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Understanding the Cultures We Serve: A Pathway to Better Customer Care

Executive Fire Officer Program

Executive Development

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Abstract

“Firefighters entered the home of an ailing Muslim woman despite her objections to render medical care to her ailing mother” (Brunson, 2005). Civic leaders believed the San Jose Fire Department (SJFD) did not understand the ethnic customs of the multicultural city they serve and that its firefighters were prejudiced and insensitive when providing customer care. Descriptive and historical research methods were conducted to identify community expectations for customer care and identify ways to help SJFD improve community relationships. Interviews, literature review and a community survey were used to complete the inquiry. Results showed the need for SJFD to create improvements in cultural awareness training, recruitment and public education efforts.

Eight recommendations were made to improve SJFD’s workforce awareness and service delivery. Some of these recommendations include improvements in the cultural awareness and diversity training for SJFD’s workforce by working with the community to create culture specific curriculums. Collaborate with other fire departments; public safety agencies and community members to produce video segments applicable to understanding specific cultural considerations for emergency incident management. Improve the SJFD website to provide current fire and life safety messages in multiple languages as well as offering a community feedback mechanism in the website. Complete, fund and implement a long term recruitment strategy for non-traditional applicants. Should these efforts be realized, the San Jose Fire Department would benefit from significant improvements in community relationships and improve the public’s awareness of fire department services.

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Introduction

The San Jose Fire Department responds to approximately 60,000 calls for help each year. Firefighter Henry Brunson recalls responding to several homes in Station 23's area in north San Jose, where his crew was initially refused entry by the female caller because according to Muslim custom, no men may enter a Muslim home without the man of the house being present. Firefighter Brunson and his crew, seeing the patient through the door, firmly explain that they came to help the caller and proceed to render medical aid to her ailing mother (Brunson, 2005). Fire Chief Jeffrey L. Clet, in March of 2005, reported feedback from community meetings and civic leaders revealing a significant community relations problem for the San Jose Fire Department. The Fire Chief reported community held beliefs that the San Jose Fire Department (SJFD) did not understand the ethnic customs of the multicultural city they serve, that the workforce was possibly prejudiced and insensitive to their needs when providing customer care (Clet, 2005). The research purpose was to conduct an inquiry to address the cultural awareness and sensitivity problem raised by the community and its civic leaders; to identify/validate community expectations for customer care; and identify strategies that would assist SJFD toward improving community relationships through the use of descriptive research methods. Interviews of community members, SJFD members and phone interviews of other bay area fire departments were conducted, in addition to a literature review of periodicals, department documents; texts; web-based data searches; videos; and a community survey was used to address the research problem. The research questions used to examine this problem:

1. What are the current demographics of the City of San Jose?
2. What are the current demographics of the San Jose Fire Department?
3. How do the organization's demographics compare with the community?
4. What are the community's expectations about customer care and service?

5. What are the current community outreach strategies employed by the San Jose Fire Department?
6. What current efforts exist to educate the San Jose Fire Department workforce about the community it serves?
7. What other efforts are being implemented by bay area fire departments to educate their workforce about the cultures and customs of the communities they serve?
8. What are some of the strategies/methods by the private sector to educate their workforce about cultural diversity and awareness?

Background and Significance

Founded in 1777, San Jose has become the third largest city in California and the tenth largest city in the nation with a population of 926,000. San Jose's demographics have changed dramatically over the last 50 years from a predominately white majority to a culturally complex community where no ethnic majority exists today in 2005. It encompasses 178 square miles inhabited by a highly diverse and healthy population in one of the best climates in the nation (SJFD Business Plan, 2005).

The San Jose Fire Department responds to approximately 60,000 emergency incidents per year in an area of over 200 square miles of incorporated land and County contract areas. Thirty-one Engine Companies; eight truck companies; three Urban Search and Rescue companies; a Hazardous Incident Team (HIT) and five Supplemental Transport Ambulance Resource (STAR) units capable of providing advanced life support and transport comprise the fleet of technical resources available for response to San Jose residents. San Jose Fire Department core services of prevention and response demonstrate a progressive effort toward comprehensive technical aspects of emergency service delivery.

One area not thoroughly addressed or examined was in the area of customer service and community relations. Early efforts by the Fire Department to address the growing cultural needs of the community were through affirmative action practices which began in the late 1960's with the hiring of the first bilingual, Hispanic firefighter, Carmello Gonzalez and later in 1970 with the hiring of the first African American male, Brooker T. Law. The 1980's brought an initiative to address interpretive needs of the growing Latino population by providing certified bilingual firefighters for ten fire station response areas. In 1995, Battalion Chief Guy Newgren conducted a National Fire Academy study for the Fire Department that focused on public education needs of the community with emphasis toward addressing the growing bilingual populations in San Jose. Newgren's effort resulted in more bilingual public education collateral with no additional cultural awareness training in understanding San Jose's changing demographics.

Past attempts at gaining direct community perspective occurred almost ten years ago in 1996 with the distribution of "After the Fire" brochures that incorporated a customer service survey in the form of a postcard that fire victims could complete and return via mail to Fire Administration. Hundreds of these brochures were distributed post fire incidents by fire personnel on scene, however only six of these customer service postcards were ever returned. The need for greater cultural awareness and customer service training was highlighted in a recent complaint received from a foreign born San Jose resident who complained about a recent service response by a San Jose Fire Department Engine Company. This resident reported that the firefighter was rude and hurried in the handling her problem.

Despite improvements in the fire department participation; public education; and cultural understanding over the last two decades, the prevailing community belief is that San Jose Firefighters lack a fundamental understanding of the cultural differences within our diverse community. This gap in awareness affects the quality of services our residents receive. Many

residents are still not aware of the range of services that SJFD provides or what to do in an emergency outside of calling 911 for help. In contrast to what we see in community policing where police officers are out talking to people in the community on a daily basis, the typical fire department response intercedes primarily in an emergent setting. When SJFD responds to the fire or medical emergency, we deliver our service; clean up and go back to the fire station. This pattern of service delivery validates past impressions from city officials and community members who said that firefighters tended to isolate themselves from the community by retreating to their stations and only coming out for emergencies. We frequently miss the opportunity to remain on scene after the call is completed to visit with the neighbors.

The economic environment in San Jose, the Capital of Silicon Valley has experienced a downturn over the last several years, which has resulted in reduced City revenues requiring budget reductions to balance the City's budget. The Fire Department's inability to effectively understand our various cultures and build better community relationships has impacted our ability to communicate our resource needs. The lack of communication has resulted in our customers not really knowing the range of services the fire department provides and not being adequately prepared for self care during small or larger emergencies when fire department resources are exhausted due to high call volumes. The 2003 City of San Jose Community Survey by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin and Associates reflects the community's general contentment with fire department services but a lack of awareness of the Fire Departments funding needs. When community members were asked what was the most important thing the City of San Jose could do to improve city services, not one of those surveyed thought the fire department was a priority. The fact that we don't show up as a priority in the survey speaks to the fact that we are not getting the message out, that SJFD provides more than just putting water on fires. A limitation in the results of the survey is that we don't know how many of those

surveyed had actually accessed our services, though the survey does acknowledge that we do a good job. Despite advancements in providing advanced life support services, quality improvement programs for medical priority dispatch and good compliance with medical protocols, SJFD has failed at providing the respect through cultural awareness that so many of our multinational San Jose residents long for and deserve.

As the Organizational Culture and Change Unit of the National Fire Academy's Executive Development course describes, an essential role an Executive Fire Officer can take in leading departments through positive change is to "set organizational priorities that reinforce our ability to meet changing missions and goals...This can be done by ensuring that organizational priorities include funding appropriation for diversity training." (Federal Emergency Management Agency, United States Fire Administration, National Fire Academy [FEMA, USFA, NFA], 2005). The ever changing demographical population of San Jose speaks of the need to take a responsible and dynamic leadership role in facilitating the highest quality customer service for our residents as well as effectively motivate the workforce to acquire this same understanding to better serve our community. The Ethics and Change Unit of the NFA's Executive Development Course describes the importance of ethical and moral decision making (FEMA, USFA, NFA, 2005). Through guiding principles illustrated throughout this unit such as the Fire Chief Code of Ethics, we are reminded to begin with the recognition of our service as a public trust that bears a responsibility to bring our best selves in the deliverance of our duties and effectively provide fire and life safety for the community to which we pledge our commitment (IFSTA, Chief Officer, 2004).

Should the recommendations resulting from this research to improve cultural awareness and understanding in our community prove positive, two of the United States Fire Administration Operational Objectives will have been satisfied. Greater cultural awareness and

diversity efforts can assist with reducing loss of life for age groups of 14 and under and 65 and older through more effective understanding of these high risk populations. Second, SJFD will be more capable of responding appropriately in a timely manner to emerging issues (EFOP Applied Research Study Guide, 2005).

This research provides an important step in dissolving any real or perceived prejudice within the SJFD workforce to provide customer care that is both compassionate and respectful. Improvements in customer care that honors the diversity of our city can create a pathway to greater cohesiveness as a community. Facilitating the community as a partner in public safety aids in future preparation for large scale emergencies or disasters. The information gathered will be used to better meet the needs of our community; enhance current diversity and cultural awareness training for SJFD personnel. This inquiry used descriptive and historical research methods, which included interviews of SJFD personnel, a review of written information on demographics, diversity, cultural awareness, multicultural customer service methods and an analysis of a community relations survey.

Literature Review

Initial literature review efforts comprised gathering applicable data found in the National Fire Academy Learning Resource Center. Further literature review efforts included eight texts, and several periodicals as primary and secondary sources, web-based data searches, SJFD documents and policy bulletins and a viewed a community college cable program. These sources were found via the San Jose Fire Department Station Library Texts, Martin Luther King Jr. Library, with some texts purchased through the internet.

Educational literature affirms the value of diversity and cultural awareness as an essential ingredient to meet the increasing demographic needs of our society; to improve public service delivery and to create more effective work environments. “Diversity has the potential of

becoming the most important consideration for public service organizations in the twenty-first century.” (Rice/White, p. 4, 2005). These authors conveyed the critical nature of creating inclusive work cultures that provide understanding for the multicultural community and how they are different from traditional public service employees. They call to action public service organizations to provide a “renewed focus to aspects of race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and religion” and that this focus requires the workforce to have greater knowledge, understanding and appreciation of human diversity.” (Rice/White, p.3, 2005). Benefits for a more effective workforce are facilitated through multicultural recruitment practices as well by ensuring a cellular understanding of today’s pluralistic society for incumbent public service providers (Rice/White, 2005).

Multiculturalism has evolved from the concepts of assimilation (adopting the culture of proximity and suppressing the culture of origin), and pluralism (maintaining one’s cultural traditions, language and customs and coexisting among many). Multiculturalism has been identified as a North American political concept with three distinct constructs: full acknowledgment of variation; that all cultural aspects are of equal value; intellect and social image and parity for minority groups in economic, political and cultural environments (Kottak & Kozaitis, 2002). *E pluribus unum* (out of many, one) takes on new meaning with multiculturalism that celebrates our society’s national mosaic: In one, many. (Kottak/Kozaitis).

Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley (CISV), a nonprofit organization created a regional cultural plan targeted at building community through arts and culture. CISV sponsored a study by Pia Moriarty, Phd that explored community building through participatory arts. Through this study, Moriarty found that through participatory arts, immigrants and their American born children are provided with the opportunity to participate as fully-fledged members of the civic community in Santa Clara County that is now their home. Immigrants want to be part of a

democracy that does not require them to erase their cultural identity and traditions...they are enacting a new model of citizenship that is identifiably cultural as well as intercultural, and not assimilated to any single, supposedly “neutral” civic standard.” (Moriarty, 2004). These types of civic activities provide excellent opportunities for SJFD personnel to participate and deepen our understanding of the diverse cultures we serve, right here in our own community.

A review of fire service literature was conducted of ten applied research projects and five periodicals related to cultural diversity training, public education and community outreach; multilingual service delivery; race relations in the fire service; emergency medical response customer satisfaction; public involvement strategies and customer service. The goal in this review was to investigate what aspects of these research efforts might validate cultural awareness as an emerging issue in the fire service and identify workable solutions for improving workforce cultural understanding as a multicultural customer service model. Results related to cultural diversity training included finding examples of fire service and private industry training programs.

Hunter (1999) reports one method used to improve communication with bilingual residents included the use of on-call translators and cards translated into simple questions for use by first responders; another was to modify another agency’s training efforts to include curriculum improvements; multicultural and political representation in program delivery and post training evaluations to ensure effectiveness relative to benefits gained in public image and enhanced service delivery.

Tommie Ann Styons (2003) of the Raleigh Fire Department (RFD) in North Carolina conducted a study on ways to improve fire and life safety education for their Latino community. Results of Styons’ inquiry highlighted the needs of Spanish speaking residents, who lacked education, literacy and work force preparation, placing them in high risk categories for injuries

and death during hurricanes and other common natural disasters that occur in their region. RFD discovered that Latinos especially during hurricane warnings were unprepared and found that they confused firefighters with law enforcement officers and don't trust what they are being told. RFD found that many Latinos learn most of their information from the local Spanish television station and by word of mouth through their neighborhood. Two examples provided in the research illustrated Latino cultural customs. These customs were related to the acknowledgement of male dominance in the Latino family in group settings and to be aware that Latino children are taught to be more passive and avoid making eye contact with authority figures (Styons, 2003). Learning these subtleties and customs would provide RFD personnel opportunities to provide greater comfort for these community members and fostered the sharing of information to assist them during their emergency. Recommendations identified the provision of Latino-specific cultural diversity training for all RFD personnel in order to develop improved mutual understanding and trust between the fire department and the Raleigh Latino community (Styons).

Michael N. Burnett, (2003) of Hillsboro Fire Department, Hillsboro, Oregon in his applied research project discovered through interviews and data searches, methods to educate current staff with Spanish-speaking language skills as well as affirming the same cultural aspects identified by Styons research on public education and outreach strategies for the Latino community. In addition to these cultural customs, Burnett reports that through understanding the culture, as service providers we can communicate better with Spanish-speaking customers. He also includes a discussion of the biases associated with service delivery. Through interviews, Burnett confirms that problems in communication contribute to bias with this community group. These communication problems compromise firefighters ability to gain accurate medical histories causing a disparate level of care for members of this community. "Cultural awareness

is skewed and may tend to increase biases of our personnel when the only relative contact or interaction with the Latino community is limited to emergency responses.” (Burnett. P.38, 2003). This study affirms the critical need for greater cultural awareness as a pathway to improve communication and community relationships and mirrors SJFD’s experience with the community and its personnel.

Rene Domingo, Oakland Fire Department identified legal precedents requiring the provision of multilingual services and the steps they needed to create a strategic plan to provide bilingual/multilingual capabilities in the delivery of fire department services, however no mention was made for the provision of cultural awareness training specifically within the scope this applied research project (Domingo, 2003)

Results and recommendations by Mark Lands (1994) of the Boca Raton Fire Department validated the multiple ways the public forms its perception of emergency personnel ranging from direct contact during emergency incidents and public appearances; to indirect contact television shows, movies, radio and print media; public education collateral; personal appearance and adherence to uniform standards; apparatus and station cleanliness; or personal conversations (referrals) of the public about how well they were served during their emergency. Lands recommendations included a comprehensive range of suggestions that would contribute to positive community relationships. A few of these included conducting a comprehensive review of all the opportunities to make direct and indirect contact with those you serve by providing attitude training and implementing standard operating guidelines; provide a good public information and public education program; ongoing assessment of community needs and develop training programs specifically for interpersonal communication with customers and co-workers (Lands, 1994).

Matt Vadala of the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) conducted a comprehensive search for effective community outreach strategies that involved all levels of his department in the form of leadership and community outreach workshops to validate the need for OCFA to improve its community relationships as well as identifying the benefits for their customers and workforce and obstacles that would hinder the long term program success. Vadala created a three phase plan to implement greater OCFA involvement with the community. Pertinent to this research effort was recognizing the essential need for training to improved customer service awareness and interpersonal skills for its personnel as an avenue to ensure program success (Vadala, 2000).

The medical community has made efforts to address the healthcare for diverse cultures. The 10th edition of Emergency Care EMT-B textbook incorporates short descriptions of approximately 14 different cultures relative to various emergent medical presentations to assist new students of emergency medicine understand the multiple dynamics involved when caring for patients of different ethnicities (Limmer/O'Keefe/Dickenson, 2005).

Customer service is identified as a priority for San Jose and other fire service experts agree that caring for others is essential to accomplish our mission. The San Jose Fire Department's mission is to serve the community by protecting life, property and the environment through prevention and response; our motto is "Courtesy and Service with Pride" (SJFD Business Plan, 2005). According fire service experts delivering the best possible service is the reason we exist as an organization (Brunacini, 1996) Brunacini's approach to customer service centers around creating a "WOW!" experience for all our customers, which means consistently delivering kind, respectful and caring service that far exceeds the customers expectations (Brunacini, 1996) Brunacini's book on customer service methodically provides an effective approach to customer service, however, it does not specifically address understanding specific

cultural customs. Addressing cultural customs is indirectly implied through providing a WOW experience and demonstrating respect, kindness, patience and consideration for all of our customers (Brunacini).

Concepts to remember in providing quality customer service include remaining cognizant of the reasons why community members become dissatisfied with our work. Examples include: waiting too long for help; little or no compassion for the patient; the customer was talked down to; or the firefighters acted as if they were put out, discourteous, inconsiderate and impatient when delivering patient care (Mack, 1998). Customer good will is to our advantage, if we let it slip away we miss valuable opportunities to convey who we are, the services we provide and how we demonstrate the extra mile to accomplish value added customer service (Thorp, 1998). Isn't making the extra effort to "customize" our customer service through understanding the cultures we serve part of delivering the WOW experience? The WOW! approach clearly has merit as a pathway to better customer care and supports our City's service priority to ensure that our public feels safe anywhere, anytime in San Jose.

Fire Service literature acknowledges the importance the importance of cultural awareness and diversity in the workplace and the betterment of community relations and customer service, however few efforts in fire service literature specifically address curriculum development and delivery of curriculum focused on individual cultures or customs on a broad comparative scale.

Literature reflecting private sector customer service strategies ranges from general to specific. Most experts agree that it is the customer's perception of how they receive their service is what determines good or bad customer service. As a philosophy of human interaction, *Seek first to understand then be understood* underscores the essential nature of understanding cultures that are different from our own. "Empathetic listening gets inside another person's

frame of reference.” (Covey, 2004) This common courtesy and attention will go along way to providing high quality customer service.

Siemens Medical Solutions provides *Knock-Your-Socks-Off Customer Service* training for its managers and supervisors. This eight-hour program created by Ron Zemke views this type of customer service as an opportunity to create a positive, memorable experience for every customer through meeting expectations and satisfying needs that delight each customer in a unique and unexpected way (Zemke, 2002). This program highlights the keys to customer Knock-Your-Socks-Off Customer Service in reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. Problem-solving skills are also developed in this curriculum as well as guidelines for working with difficult customers. “Several of the problem solving aspects and tips for working with difficult customers proved to be very beneficial for our service department.” (Singer, Siemens Medical Solutions, 2005) Many of these strategies are bridgeable for use when firefighters are providing care. Specific examples of Multicultural customer service training programs are available in the private sector. These programs will be highlighted in *Results*.

“Descriptive research aims to provide a clear, accurate description of individuals, events, or processes.” (Gall/Gall/Borg, p. 173,1999) These authors explain that the use of questionnaires, and interviews provide information about participants’ beliefs, attitudes, behaviors or interests. The authors also explain that limitations of survey research exist because survey participants may unknowingly conceal information in their answers which may distort or provide an incomplete picture of the target inquiry. Interviews provide the opportunity to adapt to individual needs relative to time and place in addition to the advantage of the interviewer being able to gain greater depth in the subjects responses (Gall/Gall/Borg, 1999). The authors temper this technique, citing possible disadvantages associated with this method. These

disadvantages can make the results susceptible to bias and subjectivity for both the interviewer and the interviewee (Gall/Gall/Borg, 1999).

In summary, many sources acknowledged that cultural awareness and diversity training benefited fire service workplace and community relationships and in the public service sector. Private industry utilizes customer service strategies to ensure customer satisfaction and viability for future business. The results of this inquiry will potentially validate community concerns through feedback received from the community relations survey and highlight opportunities for SJFD to improve community relationships through greater cultural awareness in service delivery.

Procedures

Research for this project began at the National Fire Academy in March, 2005. Initial search efforts were historical in nature within fire service related literature focused on identification of training efforts, instrumentation styles and results in relation to cultural diversity, customer service, community outreach strategies and more specifically cultural awareness training that was culture specific. Literature included relevant articles, journals, and applied research projects.

Internet searches subsequently resulted in multiple articles in customer service, diversity, cultural awareness, applicable laws and text recommendations. As a result several texts were purchased through Amazon.com that provided information on ethnic and multicultural studies, diversity and public administration, and customer service and San Jose demographic data to assist with literature review and to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the current demographics of the City of San Jose?
8. What are some of the strategies/methods by the private sector to educate their workforce about cultural diversity and awareness?

Informal interviews were conducted with ten members of the San Jose Fire Department to acquire data that would answer the following research questions:

2. What are the current demographics of the San Jose Fire Department?
5. What are the current community outreach strategies employed by the San Jose Fire Department?
6. What current efforts exist to educate the San Jose Fire Department workforce about the community it serves?

The following SJFD personnel were interviewed to assist in data acquisition for this project during the month of September and October of 2005:

Fire Chief Jeffrey L. Clet; Assistant Chief Darryl Von Raesfeld; Deputy Director Kerry Burns; Personnel Manager Dennis Hawkins, Senior Analyst Tom Mounts; Public Information Officer Alberto Olmos; Captain Cheryl Faltersack; Public Education Specialist Sheri Busansky; Management Fellow Mariah Dabel; Firefighter Henry Brunson.

City of San Jose available demographic data was categorically represented in five primary categories. For the purposes of comparing the San Jose Fire Department to the community the same categories were applied to SJFD statistics. An analysis was conducted to compare and contrast collected demographic data to address the following question:

3. How do the organization's demographics compare with the community?

A questionnaire was determined to be the method of choice to survey the community about the following research question:

4. What are the community's expectations about customer care and service?

Community survey distribution strategies included multiple public education events between October 1, 2005 through October 15, 2005. The author had two individuals review the survey prior to distribution to ensure clarity. The questionnaire, a cover letter and a self-addressed

stamped envelope were included for those recipients who wanted to complete their survey at home. Types of public education events included a District 8-Multicultural festival; Fire Prevention Week Harvest festival and Fire Station Open Houses; Women's Health Forum; and the Sikh Gurdwara San Jose and the Grand Opening of San Jose's New City Hall. Emailed Survey distribution included the following community groups: YU-AI-KAI, Japanese American Community Senior Service; National Coalitions of Silicon Valley Black Women; Asian Americans for Community Involvement; Black Chamber of Commerce; Filipino Youth Coalition; Kids in Common; The Role Model Program. Final survey return date was October 21, 2005. See Appendix B for community questionnaire example.

A phone survey was conducted to address the following research question:

7. What other efforts are being implemented by bay area fire departments to educate their workforce about the cultures and customs of the communities they serve?

The following jurisdictions were selected based on proximity and availability of department personnel to participate in the survey. Identified candidate departments included:

San Francisco, Oakland, Fremont, Contra Costa County Fire District, Livermore/Pleasanton, San Ramon Valley Fire District, Mountain View, Gilroy, Santa Clara City, Milpitas, Sunnyvale Public Safety, Richmond, Vallejo. The phone survey contained the following interview questions:

- Does your fire department provide diversity or cultural awareness training for your workforce?
- What type of training is provided?
- Do you provide any cultural awareness training include specific information about individual cultures and customs for the ethnic communities you serve as a customer relations strategy?

- If yes, what are the specific cultures and customs information do you provide for your department personnel?

Limitations on this research included the author's normal job responsibilities and duties to perform during this research; short time frames limited the number of surveys to 250 for distribution and return of the community survey. Challenges were also experienced in reaching bay area fire department representatives relative to time schedule conflicts to complete phone surveys. Another limitation of the community survey was that it was only published in English. Translation services were not funded or accessed for translation to other languages. It is assumed that all survey respondents, as well as fire department personnel interviewed answered honestly and accurately. Some questions were left unanswered by respondents. No statistical analysis was made to determine margin of error in survey results. Limitations to relative to city demographic data does not accurately delineate all ethnicities that comprise the peoples of Europe and whose primary language is other than English and reside in San Jose. Fire Department demographic data was limited to a single report provided by the SJFD Personnel Manager, though secondary efforts to verify department authorized number of positions was via published budget documents.

Results

Results indicated the need for improvement in cultural awareness training, fire academy recruitment and in the community's understanding of the Department's core services of prevention and response. Recommendations were made to improve SJFD's workforce awareness and service delivery.

The results were then checked and corroborated through the use of descriptive and historical research, involving multiple written sources and interviews with fire service personnel

and private industry professionals. Related information found by the author found significant amounts of data that was applicable toward answering the eight research questions created for this inquiry.

Question #1 What are the current demographics of the City of San Jose?

San Jose, the “Capital of Silicon Valley”, is home to 944,865 persons as of January 1, 2005 as estimated by the California Department of Finance (DOF). DOF also reported that San Jose’s population grew by 13,635 persons or 1.5% for the calendar year of 2004, (www.dof.ca.gov). The population in San Jose has grown by approximately 50,000 persons since the completion of the 2000 Census, which reported San Jose’s population as 894,943 (www.sanjoseca.gov). Santa Clara County, (in which San Jose is the largest city) is home to peoples from 177 of the 194 nations in the world (Miority, 2004). As of the 2000 Census, San Jose residents of White decent make up the largest group, 425,017 or 47.5%; Hispanic or Latino decent persons are next with 269,989 or 30.2%, and residents of Asian decent are 240,375 or 26.9%. Other races include 31,349 or 3.5% Black or African American; 6,865 or 0.8%; American Indian and Alaskan Native; 3,584 or 0.4% Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. However, Census 2000 does not reflect the true depth of San Jose’s diversity with 142,691 or 15.9% categorized as *Other* (www.sanjoseca.gov). Some examples of this category include the 10,000 Bosnians and others from Eastern European nations who have recently immigrated to San Jose. Many Arab Americans have settled here as well, though no data was found specific to San Jose. An estimated 120,000 Arab Americans reside in the San Francisco Bay Area and are of Palestinian, Jordanian, Yemen, and Lebanese decent. Because refugee service agencies initially helped them settle in San Francisco after the 1991 Persian Gulf War, many have now since moved to San Jose and to Oakland (Hendricks, 2005). San Jose is also home to the second largest Iranian population in the USA (www.iranianchamber.org).

The Asian community comprising over 26% of San Jose's community is made up of many subcultures that include Asian Indians 26,606 or 3.0%; Chinese 51,109 or 5.7%; Filipino 48,149 or 5.4%; Japanese 11,484; Korean 9,425 or 1.1%; Other Asians 14,760 or 1.6%, and the largest Vietnamese population outside Viet Nam with 78,842 or 8.8%. The statistics for San Jose's Hispanic or Latino population of 269,989 or 30.2% are also comprised of many subcultures. These Latino subcultures include Mexican 221,148 or 24.7%; Puerto Rican 4,072 or 0.5%; Cuban 1,001 or 0.1% and subcultures from Latin American countries not specifically identified are 43,768 or 4.9%. Projections in population growth for San Jose estimate that by the year 2015 there will be 1,062,500 residents. Enriched by this mosaic of cultures, San Jose residents speak 52 different languages with no single ethnic group holding a majority population within the community (www.sanjoseca.gov). This region is the genuine example of multicultural society.

Question #2 What are the current demographics of the San Jose Fire Department?

Current demographics for the San Jose Fire Department reflect 822 authorized positions according to the SJFD's 2005-2006 Operating Budget documents. The current workforce includes 714 sworn positions and 108 civilian positions. No specific demographic data was available in this budget document at the time of this examination.

Thus, workforce demographics were determined through the SJFD Candidate Physical Ability Test demographic profile (Hawkins, 2005). The total working number of personnel represented in this profile was 624 sworn members of SJFD currently working in the Bureau of Field Operations and represents 89% of the 714 authorized positions and 100% of personnel actively working in San Jose Fire Stations. This number did not account for those personnel who are currently on disability or in administrative assignments. Field Operations comprise the ranks of Deputy Chief, Battalion Chief, Captain, Fire Engineer, Firefighter, Firefighter/Paramedic.

Males represented 95% of the workforce or 607 of 639 personnel. Females numbered 32 of 639 and account for 5% of the sworn personnel. Given the total department target population, results reflect delineation by ethnicity and in the order of largest to smallest group: White or Caucasian comprised 51.4% of the workforce or 321; Hispanic/Latino comprised 29.5% of the workforce or 184; Blacks/African American comprised 6.7% of the workforce or 42; Asian/Pacific Islander comprised 4.6% of the workforce or 29; Filipino comprised 2.6% of the workforce or 16; Native American comprised 2.4% of the workforce or 15; Other Ethnicity comprised 2.7% of the workforce or 17.

Question #3 How does the SJFD demographics compare with that of the community?

Five primary self-identified Race/Ethnicity groups were described in the demographics for the City of San Jose: African American; Asian; Hispanic; White; Other. According to the City of San Jose's website, the latest available demographic data is based upon the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey from 2002 (www.sanjoseca.gov/community.html).

SJFD's demographics compare to the City of San José population as follows: SJFD reports 51.4 percent of the workforce is White/Caucasian versus 34.3 percent residing in the Community; SJFD reports 6.7 percent of the workforce is African American versus 2.6 percent African American in the community; SJFD reports 7.2 percent of the workforce is Asian versus 28.4 percent Asian or Pacific Islander in the community; SJFD reports 29.5 percent of their workforce is Hispanic/Latino versus 31.4 percent Hispanic/Latino in the community; and SJFD reports 5.1% of its workforce is Other ethnic groups versus 3.3 percent reported Other ethnic groups in the community.

Comparing each category, the following differences were noted as a result of the analysis: Whites/Caucasian demonstrated that the SJFD workforce was 17.1 percent higher than the community. African American demonstrated that the SJFD workforce was 4.1 percent

higher than the community. Asians/Pacific Islander demonstrated that the SJFD workforce was 21.2 percent lower than the community. Hispanic/Latino demonstrated that the SJFD workforce was 1.9 percent lower than the community. The Other Ethnicity category reflected 1.3 percent greater than the City's percentage.

Question #4 What are the community's expectations about customer care and service?

A questionnaire with a cover letter and self-addressed stamped envelope (Appendix B) was distributed to 250 recipients at public education events leading up to and including Fire Prevention week. (See Procedures.) The distribution time period occurred between October 1 and October 15, 2005. There were 69 total questionnaires returned by respondents as of October 22, 2005 or 28 percent of the target sample. The cultural make up of respondents included residents of Hispanic/Latino; Asian; Indian-American (Sikh), Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, African American, Muslim, Jewish, and one respondent wrote down *Human*.

The top five customer service qualities the community expects (of the 69 completed surveys) from the San Jose Fire Department are Knowledgeable (73%), Fast (72%), Professional (65%), Friendly(59%), and Respectful (52%). San Jose residents want to feel respected personally and for their culture (53%). Survey responses centered around the desire for fire department personnel to interact and participate with the community, be involved with their neighborhoods; and be engaging and friendly when out of the station. One Latino respondent commented, "I see the firefighters at the local grocery store and they rarely say hi or acknowledge kids or people in general. They joke and speak among themselves. I never see them outside the station or just to be a presence in our community and to be among us. They should acknowledge those around them when they are in public in uniform." Other themes included the desire to be informed and how to be prepared in emergencies such as a major earthquake; to be patient with people who do not speak limited or no English ; and to be more

informative during emergencies. They want know what is going on; or what is happening to and for their loved ones; what were their options are and where they can go to be safe. Another theme was focused on respect for religious beliefs. Respondents wanted the fire department to understand the overriding importance of their specific religion and its associated traditions, (i.e. take your shoes off and cover your head while in a Gurdawara (Sikh Temple)) or honoring families of the Muslim faith and their customs. Asian respondents wanted to be taught to how help themselves in an emergency.

Question #5 What are the current outreach strategies employed by the San Jose Fire Department?

The San Jose Fire Department employs multiple outreach strategies to meet the needs of the community through SJFD's fire and life safety education program. Specific program management includes presentations during national theme weeks, such as Fire Prevention Week, Emergency Medical Services Week, and Wildfire Awareness Week. Outreach programs are primarily targeted toward high risk populations i.e. children under 14 and seniors over 50 years of age and to mainstream populations of families and adults under 50. These program efforts include smoke detectors and Vials of Life (medical information profiles for emergencies at home) distribution, special event display booths, Community CPR and AED training, Public First Aid education; Senior Fire and Fall Prevention Safety education; School site visits by fire personnel and special task teams such as the Honor Guard, Fire Museum, Shark Engine and the Clown Brigade. Fire stations are now designated as "Safe Places" (where children and adults can go if they perceive they are in imminent danger) and "Safe Surrender" sites, (parents may take there new born child versus abandonment without reprisal or can seek social service assistance in an emergency) (SJFD Business Plan, 2005). In an effort to effect greater outreach results, the Fire Department collaborates with neighboring jurisdictions to facilitate the Juvenile

Fire Setters program and data exchange. Fire and Life Safety information is currently distributed via brochures, in eight languages including Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

A long-term recruitment strategy is currently under development to increase the breadth and diversity of firefighter/paramedic applicant pools. Innovative methods to attract non-traditional candidates to complete prerequisite education are being devised. These tactical elements to achieve more effective recruitment include: community outreach, mentorships, financial aid, hiring support, and paramedic school support (Debel, 2005). San Jose Fire Department currently sponsors an award winning Explorer program for ages 16 through 21. Explorer Post #888, with approximately 20 members and 4 volunteer advisors meets biweekly and provides training and support for various events supporting the fire department.

San Jose Fire Department's outreach efforts are also indirectly benefited from volunteer work performed by auxiliary support and labor groups such as Local 230, the San Jose Firefighters Burn Foundation, Los Bomberos of Northern California and the Santa Clara County Fire Associates. By supporting local hospitals, toy and food drives, chili cook-offs and barbeques, and many other worthy projects, the community becomes aware that the volunteers supporting these efforts are San Jose Firefighters.

Question #6 What current efforts exist to educate the San Jose Fire Department workforce about the community it serves?

The current efforts to educate the SJFD workforce about the community it serves are found in a diversity class based on the curriculum developed by the California Professional Firefighters Joint Apprenticeship Committee (CPF-JAC) in 1995 called *Diversity: The Impact of Perceptions*. The class was originally delivered in 1995 department wide. San Jose's Assistant Chief (AC) Darryl Von Raesfeld (September, 2005) reported that since the initial training was

delivered in 1995, all recruit classes have been provided with this class as part of their academy experience, however, that there has been no follow up or refresher training for the department as a whole with the degree of depth of this initial program. The diversity curriculum was reviewed and found to be comprehensive relative to assisting personnel in understanding the value of diversity and its history. Additional subjects included intolerance and prejudging, gender bias, communication barriers, cross cultural awareness, ethnic and gender literacy, listening and communication skills, harassment, discrimination and legal references and issues associated with this subject matter. Relative to specific customs education, the Vietnamese culture was thoroughly compared to American culture and customs. No other comparative list of customs or mannerisms was described and no recent updates to this curriculum have been made according to Mary Jennings of CPF-JAC. Additional cultural profiles could be developed by the individual fire jurisdiction. (Jennings, 2005).

The current training provided by the City of San Jose's, Office of Employee Relations for all supervisory personnel, is the newly state mandated training regarding sexual harassment according to California Assembly Bill 1825 (AB 1825). This required training does not contain any information about multicultural customs, and only discusses discrimination and harassment relative to legal liability (www.elt-inc.com).

An interview with San Jose's Fire Chief Jeff Clet (March, 2005) provided a referral to contact the San Jose Police Department's (SJPD) Audio Visual Training Unit to inquire about any possible cultural awareness training that the police department provides for their officers to enhance their understanding of the multiple cultures in San Jose. SJPD provided a copy of three video episodes of a program called *Community San Jose*. These video programs, inspired by Police Chief Robert Davis to create a program that would highlight all the diverse cultures in San Jose. Each episode was 10 minutes in length and highlighted a different culture residing in San

Jose. These video segments were shown to San Jose police officers during their daily briefings prior to the start of their work shift. To date, the three episodes have focused on the Muslim, Sikh and Vietnamese cultures and communities. A pilot test of Community San Jose was conducted in May of 2004 for this video. The Muslim segment to approximately 13 San Jose Fire Department field personnel. Reactions were mixed. Verbal feedback received ranged from “this is great, I never knew that much about the Muslim community” to “this is too politically correct”. However, most of the SJFD personnel in the pilot viewing agreed that if a video segment could be made to created with the patient care needs in mind, these firefighters could learn valuable information that would assist them in providing better emergency medical assessments.

Question #7 What other efforts are being implemented by bay area fire departments to educate their workforce about the cultures and customer of the communities they serve?

Identified candidate departments included: San Francisco, Oakland, Fremont, Contra Costa County Fire District, Livermore/Pleasanton, San Ramon Valley Fire District, Mountain View, Gilroy, Santa Clara City, Milpitas, Sunnyvale Public Safety, Richmond, Vallejo. The phone survey was conducted between September 20, 2005 and October 20, 2005 and contained the following interview questions:

- Does your fire department provide diversity or cultural awareness training for your workforce?
- What type of training is provided?
- Do you provide any cultural awareness training include specific information about individual cultures and customs for the ethnic communities you serve as a customer relations strategy?

- If yes, what are the specific cultures and customs information do you provide for your department personnel?

All departments surveyed had some type of diversity and harassment training conducted by either an outside consultant; a representative from human resources; office of employee relations or conducted as part of a firefighter academy curriculum. Two of the 13 departments facilitated delivery of the CPF-JAC Diversity: The Impact of Perceptions program. Prior to AB 1825, none of the departments had refresher training relative to this subject matter or specific to the cultures and customs of the residents of their respective communities as a customer service strategy.

Question #8 What are some of the strategies/methods used by the private sector to educate their workforce about cultural diversity and awareness?

Three companies were reviewed via internet searches and one book purchase to explore private sector diversity and cultural awareness training methods. The first company was Communicaid. Their approach was to address the needs of organizations to comprehend two basic concepts relative to cultural awareness and diversity training. The concepts include “1) Customers prefer to be served by a company and workforce with which they can identify. 2) Teams comprising mixed ethnicities, backgrounds and gender were likely to be more creative than homogenized ones (www.communicaid.com)”. This interactive program explored one’s own diversity and progresses to the diversity of others in multicultural work environments. The six hour course was designed to assist delegates in preparation for an international environment. Material included a review of what influences our behavior, perceptions, stereotypes, how cultural programming can impact a company’s dealings how we deal with others. The program studied ethnicity, human dynamics and conflict resolution. The final area covered the expectations of others, yourself, feedback about yourself, how you look to others and cultural traits in key countries and etiquette (www.communicaid.com).

ERUdyne provided customized, interactive training programs designed to meet companies global business objectives. They customized their programs according to a complete assessment of the organizational culture. ERUdyne work toward students understanding of values, attitudes and behaviors demonstrated by different regional and nations cultures. They work toward developing trust, more specifically how other cultures build trust to facilitate better cooperation and communication through interactive classroom settings or on-line courses (www.erudyne.com).

Prism International, is a consulting firm that specializes in diversity training. Four strategies guide their curriculum for success. These include leveraging diversity and inclusion; increasing cross-cultural effectiveness; preventing harassing and discriminatory behaviors; and ensuring compliance and creating representation. Prism works with fortune 500 companies such as Honeywell Systems and Siemens Westinghouse, in thirteen countries and in a variety of languages. A book found on their website by Leslie Aguilar and Linda Stokes called *Multicultural Customer Service* proved to be a valuable blueprint to bridge across different ethnic and organizational cultures. Aguilar was on staff at the Walt Disney Company for 15 years prior her work with Prism International and is an industry expert on multicultural customer service. A review of the book outlines the author's approach to high quality multicultural customer service. Multicultural customer service is about adapting one's style (you the service provider) to meet the customer's needs and expectations. The skill of listening is the key to success and creates understanding of other cultures. The authors describe one of the most important ingredients to success is gaining strategies that help you refrain from judging others. The program offers suggestions to help overcome perceived barriers by recognizing that different does not mean deficient. By keeping this concept as a core value, the choice for respectful and outstanding customer service behaviors can be made (Aguilar/Stokes, 1996). Another valuable

aspect of the program was dedicated to understanding nonverbal behavior and what different hand gestures mean for different countries. The course uses a workbook style format to progress through the curriculum.

Discussion

Understanding the cultures we serve and a desire to provide the highest quality customer service by the San Jose Fire Department drove this research inquiry. The intent was to find strategies, methods or programs that would assist SJFD in providing better customer care through learning about our community and the unique aspects of the many cultures we serve. For example, one author points out that through understanding the culture, as service providers we can communicate better with Spanish-speaking customers (Burnett, 2003). This concept applies to all cultural awareness and understanding.

Through the review of related literature; interviews/discussions with SJFD leadership; other fire service and public administration professionals, the author found agreement of the data relative to the value of diversity in the workplace in an effort to serve the needs of a multicultural community. They call to action public service organizations to provide a “renewed focus to aspects of race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and religion and that this focus requires the workforce to have greater knowledge, understanding and appreciation of human diversity.” (White/Rice, p.3, 2005).

The emerging community of San Jose is continuing to change moving from a predominately white population in the 1960’s to today, where no ethnic majority exists. San Jose’s projected population growth is expected to increase by approximately 100,000 residents in the next 10 years (www.sanjoseca.gov/planning). The department has made great strides to demographically represent the community it serves over the last 30 years, however the Asian community is significantly underrepresented in SJFD’s workforce with just 4 percent. It is

important to remember San Jose has the highest Vietnamese population outside Vietnam, one of many Asian ethnicities in San Jose. The Latino community is well represented in SJFD's demographics, with 29.5% of the workforce, however is lags behind the City's demographic figure by 1.9 percent. Among these vibrant communities many other emerging cultures reside in San Jose. Some examples of these emerging cultures are the Indian Americans, the Arabians, Bosnians, all deserving of our awareness, respect, and understanding of how we can serve them better.

Fire service information relative to providing cultural awareness training as a customer service strategy was limited. What was found related to addressing the bilingual needs of Hispanic, and Asian communities and associated public education efforts on their behalf. Thirty-nine percent of community relations survey respondents cited what they wanted San Jose Fire Department members to show respect for their culture, customs and languages when caring for their families.

Virtually none of the 13 bay area fire departments surveyed provided specific cultural awareness training based on their communities demographic make ups. Though all fire departments provided some diversity and harassment training, only three departments including San Jose provided the fairly comprehensive CPF-JAC Diversity: The Impact of Perceptions Program. Despite the comprehensive nature of this program, it only provides a comprehensive comparison of Vietnamese customs versus American customs, thus highlighting the need for further research of the multicultural city we serve and find ways to collaborate with other partners in public safety and our community to deepen our understanding of the various cultural customs that make up *Community San Jose*.

The survey in this project was designed to solicit feedback from the community. The results validated the concerns raised by civic leaders about SJFD's need to improve cultural

understanding and community relationships (see Appendix B). The results further indicated the community member's desire for connection, training and respect from SJFD. Survey results indicated that the community wants more fire department involvement in their neighborhoods, greater range of language skills available, more emergency preparedness training, and respect for their cultures and customs. This also validates the need for greater cultural awareness on the part of the fire department and well as improvements in communication with the public about the range and scope of the fire department's services provided.

Literature from private sector was helpful in understanding the common threads of high quality customer service: a genuine desire to help others; kindness and respect and that we as individuals have the opportunity to provide outstanding customer service each time we come in contact with another person. Combining these customer service aspects with the WOW! approach to helping Mrs. Smith ensures quality community relationships (Brunacini, 1996). What an opportunity to pave the way for better customer care!

Recommendations

Based on the data collected and an analysis of that data, the results of this research have the potential for offering strategies to improve SJFD personnel understanding of the cultures and customs of the community we serve; to provide customers service and care opportunities to improve community relationships. Using the results of the initial survey, further research will be needed in the area of survey instrument development; multicultural customs in health care to ensure strategies recommended here are effective and explore/evaluate future community risk reduction opportunities.

The literature and survey results support the following recommendations:

- Implement/create an update/augmentation of the current diversity/cultural awareness training curriculum to represent all cultures of San Jose.

- Creation of a community task force to assist in culture specific curriculum development.
- Collaborate with other fire departments; public safety agencies and community members to produce video segments applicable to understanding specific cultural considerations for fire and emergency medical service incidents.
- Incorporate cultural awareness/customer service skill training into current Infrequently Used Skill program as a vehicle for refresher training.
- Renovate current San Jose Fire Department Website to become an information clearinghouse for fire and life safety information in addition to emergency preparedness tips.
- Incorporate ongoing access for community to provide feedback via the SJFD website.
- Complete, fund and implement long term recruitment strategy (design phase in process) for non-traditional applicants.
- Implement Monthly Open Houses at all Fire Stations.

The San Jose Fire Department would realize significant improvements in community relationships, improve department personnel cultural knowledge and understanding, sensitivity and customer service abilities, improve public awareness of fire department services and emergency preparedness. Collaborating with community members in the curriculum development ensures accuracy and improves our ability to manage emergencies. Utilizing website capabilities for ongoing customer satisfaction provides consistent barometer checks about our service delivery. Partnering with the Infrequently Used Skills (quarterly skills practice) format provides an opportunity for live and interactive cultural awareness training in a six minute drill format. On going efforts to recruit residents who live in San Jose to pursue

careers with the San Jose Fire Department would improve our ability to accommodate the needs of the community.

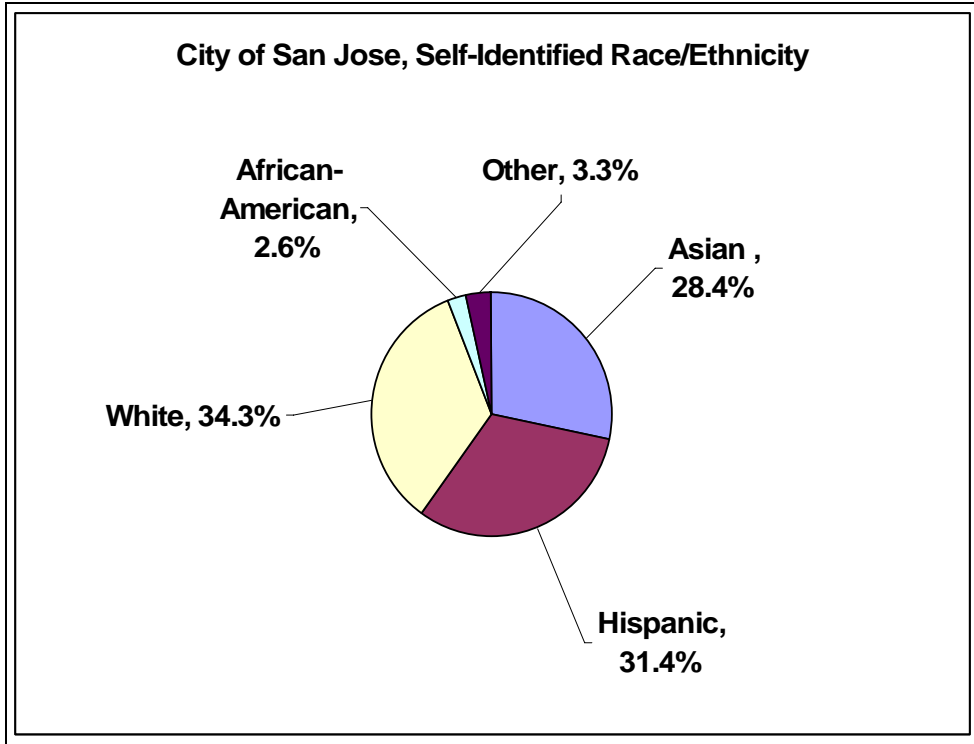
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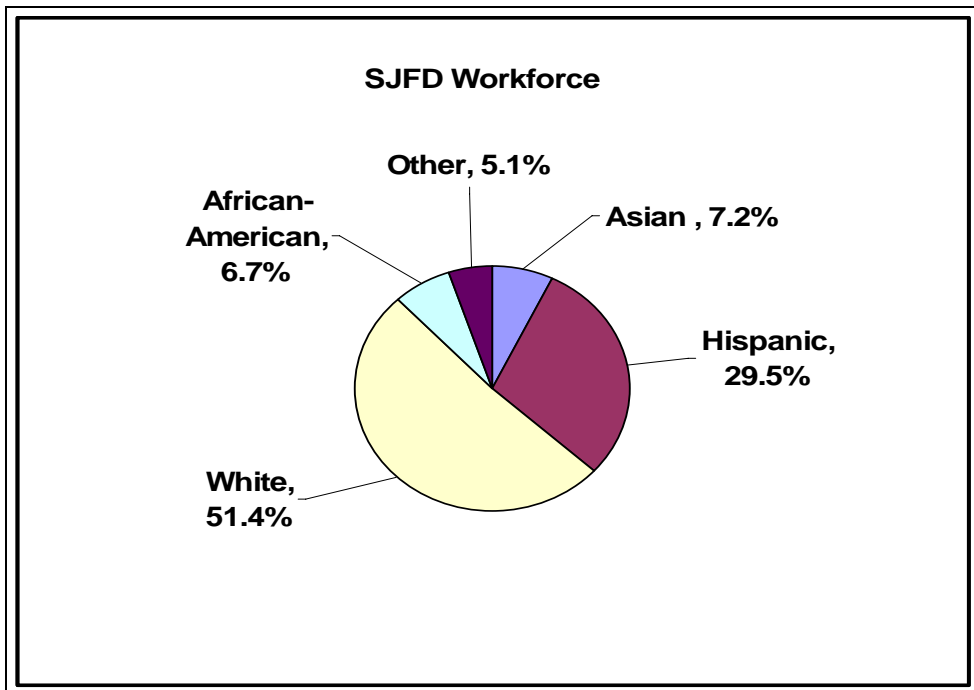
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Appendix A



U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 2002



SJFD Candidate Physical Ability Test demographic profile (Hawkins, 2005).

Appendix B



San José Fire Department

JEFFREY L. CLET, FIRE CHIEF

October, 2005

Dear Community Member;

The San Jose Fire Department is committed to providing the highest quality of emergency services to our community. In an effort to better serve you, we are conducting a survey to gain your feedback about what you think is important for us to remember when we are caring for you in an emergency.

Please complete this survey and return it to the fire department member on site or mail it in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided by October 22, 2005.

Thank you for helping us to serve you better.

Sincerely,

San Jose Fire Department

**Allison Cabral
Fire Captain**

**San Jose Fire Department
Public Education Unit**



Appendix B cont.



San José Fire Department
JEFFREY L. CLET, FIRE CHIEF

San Jose Fire Department
Community Relations Survey

What do you feel is the most important service offered/provided by the San Jose Fire Department?

What would make you feel more comfortable/at ease when interacting with members of the San Jose Fire Department?

What culture or nationality do you most closely identify yourself with?

What aspect of your nationality/culture or customs would you like the San Jose Fire Department to keep in mind when providing services to you and your family?

What additional services would you like to see offered by the San Jose Fire Department?

How could the San Jose Fire Department make you feel safer and better prepared in the event of a fire or medical emergency?

What are the most important customer service qualities you expect from your San Jose Fire Department? (Choose five)

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly | <input type="checkbox"/> Respectful | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional | <input type="checkbox"/> Helpful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledgeable | <input type="checkbox"/> Courteous | <input type="checkbox"/> Fast | <input type="checkbox"/> Caring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speaks your language | | | |

Other – Your suggestion? _____

Other Suggestions or expectations? (please use back of this form for additional space.)

Thank you for participating in our survey!

