

*Hosted by W.S. Darley & Company*



recruitment

retention

diversity

equity

inclusion

*2023 Essay Competition:*  
**THE 2ND THOUGHT  
LEADERSHIP ESSAY  
COMPETITION**

*Top 3 Winning Essays & Insights*

*We are inspired by the overwhelming enthusiasm and creativity showcased in our second Thought Leadership Essay Competition. With a commendable 85 entries centered on recruitment and diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) within the fire service, it's evident that our fire service heroes are eager to spotlight this important discussion.*

## **WHY IS THOUGHT LEADERSHIP & WRITING SO IMPORTANT?**

Informational influence has become one of the most important leadership traits. The only way to lead effectively is to be an example of how leaders share information and lead from a place of caring.

While future and current leaders may have different perspectives than more senior members of the fire service, their level of dedication and willingness to address and problem-solve reflects the best the fire service has to offer. It is both impressive and exciting when firefighters, company officers and chief officers thoughtfully and respectfully challenge how we think about the future of the fire service.

***Good leadership depends on good communication. At Darley, we encourage you all to think like a leader and write like a leader.***

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*"Being a thought leader can be an ethereal experience, yet it is not always an academic exercise. Training and education certainly provide the developmental basis and methodology for the critical-thinking process, but it's up to current thought leaders to mentor those around us to become the next group of progressive leaders. The philosophic questions we should be asking don't require a doctorate, but they certainly do require the ability to think beyond..."*

*- Chief Marc Bashoor, Executive Editor of FireRescue1 (Sept. '19)*

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# HOW IT WORKS

Fire service members responded to this prompt:

The men and women of the nation's fire services are some of the best and brightest from communities across the country. The fire service is stronger because of diversity – in thought, background, experience, race, gender and sexual orientation. However, there is still significant work to be done.

The 2023 Fire Service Thought Leadership Essay Competition welcomes essays that address the continuing challenges in recruiting and achieving diversity and creating an inclusive collaborative workplace for career, combination, or volunteer FDs and with both uniformed and non-uniformed members of the fire service.

Participants can answer one of the following questions or write on another diversity and inclusion topic:

- Are the efforts by the fire service to promote diversity and inclusion working? What changes or improvements should be made?
- Are there new recruiting approaches the fire service should consider?
- What don't we understand about the problem of recruiting?



After the submission period closed, the 85 entries went through three rounds of peer reviewed judging process by our distinguished judges. Judges evaluated essays based on four key sets of criteria including:

1. Quality of Writing
2. Potential Value to Fire Service
3. Innovative Solutions Offered
4. Intangibles

*Congrats!*

## **TOP 3 WINNERS:**



### **1st PLACE**

Dr. Lindsay Judah, DPA, CFO, CTO

*"Action, Alliance, and Awareness: The 3A's Needed in the Fire and Emergency Services Today"*

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### **2nd PLACE**

Peter Finkle, New Vernon Volunteer FD (NJ)

*"Challenges in Recruiting, Achieving Diversity, and Fostering Inclusion in the Fire Service"*

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### **3rd PLACE**

Weston Davis City of El Campo (TX)

*"How to Fix Fire Service Diversity and Inclusion"*



# WHAT DO THE WINNERS GET?

This contest serves as a gateway to enhance the contestants' opportunities. Not only does their involvement contribute to their overall career advancements, but it simultaneously gives the contestants the opportunity to voice their innovative ideas and ignite honest conversations based on their everyday accounts. This truly gives us the chance to create meaningful change in essential industries like the fire service industry and support the lives of our everyday heroes.

*All winners received a monetary prize, and were highlighted on platforms such as:*

- *the Inside Darley video series*
- *Darley Times*
- *In Service Darley podcast*
- *Darley partner channels*

An additional, exciting prize for the 1st place winner is the opportunity to present at the Texas A&M Leadership conference in Texas occurring from January 8 - 10, 2024, in San Marcos, Texas.

## 2023 JUDGES:

The competition served as a catalyst to those from all ranks and functions in the fire service to put forth their transformative ideas. This was a peer-reviewed process set to celebrate courage and innovative thinking. Ensuring a holistic evaluation of this vast pool of knowledge, our judging panel represented diverse backgrounds, genders, and ethnicities.

- *Chief Trisha Wolford, Anne Arundel County FD (MD)*
- *Bertral Washington, Deputy Chief of Administration San Bernardino County Fire (CA)*
- *Anthony James, Deputy Chief/Fire Marshal Pasadena Fire Department (CA)*
- *LaRae Smiley Sliger, Women in Fire*
- *Chief David Wolf, Estes Valley FPD (CO)*
- *Rachael Stebell, Women in Fire*
- *Chief Cheryl Horvath, Tubac FD (AZ)*
- *Kerry Henderson, Battalion Chief at James City County (VA) and 2022 essay winner*
- *Chief John Buckman (ret), past President IAFC, Past Chair VCOS (IN)*
- *Martin A. Serna, Assistant Chief Division 2 San Bernardino County Fire (CA)*



# JUDGES' INSIGHTS:

*"Darley Essay contest is one way to bring out critical thinkers who will examine specific issues and challenge the fire service to do something that might upset the status quo. The nominees are all practitioners who may actually be working through some of the issues identified by the papers. Each of the authors did complete significant research to validate their paper in a very limited time."*

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- Judge John Buckman

*"This year's topic choices were challenging. After reading through numerous essays it is clear that the solutions to hiring, retaining, and ensuring a diverse and inclusive workplace are complex. Anecdotal evidence will no longer suffice and agencies must start relying on research and data to find out what is truly working/not working in our industry to make sure we retain our best employees."*

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- Judge Kerry Henderson

*"Reading these essays provided me proof that there are several thoughts and ideas developing across the country toward building firefighter workforces that reflect the communities we serve. As these strategies are implemented by fire service leaders, we will begin to see continued improvement of our services and our people that provide them."*

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- Judge Betral Washington

## WHAT NEXT?

It is extremely honorable having the opportunity to initiate and sponsor this essay competition at Darley, as it is a fundamental way for others to highlight their creative strengths and spark necessary conversations. Darley applies the importance of thought leadership to support the fire service industry and emphasize its overall relevance, essentialness, and complexity to our nation. We encourage you to read these essays in order to help embrace and combat the challenges the fire service industry is facing regarding Recruitment, Diversity, and Inclusion.



# **ACTION, ALLIANCE & AWARENESS: THE 3A'S NEEDED IN THE FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICES TODAY**

*Dr. Lindsay Judah, DPA, CFO, CTO*

The 2023 Fire Service Thought Leadership Essay Competition requested submissions which address the continuing challenges in recruiting, achieving diversity and creating an inclusive collaborative workplace. While this topic is very complex, progress is possible and can be attained with action, alliance, and awareness.

**Action** - a thing done: deed

**Alliance** - the state of being allied: one that is associated with another as a helper, a person or group that provides assistance and support in an ongoing effort, activity, or struggle

**Awareness** - the quality or state of being aware, knowledge and understanding that something is happening or exists

Though the 3A's above are listed alphabetically, we as an industry, maybe even societally, must begin our journey to achieving positive change starting with awareness. We need to encourage, embrace, and provide visibility to those who are othered. If we are aware of workplaces which are not inclusive and supportive, we need to have the courage to address behaviors, commentary and exclusion that will not be tolerated. This requires both alliance and action. While some are privileged to serve communities in the Fire and Emergency Services profession and feel a sense of belonging, are heard, and valued from day one; that is not the experience everyone has. We need to begin with awareness and address othering. Our industry should be concerned with continued EEOC cases and have a genuine desire to do the right thing. In very simple terms from Chief Brunacini, "Be Nice."

Our alliances can derive from many sources, we can read books which cover topics of ego, emotional intelligence, leadership, and psychology. We can hire speakers who are well-informed on these topics and learn from them directly via workshops. We can support personnel to pursue higher education, which can aid in agency problem-solving and an enhanced team approach. We can collaborate with industry researchers to ensure our challenges are represented by grant-funded projects. We can also capitalize and examine content from other industries such as the Department of Defense, other male-dominated industries, and create a more interdisciplinary approach. Here is an illustrative example from the trucking industry, Tallahassee Community College video with



Alix Miller: Women in Trucking, "The face of trucking, the opportunities are changing rapidly, and when you have 50% of the population not engaged with this industry, we're really losing out."

In the book, Delete the Adjective: A Soldier's Adventures in Ranger School, the author Lisa Jaster shares extensively on her personal journey through Army Ranger school. This book was gifted to me right before an NFFF EGH Advocate trip, and I cannot express to you how gutted I felt while sitting in a Sun Prairie, Wisconsin hotel room at midnight, while reading her book. A couple quotes specifically, "I couldn't control what my grader thought about me invading his fraternity, and I had no tools to fix it." And "There's a challenge being a "first" when you really just want to be accepted." This Army Ranger was able and willing to share her personal journey.

While the content resonates deeply with me, what if we could change the narrative in our beloved industry, the Fire and Emergency Services. I personally believe the more effectively we address retention by treating one another with acceptance and kindness within the walls of the firehouse and administrative buildings; the need for recruitment may diminish and efforts will be more successful. As Jaster shares, the formula required is, "change hearts and minds, one at a time." In a recent article, Not Everyone's Cup of Tea by The Pointer, Fire Chief Deryn Rizzi shares, "We believe in public safety and that's the important thing to me." She shares insight on her journey to Fire Chief which required support from leadership to acknowledge her potential. Chief Marques communicated perspective in her Naval Postgraduate Thesis titled, Working Fire: Recruitment and Retention of Women Firefighters. She revealed that researchers have continuously identified mentors and champions as key career influences. In the Fire and Emergency Services industry, where 96% of the workforce is male, women [all of those who are othered] need support from senior male firefighters and leaders. The importance of this notion is captured in the book, Athena Rising: How and Why Men Should Mentor Women.

In closing, on a positive note, Drexel University, School of Public Health is leading a DEI initiative through the Center for Firefighter Injury Research & Safety Trends (FIRST) partnering with the IAFC Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association to create DEI FIRE; a toolkit. The successful implementation of these efforts for individual Fire and Emergency Services organizations will require the 3A's. There is hope.

*"The fire service is stronger because of diversity – in thought, background, experience, race, gender and sexual orientation."*

*-Darley®*





# CHALLENGES IN RECRUITING, ACHIEVING DIVERSITY & FOSTERING INCLUSION IN THE FIRE SERVICE

*Peter Finkle, New Vernon Volunteer FD (NJ)*



The fire service plays a critical role in ensuring public safety and responding to emergencies. As society evolves, the need for a diverse and inclusive fire service becomes increasingly evident. However, recruiting and achieving diversity, as well as creating an inclusive collaborative workplace, continue to present significant challenges. This essay aims to explore these challenges and discuss strategies to address them, considering both uniformed and non-uniformed members of the fire service.

*The Need for Diversity and Inclusion in the Fire Service:*

Diversity and inclusion are essential components of an effective fire service. By embracing diversity, fire departments can enhance their ability to serve diverse communities effectively. Different perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds contribute to improved problem-solving, innovation, and adaptability. Moreover, a diverse fire service fosters trust and improves community relations, ultimately strengthening overall public safety efforts.

*Challenges in Recruiting and Achieving Diversity:*

**Implicit Bias:** Unconscious biases in recruitment and selection processes can hinder diversity efforts. Bias may lead to the underrepresentation of certain groups and perpetuate a lack of diversity within the fire service. Implementing bias-awareness training and developing standardized, objective recruitment practices can help mitigate this challenge.

**Limited Outreach:** The fire service often struggles to reach diverse populations, especially those from underrepresented communities. Barriers such as socio-economic disparities, lack of awareness, and cultural differences can impede recruitment efforts. To overcome this, fire departments must proactively engage with diverse communities through targeted outreach initiatives, community partnerships, and mentorship programs. These programs should target high schools and vocational schools for recruitment very similar to what our armed services do.



## *Creating an Inclusive Collaborative Workplace:*

**Addressing Bias and Discrimination:** Fire departments must actively combat discrimination and bias within their ranks. Establishing robust policies, procedures, and training programs to promote inclusivity, respect, and equal opportunities for all members is crucial. Creating channels for reporting and addressing discriminatory incidents and ensuring accountability are essential steps in fostering an inclusive environment.

**Cultural Competence and Sensitivity:** Encouraging cultural competence among firefighters and fire department leadership is essential for effective communication and collaboration. Providing training on diversity, cultural awareness, and sensitivity can help bridge gaps and enhance understanding among members with diverse backgrounds.

**Career Development and Mentorship:** Offering career development opportunities and mentorship programs to all members of the fire service can contribute to a more inclusive and collaborative workplace. Providing support, guidance, and access to resources for professional growth can empower individuals from diverse backgrounds to thrive and advance within the organization.

Recruiting and achieving diversity, as well as fostering an inclusive collaborative workplace, are ongoing challenges in the fire service. Overcoming these challenges requires a concerted effort from fire departments, community stakeholders, and society as a whole. By addressing implicit biases, enhancing outreach efforts, challenging stereotypes, and creating an inclusive environment, the fire service can harness the benefits of diversity and ensure the provision of excellent service to all communities. Embracing diversity and fostering inclusion will not only strengthen the fire service but also contribute to safer, more resilient communities.



# HOW TO FIX FIRE SERVICE DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

*Weston Davis City of El Campo (TX)*



Are the efforts by the fire service to promote diversity and inclusion working? What changes or improvements should be made?

Frequently when diversity and inclusion are discussed the two topics are intertwined and poorly defined. When referring to organizations, diversity is where an organization is not homogenous and has people of different ethnicities, cultures, genders, and a host of other identities. Inclusion means that the diverse people that make up an organization have the opportunity to be actively engaged in their work.

The history of diversity initiatives in the fire service has been plagued by the negativity associated with affirmative action and hiring quotas. The fire department should reflect the community it serves. However, this cultural reflection has previously come by controversial means that ultimately did not lead to a more diverse and inclusive fire department.

When diversity is brought up on any fire service-related social media it is met with divisive and ignorant comments about what real diversity means. Commentators will talk about lowering standards, racism, citizens dying, and all sorts of negative commentary. Countless firefighters have seen firsthand the lack of inclusion, toxicity, bullying, and exclusion that happens in modern fire stations. Everywhere one looks there are countless examples of inclusion not working and rare cases where inclusion is regularly practiced.

There is much work that the fire service needs to do for diversity and inclusion to be commonplace. Leaders at each level of the fire department must be dedicated to recruiting a diverse workforce and then being inclusive of diverse people. As with any good solution, there are several low-cost/ no-cost actions for accomplishing diversity and inclusion within the fire service.

Cultural competence. Cultural competence is having an understanding that everyone is different than oneself. Cultural competence comes from providing training to firefighters to understand diverse people and their cultures. Firefighters that are culturally competent will be able to be more inclusive of people they understand. Understanding others is the first step to accepting differences.



Recruitment. Fire service leaders need to ensure that recruiting is reaching a diverse audience. Are job opportunities posted where a wide range of people from the community would have access? Are job descriptions written with inclusive language and free of arbitrary standards? Has the department promoted jobs at community events attended by diverse groups?

Culture Fit. Fire departments should place a priority on hiring for culture fit. There are a myriad of tools to assess an applicant's personality, behavior, and mindset. A preference should be given to people that are inclusive, culturally competent, and have emotional intelligence. Having a culture where only inclusive and accepting people are hired will improve inclusion.

Leadership. It is critical for leaders within the fire service to be inclusive of everyone under their command. The first point of failure for any diversity and inclusion effort is a failure of leadership buy-in. The leaders must be committed to being inclusive, holding people accountable that are not inclusive, and leading by example.

The fire service has a great opportunity to better serve its communities through public-facing diversity and inclusion examples. Organizations that respond to serve the public can better serve the public through their commitment to their diverse customers. Now is the time for fire service leaders to set the workplace standard for successful diversity and inclusion. The fire service has led the way in many advancements throughout history and can also lead in this area.



***Help us choose next year's prompt!***

What conversations do you want to spark?  
Share your ideas for next year's prompt with  
KevinSofen@darley.com.

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***STAY TUNED FOR THE 2024  
ESSAY COMPETITION UPDATES  
& FUTURE THOUGHT  
LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES!***

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***EXPLORE PREVIOUS COMPETITIONS:***

