

Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Culture in the Columbus Division of Fire

Research Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Executive Fire Officer Program

by

David Baugh, B.S.

Assistant Chief

Columbus Division of Fire (OH)

National Fire Academy

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Abstract

The Columbus Division of Fire seeks to be a diverse and inclusive organization that mirrors the demographics of the community it serves. This generic qualitative inquiry is intended to identify barriers to diversity and inclusion within the organization. Historically, the Columbus Division of Fire has been ordered to implement diversity efforts as part of a court ruling, those requirements were lifted decades later but still struggle to recruit diverse candidates. Thirteen firefighters were interviewed as part of a generic qualitative inquiry. Their responses were transcribed, analyzed, and coded into three main themes. Theme one includes various subthemes that are specific barriers to becoming a firefighter including recruiting, interacting with firefighters and the impact of firefighters that visually display diversity. Theme two includes various barriers that inhibit the culture of the organization to be inclusive, including elements of a bad culture, poor leadership, a lack of training and struggling DEI initiatives. Theme three identifies positive characteristics of participants positive experiences, where participants eventually found inclusion. Those themes included examples of good leadership and mentorship that attributed to experiences of an inclusive culture. The attributes of theme three were then leveraged into recommendations for leaders of the organization to consider when attempting to improve adding diversity and improving inclusion. Those recommendations included leadership training, recommendations for recruiting success, the impact of good customer service, and the development of a mentoring program.

Keywords: Diversity and Inclusion, Fire Service Recruiting, Diversity and Inclusion Training, Mentorship, Fire Service Leadership

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The Columbus (OH) Division of Fire is a large urban fire department with over 1,650 personnel responding to 189,000 calls annually from 35 fire stations. The City of Columbus is a diverse city founded in the late 18th century as an immigrant city. As of 2020, the City of Columbus is home to over 900,000 people; fifty-three percent of the population is white, while the remainder is either mixed race or other single race (United States Census Bureau, 2020). The fire department employment demographics do not indicate a similar representation of the public that the organization serves.

Background

The Columbus Division of Fire was formally organized in 1835, and the first African American firefighter joined the ranks in 1879 (Fukuda, 2002). While hiring African American firefighters in the late 1800's may seem that the City of Columbus was progressive in the past by hiring black firefighters, those firefighters were segregated at the Oak Street Firehouse. Then Mayor Allen signed the "King Colored Firemen Ordinance" that identified all black firefighters who would be assigned to this firehouse (Fukuda, 2002). Eventually, these firefighters were assigned other duties, and the firehouse was disbanded. There is no record of African American firefighters within the Columbus Division of Fire ranks from the 1920s through the 1930s (Fukuda, 2002). Segregation of black firefighters continued until a policy was implemented that desegregated firehouses in 1954. After desegregation, only a minimal number of black firefighters were hired.

In 1973, several black men, including Eddie Dozier, sought employment with the Columbus Division of Fire (*Dozier v Chupka*, 1975). The black men subsequently were not hired

and filed a discrimination lawsuit. The United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio ruled that the Columbus Division of Fire's hiring policies were discriminatory, and its efforts to increase diversity included a consent decree that mandated every recruit class was one-half white and one-half black (Hemmeter, 2009). The consent decree was lifted in 1991 by United States District Judge Joseph P. Kinneary (*Dozier v Chupka*, 1991). Since then, recruiting methods have been implemented with varying degrees of success.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is relevant to the desire to increase diversity in the Columbus Division of Fire. Hiring practices in the late 1970s led to minority employment within the fire division, primarily due to the ruling of Judge Kinneary in the *Dozer v Chupka* case of 1973 (Hemmeter, 2009). However, the increased diversity of employees ordered by the consent decree was lost over the ensuing years as minority members progressed through their careers and eventually retired. Subsequently, the fire division's demographics did not match the community served. Since 2000, recruitment efforts focused on recruiting and retaining minorities have met with limited success as the number of minority recruits has not increased significantly. Over the last 30 years, applicants hired within the Columbus Division of Fire have previous experience in the fire and emergency medical service (EMS) field, either from neighboring career fire departments or from volunteer fire departments throughout Ohio. However, the pool of applicants hired with previous experience were typically not minorities.

In response to discovering this phenomenon, the City of Columbus has developed a Cadet Program aimed explicitly at minority applicants to provide both experience and technical knowledge and to increase awareness that the fire service is a legitimate career. The Cadet

Program goals include exposing minority candidates to fire service employment opportunities, State of Ohio Certification in Firefighter II, and Basic Emergency Medical Technician certifications. The program offers paid training while searching for a fire service career and individual mentoring by Columbus Firefighters and Officers. However, the main goal is to provide the drive, training, skills, and abilities that lead to the Columbus Division of Fire employment.

Despite this revolutionary and effective recruiting and mentoring program for minority recruitment efforts, the division of fire has seen a recent rise over the last five years in equal employment opportunity complaints from current Columbus Division of Fire members. Vohora et al. (2015), described inclusion as the degree to which individuals feel a part of critical organizational processes. Additionally, the lack of an inclusive culture may have led to a lack of a diverse workforce. The Columbus Division of Fire leadership may not be doing enough to embrace diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Productive and cultural changes may lead to sustainable change. When examining a diversity study in a College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at a mid-Atlantic land grant institution, themes emerged: What diversity means to the students, feelings of discrimination while in college, and suggestions to improve the climate of diversity and inclusion in the college (Drape et al., 2017). An objective of the Executive Fire Officer Program recommends modern fire service leaders need to continue fostering change within their respective organizations (National Fire Academy, 2023). Additionally, the Center for Public Safety Excellence & International City/County Management Association (2020) challenged fire department leaders across the country to embrace diversity and inclusion to attract a diverse pool of future employees. Executive fire officers must expand their proficiencies by incorporating diversity,

equity, and inclusiveness to build organizational and community strength (National Fire Academy, 2023).

Problem Statement

The specific problem is the lack of diversity and inclusion of minority firefighters in the Columbus Division of Fire in Columbus, OH (Bruner, 2021). Bruner (2021) also reported diversity and inclusion are the mayor's number one priorities for the Columbus Division of Fire (CFD). Additionally, organizations seek methods to increase diversity and inclusion in their recruitment and retention strategies. CFD has implemented various strategies to increase diversity reflected in our demographics. As Johnson (2016) stated, "It is no secret that fire departments in cities and communities do not resemble the municipal they serve" (para. 5). Despite these various methods, diversity and inclusion remain an issue within the Columbus Division of Fire. Systems should be implemented to ensure the Columbus Division of Fire becomes a model for a diverse and inclusive fire department.

Like most fire departments, the Columbus Division of Fire should compete for qualified minority employees and for-profit, not-for-profit, and other government entities, as these groups are searching within a shared hiring pool. Current Columbus Division of Fire leaders interest lies in learning how other employers are addressing the minority hiring challenge, as well as how they are addressing diversity and inclusion in their organizations (T. Smith, personal communication, December 5, 2023).

Additionally, department leaders should possess the mindset to address diversity and inclusion within the Columbus Division of Fire. Finally, supervisors, union representation, and collaborating partners should create a diverse and inclusive culture for the Columbus Division of

Fire members that reflects its community. Diversity and inclusion are essential values that should be part of every organization's core philosophy. CFD must overcome the “thinking that solving their problem is their problem” (Gamson, 2000, p. 87).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this generic qualitative inquiry is to study the lack of diversity and inclusion of minority firefighters in the Columbus Division of Fire in Columbus, OH. This study may identify practices that have led to the lack of inclusive cultures in the workplace. The identified practices will be evaluated regarding the unique culture and mission of the U.S. fire, rescue, and emergency medical services, emphasizing their applicability and relevance to the Columbus Division of Fire.

Research Question

The research question is what barriers exist within the Columbus Division of Fire that create a lack of diversity and inclusion of minority firefighters? Efforts to increase diversity and inclusion within the Columbus Division of Fire have yielded some results, but not sustained results. Organizations like the Columbus African American Firefighters Association have championed for greater diversity and inclusion; however, diversity and inclusion remain an issue. Support and direction for diversity and inclusion are echoed by senior city leadership, executive fire leadership, along with former leadership. Programs such as court mandates in the 1970's, the Cadet Program, and focused recruiting still have not yielded desired results.

This inquiry examines the background of diversity and inclusion efforts in the Columbus Division of Fire. This study includes an analysis of literature that may define how a diverse and

inclusive organization is defined and inquire feedback from current Columbus Division of Fire firefighters. These findings and recommendations will be presented in Chapters Four and Five.

Summary

The City of Columbus boasts a diverse community, while the demographics of the Columbus Division of Fire do not match the diversity of the community it serves. Various methods have been implemented in the past with varying degrees of success and failure. Moving forward in Chapter Two, the researcher will examine the existing literature as to how it relates to diversity, or lack thereof, in organizations such as the Columbus Division of Fire.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

According to the Center for Public Safety Excellence & International City/County Management Association (2020), fire departments' workforces do not match the demographics of the community served. The Columbus Division of Fire is no different; diversity and inclusion are among the department's top priorities. Fire departments nationwide have struggled with diversity recruitment (Johnson, 2016). This study's focus is the lack of diversity and inclusion of minority firefighters in the Columbus Division of Fire in Columbus, OH. This research revealed few peer-reviewed literature resources have been explicitly found that focused on diversity and inclusion in the United States Fire Service within the last five years. Instead, several articles that studied diversity and inclusion efforts in other work environments, including public service careers, were reviewed.

Executives are realizing that diverse and inclusive organizations lead to innovation and effectiveness in the workplace (Pope, 2018). Fire service leaders will need to analyze diversity and inclusion efforts that may align with other workforce initiatives, or there may be a gap in research for specific fire service diversity and inclusion strategies. A report published by the Center for Public Safety Excellence & International City/County Management Association (2020) identified that changes in culture and perceptions are necessary if fire departments want to recruit the right workforce. In another study, the authors indicated that adding diversity first and developing inclusion later can lead to higher diversity and inclusion (Vedres & Vásárhelyi, 2023).

Existing Literature

Benefits of Diversity and Inclusion

Fire service leaders and those wishing to support diversity and inclusion initiatives should understand how these initiatives can improve the fire service. Explaining the benefits of specific programs will assist with buy-in from new and legacy members. Research indicates several themes emerge as benefits. The first is an augmented employee engagement that increases a sense of belonging in the organization (Wadhwa & Aggarwal, 2023). In addition, increased diversity can also improve customer service and lead to more creativity and innovation (Sweety et al., 2023).

Organizational leaders ponder whether to focus on diversity or inclusion; the answer is that it needs to be both (Pope, 2018). Vedres et al. (2023) wrote that gender diversity is a predictor of creativity; however, that token diversity without inclusion showed no benefits. Simply adding diversity may not add benefit and value; the added diversity should be part of a plan. The following literature review examines the components of diversity and inclusion in fire departments and other similar organizations.

Culture

“Culture is often defined as the learned behavior patterns of people-including what they think, say, do, value, and feel” (Center for Public Safety Excellence & International City/County Management Association, [CPSE/ICMA], 2020, pg 11). Culture is a factor in promoting diversity and inclusion programs, and positive work environments allow the individual to speak up and be heard (Buttinger, 2023). Another fire service culture phenomenon is that the fire service is a male-dominated culture (Koeppel et al., 2022). Tyler et al., (2019) stated that it is well-established internationally that firefighting is a male-dominated and culturally masculinized

position. Creating a culture of inclusion through diversity efforts can improve the current culture in many ways.

Inclusion

The existing literature indicates that inclusion is an essential factor for improving diversity in the workplace. Jung et al (2022) wrote “Inclusion is defined as the extent to which individuals perceive they are part of significant processes in the organization,” (p 522). In one study of video game developers, Vedres et al. (2023) found that adding inclusion without diversity did not add to levels of creativity; they also identified that diversity without inclusion does not lead to increased creativity. Vedres et al. (2023) determined that simply adding diversity to the team does not provide results; collaboration is needed to experience the value of diversity. This study was relevant in the literature review because video game development is male dominated (Vedres et al., 2023). In comparison, the fire service is also a male-dominated field (Koeppel et al., 2022). Inclusion improves employee performance; when employees feel included, employees are more apt to perform their best (Wadhwa & Aggarwal, 2023).

Leadership

Leaders are not only responsible for enforcing policies but also for motivating their personnel to achieve the organization's mission. Martin (2019) wrote that individuals holding leadership positions set the tone for the organization. Leaders must be proponents of diversity for an initiative to have an impact; otherwise, members perceive efforts as token measures (Martin, 2019). Leaders should set the tone for the organization, creating a mindset for diversity and inclusion in key leadership positions (Allison, 1999). In one study, the effects of transformational leadership were linked to fostering an inclusive work environment where all members feel valued and appreciated (Brimhall, 2019).

The Center for Public Safety Excellence & International City/County Management Association (2020) recommended that the 21st-century fire department leader should establish goals and develop plans that embody an optimal demographic makeup of the agency. As the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), fire chiefs should demonstrate those behaviors regularly. CEOs should reinforce statements of improving diversity and inclusion efforts in public speeches, media interviews, and press releases; endorse hiring minority candidates; initiate diversity councils; encourage diversity training; and hold employees, and supervisors accountable (Ng & Sears, 2018).

Rudman et al. (2023) found a lack of females in fire department leadership positions. Rudman et al. (2023) wrote that studies have reported female firefighters are less likely to be promoted into officer and leadership positions. A survey of female representation in Australian Fire Departments yielded similar results, a low number of female leaders in Australian Fire Departments (Parkinson et al., 2019). One reason cited by Parkinson et al. (2019) was that any perception of nurturing female leaders led to skepticism of the male members of the capabilities of the female leaders.

Training

Organizations should train leaders to exhibit inclusion activities and promote diversity in various leadership positions. Organizational policies and procedures serve as a foundation for diversity and inclusion within the agency; however, these efforts often fall short due to a lack of follow-through (Allison, 1999). "Researchers suggested that a commitment to training employees on diversity and expressing organizational values is beneficial to organizations" (Martin, 2019, p. 12). Diversity training is intended to reduce and end workplace discrimination (McGuire & Bagher, 2010). Moreover, diversity training is positioned as a competency in

organizations, implying that employees must be competent in working in a diverse and inclusive workplace (McGuire & Bagher, 2010). McGuire and Bagher (2010) wrote that “diversity training has a significant role to play in fostering greater equality, inclusion and fairness in the workplace” (pg. 499).

Diversity training should be developed keeping several aspects in mind. Training should allow for self-reflection, which helps learners understand how they are connected to diversity (Chaudhry & Lawton, 2017). Second, workshop-style training will enable attendees to learn nuances of different communication styles (Chaudhry & Lawton, 2017). Mayfield & Mayfield (2023) wrote that research has shown that typical diversity and inclusion training without communication training is ineffective. While communication enabled perspective-taking, training significantly advances this goal (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2023). Third, Chaudhry and Lawton (2017) recommended a targeted approach to deliver training; customized training based on your specific agency's demographics maximizes the training's value. Fourth, trainers needed to develop printable resources for attendees (Chaudhry & Lawton, 2017). Last, utilize online courses to supplement live training (Chaudhry & Lawton, 2017).

Recruiting

The existing literature demonstrates that there is still an underrepresentation of female and non-white Emergency Medical Service (EMS) workers (Rudman et al., 2022). Rudman et al. (2022) examined various literature sources regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion studies. The EMS workforce is like the fire service culture; fire departments provide EMS to their communities. A common theme in all literature reviewed in this study and all other literature was a desire to provide a workforce that reflects the community served. Rudman et al. (2022) wrote that recruitment for women and Hispanic EMS personnel has increased but lagged in recruiting

black candidates. One method to boost recruitment of women and minorities must include addressing deeply rooted structural racism, racial and gender stereotyping, and implicit bias (Rudman et al., 2022).

Martin (2019) wrote that fire departments may need to study their own organizations to understand what unique barriers may exist to current DEI initiatives. In Columbus, Ohio, two federal court rulings directly impacted recruitment. The first case identified no money or effort was spent recruiting minority firefighters (*Dozier v Chupka*, 1973). The judge ruled that the department must hire one black firefighter for every white firefighter. Later, the ruling was lifted in *Dozier v Chupka* (1991) since all recruitment efforts since 1973 had been focused on minority recruiting. However, this did not have a lasting effect, as minority recruiting was again a significant concern for Mayor Ginther in 2021 (Bruner, 2021). Martin (2019, p 55) also wrote, "a disparity for any group could indicate the environment is not optimal."

One of the most significant issues with recruiting women into the fire service is the misperception that women cannot be firefighters (Koeppel et al., 2022). To that end, Koeppel et al. (2022) found that exposing potential recruits to female firefighters was a significant factor in recruiting women. In an Australian article, Mackintosh (2018) reported that targeted recruitment yielded the best results; targeted recruiting events included sporting events, career exhibitions, and community events. Mackintosh (2018) also identified tactics such as graduate programs that offered preferential pathways into the London Fire Brigade (Mackintosh, 2018). Mackintosh (2018) also found that fire departments with quotas had higher rates of female firefighters, although those programs caused resentment among white male firefighters. Contrary to quotas, Young and Jones (2019) wrote that inclusion was the main component to enabling effective diversity.

Synthesis of Existing Literature

Through examination of several peer-reviewed articles on diversity and inclusion, a lack of fire service peer-reviewed work existed. However, Australian researchers have recently published several articles that are included in this literature review. Several pieces of literature focused on workplace behavior in general were also found. Several themes emerged that included the benefits of diversity and inclusion, including better performance, increased creativity, better employee engagement, and a sense of belonging. Other themes evaluated or expanded on in the existing literature included organizational culture, inclusion, recruiting, training, and leadership.

The central theme found was that organizations should match the demographics of the community they serve, which can lead to improved innovation and performance (CPSE/ICMA, 2020; Jackson, 2016; Pope, 2019; Rudman et al., 2022). An additional theme revealed inclusion efforts are the main factor in improving diversity and inclusion in organizations. Vedres and Vasarhelvi (2023) wrote that adding diversity first and then focusing on inclusion later can offer better results. Other literature provided a different perspective, indicating inclusion initiatives were more critical. Focusing on inclusion efforts to improve the culture aligns with an article written by CPSE and ICMA (2020), which stated that if fire service leaders want to recruit the right workforce, then changes in culture and perceptions are necessary. This concept is also supported by Koepfel et al. (2022), who found that exposing potential recruits to female firefighters was a significant factor in recruiting more female firefighters.

Recruiting efforts are also a factor in creating a diverse and inclusive workplace. But simply adding diversity without inclusion efforts may not yield the desired results (Young & Jones, 2019). This concept is apparent in the Columbus Division of Fire. Dozier filed a lawsuit in

1973 because black men were not recruited into the fire department, and diversity was mandated (*Dozier v Chupka*, 1975). Later, in 1991, an appeals judge assured the quota had met the required metric, and the diversity hiring techniques of one black recruit for one white recruit was lifted (*Dozier v Chupka*, 1991). However, due to a lack of inclusion efforts since 1991, the Columbus Division of Fire is back in the same place as in 1973, struggling to add diversity to the rank and file.

Leaders need to develop and enforce policies and procedures to achieve the mission and overcome department issues (Martin, 2019). Fire service leaders of the 21st-century fire department need to establish goals and develop plans to create a diverse organization (CPSE/ICMA, 2020). Although the literature may be outdated, Allison (1999) identified that leaders set the tone for the organization. Leaders should create motivation to embrace diversity and inclusion. The student manual for the Executive Fire Officer Program states a program outcome to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusiveness to build organizational and community strength (National Fire Academy, 2023). The literature review for this study has found that this construct is not only a fire service concern but also a concern for the workplace in all fields.

Summary

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are concepts essential not only to the Columbus Division of Fire but also important priorities for fire departments and employers in many fields of employment. Systems of the workplace, including culture, leadership, recruiting, and training, are prominent themes that need to be examined when implementing or analyzing each organization. This research intends to find barriers prohibiting diversity and inclusion within the

Columbus Division of Fire. The recommendations of this research may then be utilized as a resource for developing initiatives and establishing metrics that will yield positive outcomes.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter details the methodology used to conduct this generic qualitative inquiry. The initial step was to determine a relevant topic that met the requirements of the EFO program and was pertinent to the Columbus Division of Fire. The Center for Public Safety Excellence & International City/County Management Association (2020) identified that the 21st Century Fire Department needs to ensure the makeup of the fire department represents the community served. In addition, executive fire officers must expand their proficiencies by incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusiveness to build organizational and community strength (National Fire Academy, 2023). Last, Columbus Mayor Ginther announced that diversity was his number one concern with the new fire department leadership in 2021 (Bruner, 2021). Selecting the topic of diversity and inclusion with the Columbus Division of Fire was a clear, relevant choice that met the goals of the EFO program, aligned with the 21st Century Fire Department white paper, and supported the Mayor of Columbus' goals of increasing diversity.

A literature review was conducted to review existing literature on the topic. Most of the articles collected were peer-reviewed and less than five years old, obtained via EBSCO through the Columbia Southern University online library. Several keywords were used to focus the literature search: diversity in the workplace, fire service culture, leadership, inclusion, training, recruiting women firefighters, and workplace barriers.

An examination of peer-reviewed literature found a gap in the literature explicitly focused on diversity and inclusion in the United States Fire Service within the last five years. Instead, several articles that studied diversity and inclusion efforts in other work environments, including public service careers, were reviewed. The reviewed articles yielded results focused on what makes up a diverse and inclusive organization. Literature identified critical components of

fostering a diverse and inclusive organization: culture, leadership, inclusion efforts, recruiting, and training. The next phase of the research of this inquiry is to evaluate the current perceived diversity and inclusion themes within the Columbus Division of Fire. Also, identify what initiatives may work and what barriers prevent the Division of Fire from meeting its goals.

Research Design

The generic qualitative inquiry research design will investigate the lack of diversity and inclusion within the Columbus Division of Fire using semi-structured interview questions. A generic qualitative approach was selected because interviews needed to be conducted to articulate the participants' experiences. The research question is intended to identify barriers that limit diversity and inclusion in the Columbus Division of Fire; a qualitative design will glean actual employee experiences that may identify those barriers. Creswell and Creswell (2018) wrote that a transformative worldview in a qualitative approach is the best method to examine issues related to the oppression of individuals. Additionally, “the generic method allows for impressions or perceptions deemed significant to the interviewee to be identified and described (Ellis & Hart, 2023, p 1764). The generic qualitative method is best designed for this inquiry as the research aims to analyze what the participants believe to be the barriers against what is known in the existing literature.

Population and Sample Size

The Columbus Division of Fire employs 1650 members, which comprise the organization's staff. These numbers include the Chief, five Assistant Chiefs, four Deputy Chiefs, 37 Battalion Chiefs, 65 Captains, 220 Lieutenants, and 1318 firefighters. The Division of Fire

has five bureaus: Emergency Services, Administration, Support Services, Training, and Fire Prevention. The researcher interviewed thirteen firefighters from various assignments across the city except for the fire prevention bureau since the researcher is the bureau head of fire prevention. Firefighters in the Columbus Division of Fire conduct various task-level activities, from responding to emergencies, assisting with plan development, delivering training, inspecting buildings, and maintaining equipment and work locations.

Firefighters were selected for interviews based on their time of service. Typically, more senior firefighters resist change and may support legacy methods of the existing culture. As newer firefighters join the rank and file, they are more apt to maintain a different view of what a diverse and inclusive organization may look like. To ensure that the research captured this phenomenon's essence, participants with less than ten years of experience were chosen. Due to retirements and growth opportunities, over half the membership was hired within ten years, according to data gathered from Columbus Human Resources. Another factor in selection is race and gender. Since the division of fire wishes to develop a staff that mirrors the demographics of the community, a diverse group of participants are a part of this inquiry.

Instrument

Interviews were either conducted in person and all interviews were recorded. The interview recordings were then processed through a program titled *Rev* to create a written transcript of the interviews. The interview was then placed into a *Word* document and uploaded into a qualitative analysis tool titled *Dedoose* for analysis and coding. The coding led the researcher to identify common themes.

Each participant signed a consent form developed by the National Fire Academy (Appendix A). Before the interview, a background and significance statement and the purpose statement were sent to each participant for review. After receiving the consent form, the participant was scheduled for an interview that was convenient for the participant. Interviews were conducted at the participants' work locations and other locations. The following questions were presented by the researcher and answered by each participant (Appendix B):

1. Tell me about yourself and how you became interested in becoming a Columbus Firefighter.
2. How long have you been employed by the City of Columbus, Division of Fire? Describe your other fire service employment experience, if any.
3. Explain how current diversity recruitment and inclusion programs work well or fall short.
4. What barriers do you think exist that hinder effective diversity recruitment?
5. Inclusion is defined as the extent to which individuals perceive they are part of significant processes in the organization. What is your definition of inclusion? Explain how anyone disagreed or agreed with you on this definition.
6. Where are you currently assigned? What do you enjoy about your work location and crew?
7. What challenges or struggles have you had at your work location?

8. Describe the culture of your work location. How does it differ from other stations where you have worked?
9. What effort has the division promoted to improve inclusion efforts within the Columbus Division of Fire?
10. Describe a time when you have experienced discrimination or exclusion in the CFD.
11. Describe how you are supported within the organization to advance or achieve your professional goals.
12. How has executive or mid-level leadership supported you to feel included and be your true self at work?
13. What policies in place promote your ability to feel included at work? What policy recommendations do you have for the division of fire?
14. Explain what training you have had that promotes diversity and inclusion. How has that training, or lack thereof, helped or hindered the division's goals for a diverse and inclusive organization?

Research Process

The research process began with finding participants who meet the description in the participant section of this chapter. The Columbus African American Firefighters Association (CAAFFA) and a diverse group of officers were selected to assist in identifying diverse

participants. Those names were placed into a Word document containing contact information and stored on the researcher's computer. All participants were contacted via phone numbers listed in *Telestaff*, the division of fire's staffing software program. All participants were contacted by phone or in person, where the researcher introduced the inquiry and explained the purpose of the research. The consent form was emailed to the participant and requested to be returned to me with their signature. The participants were offered to keep a version for their records. Interviews were then scheduled based on the participant's availability.

The participants were informed that their contact information, names, and responses would be confidential. The researcher explained to each participant that their responses would be anonymous and not contain any identifying qualities except that they are Columbus Firefighters. All participants were assigned a generic identifier that included their participant ID number and their gender and ethnicity. Participant information and responses will be secured on the researcher's personal computer and destroyed after the conclusion of the Capstone project.

Before finalizing the questions utilized in the interview process, the researcher field-tested the interview questions with several other members of the Columbus Division of Fire. The researcher was able to refine and improve the interview questions before conducting the interviews. Each interview was conducted and recorded in person. Rev, a transcribing software program, was then used to produce a written transcript of the interviews. The transcript was then converted to a Word document and uploaded into a qualitative coding program titled Dedoose. Excerpts from the transcripts were then coded to identify themes and patterns. Examples of the excerpts and themes are included in Chapter Three.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher recognizes the importance of addressing ethical considerations with this research. Diversity and inclusion research involves analyzing how underrepresented members may have been treated. Therefore, ensuring ethical considerations are mitigated is imperative. Before conducting the study, the researcher consulted with the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion office, the EEO compliance officer, and several other trusted colleagues. The topic was chosen based on a representation of other members and future members of the Columbus Division of Fire. The literature for Chapter Two of this inquiry was obtained via EBSCO, a peer-reviewed article database. In addition, the researcher obtained official written permission from the Fire Chief before conducting research. The researcher also acknowledged the individuals who helped test the interview questions with their permission.

The ethical considerations of the participants were addressed in several ways. Each participant was not forced to participate and signed a consent form. The researcher contacted each participant personally so as not to involve others in the awareness of the inquiry. The final capstone project does not include each participant's name and contact information, thereby maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. Each participant and field tester were made aware of the purpose of this inquiry outlined in Chapter One. Each interview was conducted in a method that was preferable to the participant. A power imbalance exists since the researcher is an Assistant Chief, and this power balance was difficult to address. Several methods addressed the issue:

1. The researcher ensured the anonymity of the participants and forced no one to participate—a number identified for each participant.
2. The researcher accurately displayed their responses.

3. The researcher did not ask leading questions or share personal impressions of their responses.
4. The researcher conveyed that their participation would be utilized to improve diversity and inclusion within the Columbus Division of Fire.
5. The researcher provided a copy of the inquiry for their review.

In addition, the researcher acknowledges the potential for biased reporting. To guard against biased reporting, the researcher only reported on the study's findings. The researcher did not insert their own opinions, nor did the researcher omit any data collected. Some data collected may be perceived as unfavorable for the Columbus Division of Fire; however, the researcher reported wholly and honestly. An honest analysis will be utilized to develop recommendations for further improvement of diversity and inclusion efforts in the Columbus Division of Fire.

Other ethical considerations were also addressed. The researcher will destroy files and copies of responses and/or recordings after the completion of the inquiry. Further research into this topic will not use the data collected in another research project. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that good qualitative research displays the diversity of responses from the participants. The results of this inquiry will not only report positive cultural experiences but also report those that may be perceived as unfavorable.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher detailed the entire research process. The author first selected the topic, demonstrated the background and significance, and then identified a central research question. The researcher then explained the literature review process and general findings of the literature. The researcher then supplied the research design, the survey

population, and the participants' demographics. A copy of the instrument developed to collect data is included in the chapter (Appendix B). The researcher then explained specific methods of how the research was conducted. Last, the researcher demonstrated how various ethical considerations were mitigated. The next chapter will display the research results, followed by recommendations from the research conducted.

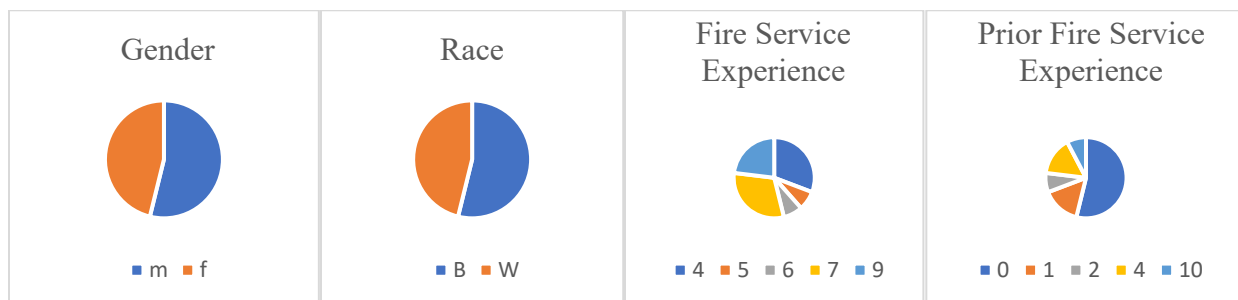
Chapter 4: Study Results

Introduction – Demographics of the Participants

The purpose of this generic qualitative inquiry is to identify barriers that might prohibit the Columbus Division of Fire to be a diverse and inclusive organization. Interviews were conducted with thirteen participants using the interview questions outlined in Appendix B. The researcher used follow up questions to gain more details in each participants interview such as: *tell me more, what do you mean by...or please expand on that point.* Each participant completed an informed consent form and kept on file. The participant was asked for their choice for the interview to ensure that the participant was comfortable. The average time of interviews was fifty-four minutes, with the longest being one hundred three minutes and the shortest was twenty-five minutes. Figure 1 demonstrates the participants were a diverse group of firefighters with experience ranging from one to nine years of service. Figure 1 shows that seven of the participants were women while the remaining six were male; seven of the participants were black while six participants were white. Figure 1 also shows four of the participants had prior fire department experience, while the other nine participants had previously worked in other industries. All the participants held the rank of firefighter.

Figure 1

Participant Demographics



Research Results

Each participant was interviewed using the questions listed in Appendix B. During the interviews the participants elicited many emotional and explicit responses. Excerpts from those interviews were coded utilizing a program called Dedoose. Those codes led to the development of three common themes as well as various subthemes. The three themes and relative subthemes are displayed in tables: Table 1-Barriers to becoming a firefighter, Table 2-Internal barriers to inclusion, and Table 3-Positive cultural attributes. Excerpts of various quotes are included with descriptions of each theme and subtheme.

Theme 1: Barriers to Becoming a Firefighter

The first theme that emerged was comments on how each participant became a firefighter, those results are displayed in Table 1. The participants identified several methods or paths into the Columbus Division of Fire. Two percent of participants had family that were firefighters; they gained their desire for the industry through the shared experiences of their family members. Participant #3 indicated “I was aware of the job because of my close family member, I was also aware of the benefits of employment.” Participant #3 also reported “because my family member was a firefighter, that broke the ice for me.” Another participant had a sibling that was a member of another fire department, they indicated because of that circumstance that participant #12 always wanted to be a part of the job.

Subtheme: Positive Interactions with Firefighters

Positive interactions with firefighters emerged as a subtheme as shown in Table 1. Fifty-Four percent of the participants reported positive interactions with current firefighters as a factor that led people to become firefighters. Participant #5 reported “he sparked my interest by bothering me for two years in a row.” Participant #7 had a firefighter that was a customer at his

old job, “he told me about his experience, he handed me a CFD flyer, and the rest is history.”

Participant #11 approached a firefighter at a home OSU football game, “I asked a firefighter how to become a firefighter, he challenged me to apply for the job.” On the contrary, Participant #11 reported that a firehouse was across the street from the school they attended; “they never came and talked to us, we didn’t know the fire service was a path.”

Participant #1 grew up in a large city in another state, the local firehouse was next door to his grandparents’ house. The firefighters would check on his relative and showed an interest in him, “I always wanted to be a firefighter after that” added participant #1. Participant #10 reported “their house caught fire and the arson investigator that was there, she was just great. She came by a couple times after to kind of check on the family, check on the progress of the house as we were rebuilding and stuff. And I told my mom one day I'm going to be like her.”

Participant #8 worked with firefighters in another career, those interactions with those firefighters led to the desire for employment. Participant #8 stated “they told me about the test and their schedule and a little more about it and I took the test.”

Subtheme: Recruiting

Table 1 displays that recruiting methods also emerged as a subtheme. Recruiting efforts are a potential barrier for diversity and inclusion, eighty-five percent of participants made statements on recruiting. Participant #5 reported “we send people out to help with recruiting, but then they get negative backlash from the [other] guys on the division.” Participant #5 added, “other firefighters look at [minority recruiting] as a slap in the face.” These reactions from other firefighters may inhibit minority firefighters from wanting to help with recruitment efforts. Another barrier is the time it takes to navigate the hiring and testing process. Participant #10 stated “As a firefighter, we always say we hit the lottery, and this is the best job ever. But to the

person who's just trying to make ends meet can't sacrifice going to take this test and not knowing six months, eight months, 12 months from now if I'm going to get it." Participant #11 stated something similar, "part of the challenge with integrating people into the fire service is the superlong program." One firefighter, Participant #10 mentioned how the long process could be a barrier for single moms:

"I think again, going back to the length of the process and then also culturally that the length of the process far as a single mom, both culturally or any single mom, you're trying to work, get the kids to school, and then you got to come and do an interview this month, two months from now. That's a lot of stuff to a lot of hoops to jump through for the job. Especially it could take anywhere from 12 to 18 months to get on the fire department and trying to balance that with whatever current job you have, it becomes a lot and there's no easier way to weed it out."

Participant #13 described how potential candidates from a lower socioeconomic status may be challenged with recruiting efforts:

"I think first of one that jumps out to me is access to information. When you have people, let's say that live in maybe the lower socioeconomic status part of town, how are they going to find these, let's say recruiting events for the fire department? Let's say little boy, little girl wants to grow up how be a fireman, how do I get there? How can I take the bus to an interest meeting?"

Subtheme: Look Like Me

The last subtheme to theme one relates to common comments from participants that stated firefighters that "look like me" as a factor into why they became a firefighter as displayed in Table 1. Sixty-nine percent of participants in the research indicated that seeing other people

that looked like them helped with diversity and inclusion. Indicating that an important factor of being able to visualize themselves in a position of a firefighter relied on seeing minority firefighters in the public.

Participant #7 reported:

“So specifically, this is an African American community that I live in and work in and a lot of minorities need to see people that look like them in different careers, different programs, different educational fields in order to feel inspired. If they see a whole bunch of people that don't look like him either they might feel intimidated or might believe that that's not a job or career path for them.”

Participant #6 described their viewpoint on female recruiting events by stating:

“Within this past year, there have been more of the events where it has been female specific, getting them introduced to the fire service. Initially when I heard about that, I didn't know how I felt about it, whether it rubbed me wrong or not, because it's not a true indication of what you'll be doing or whom you'll be working with. But then after seeing the turnout of that, maybe women did feel more comfortable showing up an event that was specifically towards them.”

Participant #11 made a similar statement:

“you have to switch from one career to the other. And I just think that it's, it's a little hard there. Um, I also think that it is, it's hard if you haven't seen if, if it is not as visible for you to see people who look like you in that space. Um, because like, just like I said earlier, like it's hard to visualize yourself as a firefighter, but it's even harder when like nobody kind of looks like you would kind of feel like you can begin to create those internal perceptions of like, oh it's a, it's a them kind of thing.”

Participant #11 also added “that crew is African American like me. And like I said, they [the public] love it when they see somebody that looks like them, talks like them, or even sounds like them in a sense pull up and they're like, oh man, I'm glad you're here.”

Table 1

Theme 1: Barriers to Becoming a Firefighter

Subtheme	Participants		Example Quote
	n	%	
Family Firefighters	2	15	“I was aware of the job because of my close family member, I was also aware of the benefits of employment.”
Positive Interaction with Firefighters	7	54	“I asked a firefighter how to become a firefighter, he challenged me to apply for the job.”
Recruiting	11	85	“other firefighters look at [minority recruiting] as a slap in the face.”
Looks Like Me	9	69	“that crew is African American like me. And like I said, they [the public] love it when they see somebody that looks like them, talks like them, or even sounds like them in a sense pull up and they're like, oh man, I'm glad you're here.”

Note. n = number of participants that indicated the response

Theme 2: Internal Barriers

As shown in Table 2, internal barriers that exist within the culture of CFD emerged as theme two. Many responses were coded into a second theme that identified several characteristics of a bad culture to creating a diverse and inclusive organization. Eighty-five percent of the participants commented that they experienced a form of bad culture. Several participants noted how they felt alone in their assignments and did not fit into the culture. Participant #5 was the only black firefighter in a certain part of town, other black firefighters would state “you need to get from out of there.” Participant #5 had previous experience at

another fire department, “I was the only black firefighter on the whole department...I was accepted and supported...once I came here it was the biggest barrier...in a segregated kind of way.” Participant #5 stated “it doesn’t really come down to black or white. It just comes down to who you are and you’re comfortable with and what your core values are and what you stand for.”

Participant #5 added:

“I feel like we miss that as a division because it’s too many people looking to impress this certain individual because we self-proclaim guys and build them up and put them on pedestals...it gets in the way of actually accomplishing anything because it’s cliquy...no one wants to stand alone and just build themselves up.”

Another firefighter reported how much they didn’t understand the culture. Participant #12 profoundly stated “My expectation was that everybody just loved everybody, I didn’t know they didn’t like each other.”

Subtheme: Lack of Inclusion

Another subtheme describes a lack of inclusion within the culture of CFD, displayed in Table 2. A lack of inclusion was experienced by ninety-two percent of the participants. Some firefighters felt that no one would help them succeed. Participant #13 stated:

“I came from [another industry] I didn’t know what a valve was...a five inch...a hydrant adapter. I felt there was this expectation that they made it through the academy, they should be at this level, but they aren’t at this level. [The other firefighters] had very little patience with me, picked on me, and not in a comradery, brotherly kind of way.”

One firefighter was considering quitting; participant #13 reported: “I was so unhappy. I started looking for other jobs, I had gotten through the academy, I was going to quit.”

Another firefighter, participant #7, stated:

“I was upset in the beginning after the TA. Once I got on company, the culture here was weird...I understood the concept of being seen and not heard...but as a new guy your opinion don't matter...I get that but what bothered me was the way some of the guys communicated with me.”

“Participant # 7 indicated he felt as though he didn't fit in, he reported “the tone of the conversations and the way that I felt like I was isolated and treated at the time definitely made me feel like it was a race thing, and I probably had that mindset until I talked to someone different.” Participant #7 reported that eventually he found people that gave him hope.

In another instance participant #6 reported that she was treated different as a female, other firefighters made comments such as “are you just here to find a husband? Or you just took this job to be around men.” Another firefighter was left to feel hopeless about their situation, participant #13 reported:

“I felt like they had very little patience with me, picked on me, not in that comradery, brotherly kind of way because there's a difference brother sister kind of way. I felt like she's a lost cause. So, we're just going to give her the bare minimum basic answer to her questions or just ignore me altogether. And that made me feel like garbage. I'm not going to lie. It was terrible.”

Participant #3 indicated that CFD purchasing women's gear was an inclusive program. But another firefighter, participant #13, felt it was setting her apart and didn't have the same feeling. Participant #13 stated “I don't want to look like I'm getting special treatment. I want to be included, but I don't want to be, I guess I don't want to draw attention to myself and be different.” CFD requires each station to identify female sleeping quarters, some of those areas are defined by curtains. One participant found it to be awkward; participant #6 stated “why

should only one bunk have a curtain? Every bunk should have a curtain.” Participant #3 added “I tell this to every new female that I see, if you go to a station with a crew that doesn't know you, they're going to be standoffish until they make the decision for themselves that you're a safe female.”

Some instances occur that make firefighters feel like outcasts. Participant #9 stated “nobody would help clean the station...they would lift their legs for us to mop under their feet...like all day for twenty-four hours, it happened mostly when my officer was gone.” Participant #9 added “the other firefighters were eating lunch and making me and the other black apprentice wash dishes while they ate.” At another station, participant #11 was a new firefighter assigned he stated, “it was Fox news all day on every TV, I prefer not to talk politics because it is divisive.” Participant #6 reported “it feels like sometimes you’re the one outlier at the table and we have to talk about it and make it a thing.” Another firefighter was discriminated against during recruit training, participant #12 stated her instructor told her on the first day “you’re too old to be on the fire department, you’re not going to last long during PT from the way you look.”

Other firefighters felt as though there were conflicting expectations based on gender or ethnicity. Participant #6 mentioned a time in the training academy “why are all the [instructors] watching her suck at something, when I just watched a white guy suck at the same thing?” Participant #6 also stated “it’s a simple gesture, we sit at an entire table of ten people, and someone comes in to shake everyone’s hand but mine...I ask myself do I not belong?” Participant #1 stated “I teach down at the TA ... you hear things like, oh man, she's not going to be able to do it. Women can't do this, or women can't do that.” Participant #1 added “It's not about brute strength. This job is technique and the knowledge of the job and the more you work it, the more you'll see that you don't have to be the strongest firefighter to be the best firefighter. So, I think

it's just those people stuck in their own way that creates that barrier.” Participant #3 reported that “they fear they may have to change because of a female in the firehouse...we’re all people, we can live together...but it’s a huge barrier because some people don’t want to work with women.”

Subtheme: Poor Leadership

Table 2 also displays a subtheme where participants identified examples of poor leadership. Another barrier revealed that is of great concern is officers that do not hold others accountable or demonstrate poor and inconsistent leadership. Sixty-nine percent of the participants reported they have experienced poor leadership. Participant #5 stated “I think lines get blurred because of friendships...that individual does not separate outside of work relationships to work.” Participant #5 reported they started receiving unfair treatment, when reported to the officer they stated, “you need to let me know, because I don’t pay attention to that.” Participant #10 added “leaders need to be leaders.” Participant #13 described when they weren’t having a good experience at the firehouse, there was an opportunity for the officer to stop the behavior but did not act; they stated, “the leadership at that point was a part of it.”

Some of the participants felt that the officer did not step up and lead when diversity and inclusion topics were present. Participant #7 felt as though other firefighters excluded them because of differences of opinions in social issues, when asked if the officer helped to navigate those conversations, participant #7 stated “they were not around.” Participant #6 stated “people don’t bring things up because they don’t want to cause trouble...but the officer not addressing the issue is not the answer, them not dealing with it because of a fear of what’s going to happen is also a problem.”

Participant #10 provided a very insightful statement on leadership:

“I think moving forward officers have to be held accountable for some of the stuff that is happening at the station. Weak leadership leads to weak firehouses, and I've said, I am in the station for 24 hours. I shouldn't have to walk on eggshells because Joe Schmo doesn't like women in the firehouse or doesn't think women can do the job or whatever. And when we're having those conversations around the kitchen table for the officer to get up and just be like, I don't hear anything, is poor leadership. And I think that really sets the tone for how things go in the station. So, I think there's policies in place that the officer should enforce, but having those officers held accountable for those things, because it really sets the precedent on how the station runs. You have to be respectful with people. And again, opening people to the different cultures and different experiences make for a better firehouse experience. So having the officer leave the room or not kind of navigate those situations is where people continue to be biased and continue to be bigots in their own thought process.”

Subtheme: Lack of Effective Diversity Training

Another subtheme relates to ineffective diversity training, those results are reported in Table 2. Training on topics, such as diversity and inclusion have delivered limited awareness. Eighty-five percent of the participants mentioned how a lack of diversity and inclusion training are potential barriers to increasing diversity and improving inclusion. Most firefighters interviewed did not recall effective diversity and inclusion training. Participant #7 stated “the only training I can think of is what we did on target solutions.” Participant #6 gave a similar response, “I believe it was on target solutions...we did a video in the academy...maybe the first couple weeks.” Participant #6 also added “the training on target solutions, you are just trying to click through those and get them done.” When asked about discrimination policies participant #2

stated “I know those policies are in place...I’m just not familiar with them.” Participant #9 indicated that firefighters don’t know what plans are in place for diversity and inclusion “There is all this stuff happening, it’s not really making it on the station level yet.” Participant #9 also added that “No I have not had any [diversity and inclusion training], I have been in a corporate setting and brought those skills with me to fire.”

Subtheme: Struggling Diversity and Inclusion Programs

The last subtheme describes struggling diversity and inclusion programs (Table 2). Several firefighters indicated the Columbus Division of Fire is doing some good things to improve diversity and inclusion, such as the Cadet Program and creating the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion office. However, the firefighters interviewed were not sure of the plans for these offices and reported that some people did not respect or value the Cadet Program. Sixty-nine percent of participants indicated that current diversity and inclusion programs are falling short. Participant #5 stated “when the DEI office opened up...there were a couple officers that were just placed there...then you heard the disgruntled conversations of I don’t want to do this and don’t want to do that.” Participant #3 stated “I feel DEI was forced on the Division of Fire; they wouldn’t have done it on their own...there is no plan.” Participant #3 added “there is not a great perception of the DEI office...it’s a great unknown. It’s a big question mark and they are taking way too long to come out and tell people what they are doing. The longer they wait the harder it’s going to be to fix bad opinions.” Several participants are concerned about incomplete planning and implementation. Participant #5 stated “DEI...what does that really do? What is the reasoning for that?” Participant #10 added “The DEI office is up and coming. I’m eager to see how that plays out. I know when you hear DEI, a lot of people get defensive or annoyed.” Participant #3 stated:

“I think that diversity recruiting has been a priority for the city I think they've made that pretty obvious. But I don't think that, uh, organizational change for all of those new diverse applicants has been a priority at all. I think that they're, they really want to hire minorities across the board, but they're not considering in any way what changes that's going to bring to the function of the division and good and bad.”

Another firefighter felt as though not enough was being done to explain why diversity recruiting and inclusion is important; participant #1 stated “not enough information is being delivered to the entire department to where people can make informed opinions, maybe more of an explanation of the reasoning.”

Table 2

Theme 2: Internal Barriers to Inclusion

Subtheme	Participants		Example Quote
	n	%	
Bad Culture	11	85	“My expectation was that everybody just loved everybody, I didn't know they didn't like each other.”
Lack of Inclusion	12	92	“it feels like sometimes you're the one outlier at the table and we have to talk about it and make it a thing.”
Poor Leadership	11	85	“I think lines get blurred because of friendships...that individual does not separate outside of work relationships to work.”
Lack of Training	9	69	“the training on target solutions, you are just trying to click through those and get 'em done.”
Struggling DEI Programs	9	69	“DEI...what does that really do? What is the reasoning for that?”

Note. n = number of participants that indicated the response

Theme 3: Positive Cultural Concepts

The third theme, displayed in Table 3, emerged during the inquiry that describes several cultural aspects that are perceived as positive attributes in the CFD. Seventy-seven percent of participants reported that their current work locations were going well. Participant #13 stated “I love having a senior ladder crew...our engine crew is a little fresher...that’s a great combination to have both.” One firefighter explained about what was enjoyable at their current station.

Participant #8 stated:

“we're pretty family-oriented station. I've seen some that are less where the guys go and hide in the rooms all day and you don't see them. We hang out, we play games together, you know, between runs after, after dinner, we'll go out and play cornhole or darts or work out together.”

Participant #1 described the crew at their current station:

“we put together this crew very meticulously and we put pieces of the puzzle that we knew would fit and that will buy into the standard. And I think that as far as that goes, we haven't seen any serious challenges. Even the community accepts us and they're like thanks, I'm glad you guys are here.”

Subtheme: Inclusion

A subtheme describes inclusive behavior as reported in Table 3. One hundred percent of participants claimed to have experienced inclusive behavior at their current work location.

Participant #6 recalled being a part of a committee that was developing a policy, “they’re asking what you think. You aren’t getting reprimanded for just being human and saying what you are thinking or feeling or seeing, being open to hearing that.” Participant #9 reported “one of the reasons why I love it so much is there are a lot of people that look like me there.” Participant #11

reported “sometimes when you are just around people and you just spend time with them, then part of you wants to make a space more comfortable for them feel like they belong.”

Subtheme: Good Leadership

Table 3 displays another subtheme where participants describe experience with good leadership. Ninety-two percent of participants reported good leadership at their current work locations. Participant #13 reported a time when an officer noticed they were having a rough time “I thought this is the fire department? I don't fit here. I'm the problem. And he said, no, you're not here. Let me give you some ideas. Let me try and talk to some people. Let's try and improve that situation.” Participant #6 stated “the only reason why I am still at my current station is because of my Battalion Chief, Engine Officer and EMS officer.” Participant #7 also reported that “my officers here are very supportive.” One firefighter reported how his officer noticed how they were changing at work; participant #4 stated “I'm losing my compassion. The officer said it's time to switch stations or do something else. He recognized that because he'd been through it. I went kicking and screaming, but it was absolutely the best thing for me. And I'm so thankful for him that he was, that he recognized it.”

Subtheme: Mentorship

Table 3 displays the last subtheme reveals opportunities for mentorship. Several firefighters have reported that they have found mentors that have helped them assimilate to the fire department. Participant #13 stated “she's put herself out there, but she's not demanding. She just says, here I am. I'm more than willing to listen talk and just from the female side, a lot of females have done that.” Participant #7 added “it took me a while, but it was him seeing me, talking to me, being able to relate to me, be transparent with me and I could be vulnerable enough with him.” Participant #6 also stated “people who are going to say something positive are

probably going to come up and talk to you, versus someone who has these negative thoughts or ideas, they're probably not going to come up and trample you down.” Participant #12 stated “I like find other black people and then like when something happens, I'll go to them first before I like report anything to anybody else.” Participant #3 reported “she helped me at a few points throughout my career where I felt like I didn't know what I should be doing, or I wasn't sure if I was making the right decision.

Table 3

Theme 3: Positive Cultural Attributes

Subtheme	Participants		Example Quote
	n	%	
Doing Well	10	77	“I love having a senior ladder crew...our engine crew is a little fresher...that’s a great combination to have both.”
Inclusion	13	100	“they’re asking what you think. You aren’t getting reprimanded for just being human and saying what you are thinking or feeling or seeing, being open to hearing that.”
Good Leadership	12	92	“my officers here are very supportive.”
Mentorship	7	54	“it took me a while, but it was him seeing me, talking to me, being able to relate to me, be transparent with me and I could be vulnerable enough with him.”

Note. n = number of participants that indicated the response

Summary

The purpose of this generic qualitative inquiry is to identify barriers that prohibit the Columbus Division of Fire to be a diverse and inclusive organization. In Tables 1 and 2, themes emerged that identified barriers, those themes were further dissected into subthemes. Theme one

identified barriers to becoming a firefighter including: family firefighters, interactions with other firefighters, recruiting efforts and phenomenon titled *look like me*. Theme two identified barriers that existed within the culture of the Columbus Division of Fire. Theme two was dissected into subthemes including: Bad culture, a lack of inclusion, a lack of diversity and inclusion training, poor leadership, and struggling programs.

As shown in table 3, another theme emerged as well that identified positive cultural aspects within the Columbus Division of Fire. The third theme was dissected into subthemes including: phenomenon that promote a good culture, examples of positive inclusion, demonstration of good leadership and mentorship. In Chapter Five the researcher will develop conclusions from the three main themes and provide recommendations. The third theme, positive cultural aspects, will help leverage recommendations to address the barriers identified in themes one and two.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This generic qualitative inquiry identified barriers that prevent the Columbus Division of Fire from developing and maintaining a diverse and inclusive culture. The Columbus Division of Fire aspires to become a model for a diverse and inclusive organization that mirrors the population it serves. Recent programs, including the Cadet Program, have yielded optimistic additions to increasing diversity. The emerging themes mirrored those reviewed in the literature review outlined in Chapter Two. The significance of the emerging themes is not necessarily groundbreaking but rather an indication that a lack of diversity and inclusion is confirmed within the Columbus Division of Fire. Based on the results of this research, additional work is needed to improve the organization. Previously, in Chapter Four, those results were presented. This chapter presents conclusions and recommendations that may be used to enhance diversity and inclusion in the Columbus Division of Fire.

Summary of the Results

Thirteen firefighters with less than ten years of service were the focus of the study. Three main themes emerged as the researcher coded responses into various categories. The first theme identified barriers to becoming a firefighter as shown in Table 1. The interviews revealed what led the participants to become firefighters in Columbus. Participants discussed recruiting efforts or lack thereof. The *looks like me* phenomenon also emerged as a motivating factor for many participants. Over half of the participants were influenced to become firefighters by positive interactions with firefighters. Only two percent of participants mentioned that they were legacy firefighters, referring to family members who are current or past firefighters.

The second theme identified internal barriers that degraded the spirit of diversity and inclusion (Table 2). These barriers contributed to a lack of inclusion within the Columbus Division of Fire. A concerning subtheme identified multiple examples of poor leadership. Examples demonstrated frustration from the lowest rank in the organization that their supervisor either contributed to or did not manage conflict effectively. Data also indicated that the Columbus Division of Fire does not offer practical diversity training. In addition, programs implemented to improve diversity and inclusion are not meeting their intended potential.

The third theme that emerged was not barriers but rather details of positive cultural characteristics (Table 3). While participants detailed negative experiences, one hundred percent of participants reported that they enjoyed their current work location. These participants experienced inclusion and good leadership and developed mentoring relationships. Later in this chapter, recommendations will leverage positive cultural aspects to address and improve pockets of negative cultural elements.

Conclusions Based Upon Your Results

The Columbus Division of Fire desires a diverse group of firefighters in the rank and file of the organization. Having a family member in the fire service is not an uncommon phenomenon; however, only two of the thirteen participants interviewed had family as firefighters. Since the participants were a diverse group and the researcher has stated that CFD is not as diverse as they would like to be, limited family influencing future firefighters is most likely from not having diversity in the CFD. Recruiting efforts should be focused on developing connections with diverse candidates. Those efforts need to begin with including people that reflect the desired diversity. Table 1 demonstrates that eighty-five percent of participants in this

study identified minority firefighters as part of recruiting events. Table 1 also shows that sixty-nine percent of participants stated that seeing people who look like them allows potential recruits to envision themselves in that position. CFD recruiting efforts should continue to use diverse firefighters at recruiting events. One of the participants indicated they did not particularly feel representative recruiting was an effective idea. Still, after seeing how their presence made potential recruits comfortable, they were more likely to buy into those efforts. This statement and other similar statements demonstrate that including a diverse group of firefighters at recruiting events is valuable. Another conclusion that relates to recruiting is keeping candidates engaged. Participants reported that the time it takes to get hired may lead to good candidates moving on or becoming disengaged in the hiring process. Time to navigate the hiring process is another barrier.

In addition, utilizing minority firefighters for recruiting events has caused backlash from other firefighters. These reactions may be a hindrance to future participation. In the CFD and other organizations, if recruiters have difficulty convincing minority firefighters to help with recruiting, leaders should examine why they do not want to participate. This harassment should be halted immediately, and additional work should be accomplished to reengage effective minority firefighters.

Participants also identified that they had positive reactions to firefighters in their community before becoming a firefighter. Potentially, every firefighter is a recruiter. Several participants displayed in Table 1 reported their positive experience with firefighters and how that fostered their desire to join the profession. Often, fire service personnel study customer service; retired Chief Alan Brunacini taught us to shift the focus from firefighters to the citizens they serve (Caughey, 2020). The research in this study demonstrated that customer service can impact

future potential recruits. Table 1 indicates that fifty-four percent of participants reported positive interactions with firefighters led them to become firefighters.

Table 2 indicates results from participants who experienced a bad or failing culture. Existing literature reviewed in chapter two of this inquiry provided a definition for culture. “Culture is often defined as the learned behavior patterns of people-including what they think, say, do, value, and feel” (CPSE/ICMA, 2020, pg 11). Culture is a factor in promoting diversity and inclusion programs, and positive work environments allow the individual to speak up and be heard (Buttinger, 2023). Reported in this inquiry, firefighters may not be very friendly and welcoming to each other; eighty-five percent of participants reported how they felt alone and not included. These statements lead to the conclusion that there are workplaces that do not embrace the inclusion of minority firefighters. Participants reported they *felt like quitting, or no one would help them succeed, and I was bothered by the way some guys communicated*. Firefighters need to function as a team, each one relying on the other. A culture that leads firefighters to feel like quitting or being unsupported does nothing to promote the teamwork needed to be successful as an organization. Other participants reported activities such as discussions about social issues and politics left them feeling like outcasts. CFD has established rules about discussing topics that may be controversial or have a social impact. Firefighters not following these policies are leading to a lack of inclusion.

Responses from female participants were included in themes displayed in Table 2, those responses led to the conclusion that female firefighters may be outcasted differently. Koepfel et al. (2022) indicated the fire service is a male dominated culture. This inquiry has revealed that CFD appears to have a similar culture. Several participants indicated that special considerations for sleeping quarters, fire gear, or bathrooms accentuate the differences. Several participants

reported issues at the training academy. Those issues included unfair expectations because a recruit was a female. They included pointing out the shortcomings of female recruits and discounting their ability based on gender. Female participants consistently reported they were treated differently. These types of comments and behavior do not support training and motivating female firefighters to be a part of the team.

A concerning result reported in Table 2 is sixty-nine percent of participants making statements of poor leadership. An officer's job is to enforce policy, and they set the tone for the station's culture (Martin, 2019). Statements were made like the one that the officer could have stopped the situation or that the officer had left the room when the bad behavior started. Participants felt the officer wasn't confident enough to address the problem, while others felt the officer did not want people to get in trouble. Another participant specifically alleged officers did not hold their friends accountable; officers should be consistent, fair, and impartial when enforcing the Columbus Division of Fire policies.

Diversity and inclusion training has not been effective in the Columbus Division of Fire. Eighty-five percent of participants reported that training was ineffective. Most of the training on the topic was viewed on CFD's distance learning platform; some noted that people didn't even watch the videos. McGuire and Bagher (2010) wrote that "diversity training has a significant role to play in fostering greater equality, inclusion and fairness in the workplace" (pg. 499). Mayfield and Mayfield (2023) wrote that research has shown that typical diversity and inclusion training without communication training is ineffective. CFD should develop training methods that include in-person discussions that may significantly impact expected behavior and existing policy.

The Columbus Division of Fire has implemented several programs to improve diversity and inclusion. Sixty-nine percent of participants stated that these programs may not be as successful as intended. The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) office was recently created; however, participants complained that they were unsure what the office was doing. Participants reported that the DEI office is taking too long to explain its mission. The Cadet Program was designed to provide an opportunity to potential candidates who may not realize the fire service is a valuable and honorable profession. However, participants reported that other firefighters complain about the Cadet Program and do not know what the program is intended to accomplish. Uninformed members of the CFD are left to form their own opinions of the program.

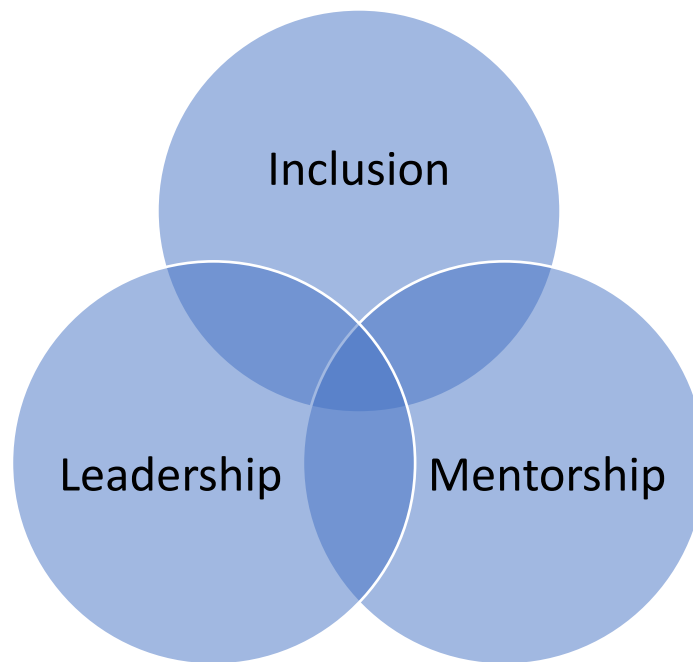
Results displayed in Table 3 indicated that while each participant identified struggles to feel included at work, they eventually found a place to fit in. All the participants, one hundred percent, reported good inclusion at their current workplace. At first glance, this can be misperceived as a positive. While each participant found their place of belonging, why could their place of belonging have existed everywhere? This revelation leads to the conclusion that CFD is not a systemically non-diverse and non-inclusive organization; instead, there are pockets where the organization fails to provide a diverse and inclusive environment.

Among firefighters experiencing positive aspects of inclusion at their current work location, the participants described examples of positive leadership. A direct connection to good leadership translates to improved inclusion. Participants who described positive leadership also related those comments to mentorship. Brimhall (2019) wrote the effects of leadership are linked to fostering an inclusive work environment where all members feel valued and appreciated; the participants statements from this inquiry mirrored claims from Brimhall. Feeling included and supported led to views of improved inclusion. Improved inclusion reported from the participants

of this inquiry, was directly related to leadership, and participants viewed those leaders as mentors, as displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Inclusion Relationship



Note. Demonstrates the relationship between leadership, mentorship, and inclusion. Participants who indicated these three attributes reported a good working culture at their respective work locations.

Limitations

The participants in this inquiry were selected to represent a diverse group of firefighters. The participants of this inquiry represent a small percentage of the firefighters who work for the Columbus Division of Fire. The participants represented less than one percent of all Columbus

Division of Fire employees. However, to counteract the imbalance, the research focused on participants of a single rank, firefighters. In addition, participants with less than ten years of service were recruited for this study. De Smet et al. (2023) wrote that retention factors for newer generations are not the same as what motivates older generations of workers. Applying this concept, this research examines what experiences newer firefighters may have that may help improve the culture for the future of the Columbus Division of Fire. Conversely, firefighters with more than ten years of service may have different opinions and responses to the same interview questions listed in Appendix B.

Another limiting factor of participant selection was rank. The Columbus Division of Fire employs an additional six layers of supervisors above the rank of firefighter. Dishman (2016) reported that significant cultural differences between workers, management, and human resource personnel are apparent. This study intends to define barriers to diversity and inclusion from a firefighter's perspective, the lowest rank. Other ranks may have different perspectives and responses to the same interview questions listed in Appendix B.

The Columbus Division of Fire staffs thirty-five stations across three shifts and over two-hundred fifty office positions at headquarters. Different stations and offices may have other subcultures at those work locations; firefighters at those locations may yield different responses to questions listed in Appendix B. Potentially, there may be different subcultures at the same fire station across the three different shifts. Those different cultures could be products of different leaders and firefighters who work at those various locations; this study only represented the opinions and experiences of the participants of this inquiry. However, common responses among a high percentage of participants could indicate a potential experience that others not included in this study may have experienced.

The research also indicated that during the interviews, each participant had different experiences before becoming a firefighter. In addition, each participant may have had a different upbringing or education. This study did not evaluate details that may limit the impact of these aspects. Also not included in the analysis are the ages of each participant; no relationship between gender, age, race, and the responses were analyzed.

Creswell & Creswell (2018) acknowledge that the researcher's presence may bias responses. The researcher ranks five levels of supervisor above the firefighters, which may have led to less than genuine responses from the participants. The researcher offered several methods to address the issue:

1. The researcher ensured the anonymity of the participants and forced no one to participate—a number identified for each participant.
2. The researcher accurately displayed their responses.
3. The researcher did not ask leading questions or share personal impressions of their responses.
4. The researcher conveyed that their participation would be utilized to improve diversity and inclusion within the Columbus Division of Fire.
5. The researcher provided a copy of the inquiry for their review.

Notwithstanding these tactics, bias may still be part of the participant's genuine experience. Another limitation concerns participants' ability to articulate their perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher countered this limitation by asking various open-ended follow-up questions to encourage the participants to elaborate on their responses.

Implications and Recommendations to the Field

Recommendation 1

Theme 1 described how fifty-four percent of firefighters became firefighters because of positive interactions with current firefighters. Potentially, every firefighter is a recruiter. This statistic should lead to preparing firefighters with recruiting information. Recruiting information should be available at every firehouse. This recruiting information should include handouts for interested persons to take with them. In addition, customer service has an impact; CFD members need to understand they are public servants, their behavior could have impact on future generations of firefighters. These statistics should be included in a training lesson for all members so they may realize their potential impact on future firefighters and the public.

Recommendation 2

Recruiting efforts should continue to use minority firefighters at recruiting events. Since sixty-nine percent of firefighters indicated that firefighters who represented their demographic were a factor in becoming firefighters, minority involvement is paramount. Firefighters who participate in minority recruiting events should be empowered to report discrimination for being involved in those events. Several participants reported backlash for helping, that added pressure could degrade willingness to participate and should not be tolerated. In addition, recruiters should continue to keep candidates up to date and engaged in the hiring process. Some candidates may lose interest because of the time it takes to navigate the hiring process. Keeping candidates informed may help retain future employees.

Recommendation 3

The conclusion that officers are not holding people accountable or intervening in discriminatory behavior is concerning. The Columbus Division of Fire facilitates Officer I

training that training meets NFPA 1021 standards. CFD is also in the process of starting Officer II training and beginning to develop criteria for Officer III and IV. Each of those officer classes should have diversity and inclusion training. In addition, regular officer refresher training should be delivered on handling specific issues such as diversity and inclusion. Some officers may not be comfortable handling those situations, they should be offered tools to navigate those conversations appropriately. Last, higher-ranking mid-level supervisors need additional training as well. If they become aware of issues not being addressed, mid-level officers may also not be equipped.

Recommendation 4

Diversity and inclusion training should be delivered annually to all members. Participants in this study indicated that typical remote training was ineffective; future training should be provided in person. A component of that training should include how a discriminated person could report issues without going through their chain of command. Several participants indicated a fear of retaliation or their officer not handling issues led to problems never being addressed.

Recommendation 5

Sixty-nine percent of the participants indicated that current programs may be struggling. The DEI office should regularly communicate the mission of their office and what they are doing. In addition, the Cadet Program is not perceived well according to the participants. The fire chief or other executive leaders should explain the purpose in general and promulgate their support.

Recommendation 6

Eventually, all the participants indicated good inclusion in their current work locations. The DEI office should survey to determine what attributes determine *good inclusion*. From that

survey, potentially research other metrics that demonstrate good inclusion should be established. Those metrics should be evaluated annually to size up the inclusion efforts within the Columbus Division of Fire. As the DEI office creates new programs and recruiting efforts to add diversity to the membership, CFD leaders must know if the current state is moving toward the aspired state of a diverse and inclusive organization.

Recommendation 7

Fifty-four percent of the participants indicated that mentorship was essential in finding their place within the CFD. There currently is no formal mentorship program. The DEI office should explore how a mentorship program can be developed not only for new members but for officers as well.

Recommendations for Future Research

The participants included in this inquiry represent one small part of the Columbus Division of Fire. An extensive quantitative study could possibly provide insight that represents a larger population of the members that comprise the organization. Like a quantitative study, a mixed methods approach could use similar questions with a larger group and then identify participants with negative or positive perspectives. Other additional research may be to perform a qualitative inquiry of the non-minority employees of the Columbus Division of Fire. That research may reveal potential barriers to buy-in and other unforeseen circumstances. Those results may demonstrate a more accurate and wholistic picture of the culture of the Columbus Division of Fire.

Supervisors may have different opinions about the descriptions of workplace culture (Dishman, 2016). Therefore, an inquiry of a diverse group of supervisors using similar interview

questions may be of value. Not only is the rank of firefighter not representative of the population CFD serves, but the supervisors are also even less diverse. An examination of the perspective of supervisors may yield similar results or reveal issues related to race, gender, and promotions. The results of that study could lead to examinations of any correlation between a lack of diversity in the supervisor ranks and feelings of inclusion within the rank of firefighter.

Yet another possible research project may include a researcher using the same methodology to conduct research in a completely different fire department. Those results could be compared to the results of this inquiry. Is the Columbus Division of Fire unique? Do other fire departments have similar issues? The lack of peer-reviewed literature explicitly focused on the United States Fire Service demonstrates the immediate need to conduct research that will add to the results of this work and other literature analyzed in chapter two of this study.

Last, the most concerning conclusion revealed in this inquiry was that officers are not enforcing policies. As the supervisor, an officer is responsible for implementing policy at each work location. The policies that are in place exist to protect employees and the City of Columbus from others' misconduct. An inquiry into why officers are not enforcing various policies that have led to a lack of inclusion of firefighters would be extremely valuable when implementing recommendations from this inquiry.

Conclusion

This generic qualitative inquiry is intended to identify barriers to the Columbus Division of Fire becoming a diverse and inclusive organization. Chapter Two of this inquiry analyzed various peer-reviewed journal articles that identified barriers for diversity and inclusion in fields other than the American Fire Service. This inquiry verified the claims made for diversity and

inclusion in other organizations apply to the American fire service, as well as to the Columbus Division of Fire.

In addition, specific examples of how minority firefighters are marginalized in the Columbus Division of Fire. Potential recruits need to be inspired to become a Columbus firefighter. Recruits need to see people that look like them at recruiting events. They also, need to have positive experiences with other existing firefighters. These two phenomena allow a person to envision themselves as a firefighter. Once these firefighters are hired, they need to be treated effectively to learn and retain information in the training academy and then in the learning environments of service delivery. Female firefighters should be respected and valued so they may become a part of the team. The City of Columbus invests in the recruitment and training of firefighters, making them feel included ensures they will not quit or subside to mere existence and instead, become valuable members of the team.

Last, leadership and mentorship are vital to ensuring that inclusion is part of the culture of the Columbus Division of Fire. Training is a big part of that equation. Senior leaders should develop effective diversity and inclusion training for the entire membership. Leaders do not tell people how to behave and respect others, leaders show people how to behave and respect others. Effective diversity and inclusion training will ensure that the tools are available to equip individuals and leaders to promote and foster a diverse and inclusive Columbus Division of Fire.

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Appendix A

Interview Consent Form

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by David Baugh from the National Fire Academy (NFA) and Columbia Southern University. The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of a critical issue in the fire and emergency services. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of their final project for the Executive Fire Officer program.

Research Procedures

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all of your questions about the study have been answered to your satisfaction. The study consists of an interview that will be administered to individual participants. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to your experience within a particular community. **An [audio/video] recording of the interview will be taken for transcription purposes. The [audio/video] file will be deleted at the conclusion of the study and will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher.** You may turn off your camera if you do not wish to be filmed.

Time Required

Participation in this study will require approximately 60 minutes of your time.

Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

The NFA, Columbia Southern University, and its contractors take no responsibility for the actions or outcomes of the research study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to the participant; however, information from this study may benefit your, and other communities, in the future.

Incentives

There are no incentives (financial or otherwise) associated with participation in this study.

Confidentiality

The results of this research will be presented to NFA and Columbia Southern University program faculty and students. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers (including audio and/or video recordings) will be destroyed. Final aggregate results will be made available to participants upon request.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion, or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

David Baugh

Student
National Fire Academy
Dbough21@yahoo.com

Dr. Justin Heim

Course Manager
Columbia Southern University
Justin.Heim@columbiasouthern.edu

Giving of Consent

I have read this consent form, and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have received satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18-years of age.

I give consent to be filmed and audio recorded during my interview. _____ (interviewee initials)

I give consent to be audio recorded during my interview. _____ (interviewee initials)

Interviewer Signature		Date:	
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Interviewee Signature		Date:	
Interviewee Name		Date:	

Appendix B

1. Tell me about yourself and how you became interested in becoming a Columbus Firefighter.
2. How long have you been employed by the City of Columbus, Division of Fire? Describe your other fire service employment experience, if any.
3. Explain how current diversity recruitment and inclusion programs work well or fall short.
4. What barriers do you think exist that hinder effective diversity recruitment?
5. Inclusion is defined as the extent to which individuals perceive they are part of significant processes in the organization. What is your definition of inclusion? Explain how anyone disagreed or agreed with you on this definition.
6. Where are you currently assigned? What do you enjoy about your work location and crew?
7. What challenges or struggles have you had at your work location?
8. Describe the culture of your work location. How does it differ from other stations where you have worked?
9. What effort has the division promoted to improve inclusion efforts within the Columbus Division of Fire?
10. Describe a time when you have experienced discrimination or exclusion in the CFD.

11. Describe how you are supported within the organization to advance or achieve your professional goals.
12. How has executive or mid-level leadership supported you to feel included and be your true self at work?
13. What policies in place promote your ability to feel included at work? What policy recommendations do you have for the division of fire?
14. Explain what training you have had that promotes diversity and inclusion. How has that training, or lack thereof, helped or hindered the division's goals for a diverse and inclusive organization?