



Fire Recruitment and Retention Work Group Report

Background & Data

The Anne Arundel County Fire Recruitment and Retention Work Group was formed in April 2023 to evaluate the demographic composition of the Anne Arundel County Fire Department, and to make recommendations for diversification of the workforce. The Work Group included representatives from the Office of the County Executive, Office of Equity and Human Rights, Fire Department, Office of Personnel, and the Caucus of African American Leaders. This Work Group served as part of a county-wide diversity effort to identify and engage underrepresented groups in county hiring and partnerships.

The Work Group primarily focused on African American representation in the Fire Department; however, it was understood that the analysis and recommendations may be applicable to other underrepresented groups. After reviewing national and local data, and understanding that the population data includes persons who would be ineligible to serve as an EMT/Firefighter due to age and level of physical fitness, the Work Group made three conclusions.

National Population*	
Group	Percentage
Men	49.5
Women	50.5
White	75.8
Hispanic/Latino	18.9
Black	13.6
Asian	6.1

National Firefighter Workforce**	
Group	Percentage
Men	95.6
Women	4.4
White	85
Hispanic/Latino	13.1
Black	8.4
Asian	13.1

* National population includes persons who would be ineligible to work due to age.

** Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020

County Population*	
Group	Percentage
Men	49.7
Women	50.3
White	72.3
Hispanic/Latino	19.1
Black	19.1
Asian	4.5

County EMT/Firefighter Workforce	
Group	Percentage
Men	91.3
Women	8.7
White	88
Hispanic/Latino	2.1
Black	8.1
Asian	.5
Other	1.4

First, African Americans are underrepresented in firefighting nationally. As of 2020, African Americans represent 13.6% of the population, but 8.4% of the firefighting workforce. Second, African Americans are underrepresented in the Anne Arundel County Fire Department’s workforce, constituting 19.1% of the county’s population, but 8.1% of Fire Department personnel. Finally, the county’s percentage of African American EMT/Firefighters (8.1%) compared to the county’s African American population (19.1%) is less representative than the national percentage of African American Firefighters (8.4%) compared to the nation’s African American population (13.6%).

The Work Group recognized that lack of representation of African American individuals in the firefighter workforce is a national pattern, allowing the Work Group to seek out resources from other jurisdictions working to diversify their EMT/Firefighters. These resources included the 2015 RAND Corporation’s study [“Recommendations for Improving the Recruiting and Hiring of Los Angeles Firefighters,”](#) Harvard Business Review article [“Making U.S. Fire Departments More Diverse and Inclusive,”](#) and litigation summaries from *United States and Vulcan Society v. City of New York*. The Work Group found that publicly available data and resources from neighboring jurisdictions in Maryland was limited.

* County population includes persons who would be ineligible to work due to age.

Current Recruitment Practices

The Anne Arundel County Fire Department employs a designated Recruiter and maintains a Community Outreach Office to engage with residents and potential recruits. The Fire Department estimates that their team participates in about ten “recruitment” events a month, in addition to about eighteen “friendly firefighter” events a month. Friendly firefighter events focus on reaching young people at an impactful age for their future career. These events are staffed by a diverse group of EMT/Firefighters who are skilled in connecting with community members.

As part of their targeted outreach, the Fire Department has conducted recruitment and friendly firefighter events at venues where they can reach larger numbers of African Americans, including visits to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), athletic teams, scouts, churches and other houses of worship, summer camp, job fairs, other community events and organizations, and most middle schools, high schools, and colleges in the region.

The Fire Department has adapted its recruitment strategy to be responsive to the current recruiting climate, especially with respect to the increasing use of technology to build relationships with prospective candidates. The department has added a digital recruitment officer to manage recruitment on social media and modernize their outreach strategies. Relying heavily on digital outreach in response to the pandemic, a decrease in in-person recruitment opportunities, and a shift in residents’ personal habits has allowed the department to reach a wider range of candidates, and a younger workforce.

Another new addition to the recruitment process is internal recruitment. To reach even more candidates, application information is shared with all EMT/Firefighters, who are encouraged to share the information with their networks and serve as a direct resource for interested applicants and new recruits.

Current Hiring Practices

The hiring process for Anne Arundel County EMT/Firefighters is governed by the county’s Administrative Code and collective bargaining agreements. Hiring is a collaborative process involving both the Office of Personnel and the Fire Department.





The Work Group reviewed application data from 2019* provided by the Office of Personnel and assessed where candidates no longer move forward in the process. The data showed that the highest drop off point is after candidates are invited to the Candidate Physical Agility Test (CPAT), with 66.5% of candidates in 2019 who made it to that point in the process not moving forward from “Invitation to CPAT” to “Pass.” The second highest drop off point in the process is after the initial application, with 38.8% of total candidates in 2019 not moving forward from “Application” to “Taking the Written Exam.”

As a part of the county’s ongoing discussions about increasing diversity in the Fire Department and streamlining the recruitment process, in 2021 the county conducted a survey of applicants from 2017 and 2019 to understand how many individuals would be interested in participating in the next recruit class, receive feedback on the process, and understand why an individual was no longer in the process. Approximately 4,000 candidates were invited to take part in the survey, and approximately 214 individuals responded to the survey. In response to feedback collected in the survey and in an effort to increase diversity of recruitment classes, the hiring process was updated to better identify the best candidates and decrease barriers to completing the hiring process.

The Fire Department works with vendors to design examinations, and the Office of Personnel analyzes the process for potential adverse impacts on applicants. Morris & McDaniel, a nationally recognized screening vendor, conduct both the written exam and oral interview, and score them using a diverse panel of experts. The examination process now takes place over one weekend instead of being divided up over multiple weekends, reducing the number of trips a candidate must take to complete the hiring process. These updates have made the process logistically easier for candidates, and sped the hiring process up.

The Fire Department is exploring the feasibility of hosting the exam more often and at more sites throughout the county, making it more accessible to candidates across the region. Additionally, the Fire Department has added another tier to its comprehensive Candidate Physical Agility Test (CPAT) mentoring program to allow candidates who fail their initial CPAT an opportunity to try again. Lastly, the county has begun separating job postings for paramedics and firefighters, allowing the county to advertise the higher pay range and more specifically target candidates for each posting.

* The 2019 examinations were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have impacted drop off rates

Recommendations

The Work Group concluded that the best course of action to increase African American representation in the Fire Department is to utilize recruitment efforts to diversify the applicant pool, resulting in more African American candidates progressing through the recruitment and hiring process. Additionally, the Work Group advises that the Fire Department should ensure that African American members of the workforce feel encouraged to stay with Anne Arundel County and have opportunities for mentorship, professional growth, leadership, and promotions available in the department.

After reviewing the Anne Arundel County Fire Department’s current practices and procedures for recruitment and hiring, discussing potential barriers to employment in the field, and researching best practices of other jurisdictions, the Work Group presents the following recommendations to the County Executive to increase African American representation in the Anne Arundel County Fire Department and asks the administration to consider the resources needed to move forward with these recommendations.

1. Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation, the Fire Department, the Anne Arundel County Public School System, the Paragons of Anne Arundel County, and the Caucus of African American Leaders should work together to develop a proposal for a youth engagement and intern program, specifically for prospective underrepresented candidates to introduce underrepresented groups of people to the fire and emergency services.
2. The Fire Department should maintain a current list of community contacts with assistance from the County Executive’s Office of Community Engagement & Constituent Services, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the United Black Clergy, the Caucus of African American Leaders, and other partners. The Fire Department shall provide their recruitment officers name and contact information to community partners and stakeholders.
3. The Fire Department should develop and maintain a recruitment plan to increase African American representation in the workforce.
4. The Fire Department should work with the Caucus of African American leaders and other community organizations to advocate for policies that will allow the department to increase diversity in all ranks.
5. The Fire Chief should meet quarterly with the local chapter of the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters, at their request, to discuss recruitment, hiring, and professional improvement and development for minority members.
6. The Fire Department will maintain workforce demographic data and make it publicly available.

