its public education work, goes on all year round. Consciously or otherwise, a fire department recruits new members and gives out information about itself all the time. Women currently on the department should be included in all of the department’s public activities. Fire fighters self-recruit and attract people like themselves because of their visibility. Every time a department is in the public eye, and especially when the press is covering it, its diversity should be visible. A chief who takes advantage of the recruitment potential of everything the department does can make its efforts both efficient and productive (Federal Emergency Management Agency, n.d.).

Chief Daniel Olsen (1996) of Marion County also agrees that a successful organization recruits all year long. Many traditional elements of a short-term recruitment drive can easily be kept operating year round. Periodic open houses, practice test sessions and orientation sessions can draw candidates’ interest well ahead of test dates, allowing more time for them to develop
their strengths and skills or to seek relevant education (Federal Emergency Management Agency, n.d.).

Catherine D. Fyock (1991) offered some creative methods of recruitment, and reaffirmed some strategies recommended in other fire service publications. A few of her ideas were:

1. Talent scout cards—a card larger than a business card is given to a promising candidate. It includes information pertinent to the position and the organization.
2. Posters—posters are placed in targeted locations.
3. Public service announcements—job openings are advertised at no cost.
4. Alternate newspaper sections—advertise in other than help-wanted or classified sections to attract individuals not actively seeking employment.
5. Employee referral programs—employees tend to identify candidates that replicate the current work force.

**Management’s commitment**

Top individuals in the fire department must be firmly behind the recruitment and integration of women into the department. All aspects of the recruiting effort must reflect management’s sincere commitment not only to bring women firefighters onto the department but to support a diverse fire service workforce. Management can support recruitment in the following ways (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1993):

1. Obtaining the funding necessary to make the recruitment program a success.
2. Make other departmental resources available to maximize the allocated money.
3. Working with other city departments as needed to obtain adequate lead-time and to settle any other jurisdictional or political problems.
4. Demonstrating leadership by representing the program positively to elected officials in order to obtain their support, and by making public statements, particularly in the media, in support of the recruitment effort to hire women.

Moving towards a workplace where cultural diversity is valued means challenging the comfort zones of people entrenched in the status quo. Those who promote change within an institution thus face strong reactions. For top management to be able to support diversity effectively, its members must understand and be able to identify the cultural differences that exist within the workforce. Managers should be aware of their own stereotypes and assumptions, and learn to listen to people positively, not discounting ideas they don’t agree with or that come from someone with a different background. Managers should actively promote diversity education and see that all employees have access to information, people and other resources they need to do their jobs. A good manager of a diverse workforce will encourage constructive communication about differences instead of pretending everyone is alike, and will treat people in the workforce with fairness instead of with cookie-cutter uniformity.

Week leadership and a superficial commitment to diversity can mean reduced respect for the fire department in the community by city government. This in turn can translate to reduced financial and political support, affecting how much clout the chief or department has in other areas (Women in the Fire Service, 2001).

Retention

Career personnel leave because of factors that exist both within and outside of the organization and control of its managers. External factors, such as changes in lifestyles, family demands, and other social responsibilities, affect the attitudes of career personnel towards their jobs. Internal factors within the organization such as job satisfaction, also affect the attitudes of
employees towards their work and their desire to seek a new position elsewhere. To retain career employees, a manager must keep these internal and external factors in mind and try to make necessary accommodations in the workplace when necessary (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1995).

The ability of a fire department to retain women firefighters will depend, in large part, on whether it develops and implements clear and fair policies in area that have a unique or particular impact on women. These areas include reproductive health and safety, childcare, firefighter marriages, hair length and grooming, and fire station facilities. The very important topic of sexual harassment is a must for all employees. It is important to have these policies in place before the first women are ever hired for the following reasons:

1. Policy development and documentation can be handled carefully and not rushed.
2. The department shows that it is prepared for women and supportive of their presence.
3. Any controversy surrounding the implementation of a policy will be focused on management and on the policy itself. If women are already on the job, they often become scapegoats and are blamed for unpopular policies.
4. All members of the organization know what they can expect (Federal Emergency Management Agency, n.d.).

In October 1994, the United States Fire Administration convened the symposium on “Health and Safety Issues of the Female Emergency Responder” and attendees were asked to rank the importance of health and safety concerns of female first responders:

1. Stress relating to “fitting in.”
2. Personal protective equipment not designed to fit women properly.
3. Exposure to toxic substances and their possible effect on reproductive health.
4. Stress related to tasks required on the job.
5. Engineering design of equipment required for the job may not be appropriate for women.
6. Accepted protocols for accomplishing task.
7. Exposure to blood borne pathogens.
8. On the job injuries.
10. Training provides sufficient safety information in areas specific to women.
11. Increased risk of heart attack in comparison to the general population.
12. High-energy expenditure required by firefighting and firefighting gear, which can raise the core body temperature and affect reproductive health of mother and fetus.

Firefighters are in a unique situation when it comes to childcare. Their children usually need non-parental care for more than 24 hours at a time. In addition, many firefighters are subject to emergency callback during major incidents, and may need someone to take care of their children on a moment’s notice at any hour of the day or night.

Many cities and private employers have begun to take an interest in the childcare needs of their employees. They recognize that childcare problems cause absenteeism, reduced productivity and poor morale, and may lead to the loss of good employees. In particular, they know the difficulties with child care are significant reason women may not enter the fire service, may leave early in their careers, or may not return after having children.

Creative solutions are needed and have begun to emerge. One fire chief has suggested that his city develop old fire stations into around-the-clock childcare centers specifically for the
benefit of firefighters’ children. In Great Britain, the London Fire Brigade provides childcare allowances to parents who pay babysitters, and subsidizes spots in childcare centers for its employees’ children. The Suisun City Fire Department, in California, has increased the off-duty response of its full-time personnel to major incidents by outfitting and staffing one of its rehab vehicles to handle childcare (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1999).

Summary

A productive recruitment drive is just part of what it takes to increase the number of women on a fire department. For recruitment to be really effective, managers must establish a positive climate within the department before encouraging women to become fire fighters. Fire Departments must also begin to recognize, and take advantage of, the recruitment impact of most of their public activities. Expanding the concept of recruitment in these two directions will make the recruitment drive itself more productive and will increase the likelihood that the women who are recruited will actually become fire fighters.

PROCEDURES

This research employed historical research methodologies to examine the current practices of the HFD relating to the recruitment and retention of women firefighters. A collection and/or review of all written of documents within the HFD and the City and County of Honolulu relating to this subject was conducted. This included the department’s Policy Manual, the Rules and Regulations, Union Agreement, Procedures and Manual of Operations, memos, correspondence, reports, records, and minutes of Staff Meetings. The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 4th Edition was used.

Reference materials relating to this subject was obtained from the National Fire Academy’s Learning Resource Center, the United Stated Fire Administration, the HFD’s library,
and the libraries of the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Additional searches were conducted via the Internet.

A chronological series of events leading up to the current status of women in the fire service was compiled and documented. Then an effort to identify factors, effects, and causes relating to this issue was undertaken.

Interviews were conducted with individuals possessing expert knowledge of the recruitment practices affecting the HFD. One such expert is Lois Enomoto of the City and County of Honolulu’s Department of Human Resources. Ms. Enomoto, who has 25 years of experience in personnel management, was interviewed on October 24, 2001. Her assistance was needed on issues specifically pertaining to existing efforts within the City and County of Honolulu to recruit women into non-traditional careers.

Another expert that provided invaluable assistance was Personnel Assistant Dean Matsukawa of the Honolulu Fire Department’s Administrative Services Bureau. Mr. Matsukawa has a total of 12 years in the field of personnel administration. He provided insight to the statistical data relating to the quantities and genders of applicants for fire recruits in the HFD. He was interviewed on October 24, 2001.

The City’s Equal Employment Opportunity Officer Denise Tsukayama was interviewed on October 24, 2001 and she provided the legal perspective on the Department’s inability mirror the national average for women firefighters.

Fire departments that employ a higher than the national average percentages of women were contacted by telephone to determine whom in their department or city was responsible for female recruitment. Included were the two fire departments mentioned in the Background and Significance section of this research. Once the primary contact was established, a telephone
interview ensued. Deputy Chief Monica Morgan, a 23-year veteran of the Montgomery County Fire Department in Maryland was interviewed on October 21, 2001. She provided insight into the success of her department’s ability to recruit and employ 94 women out of a total of 862 operational personnel. This equates to approximately 11% women. Another success story is that of the Madison Fire Department in Wisconsin. Fire Chief Debra Amesqua heads this department with her 19 years of experience. She shared her department’s established recruitment/retention policies and procedures that resulted in the achievement of nearly 15% women within their suppression ranks. Chief Amesqua was interviewed on October 21, 2001.

Since the fire service is steeped in tradition, an outside perspective appeared necessary for the purpose of this study. Findings of private industry recruitment and retention efforts were also analyzed and reviewed.

All data collected was then analyzed, organized, and synthesized within the context of stated purpose and research questions. From there, conclusions were drawn about the past, generalizations formulated about the present, and recommendations made for the future.

The six-month time limitation for submission of this research paper to the National Fire Academy’s Executive Fire Officer Program resulted in a limited comparison between identified fire departments and the HFD, this provided a representative view of the overall issue and was sufficient to develop baseline recommendations. The narrowness of this research also provides the opportunity for others to expand this subject matter as it specifically relates to fire departments with successful female recruitment and retention strategies.
RESULTS

What female recruitment strategies are being utilized in private industry?

According to Dr. Wendy Griffin, Associate Professor of Women Studies at California State University Long Beach, the single most important thing an employer can do to increase the number of women is to provide on site quality day care. According to research done by Dr. Griffin, “After less than four years employers recover the costs from building on site day care. After two additional years they begin to turn a profit due to lower absenteeism and increased productivity” (Mathias, 1999).

Therese Floren (Matias, 1999) also agrees with this research, “Both men and women want to know that their children are safe and well cared for.” She has spoken with many women who have an interest in becoming firefighters but have concerns as to how to get adequate child care for their children during night time hours.

In private industry there are many companies that have been successful at increasing diversity. According to The Federal Equal Employment Commission Task Force Report “Best” EEO Policies, Programs, and Practices (Matias, 1999) two private companies were recognized by the federal EEO office for “best” equal employment opportunity policies, programs, and practices of private sector employers. In reviewing these reports there seems to be several methods to attracting, hiring, and retaining a diverse work force.

International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) states that its “Project View” has become one of the most successful programs for targeting minorities and women in the country. Project View is a three-day program incorporating networking, career fair, and interviewing. Campus recruitment managers do recruitment for the project at minority campuses through
publication and using campus recruitment managers. In 1998, the number of women employees was at 29.4%. Of the 13,791 employees hired in 1997, 34% were women.

IBM focuses much of its attention on providing service that promotes the well being of their employees. This is referred to as “Work-Life Program.” Services covered in these programs include:

1. Child care and elder care resource and referral
2. Adoption assistance
3. Flexible working arrangements
4. Leaves of absence
5. Personal choice holidays
6. Flexible vacation schedules
7. Assessment counseling and referral program

In addition to its “Work-Life Program” the company believes much of its success in hiring and retaining women is due to an “Individual Work Schedules Program” which permits employees to begin their workday up to two hours before or two hours after the normal location start and stop times. When employees need to be away from work they may take a leave of absence for up to three years.

In 1996, Price Waterhouse LLP, one of the largest accounting and professional service firms in the country hired 500 women in entry-level positions. This translates to approximately 46% of new hires were women. The firm has increased representation of both women and minorities by forming partnerships with women and minority organizations, such as A Better Chance, and Women’s Society of CPA’s, among others. The firm also established internships and mentoring programs. They offer bi-monthly Female Leaders Luncheon Meetings, which
concentrate on generating ideas on improving the retention and career advancement of women in the firm.

The firm offers a variety of flexible work schedules that are used to accommodate diverse personal situations such as transitioning back to work following the birth or adoption of a child, caring for sick or elderly parents, or returning to school. Partners within the firm are evaluated on their success in fostering the careers of women, minority staff and seeking innovative alternative workplace solutions to retain top performers (Matias, 1999).

What female recruitment strategies are being utilized by comparable fire departments?

Deputy Chief Monica Morgan of the Montgomery County Fire Department (MFD) in Maryland (personal communication, 10/21/01) stated that recruitment and retention must be considered in tandem. She stated that there are three important components of successful recruiting and retention of women in the fire service. These areas are recruitment, policies and training. MFD has been able to attain an above average percentage of women within their ranks by utilizing existing firefighters in their recruitment efforts. When possible women firefighters are used to attract other women having similar backgrounds and personal objectives. High school age women are made aware of the career possibilities as an employee of the fire service through career and job fairs. Many girls still believe that firefighting is strictly a male profession and the MFD has been able to enlighten these women and include firefighting as another career option. The athletic and physical education departments of junior colleges are another fertile ground for the recruitment of qualified women. This along with the military, health spas and gyms all have proven worthy arenas for recruitment. One is only limited by one’s imagination and effort.
Fire Chief Debra Amesqua (personal communication, 10/21/01) of the Madison Fire Department in Wisconsin has been able to achieve nearly 15% women in her workforce by devoting resources and energy up front in the hiring process. It is important to hire individuals that have similar values and behaviors to the organization they are being hired into. Madison has a three phase hiring scheme. In the first phase, applicants are given a written examination, a personality profile and a “bio-data life history.” The personality profile identifies the personality traits and values of the individual being considered. The “bio-data life history” researches the individual’s work history. The written examination has been refined by a consultant resulting in a highly successful indicator of the desired qualities of an ideal firefighter. The number of questions on the examination has been researched and it has been determined that 75 questions result in a better examination than a 100-question test. Each test question has a “life history.” This history reveals if individuals of different cultural backgrounds, various ethnicities, and genders can successfully answer the question. A job task analysis also influences the type and number of questions asked on the examination. The key test is if the question has a “desperate impact” on a certain minority group.

The second phase is a physical agility examination. Again, job/task analysis plays an important role in the development of the examination. Someone walking in off the street without any firefighting experience can successfully perform all events. In addition, the cutoff times or performance indicators are set by department incumbents, many of whom are women.

A series of oral interviews make up the third phase of the hiring process. Here values such as leadership, initiative, and morals are desired. The Fire Chief personally conducts the final interview looking for individuals that will easily assimilate to the culture of the department.
When someone is hired into the Madison Fire Department it is made clear what is expected including acceptable practices regarding the diversity of its workforce.

Generating interest in becoming a firefighter for the Madison Fire Department is an ongoing endeavor. Year around, the Department’s recruitment team made up of incumbent firefighters go out into the community at every opportunity. Initially, a survey of employees was done to determine what they value most about their career choice. It was determined that women firefighters value the prestige and the self-esteem that accompanies the firefighting occupation. People look up to members of the fire service. With this information, the recruitment of women emphasizes this aspect of the occupation. Using women as recruiters, including the women Chief Officers of the department, help potential candidates paint a mental picture of the possibilities and opportunities for women in the fire service. It reinforces the message that the fire service can and should be an option for women as much as it is for men (D. Amesqua, personal communication, 10/21/01).

Theresa Floren, Executive Director For Women in the Fire Service (Mathis, 1999) pointed out that if a department wants to increase the representation of women they have to make it a place where they want to come.

Consideration must be given to facility changes; appropriate changes must be made to the showers, locker rooms, and bathrooms to accommodate both men and women. Policies that affect women like pregnancy and family leave must also be incorporated. According to Director Floren, “Chiefs of many departments want magic, there is no magic.” Increasing the numbers of women within a department is a “gradual process where departments make the public aware of opportunities, and support by both men and women within their organizations ultimately making the organization a place where people want to work.”
The Ohio Fire Academy provides women in Ohio who are thinking about becoming firefighters an opportunity to learn about the profession through a program called “Can You Take the Heat?” This program was started in October 1998, and is sponsored by the Ohio Department of Commerce. Women spend a full day at the Ohio Fire Academy getting hands-on experience in everything from auto extrication to search and rescue. Participants also get to extinguish a fire. The day ends with a panel discussion on topics such as firehouse culture, family life and the firehouse, station facilities and accommodations, physical fitness and strength, and career opportunities and scheduling (Floren, 2000).

**What female recruitment strategies are currently being utilized by the HFD?**

The hiring process itself consists of six phases. These phases are: the application; a written examination; a physical agility test; a medical examination; an oral interview; and an 18-month probation period which includes 15 weeks of formal recruit academy training.

Overall recruitment and hiring is the responsibility of the City of Honolulu’s Department of Human Resources (DHR). The City’s efforts to recruit women to non-traditional roles are the sole responsibility of one individual. No firefighter specific program has been developed but a citywide campaign is conducted to attract women to all City jobs that may be considered non-traditional. The following represents what has been done in the past (L. Enomoto, personal communication, 10/24/01):

1. Advertisements in the Sunday edition of the State’s two largest daily papers.
3. Special interest articles on women in non-traditional roles in the daily papers.
4. Local television station filmed the firefighter recruit performance test.
5. Exhibit in City Hall called “Women’s History Month” with pictures of women in non-traditional jobs.

6. Developed a booklet “Women’s Opportunities are Unlimited.”

7. Press release and invited all the local television stations.

8. Letters to area colleges, universities, community groups (ethnic groups, canoe clubs, etc.), health clubs, sporting good stores, organizations and agencies.

9. Outreach presentations at “Women in Transition” programs at community colleges, intermediate and high schools, Non-traditional Employment for Women (N.E.W.) program with the YMCA, booths at shopping centers, job fairs, Girl Scouts, women’s fairs and workshops.

10. Developed a video on women in non-traditional jobs through the NET (Non-traditional Employment Task Force). This video was accompanied by a curriculum guide and was used in the schools.

11. Individual letters to women who applied to encourage them to take the written test.

Although the number and percentage of women within the ranks of the HFD was well below the national average, there has never been an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) challenge targeting the City and County of Honolulu’s employment practices. Although not necessarily as effective and productive as one would desire, the City’s effort to attract women into the fire service sufficiently addressed this issue. In order to successfully challenge the City’s EEO obligation, one would have to prove that any of the six phases adversely impacts women (D. Tsukayama, personal communication, 10/24/01).
What measures should be undertaken to ensure that female candidates succeed once they have been recruited and selected?

As previously mentioned, Deputy Chief Monica Morgan (personal communication, 10/21/01) of the Montgomery County Fire Department (MFD) indicated the recruitment, policy changes, and training all equally affect a successful drive to increase the number of women in a fire department. Policies have to be in place before women are recruited. This helps the existing workforce understand the importance of gender based diversity and sends a message to the newly recruited that the organization’s values and culture embraces this diversity. Policies such as pregnancy leave and grooming standards are examples of changes that need to be addressed. Having these policies already in place reduces the situation where incumbent women employees are targeted for blame for an unpopular new policy. Education through training will also reinforce the diversity issue.

The physical facilities of the MFD have been redesigned to provide privacy for both men and women. Personal protective equipment has also gone through metamorphosis during Chief Morgan’s career. At first, there were no smaller size turnouts and gloves, but now all vendors provide a wide range of equipment that adequately address the needs of women firefighters.

Chief Amesqua (personal communication, 10/21/01) of the Madison, Wisconsin Fire Department utilizes personality traits surveys for each recruit to tailor the training that this individual receives. Recruit training officers are taught to enhance their training abilities and to employ different methods for students with varied learning styles. Presentations reflect this diversity awareness. “Hard skills” such as putting up ladders, and pulling hose are augmented with “soft skills.” Soft skills such as compassion and caring; courage and bravery; and honesty and integrity are promoted in recruit training. Getting away from the “cookie cutter,” “one size
fits all” type training has really benefited the women recruits and firefighters. Women really feel like there is a place for them in this organization and are no longer trying to fill a man’s shoes, but have shoes of their own to fill.

In 1994, members of the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) compiled a report addressing issues of equity, inclusion, and accountability. This committee was named the Human Relations Development Committee (HRDC). This report was in response to issues raised by the Los Angeles City Personnel Department in their study of Human Resource Management in the LAFD. This report addresses steps the Department must take to ensure that all candidates, once recruited and hired, are provided the greatest opportunity for success. This report is very comprehensive and includes many recommendations. Several key components are listed below (Los Angeles City Fire Department, 1995):

1. Ensure that applicants have a realistic view of the job requirements.
2. Provide support through mentoring programs and networking.
3. Assure the policies such as sexual harassment and discrimination are enforced.
4. Provide a working environment that is comfortable by installing restroom, shower, and changing facilities.
5. Consistent application of training and evaluations process.
6. Utilizing standard training procedures for incoming probationary employees.
7. Holding supervisors accountable for appropriate behavior of their employees.

According to the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EEO) leading companies in the area of equal employment opportunity programs took the “SPLENDID” approach (Mathis, 1999). This stands for a series of actions that a conscientious employer can
take to address EEO and diversity issues: study, plan, lead, encourage, notice, discussion, inclusion, and dedication.

1. Study—Know the law, the standards that define one’s obligations, and the various barriers to EEO and diversity.

2. Plan—Know one’s own circumstances (workforce and demographics—locally, nationally and globally). Define one’s problems; propose solutions; and develop strategies for achieving them.

3. Lead—Senior, middle, and lower management must champion the cause of diversity as a business imperative, and provide leadership for the successful attainment of the vision of a diverse workforce at all levels of management.

4. Encourage—Companies should encourage the attainment of diversity by all managers, supervisors, and employees, and structure their practices and reward systems to reinforce those corporate objectives. Link pay and performance not only to technical competencies, but also for how employee interaction, support and respect each other.

5. Notice—Take notice of the impact of your practices, after monitoring and assessing company progress. Self-analysis is a key part of this process. Ensure that a corrective strategy does not cause or result in unfairness.

6. Discussion—Communicate and reinforce the message that diversity is a business asset and a key element of business success in a national and global market.

7. Inclusion—Bring everyone into this process, including white males. Help them understand that EEO initiatives are good for the company and thus good for everyone in the company. Include them in the analysis, planning and implementation.
8. Dedication—Stay persistent in your quest. Long-term gains from these practices may cost in the short term. Invest in the needed human and capital resources.

DISCUSSION

Before the HFD can even begin to attract and retain additional women into its ranks there must be a firm commitment from the top echelon of the organization. As FEMA indicates, all aspects of the recruiting effort must reflect management’s sincere commitment to bring in women firefighters (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1993). Top management must challenge the comfort zones of people entrenched in the status quo and effectively help its members identify and understand the differences that a diverse workforce brings to the organization. Weak leadership and a superficial commitment can result in reduced support both internally within the organization as well as externally (Women in the Fire Service, 2001).

I believe that a strong commitment from the Administration will result in the appropriation of the necessary funding and other resources. The positive example set by the Chief Officers will have a trickle-down effect and soon all members will understand the relevance and importance of a diverse workforce. Beyond the internal support, a demonstration of this commitment will reflect positively to elected officials and this support will result in them making public statements particularly in the media in support of the recruitment effort to hire women.

Vital to the success of any recruitment program is the emphasis place upon proper and adequate planning and organization. Recruiters must identify the current make up of the work force, define the target groups, identify strategies and resources, and prepare job announcements. Recruitment team members should be made up of incumbent protected classes and that they should be role models for the community (Laabs, 1991). One of the first things the recruiter should do is to train other members of the organization on how to recognize an opportunity to
recruit new members (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1995). Who better to attract and recruit the identified target groups, than members within the same class? Chief Amesqua (personal communication, 10/21/01) said that whenever possible women firefighters should be used to attract other women having similar backgrounds and personal objectives. Every activity of an organization can be deemed yet another opportunity to recruit. Whether it is a training exercise in a public park or an emergency incident that gets airtime on the local news, members must be cognizant of the potential to utilize this public exposure to further its desire to attract women into its ranks. Once a department-wide goal has been established, every member’s personal “antenna” should automatically extend seeking and finding opportunities to further their efforts.

Bybam (1998) emphasizes the importance of training the recruiters in the development of good interviewing skills that can identify qualified candidates and create a positive atmosphere that will enhance recruitment efforts and public relations for the organization. Recruiters must be enthusiastic, dedicated, motivated, and sold on the product. A casual attitude will not achieve the results needed. Each and every step in this process is critical. You may be able to generate enough interest to get a candidate to interview, only to fail to “make the sale.” Madison Fire Department (Debra Amesqua, personal communication, 10/21/01) determined that women firefighters value the prestige and the self-esteem that accompanies career in firefighting. Training of recruiters should include awareness of the importance of this value and paint a mental picture of the possibilities and opportunities for women in the fire service.

Although the City of Honolulu’s Department of Human Services (DHR) have identified the need for the increase of women in “non-traditional roles” and have developed a sound plan to achieve this goal, a partnership with the Honolulu Fire Department (HFD) must be established.
With a firm commitment from the Fire Chief, as well as the entire membership, many of the programs already established can be enhanced. The implication to the HFD will be the emphasis to seek opportunities on its own, or in conjunction with DHR, by realizing that the potential for recruitment in both its emergency and non-emergency activities is only limited by the creativity and imagination of its members.

How and where will these women be found? Most are in agreement here. Lois Enomoto from the DHR (personal communication, 10/24/01), Chief Morgan (personal communication, 10/21/01) from Montgomery County Fire Department (MFD), and Chief Amesqua (personal communication, 10/21/01) of the Madison Fire Department all indicated that once the desired type of candidate is identified a targeted effort must ensue. High school and college career job fairs, athletic and physical education departments of colleges, the military, along with health clubs and gyms should all receive the attention necessary to recruit women. I believe if the values and goals of the individual you are attempting to attract parallels the organization it will be both easier to attract, but more important, easier to retain this individual. Women that value physical activity and possess the desire to challenge themselves in the face of physical and mental duress will find a career in firefighting very rewarding and satisfying. Additionally, it is important to attract women that can compete academically with male applicants. As Dean Matsukawa (personal communication, 10/24/01) has pointed out, male applicants have a passing rate 54% higher than their female counterparts. So it is not only imperative that more females apply, but the capabilities and qualifications of these female applicants must be considered.

Women issues (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1996) such as properly fitting personal protection equipment, exposure to toxic substances and its possible effect on reproductive health, stress from trying to “fit in,” chemicals in breast milk, and of course child
care; must all be addressed in either a department policy or new procedure. Theresa Floren (Mathis, 1999) pointed out that if a department wants to increase the representation of women, they have to make it a place they want to come. Dr. Griffin (Matias, 1999) said that the single most important thing an employer can do is to increase the number of women is to provide on site quality day care. Having on site day care in the fire service may present a challenge, but alternatives can be developed and should be given priority. Creative solutions can include developing old fire stations into around-the-clock childcare centers for the benefit of firefighter’s children or by outfitting and staffing a rehab vehicle to handle childcare (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1999). Policies such as pregnancy leave and grooming standards are other examples of changes that need to be addressed. The physical facilities of your organization must accommodate both men and women.

Training programs for firefighters must be retooled to employ different methods for students with varied learning styles. Placing emphasis on both “hard” and “soft” skills as described by Chief Amesqua (personal communication, 10/21/01) will benefit an organization’s efforts towards achieving diversity in its work force. Skills such as compassion, caring, courage, bravery, honesty, and integrity can be promoted and getting away from the “one size fits all” training will benefit women by making them feel that there is a place for them in the organization and they are no longer trying fill a man’s shoes.

The implication to the HFD will be the development of diversity friendly policies, procedures and programs that will address the above-mentioned issues. The appropriation and commitment of monetary and non-monetary resources to implement these initiatives must occur.

I don’t believe that all of the successful initiatives and promotions being used in private industry will work in the fire service. For instance, IBM’s “Work-Life Program” (Matias, 1999)
with its flexible working arrangements, leaves of absence, personal choice holidays, and flexible vacation schedules may be difficult to implement in an emergency service organization. But, their formation of partnerships with women organizations to generate ideas on improving the recruitment, retention and career advancement of women have resulted in 46% of new hires in 1996 being women.

The implication to the HFD as well as the fire service as a whole will be a definite strengthening of its values in the formation of these partnerships with non-fire service related organizations. This reciprocal increase in awareness of each other’s respective strengths and weaknesses will result in making the fire service a place where women will want to work, but more important, once hired are provided the greatest opportunity for a successful career.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based upon the data presented in this report that specifically relate to the Honolulu Fire Department’s desire to increase the number of women within its ranks and purpose of this research which is to determine if there are ways to improve its efforts to assure qualified females are recruited and retained for the position of entry-level fire fighter, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Secure a definite commitment from the Fire Chief and Executive Fire Chief Officers in the HFD in support of this effort. This will expedite the eventual acceptance by all remaining members of the HFD for any change in policy and procedure or for the support of any newly developed program. A complete and sustained commitment of resources can also be expected through this support. Organizational leaders should also actively promote diversity through education, encouraging constructive communication, and just being aware of their own stereotypes and assumptions.
2. Secure commitments from the elected officials of the City and County of Honolulu. As discussion takes place for the continuance of any and all programs aimed at increasing the number of women in the HFD, there will a pre-established understanding of the importance of such a proposal. Support will also be evident in the interviews and news releases conducted by these elected officials.

3. Policy development and documentation must be handled expeditiously but not rushed. The department must show that it is prepared and poised for women and supportive of their presence. Women issues addressing stress relating to fitting in, properly fitting personal protecting equipment, reproductive health of mothers and fetus, chemicals in breast milk, childcare, and diversity based training should all be explored.

4. Initiate a partnership with the City and County of Honolulu’s Department of Human Resources (DHR) to augment their existing programs in identifying and recruiting qualified women into non-traditional careers. A steering committee comprised of members of both departments should be established where goals and objectives can be created and the resources necessary to achieves these goals and objectives can be committed. Short and long term goals must be established. Beyond the existing DHR programs and efforts, this committee can identify other opportunities for the HFD of both an emergency and non-emergency nature. An employee referral program where incumbent employees will identify potential candidates is one such effort.

5. Future research into the success of fire departments such as the Montgomery County Fire Department with over 10% women and that of the Madison Fire Department with nearly 15% women in their workforce should take place. Their total package of
department values, programs, policies, training, facilities and hiring scheme will expedite the success curve of the HFD by not having to “recreate the wheel.”

6. Adopt and practice the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) model taking the “SPLENDID” approach. Become a proactive conscientious employer by addressing EEO and diversity issues before a challenge is lodged by: study, plan, lead, encourage, notice, discussion, inclusion, and dedication. This will ensure the success that all candidates, regardless of gender, once recruited and hired are provided the greatest opportunity for success throughout their careers.
REFERENCES


