Recruitment Methods to Increase Firefighter Applicants for the Fargo Fire Department

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Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of the others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed:_____

Abstract

The fire service has traditionally been an attractive place to work. Many fire departments get so many applicants that they have needed methods to narrow down their applicant pool before testing. Over recent years the Fargo Fire Department has had a low number of applicants and is facing increasing competition to a strong local economy and an oil boom in the western portion of the state of North Dakota. As a business the Fargo Fire Department must remain competitive in this environment and work to continue to get enough qualified employees. The purpose of this research is to identify methods for the Fargo Fire Department to maintain a sufficient number of applicants for the position of firefighter. This research used the descriptive method to identify methods to increase the number of firefighter applicants and answer the following questions:

1. Which recruiting methods are currently being used by the Fargo Fire Department?
2. Which other recruiting methods exist that could be used by the Fargo Fire Department?
3. Which recruiting methods should the Fargo Fire Department use to maintain a sufficient number of firefighter applicants?

The data was gathered by completing a literature review of recruiting materials and interviewing a City of Fargo Human Resources Generalist. A questionnaire was also sent to the City of Fargo Human resources and six other regional human resources departments with full-time fire departments similar in size to Fargo. The results gathered indicate that some, but not all fire departments in the region are getting the desired number of applicants. The Fargo Fire Department is not getting the desired number of applicants. The results also showed that one of the most effective methods to increase quality applicants is through formalizing personal recommendations from current employees.

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Recruitment Methods to Increase Firefighter Applicants for the Fargo Fire Department

In an increasingly competitive global economy the Fargo Fire Department must remain competitive by identifying the best ways to attract a high quality workforce. This requires being an active part of recruitment efforts and it also requires learning about the most effective methods to recruit a qualified workforce. The purpose of this research is to identify methods to increase the number of new firefighter applicants. By doing this research the Fargo fire Department will be aided in attracting a desired number of firefighter applicants. It will also assist with establishing and evaluating a more proactive recruitment process. The descriptive research method will be used to answer the following questions and clarify the current recruitment efforts:

1. Which recruiting methods are currently being used by the Fargo Fire Department?
2. Which other recruiting methods exist that could be used by the Fargo Fire Department?
3. Which recruiting methods should the Fargo Fire Department use to attract a sufficient number of qualified applicants?

Background and Significance

The City of Fargo is located on the eastern border of North Dakota in the southern half of the state. It sits on the west bank of the Red River which is the state boundary separating North Dakota and Minnesota. The topography is flat and open prairie. This location in the north central part of the country produces a short summer and a long cold winter. The region experiences one of the largest temperature variances in North America between summer and winter. The location is often unappealing to those who are not from the area because of the lack of interesting topography and long cold winters. This reduces the ability of the Fargo Fire Department to recruit qualified applicants from other parts of the country. There are three colleges in the immediate metropolitan area surrounding Fargo. The local colleges and universities provide a strong source of well-educated workers and could be a source for Fargo to increase firefighter applicants.

The City of Fargo's population is estimated at about 115,000, which is significantly higher than the 2010 census population of 105,549 because the area has been experiencing rapid growth for several

years. (US Census Bureau, 2015) The city limits currently cover approximately 48.84 square miles and continues to grow as the City of Fargo annexes land. (City of Fargo, 2015) The growth of the city has also led to an increase in the number of fire stations and personnel required to properly staff fire stations. Two fire stations have been added in the last 11 years and an additional fire station is currently targeted for construction in the next two to three years. This growth in the fire department requires hiring and maintaining a higher number of personnel.

There is a large agricultural industry in the Fargo area, but there have also been many technology related businesses attracted to Fargo because of the low cost to get established, the constant supply of educated workers, and the work ethic of those living in the area. An oil boom in the western portion of the state is also impacting the area as more oil field workers move their families to the area and businesses spring up to fulfill the needs of the oilfield development.

The number of workers required to operate in the oilfields and the high wages offered to workers has drawn them away from their local area jobs. Truck drivers in the oilfield have been known to make over $100,000 per year. This impact has even started to pull police and firefighters away from their jobs in the areas closest to the oilfields. They see this as an opportunity to get ahead in life. In the meantime, the public safety agencies closest to the oilfields struggle to attract quality employees at comparatively low wage levels. (C. Craven, personal communication, January 10, 2014) The oil boom may or may not be short lived, but fire departments still need to be prepared to proactively recruit quality employees indefinitely because there may be other forces in the future that draw applicants away. The impact of the oil boom has been moving east across the state over the last few years, but Fargo is currently far enough away from the oil boom that they have not lost any firefighters to lucrative oil field jobs yet.

The Fargo Fire Department is an all full-time fire department consisting of 122 personnel serving a population of approximately 115,000. There are three shifts A, B, and C. All three of the shifts work a 24 hour rotating schedule. The fire department responds to a little over 7,000 calls for service per year. Most of these calls are emergency medical service incidents. The Fargo Fire Department provides basic life support response and does not transport patients. The rest of the calls for service consist of fires, fire

alarms, water and ice rescue, hazardous materials response, technical rescue response, and other miscellaneous incidents.

The Fargo Fire Department has been working to keep up with the growth of the city and growth of the fire department. As the city has grown, so has the fire department. The resulting increase in personnel has been relatively steady and retirements are slowly increasing too, creating a situation where the fire department is sometimes recruiting, hiring, and training two or three classes of new firefighters in a year. In the future this number could grow as the number of retirements also slowly grows. The City of Fargo Human Resource Department indicates that an optimal number of firefighter applicants would be 100-150 range for each recruiting period. The current recruitment efforts for the Fargo fire Department are not yielding the desired number of firefighter applicants. The last three recruitment periods yielded 73, 71, and 66, (J. Lyon, personal communication, April, 8, 2015) At the present time recruit numbers are lower than desired. If the number of firefighter applicants were to drop further in the future it could widen the gap between the desired number of applicants and the actual number of applicants. The fire department could have a difficult time recruiting and staffing the fire department, especially as the fire department grows and requires more personnel. In the case of growth, it would be ideal to continually receive more firefighter applicants until the ideal number range is reached. If recruitment is not researched and evaluated a situation could arise where the fire department doesn't know how the numbers are trending. It could also lead to a situation where the hiring standards are lowered in an attempt to increase applicant numbers. The City of Fargo is still growing, the fire department is slowly growing, and the retirements will slowly rise accordingly. Action now to effectively recruit in the future could help the Fargo Fire Department avoid a future staffing problem.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) established five strategic goals in their *Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2010-2014*. One of those goals is to "improve local planning and preparedness" (USFA, 2015, p.13). Another one of those goals is to "improve the fire and emergency services professional status" (USFA, 2015, p.13). This recruitment research will help with both of the USFA goals mentioned above. By identifying recruitment methods and learning recruitment strategies the Fargo Fire

Department will be better prepared for future personnel planning when looking to hire new firefighters. It will also help the Fargo fire Department with preparedness by increasing the understanding of where firefighter applicant numbers are, where they have been, and where they should be. By tracking recruitment efforts and identifying effective recruiting methods, the Fargo fire Department will better be able to ensure that there are a sufficient or ideal number of candidates during future recruiting periods. The second USFA strategic goal mentioned above pertains to improving professional status of the fire service. This research also will help establish a qualified candidate pool in the future along with teaching the fire department about methods used in the professional world of business.

The USFA Executive Fire Officer Program Executive Development course has three focus points. They are "leadership, research, and change" (Course Description, para. 1). In the class students learn "how to enhance personal/ team development and engage in applied research" (Course Description, para. 1). The research in this document pertains to the Executive Development class by identifying a problem, researching it, and hopefully by identifying effective methods that can be used in the future to ensure the Fargo Fire Department always has an ideal pool of firefighter applicants.

Literature Review

Employers across the country are having a difficult time facing recruitment challenges (Arthur, 2012). The Fargo Fire Department via the human resources department is currently using several recruiting methods that are not achieving the desired number of applicants. These methods include traditional advertising, electronic advertising, and college advertising. The traditional advertising includes a spot in the local newspaper. The newspaper advertisement contains a link to the City of Fargo website where applicants can find the full job posting and instructions for completing the application. A sample of the Fargo Firefighter job posting is provided in Appendix A. Although some new applicants are recruited by personal recommendations from current employees, this is not and has not been a formal recruitment method used by the Fargo Fire Department. Currently the Fargo Fire Department is not getting the desired number of firefighter applicants. They are not alone and may encounter more competition for qualified workers in the future. Other employers in the region are likely increasing their recruiting efforts to

improve their recruiting effectiveness in order to attract and retain a qualified workforce. The Fargo Fire Department has been using the same recruiting methods for years, and using the same recruiting methods are likely to lead to obtaining the same results. (Arthur, 2012) In this case, it is likely if Fargo does not change recruiting methods, they will continue to get the same number of recruits. This also leads to getting the same types of candidates, thus the candidate pool is not diverse. An organization using the same methods, as in this case, may be opening themselves up to discrimination in a systematic manner. (Arthur, 2012) These are important reasons to look at other methods of recruiting. Some of the methods identified that are either not currently used in part or whole, or are informally used. In Fargo the current methods include: partnering, increasing diversity, branding, and formalizing current personnel recommendations. An awareness of other methods is important to determining what methods the Fargo Fire Department might be missing.

In *101 Strategies for Recruiting Success*, Christopher Pritchard (2007) recommends recruiting for diversity and partnering. Partnering can be accomplished in several ways and assists by combining the resources of others with your own to increase your overall ability and effectiveness. In the case of recruitment, partnering would help reach more applicants without dramatically adding to the costs or efforts. The first partner for fire departments should be their own human resources department. The Fargo Fire Department does work with the human resources department by providing some direction, but it is not currently done in a formal partnership manner with them. The Fargo Fire Department also does not currently place a lot of time into evaluating recruiting efforts as a formal process. These efforts can be time consuming, but may be some of the most important work a fire department does. Other potential sources of partnerships are local colleges and fire schools, community groups, churches, and health clubs. The Fargo Fire Department does work with local colleges and has a ride-along program for students enrolled in regional technical college fire programs, but the extent of these partnerships is very limited. These partnerships work well and are an example of partnering, but there is definitely room to increase, add-to, and improve the partnerships.

Diversity brings many positive attributes to an organization and should be actively pursued in recruitment. (C. Pritchard, 2007) A phone discussion with human resources personnel from six regional full-time fire departments in North Dakota and Northern Minnesota revealed that none of the fire departments are getting the diversity of applicants they desire (L.Rood, L.Jundt, R.Mcconnell, D, Gaetz, J.Lyons, K.Stulken, personal communication, April 17, 2015). From a recruitment standpoint, actively pursuing diversity also opens up a larger pool of potential candidates. "Annually, the United States and Canada welcome significant numbers of immigrant professionals with high levels of formal education (bachelor's degree, master's degree, and Ph.D.)" (LaRoche & Rutherford, 2007, p. xiii). This is also true for the City of Fargo where many immigrants of differing nationalities have settled. LaRoche and Rutherford (2007, p. 2) also caution that many recruiting processes are liable to create cross-cultural misunderstanding and could be part of the problem when not receiving a diverse pool of applicants. To address this fire departments must make applicant processes as simple and straight-forward as possible. Both fire departments and human resources departments should also provide assistance and direction with the process to help reduce misunderstandings. Fire departments must also learn to advertise in the right places. In the case of minority groups, you need to be reaching out directly to the places they visit most often to gather and share information with them. These places include social clubs, professional associations, and nonprofit organizations. (LaRouche & Rutherford, 2007, p. 58) In his research paper Willard Scott Justice wrote "advertising in diverse areas of the community and improved marketing of fire division positions could aid in improving the diversity of fire division applicants" (Justice, n.d., p. 24). Justice (n.d., p. 27) also found that targeted advertising showing a diverse fire department will help attract minority applicants.

Branding is another recruiting method that can be used to help market your organization. The branding process is a way to help promote the attributes of your organization in a way that will help draw in not just any applicants, but the applicants that are more likely to be a good fit for your organization. For a fire department part of the brand may involve a focus on the exciting aspects of the job or it might focus upon getting paid to help others. "This helps attract and deliver the right candidates like nothing else"

(Brown & Swain, 2012, p. 208). Branding involves creating and providing a clear definition of who you are and what you do. This helps to ensure that job seekers and applicants are applying for a job they desire with an organization that will be a good fit for them. By reducing the confusion and specifically explaining what your fire department is and what they do, you reduce the number of applicants that are likely to quit or wash out because the job is not what they thought it was going to be. It essentially helps fit the right type of person to the right job and in the case of the fire service, the right fire department too. This process can be started by asking what you will need people to do, what work they will be doing, what skills they will need, and what characteristics are necessary to support them in the job they will be doing? (Brown, 2011)

Although this research primarily is focused upon recruiting applicant numbers, there were several references which stressed that the focus should not be placed purely upon numbers, but rather should focus upon attracting the right people. Many recruitment processes focus upon getting highly skilled people, but most workers don't fail due to a lack of skill. Most workers fail because they did not have the right personal characteristics and values for the organization they were hired by. (Murphy, 2012) A list of top characteristics of low performers such as negativity, entitlement, and resistance to change do not mention skills at all. (Murphy, 2012) Finding the right attitude begins with defining the attitude and culture of your organization. This could also be thought of as branding which was discussed above. If you know what your organization is about, it will make it easier to know who you are looking for. (Murphy, 2012, p.1-2)

Who mistakes happen when managers:

- Are unclear about what is needed in a job
- Have a weak flow of candidates
- do not trust their ability to pick out the right candidate from a group of similar-looking candidates
- Lose candidates they really want to join their team

These who mistakes are pricey (Smart & Street, 2008, p.xvii).

To add further pain to the pricey who mistakes is the relatively high percentage of how often it occurs. Managers hover around an estimated 50% success rate when it comes to hiring. (Smart & Street, 2008)

One of the most effective methods to increase success for hiring the right person is through recommendations of your current employees. In some businesses employee recommendations have been identified as the most effective recruiting method they use. In these cases the employees are instructed to proactively recruit people that would fit the organization well. In proactive recruitment companies the recruitment process is treated as a formal and constant process, so employees are always looking for new people that would fit in well. (Smart and Street, 2008)

Several other issues related to recruiting were found while researching. Although they are not actual recruiting methods, they can significantly affect the ability and methods used in recruitment. One of the significant issues is compensation and benefits. In the case of compensation and benefits it is advised to know what benefits you can offer to potential applicants. A list of the benefits you offer and how they compete with regional benefits may help applicants see what you can do for them. It can also help you identify any weak areas where your benefits are not competitive. (Manning & Brugh, 2001) For fire departments many of the benefits are not seen if you only advertise or look at the salary. These other not as visible benefits may include medical, dental, pension, work schedule, disability, etc. that add up to a significant amount if shown as a total benefit package.

Hiring standards is another topic that is often brought up when discussing recruitment that can have a significant impact. In the case of hiring standards it should be noted that if you want to be the best, you need to hire the best, so it is recommended not to lower your hiring standards. In some cases you may even want to look at raising your standards. (Smart and Street, 2008)

A third issue relates to outside forces. In North Dakota there has been an oil boom over the last several years. This has primarily impacted the western portion of the state, but Fargo has felt some of the impact. The oil boom has created a pull of employees to the western part of the state for higher wages. This has made it difficult for fire departments in the western part of North Dakota to retain and attract employees. This impact does not appear to have directly impacted the Fargo Fire Department yet, but it

could if the oil boom continues to grow. All potential outside factors like the oil boom should be continuously monitored and evaluated for impact to the fire department.

This literature review revealed that there are recruitment methods the Fargo Fire Department is not using in whole or in part that would be beneficial to attracting more applicants. These methods include increased partnering with other departments or organizations, increasing diversity recruiting efforts, branding, and formalizing personnel recommendations. Some of the literature reviewed advised that the focus of recruitment should be upon getting the right people, not just the right number. Benefits, hiring standards, and external forces can also impact recruitment and should be researched, discussed, and identified prior to recruiting.

Procedures

The procedures used in creating this research project had the purpose of answering three questions in an attempt to identify new recruitment methods for the Fargo Fire Department. The first question was, “Which recruiting methods are currently being used by the Fargo Fire Department?” To answer this question one step was used. This step was an interview with Jennifer Lyon from the City of Fargo Human Resources Department on April 8th, 2015. Jennifer explained that the City of Fargo Human Resources Department works with each city department and gathers input from them as to what they would desire to see in the application process. Jennifer also explained that most of the city departments in Fargo rely on the human resources department for setting up and running their recruitment and application process. By doing this the city departments know that all legal obligations are met and the people who know the most about recruitment have the largest part in it. The problem with this is that the Human resources department does not have the permission, time, or resources to grow the recruitment process for individual departments without the assistance or encouragement of the department looking for new personnel.

The current methods that are used for recruiting for the Fargo Fire Department are traditional advertising, electronic advertising, personal recommendations, and advertising at colleges in the region. The college advertising could also be thought of as a very basic level of partnering. As stated above these

are for the most part the exact same methods used by other city departments in Fargo. This could be seen as the basic recruitment package that is used for all city departments, unless a department takes the time and energy to add to it by working with the human resources department. The human resources department is very open to working with and adding to the recruitment process at the request of the city departments. In the case of fire it seems that we have often relied upon the popularity of the job and an ample supply of applicants to recruit for us. The current number of applicants is significantly lower than desired, and as explained earlier the popularity of the job may have changed over time. This may be compounded by outside forces, such as an oil boom, to make the job less attractive to potential applicants. It could also be impacted by internal forces. For example, if there is low morale and the word gets out it may prevent good applicants from applying. The number of applicants may also be lower than desired because the Fargo Fire Department has never actively attempted to raise the number of firefighter applicants through the use of alternative or additional recruitment methods.

The second and third research questions asked used the same procedures to obtain answers. The second question was “Which other recruiting methods exist that could be used by the Fargo Fire Department?” The goal of the second research question was to identify potential recruitment methods available. The third question was, “Which recruitment methods should the Fargo Fire Department use to increase the number of applicants for the position of firefighter?” The goal of the third research question was to identify the most effective methods for the Fargo Fire Department to use for recruiting. To answer both the second and third questions there were two steps used.

The first step was a review of literature about recruiting. The bulk of the literature reviewed for this portion of the research came from outside of the fire service. It can be beneficial to look outside of the fire service world to identify methods and procedures that may also work well in the fire service. Sources from which this literature was drawn include the Learning Resource Center at the National Emergency Training Center and the Moorhead Public Library. The Moorhead library assisted with accessing interlibrary loan materials which comprised most of the literature used in the review. The literature review assisted with answering both questions two and three simultaneously.

The second step which was used to answer the second and third questions was sending out a Human Resources Questionnaire (Appendix B) to the City of Fargo Human Resources Department. The questionnaire was also sent out to six other human resources departments in the region with full-time fire departments that are similar in size to Fargo. The other human resource departments receiving a questionnaire were from North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota. Other North Dakota cities receiving the questionnaire were Bismarck, Minot, and Grand Forks. The only South Dakota City receiving the questionnaire was Sioux Falls. Minnesota cities receiving the questionnaire were St. Cloud and Moorhead. Of the seven cities receiving the questionnaire, six completed it.

The questionnaire asked seven questions. The first question asked, "What would be the ideal number of new firefighter applicants for each application period for your fire department?" Respondents were given five answer choices: 0-50, 50-100, 100-150, 150-200, or 200+. The purpose of this question was to see what the range is for the ideal number of applicants in the region. The second question asked "What do you believe prevents your fire department from getting more new firefighter applications? Check all boxes that apply." Respondents were given nine answer choices:

1) We get an appropriate or desired number of applicants
2) Compensation and benefits package
3) A lack of diversity in the fire department
4) Type of work
5) Insufficient recruiting and advertising
6) Process is unfamiliar or difficult for applicants
7) Minimum application requirements are too high
8) Outside forces
9) Other

The purpose of this question was to see if fire departments were receiving their desired number of applicants, and if not what they thought the reason(s) might be. The third question was "How many applications did you receive from each of the past three new firefighter application periods?" Respondents

were given three boxes from most recent to least recent to place the number of applicants. The purpose of this question was to compare the desired number of firefighter applicants to the actual number of firefighter applicants and to identify any trends in applicant numbers. The fourth question asked was "What recruitment methods do you currently use for new firefighter applicants? Check all that apply." Respondents were given five answer choices:

1) None, fire department does all recruiting
2) Traditional advertising
3) Electronic advertising
4) Personal recommendations
5) Other.

The purpose of this question was to identify the methods currently being used for recruiting and identify whether the methods were similar. The fifth question asked "How effective would you rate your new firefighter recruiting?" Respondents were given four answer choices:

1) Very effective
2) Somewhat effective
3) Not effective
4) Not sure

The purpose of this question was to identify whether recruitment was a problem in the region and if so, to what degree. The sixth question asked "What recruiting methods do you believe would be the most effective to increase the number of new firefighter applicants?" Respondents were given a fill-in box to write their answer. The purpose of this question was to identify new recruitment methods and to identify whether methods viewed as most effective were currently being used. The seventh question asked "Is there anything else you would like to add or consider applicable to the data I am trying to collect?" Respondents were given a fill-in box to write their answer. The purpose of this question was to provide respondents a chance to provide something the questionnaire missed.

There were some limitations to the questionnaire given to respondents. The first limitation is the number of questionnaires sent out. The questionnaires were only sent to cities with all full-time fire departments in the region. In the state of North Dakota there are only four, so some cities with fire departments similar in size in Minnesota and South Dakota were included. Not all cities in North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota received a questionnaire and of those receiving questionnaires one did not complete it. In the questionnaire the list of possible answers for each question was only broken down into several categories to make it easier for recipients to complete. Several of the questions allowed selecting more than one answer and some allowed for a space to write in answers in case an appropriate answer was not included in the list. After calling the human resource departments for the cities surveyed it was discovered that the human resources departments are largely the party in control of recruiting for the fire departments. This is why the questionnaire was sent to human resource departments, but in some cases fire departments may be more involved with recruitment and this could impact the answers received too.

Results

The first research question asked, "Which recruiting methods are currently being used by the Fargo Fire Department? A personal interview on April 8th, 2015 with Jennifer Lyon from the City of Fargo Human Resources Department answered the first research question. In the interview Jennifer stated that the City of Fargo currently uses four formal recruitment methods and one informal method to recruit applicants for the position of firefighter. These methods are:

1) Traditional Advertising (newspaper, job fairs)
2) Electronic advertising (city webpage, social media, email)
3) Advertising with regional colleges and technical schools (this could be seen as partnering in a limited fashion)
4) Citizen/Fire Explorer programs
5) Personal recommendations

The personal recommendations are the informal method. By this it is meant that employees are not taught or instructed to actively recruit or provide personal recommendations. Recommendations are happily

accepted, but not requested so it is not a formal method used by the Fargo Fire Department. If it was a formal method employees would be notified of a hiring process, encouraged to find potential applicants who might fit the fire department well, and encouraged to get applicants to apply. If the applicants apply, then the employees could provide a personal recommendation to the city or fire chief. This is not currently done, so the recommendations are low in numbers. The personal interview with Jennifer Lyon also revealed that Fargo would ideally receive 100-150 applicants during a recruitment and application period. In the last three application periods the Fargo Fire Department has received 73, 71, and 66 applicants from most recent to least recent. Although this trend shows an increase in the number of applicants over each of the last three application periods, the number is not large enough to be of significance. The number of applicants over each of the last three application periods is well below the desired 100-150. Jennifer also noted that multiple application periods in the same year or a short period of time tended to produce the same applicants, suggesting that application periods within the same year should be avoided when possible. While the Fargo Fire Department provides input to the City of Fargo Human Resources Department, Jennifer reported that human resources does all of the recruiting. This suggests that there is room for a more active role and participation from the fire department to create more of a partnership with human resources.

The second and third research questions used the same procedures in parallel to obtain answers. The procedures were a literature review and sending out a questionnaire to human resource departments in the region with full-time fire departments. The questionnaire contained seven questions.

The first question asked “What would be the ideal number of new firefighter applicants for each application period for your fire department?” The answers to this question revealed one fire department was 0-50, one fire department was 50-100, two fire departments were 100-150, and two fire departments were 200+. Four of the fire departments desired over 100 applicants.

The second question asked “What do you believe prevents your fire department from getting more new firefighter applications? Check all boxes that apply.” The answers to this question revealed that two of the fire departments felt they were getting the desired number of applicants, two fire departments

felt compensation and benefits packages were a reason, one felt the type of work was a reason, one thought the application process was difficult was a reason, one thought outside forces were a reason, and four felt there were other reasons. The other reasons listed were: “a lack of understanding position,” “Hard to compete with metro: higher pay and virtually no requirements,” “We are competing with oil industry employers in Western ND,” and “Timing of the test.”

The third question asked “How many applications did you receive from each of the past three new firefighter application periods?” The answers to this question revealed that the numbers overall were highest in the least recent application period, second highest in the most recent application period, and lowest in the middle application period. Individual responses for the most recent application periods were 445, 117, 175, 28, 188, and 73. Fargo has the third largest department of the seven who were sent questionnaires, but in the most recent application period, they were fifth in the number of firefighter applicants and well below all other departments except for one.

The fourth question asked “What recruitment methods do you currently use for new firefighter applicants? Check all that apply.” None of the respondents answered that the fire department does all of the recruiting. All six replied that they use traditional advertising (newspaper, job posting). Four of the respondents use electronic or social media advertising such as email, Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Three of the respondents reported using personal recommendations, although this is likely in an informal manner. This means they accept recommendations, but likely do not formally encourage or promote them. Four of the respondents replied “other” to this question. The other responses were “media,” “League of MN Cities, CareerBuilder,” “Outreach to schools and colleges with fire programs,” “Department advertising in the colleges too.” These responses did not identify any new recruiting methods that Fargo is not currently using in some manner.

The fifth question asked “How effective would you rate your new firefighter recruiting?” The answers to this question were evenly split with three responses indicating “very effective” and three responses indicating “somewhat effective.” This indicates overall satisfaction with recruiting efforts, but

does not explain why Fargo is considerably below the desired number of applicants, yet rated recruiting at least “somewhat effective.”

The sixth question asked “What recruiting methods do you believe would be the most effective to increase the number of new firefighter applicants?” The first respondent listed, “Internship programs, Citizen Programs, i.e. fire academy.” The second respondent listed, “Revamp webpage for what department can offer (culture, promotional opportunities); state overall dollar amount of benefit package.” The third respondent stated, “Haven’t has trouble with attracting applicants.” The fourth respondent answered, “More social media exposure.” The fifth respondent answered, “Fire and HR working together to do personal outreach through social media, media, and schools.” The sixth respondent replied, “More personal recommendations.” The answers provided above provide insight to the direction not only Fargo Fire Department recruiting needs to go, but also to the direction the fire service recruiting should go. The focus of the above answers point toward; increasing partnerships, working together with human resources departments more proactively, using more social media, and using current personnel to assist with the recommendation method of recruiting.

The seventh question asked “Is there anything else you would like to add or consider applicable to the data I am trying to collect?” This question was only answered by three of the respondents. Of the three respondents who replied to it, two of them put “none” or “no.” The third respondent answered, “Please note that when we run multiple testing in the same year, we run into getting the same candidates over and over.” The only answer to this question suggests fire departments should be careful about recruiting too often in a short period of time. In many cases fire departments in the region recruit and complete a new firefighter hiring process every two years. After completing the process, the fire department builds a list of candidates from which they will hire over the next two years. If a fire department loses an abnormally large number of personnel or encounters significant growth, as happens when a new fire station is opened, it may force a fire department to run a hiring process sooner than two years. In this case they should be aware that they are likely to encounter many of the same applicants

from the previous process. In these situations active and effective recruiting becomes even more important.

After completing the literature review and reviewing the answers provided in the questionnaire, the following results were obtained. The second research question asked which other recruiting methods exist that could be used by the Fargo Fire Department? The results of this question revealed that there are four other methods the Fargo Fire Department could be using that they currently are not completely or formally using. These methods include:

- Partnering with other departments and organizations, not just fire technical colleges
- Increasing diversity recruitment
- Branding
- Formalizing personal recommendations

The third research question asked "Which recruiting methods identified should be used by the Fargo Fire Department to increase the number of firefighter applicants?" Reasons for using or not using a particular recruitment method include cost, time, and effectiveness. After researching this topic it was identified in many sources that recruitment is one of the most important tasks for any organization and should receive a high priority. it can be pointed out that the cost of recruiting may be high, but the cost of not getting enough applicants or enough high quality applicants is very high. The research suggests the Fargo Fire Department should begin formally using all four of the methods identified that they currently do not use. Some of the methods do get some partial or informal use in Fargo such as partnering and personal recommendations. In the case of these examples where Fargo uses them a little, the methods need to be maximized for effectiveness. This includes formalizing and institutionalizing their use.

Partnering with other departments or organizations assists by increasing the reach and resources of your current system. Partnerships can take place in many different manners. A good starting place is the human resources department because they are the closest and likely the most involved in recruiting for the fire department. Beyond the human resources there are many other places that might make sense to partner with to begin building a wider recruitment base. Some of these places include local high schools,

colleges, and universities. It should also be noted that partnering with these organizations means more than just advertising with them. Other potential organizations to partner with might include other fire departments, the military, churches, or athletic clubs.

Increasing diversity recruitment opens up a whole new potential pool of candidates if prior recruitment has not previously focused upon diverse groups. In Fargo there is currently not a focus or increased effort to find diverse applicants. To find diverse applicants it is helpful to advertise and seek them out at clubs, groups, and organizations where they are members. It is also helpful to provide assistance to these groups with the application process because it may be difficult, confusing, or unfamiliar to them.

Branding can be used to market your organization or fire department. It begins with the organization or fire department describing who they are. They do this by defining what they do, what they represent, and what their values are. This helps potential applicants by showing them what the job will be like and what kind of person is being sought by the organization. Ideally this will attract applicants that want the specific kind of work you are recruiting for. At the same time it lets applicants that are not the right fit know that it may not be a place they want to work. Branding helps market the organization to those who are likely to fit well with it.

Personal recommendations were identified as one of the most effective methods to attract the best employees. Many workplaces use personal recommendations, but in an informal manner. Institutionalizing personal recommendations formalizes this process to make it more effective. For organizations that use this method in a formal manner, it becomes a large part of their recruitment process. By this it is meant that they inform and teach employees to actively seek out people who would fit well with their organization. The employees are also taught that this is a continuous process because you don’t know when you will run into a potential applicant that would fit well with the organization. Employees are then encouraged to both make contact with these people and recommend them to the organization. (Smart & Street, 2008)

Discussion

The results of this study show that the Fargo Fire department is not using a wide variety of recruiting methods for new firefighter applicants. It also shows that other fire departments in the region are using similar recruiting methods. Some of the fire departments in the region are receiving an ideal number of firefighter applicants, but some are not even though the methods used are similar. This may indicate that each fire department needs to review their recruitment process and numbers to learn if they are as effective as they would like to be. If they find they are not as effective as they would like to be either because their numbers are low, their applicants are unqualified, or their applicants are not diversified, then they may need to look at new and different recruitment methods.

The results also showed that the actual number of firefighter applicants in Fargo which ranged from 66-73 over the last three application periods is well below the desired level of 100-150 (J. Lyon, personal communication, April 8th, 2015). The questionnaire sent to other human resource departments in the region showed applicant numbers over the last three application periods fluctuated, ranging from an average high of 179 from the third most recent application period to an average low of 133 in the second most recent application period. Compared to the results found in the literature review, the Fargo Fire Department should be taking advantage of additional recruiting methods that were identified to help boost the number of firefighter applicants. The findings identified four methods the Fargo Fire Department could use to increase the number of firefighter applicants. Some of the literature reviewed explained the importance of not just focusing on the number of applicants, but rather focusing upon the quality of the applicants. It should also be noted that “the biggest challenge in hiring is not determining skill but rather determining whether or not someone has the right attitude to be a good fit in your organization” (Murphy, 2012, p. xiv).

The research shows that the Fargo Fire Department is using the same basic methods to recruit that many other cities in the region with full-time fire departments are using. These methods appear to work, but not very effectively for Fargo. Half of the responding human resource questionnaires felt their

recruiting was very effective. Four methods were identified that have the potential to both increase the number and quality of firefighter applicants for the fire department in the City of Fargo.

The implications of the research could positively impact the Fargo Fire Department and its ability to attract a sufficient number of qualified firefighter applicants well into the future. If the recommendations are not followed Fargo may continue on with similar numbers of firefighter applicants well below the desired level. As the city grows, more applicants may be needed, creating a divergence between the actual number of applicants and the desired number of applicants. It is also possible that outside forces could further negatively impact the applicant numbers. By taking advantage of and implementing new recruiting methods the Fargo Fire Department could likely raise the number and quality of firefighter applicants. A quote by John Zillmer in the book *Who* explains it best, "I think the fastest way to improve a company's performance is to improve the talent of the workforce" (Smart & Street, 2008, p.17).

Instituting new recruitment methods may also help bring more attention to the formal recruitment process and encourage the fire department to evaluate and analyze the effectiveness of their recruitment process. In the fire service there is a constant expectation to perform at a very high level under stressful and less than ideal conditions. This requires finding and recruiting people with strong attitudes, values, character, and work ethics. To ensure we retain the highest quality people and therefore the highest level of service we must be sure to start where we begin looking for people. We should start with high quality recruiting practices which can lead to high quality applicants.

If the recruiting in Fargo is not approached in the future as an active process applicant numbers could increase or decrease based upon many factors, some internal and some external, and the fire department might not recognize there is a problem in time. It is important that Fargo actively participates in recruiting with human resources to monitor applicant numbers and recruiting effectiveness. This can help to ensure that the Fargo Fire Department will know whether there is always a desired number of firefighter applicants before it becomes an major issue.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations for the Fargo Fire Department based upon the results found in this research. The first recommendation pertains to increasing the focus and participation of the recruitment process. For the Fargo Fire Department this means getting more actively involved in the recruitment process with human resources. This also means becoming more of a partner to the City of Fargo Human Resources Department. Actively working together can help increase the effectiveness of recruiting practices because it combines resources.

The second recommendation is to evaluate and track recruitment efforts to analyze their effectiveness. Periodic evaluation of the recruitment process will help identify whether efforts are effective. Ideally for Fargo, becoming more involved with and adopting some new recruitment methods will eventually attract the desired number of applicants. Effective recruitment is often an on-going process, so if the ideal number of applicants is reached in Fargo, the process should not end. Fargo should always continue to work with human resource and evaluate recruitment effectiveness.

The third recommendation is for the Fargo Fire Department is to implement the four methods identified to improve recruitment. These methods are partnering with other departments or departments, increasing diversity recruitment, branding, and formalizing personal recommendations.

Partnering with other departments and organizations helps in several ways. By partnering you can often gain output or effectiveness without putting a lot more in. Partnering can save money and time for fire departments while also producing more results. For recruiting, this may mean more applicants or even better qualified applicants without deploying a lot more resources.

Increasing diversity recruitment means actively looking for firefighter applicants and recruiting them in places you may have missed reaching applicants during prior recruitment periods. This has the potential to open new pools of candidates that you won’t reach with current recruiting and advertising methods. Along with opening up new pools of candidates, this method may also assist with making your fire department more representative of the population that it serves.

Branding is a way for the fire department to let applicants know who they are and what they represent. This starts with the organization identifying what it is and what it is about. After a fire department figures this out, they can use it to advertise and reach potential applicants who want to be a part of, or who would fit well in the organization because they can identify with the brand. Without the brand applicants don't know important information about the fire department seeking them out.

Formalizing personal recommendations may be one of the most effective methods to recruit firefighter applicants who are likely to be successful in your organization. This process starts with educating current employees about how important recruitment is and how it should be done. When employees are educated on the process they can be encouraged to recruit and recommend applicants.

Fire Departments need to be actively involved in recruiting new firefighters. Many children grow up seeing firefighters as heroes and wanting to become one when they grow up. This has no doubt helped as a recruitment tool for the fire service over the years, but the world surrounding the fire service is becoming more competitive and more sophisticated in attracting employees. For the fire service to compete they must become an active part of recruitment. They must analyze and evaluate effectiveness of the methods they're using to recruit firefighters. This will help to ensure there are always enough qualified applicants who can become great firefighters, who can become great officers, who can lead the fire service and carry on its reputation for excellence into the future.

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Appendix A
Fargo Fire Department Firefighter Job Posting

www.cityoffargo.com

Firefighter

The City of Fargo is seeking qualified individuals for the position of Firefighter.

SALARY: 2015 annual starting salary is **$45,748 ($3812/month)** plus benefits.

POSITION QUALIFICATIONS: Applicant must be a high school graduate or equivalent (GED) and must have a minimum of **one** of the following:

1. An Associate of Science Degree; or
2. An approved Fire Fighter I/II curriculum certification which conforms to NFPA 1001 **and** successful completion of 60 college semester hours in any subject; or
3. Successful completion of 90 college semester hours in any subject; or
4. Equivalent education and experience.

SUBMIT WITH APPLICATION: OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPTS (See Fire Fighter Applicant Handbook page 2 for details), copies of course documentation and certifications and Attachment #1 (Notice to Applicant for Fire Fighter Position- Applicant/Medical Provider Statement).

ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS: The applicant must obtain national certification as an Emergency Medical Technician within the probationary period (one year). The applicant must have the ability to understand the English language, written and spoken. They must pass a physical agility test that will demonstrate they possess adequate physical ability to perform all duties and be able to utilize all issued equipment under hazardous conditions. In addition, they will participate in an oral interview with a panel representing Human Resources and Fire officials. Following a conditional offer of employment applicant are subject to a background investigation and shall be required to successfully pass a pre-placement medical examination (includes drug screen), psychological exam and a polygraph exam.

CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT: Applicant must possess a valid driver's license with a good driving record. Appointees to the position of Firefighter are also subject to all applicable provisions of federal and state law; the Ordinances of the City of Fargo as set forth in the Fargo Municipal Code; all City of Fargo Employment policies; and all applicable departmental rules, regulations and standard operating procedures.

EXAMINATION INFORMATION: Only those who have applied in a timely manner, meet minimum qualifications and have received notification will be admitted to the written examination. Those applicants not meeting the minimum qualifications or not meeting the deadline for receipt of applications will be notified of their ineligibility and notified not to report for the written examination.

WRITTEN EXAMINATION: Qualified applicants will be notified in writing of the time, date and location of testing. Writing materials and examination booklets will be supplied. Do not bring any materials into the examination room.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: Application packets are available at the Human Resources Office, Fargo City Hall, 200 Third Street North, Fargo, ND 58102 (701-241-1321), or at Job Service North Dakota, 1350 32nd Street S, Fargo, ND 58103 (701-239-7301); or by requesting a packet by e-mailing hre-mail@cityoffargo.com. All requests for application packets must be made in a timely manner as to allow enough time for the applicant to receive, assemble all the required documents, and complete and return the application with required Attachment #1 by the deadline date. Applications must be received or postmarked no later than **4:00 PM, Friday, May 29, 2015** at **City of Fargo, Human Resources Department, Attn: Jennifer Lyon, 200 3rd Street North, Fargo, ND 58102. EOE**

Appendix B
Human Resources Questionnaire

1. What would be the ideal number of new firefighter applicants for each application period for your fire department?
    a. 0-50
    b. 50-100
    c. 100-150
    d. 150-200
    e. 200+
2. What do you believe prevents your fire department from getting more new firefighter applicants? Check all boxes that apply.
    a. We get an appropriate or optimal number of candidates
    b. Compensation and benefit package
    c. A lack of diversity in the fire department
    d. The type of work
    e. Insufficient recruiting, advertising, job awareness
    f. Process is unfamiliar or difficult for applicants
    g. Minimum application requirements are too high
    h. Outside forces
    i. Other? explain:_____
3. How many applications did you receive from each of the past three new firefighter application periods?
    a. Most recent:_____
    b. Next Most recent:_____
    c. Third most recent:_____
4. What recruitment methods do you currently use for new firefighter applicants? Check all that apply.
    a. None, fire department does all recruiting
    b. Traditional advertising (newspaper, job posting)
    c. Electronic advertising (social media, email)
    d. Personal recommendations
    e. Other (please specify):_____
5. How effective would you rate your new firefighter recruiting?
    a. Very effective
    b. Somewhat effective
    c. Not effective
    d. Not sure
6. What recruiting method do you believe would be the most effective to increase the number of new firefighter applicants?
    a. _____
7. Is there anything else you would like to add or consider applicable to the data I am trying to collect?
    a. _____