

# Firefighter's ABC's "Diversity in the Fire Service"

*PHILOSOPHY and APPROACH*



## **Overview:**

The under representation of women and minority groups within corporate America is mirrored within the fire service. While great strides are being made, a continued and focused effort must continue.

With this knowledge, Firefighter's ABC's formed the [Firefighter Diversity Recruitment Council](#), the [National Recruit Database](#), [Firefighter's ABC's Online Internship Program](#) the **Firefighter Learning And Support Help - Training Education Scholastic Tools - F.L.A.S.H. T.E.S.T.** and lastly the [21<sup>st</sup> Century Diversity Recruitment Workshop](#) of these the National Recruit Database and the Firefighter's ABC's Online Internship Program are **100% Free** to anyone seeking a career in the fire service as well as other fire service related careers.

Firefighter's ABC's firmly believe that full representation of all societal segments, within the fire service, can and will be achieved. However, solutions will require heavy doses of creativity, ingenuity, new strategic initiatives and, broad alliances to offset the many challenges that fire service faces.

Most people recognize that the desire to become a firefighter is typically incubated at a relatively early age, especially when a young person relates to the uniformed person as a role model. However, this is less prevalent among minorities and women who might harbor the attitude of "If I don't see any that look like me, then it's probably not meant to be or most likely meant for me".

Added to this dilemma is the cost of EMT, Medic and other training requirements for prospects that typically come from lower income households. There is also the need to earn an income throughout the lengthy process of getting hired for one of the few available positions. Lastly, the education disparity is reflected in segments of schools and neighborhoods.

These issues, among others, represent significant impediments among fire departments seeking ample numbers of diverse recruits for current openings. The situation can literally seem like finding "the needle in a haystack". Added to this is the need to build a viable pipeline of qualified and motivated candidates in future years.

By coupling the **Firefighter Diversity Recruitment Council** with the **National Recruit Database**, a strong foundation can be formed to successfully address the pressing requirement for fuller diversity within the fire service. This will be accomplished through the Council's combination of "Best Practices", collaboration and cooperative efforts among fire departments nation-wide.

### **Fire Service Observations:**

Through hundreds of conversations with fire departments nation-wide, Firefighter's ABC's has observed a host of non-optimal efforts that hinder the fulfillment of diversity recruitment goals.

While some departments do a better job than others, our anecdotal evidence clearly indicates that most programs are not sustained over time and are not comprehensive or broad enough in scope.

Provided below are a few of the "Areas for Improvement" that we see repeatedly:

- Informal diversity initiatives versus written declarations with quantifiable recruitment goals.
- The absence of diversity within a department's long-term operational plan.
- Diversity mandates not permeating every level of the organization via periodic communications.
- Failure to establish a "**Diversity Czar**" with accountability for coordinating efforts and realizing quantifiable goals.
- No working relationships with diversity based organizations.
- Lack of community outreach, entry-level workshops, internships and other programs designed to fill the pipeline with future candidates.
- A singular focus upon the 'next' recruitment event versus longer-term activities to sustain the pipeline.
- 'Fishing' only in the local pond versus expanding the traditional geographic area of recruitment.

If your department/agency can relate to any of the above, membership in the Firefighter Diversity Recruitment Council will serve you well.

Through vigorous collaboration with other departments, and greatly aided by the National Recruit Database of candidates, you will find solutions readily available.

### **Our Approach:**

A belief in the '**Power of Numbers**' is why the Firefighter Diversity Recruitment Council was formed and was subsequently coupled with the Firefighter's ABC's National Recruit Database.

We also view collaboration among a nation-wide network of Council member fire departments as pivotal to optimizing and sharing best practices in the area of diversity recruitment.

### **Key elements of our approach, and why they work, include:**

- Collaboration through the Council member's ability to exchange ideas and experiences. Find out what works and what doesn't. Don't 'reinvent the wheel' and minimize duplicating errors already made by others.
- Benefit from the collective experiences of fellow Council members and experts in the field of diversity recruitment through "How To" tips and articles via the Council web site.
- Significantly broaden the awareness of promotional job openings, by posting opportunities directly to fellow Council members.
- Entry-Level recruitment postings to reach the nation-wide subscriber audience of the National Recruit Database, thereby expanding the available pool of candidates for all Council members. This is of particular importance for fire departments for which a diversity of candidates is not clustered within their served community.
- Fostering an "Across-the-Board" embrace of diversity initiatives through collaboration with local, regional, state and national entities, e.g., Chiefs Associations as well as ethnic and gender based organizations.
- Fostering joint efforts among "**Council**" member departments to generate more "**effective** and **cost efficient**" outcomes while spreading the manpower load.

### **Requested Support:**

- Your support in supporting the 100% Free Firefighter's ABC's Online Internship Program to our diverse youth within your high school districts starting at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade through post college to include the newly enlisted members of the arms services.
- Your support in sharing the Online Internship Program with other members of other school districts and congress.
- Your support in supporting this as a national awareness tool as it relates to diversity in the fire service independent of traditional entities within the fire service.

**Resources:**

We ask that you please take a moment to view a host of support tools on our site. Please visit and learn more about the “**Council**” and “**Online Internship Program**” at [www.FirefightersABCs.com](http://www.FirefightersABCs.com) and the [Resources and Directory](#) pages.

**Note:**

I was from a low income single parent home and I was once an at-risk high school student. I was also a student that simply failed in my attempts to stay in college. Lastly, I was homeless for a short while until a professor from Foothill Jr. College picked me up on Highway 280 in Los Altos. Dr. Irvin Roth took me to Los Altos Fire Department and introduced me to a very unknown world – the fire service. I soon became a student firefighter and the first black firefighter hired by the Los Altos Fire Department and that was the start of a 34 yr. career.

One promise I made back in 1969 was to forever work to increase diversity in the fire service and to continue to help the next diverse generation of firefighters achieve their goal.

Yes, many of our diverse youth simply need a bit of guidance and support regardless of their career choice and if they aren’t aware of the fire service as a viable career choice it simply may not come to be regardless of their status in life.

Thus the founder Russell G. Hayden was:

Co-founder of the Santa Clara County Black Firefighter’s in 1973

Appointed the first Recruitment Officer for the San Jose Fire Department in 1998

Employee of the Year City of San Jose – Related to Diversity in the Fire Service in 1999

Founder of Firefighter’s ABC’s in 1999

Presenter/Founder – 21<sup>st</sup> Century Diversity Recruitment Workshop

Lastly, please feel free to contact the Founder of Firefighter’s ABC’s at:

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Thanks for taking of your time to review all of the above and I look forward to your support and most of all for sharing this within your network nationwide.