



CITY OF SAN JOSE RESPONSE TO  
THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE  
2019-2020 SANTA CLARA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY REPORT,  
“WHY AREN’T THERE MORE FEMALE FIREFIGHTERS IN  
SANTA CLARA COUNTY?”

**Finding 1a: Recruiting**

*A lack of effort to recruit female firefighter candidates to apply for positions in Palo Alto, Santa Clara County, and San Jose Fire Department’s has resulted in very few female firefighters being hired.*

The City disagrees partially with this finding. Numbers of San José Fire Department (SJFD) female firefighters trended downward from the peak high of 43 in 2010 to 17 in 2020. While neither number is an acceptable representation of the greater community that SJFD serves, recent recruitment efforts have yielded positive results and the Department is committed to maintaining and expanding those efforts. SJFD supports Explorer Post 888, a Learning for Life Corporation Exploring program that introduces the fire service to male and female youth from sixth grade to age 20. Explorer Post 888 provides didactic and manipulative curricula introducing Explorers to all aspects of the fire service. In 2017, the Department hosted FireOps 101 to increase public awareness of fire services and career opportunities. FireOps 101 provided participants with the opportunity to work alongside professional firefighters in simulated emergency mitigation scenarios. SJFD hosted Women’s Boot Camp events in 2019 and 2020 specifically focused on encouraging and inspiring women to pursue careers in the fire service. The Department has also increased its presence on social media platforms to increase community engagement, highlighting Department activities, providing fire safety and health information, and introducing SJFD personnel through video presentations. In addition to maintaining current efforts, the Department will continue to pursue opportunities to increase recruitment reach and effectiveness.

**Recommendation 1**

*Palo Alto, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San Jose Fire Department should develop, fund, and implement a plan to increase recruiting efforts to grow their number of female firefighters. Individual plans should be developed by June 2021.*

Recommendation requires further analysis. San José Fire Department (SJFD) is currently drawing from a newly established Firefighter Recruit eligibility list. It is anticipated that the next list will be established for use in 2023. SJFD has already initiated efforts to increase outreach, provide in person learning and mentoring, and to broaden applicant pool diversity. SJFD will continue to support current effective recruitment programs including Explorer Post 888, annual Women’s Boot Camps, and community outreach efforts; however, new recruitment strategies and initiatives will require further evaluation to address broader diversity hiring challenges and to identify timing and funding needs. Further, opportunities for regional collaboration amongst fire agencies, educational institutions, affinity groups and other stakeholders will require time to assess and develop.

**Finding 2: Mentoring**

*Talent and knowledge are lost or wasted in organizations that do not create a mentoring program. Mentoring potential recruits and firefighters currently is voluntary, loosely defined, and unpaid, which hampers recruiting efforts in the SCC Region.*

The City disagrees partially with this finding. Welcoming, coaching and mentoring prospective Firefighter Recruit candidates is a longstanding tradition in the San José Fire Department (SJFD). Candidates are encouraged to visit fire stations and firefighters are encouraged to accommodate meetings while on duty. Successful candidates often comment on how they benefitted from the coaching and mentoring that resulted from fire station visits. One of the objectives of the annual Women's Boot Camp is to connect SJFD female firefighters with prospective female applicants. Promotional processes for supervisory ranks of Fire Captain and Battalion Chief are clearly defined and include State Fire Marshal Fire Officer courses covering multiple aspects of job elements and are taught by fire service professionals. These courses are offered on a recurring basis by the Department and employees are eligible for education reimbursement benefits. Employees interested in senior management positions may participate in the City's Mentorship Program, develop mentor-mentee relationship with peers and/or supervisors, and the Fire Chief accepts all employee requests for career development engagement. The Department agrees that mentoring is an important aspect of career development and will continue to evaluate and strengthen existing mentoring pathways and pursue other viable opportunities.

### **Recommendation 2**

*Fire departments in the SCC Region should develop, fund, and implement mentoring programs. Mentors should advise and guide potential recruits, new recruits, and current firefighters. Mentoring programs should include visits to local schools and organizations to demonstrate encouragement of female candidates. Individual plans should be developed by June 2021 by Mountain View, Palo Alto, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Departments.*

This recommendation will be implemented. In 2019, the San José Fire Department (SJFD) convened a recruitment stakeholder meeting to advance diversity recruitment Strategic Business Plan goals. A clear outcome of this meeting was to increase outreach by recruiting and building relationships at educational institutions and other organizations. Unfortunately, the 2020 recruitment cycle coincided with the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, efforts were focused on conducting outreach through social media and other platforms that did not require in-person visits. The Department will resume these efforts when safe to do so.

### **Finding 3: Opportunity for Promotion**

*Although there is an insufficient pool of women firefighters, the SCC Region fire departments are promoting women to management positions.*

The City disagrees partially with this finding. Currently the number of female firefighters in the San José Fire Department (SJFD) less than half of what it was at its peak in 2010. While numbers are presently trending upwards, only six female firefighters currently hold ranks that would enable them to compete for senior management positions. While the Department works to increase hiring diversity, it may take some time before outcomes are reflected in senior management ranks.

### **Finding 4a: Accommodations**

*There is a lack of gender-separate accommodations for bathing, sleeping, and dressing in fire stations in the Mountain View Fire Department, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Department, which can cause privacy concerns for all firefighters.*

The City disagrees partially with this finding. The Department presently operates from 33 fire stations. Specific provisions to ensure that gender privacy is addressed are contained in each Fire Station

Procedures Manual. The newest fire stations provide single person privacy accommodations including sleeping quarters, bathrooms, and locker access. The oldest fire stations were built with common space dormitories, bathrooms, and locker rooms. Modifications intended to provide for greater privacy have been completed at all older fire stations. The extent of modifications in some cases was limited by building design, available space, and cost.

**Recommendation 4d**

*Because San Jose Fire Department has four stations with no separate locker rooms for women, 14 stations with no separate dorms for women, and four stations with no separate restrooms with showers for women, the City of San José should develop a plan to create better privacy for all firefighters. The plan should be developed by June 2021.*

This recommendation will be implemented. The Department will gather employee concerns, reassess all fire station conditions, and develop a revised workplan. The Fire Chief will receive a proposed workplan by May 2021. Employee concerns and a proposed work plan will be presented to the City Manager.

**Finding 5: Work Environment**

*Although every SCC Region entity has a non-discrimination policy, the unique work setting of a fire department coupled with the low number of women in fire service presents out-of-the-ordinary workplace challenges because they live together and rely on each other during life-or-death situations. These unique features of this workplace make it more challenging for women to report discrimination and/or harassment.*

The City disagrees wholly with this finding. Annually, each employee is required to review the City's Discrimination and Harassment Policy which includes both direct and confidential options for reporting discrimination and/or harassment both within and outside of the City organization. The policy also affirms intolerance for retaliation or reprisals against witnesses or employees who in good faith file harassment or discrimination complaints or provide information in an investigation. Additionally, all employees receive recurring sexual harassment training as required by California law and, the City offers several avenues for any employee, including sworn female fire personnel, to report concerns including to the City's Office of Employee Relations and/or to raise anonymous concerns via the City's Whistleblower Hotline.

The Department recognizes the unique nature of the fire service organization and the challenges that firefighters confront in the course of their daily work-but does not believe that this makes it more challenging for a female in the fire service to report alleged violations of the City's Discrimination and Harassment Policy.

**Recommendation 5**

*To address the unique challenges of promoting a gender-inclusive work culture for women in the setting of a fire department, each fire department in the SCC Region should develop city- or county-approved plans that focus on the remedies to the challenges of the fire service workplace for women. These plans should be developed by the Mountain View Fire Department, Palo Alto Fire Department, Santa County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Department by June 2021.*

This recommendation will be implemented. The San José Fire Department will convene an employee group to identify workplace challenges for female firefighters, develop a workplan, monitor workplan progress, and revise on an annual basis. An initial report from this group will be provided to the Fire Chief in May 2021. Findings and a proposed work plan will be presented to the City Manager.

**Finding 6: Gear**

*Due to ill-fitting uniforms and gear, women are not on a similar footing as their male counterparts. Women should feel secure in their everyday uniforms and formal wear and, for safety reasons, have properly fitting gear when engaged in firefighting.*

The City agrees with this finding. While the Department has no evidence that this circumstance has resulted in compromises firefighter safety, the Department has confirmed that employees would like more sizing and style options for uniforms and other worn personal protective garments.

**Recommendation 6**

*All fire departments in the SCC Region should make correctly fitting uniforms for women available and ensure that a sufficient supply of firefighting and specialty gear is available in women's sizes and the time they begin work. This plan for procurement should be implemented by June 2021 by Mountain View Fire Department, Palo Alto Fire Department, Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, and San José Fire Department.*

This recommendation requires further analysis. To determine available options for uniform styles and gear sizes, the San José Fire Department will seek feedback from vendors and manufacturers. The Department will convene an employee group to take on this task and an initial report will be due to the Fire Chief in May 2021. Findings and a proposed work plan will be presented to the City Manager.