



A Fire Service for All:

Exploring Ways to Further Diversity and Inclusivity for Women in the Canadian Fire Industry

A Report Back and Action Plan from the Joint Meeting of the CAFC Women Fire Chiefs and Company Officers Network and the Alberta Fire, Emergency Management and Wildfire Management Women (AFEW).

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From the CAFC President and Committee Co-Chairs

We are pleased to present this report entitled *A Fire Service for All: Exploring Ways to Further Diversity and Inclusivity for Women in the Canadian Fire Industry*. This report synthesizes the findings from the September 13, 2019 joint meeting of the Alberta Fire, Emergency Management and Wildfire Management Women (A FEW Women), and the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) Women Fire Chiefs and Company Officers Network of Canada.

This is an important report for the CAFC. Diversity, equity and inclusion with a focus on gender and more recently on race and ethnicity are a core priority for the CAFC. They are viewed and embraced as fundamental to our future success as a sector, and not as a special interest pursuit. Our thanks to the AFEW Women who co-hosted this national event in their home province and to the Government of Alberta who supplied a facilitator for the event and who provided thoughtful review of this report, as well as to all our provincial counterparts across the country.

For many who attended the September 13 meeting, this was the largest meeting of women in the fire service that they had ever attended. The session was followed by an all “allies” meeting. This report, therefore, synthesizes both portions. The result is not only the learnings which we have documented, but also calls to action.

For the women who attended this meeting, we thank you for your leadership and willingness to think about how we can best support women currently in the fire service and how we can create environments that will attract and retain more women into the industry. You are trailblazers. We recognize the irony and burden of this. We hope your experiences will help to normalize the opportunity for more women to “enter, stay and succeed” in the fire service.

For all of the allies reading this report, we thank you for the transformational changes you are helping to lead and the support you already provide. It is our hope and belief that in recommendations focussed here on addressing issues related to women in the fire service, will also create a better environment for everyone.

Finally, to all our readers, thank you for reading. We hope it helps achieve “a fire service for all”. If you have any questions please don’t hesitate to contact the CAFC Executive Director, Dr. Tina Saryeddine at tsaryeddine@cafc.ca.



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A Fire Service for All: Exploring Ways to Further Diversity and Inclusivity for Women in the Canadian Fire Industry

Executive Summary

On September 13, 2019, the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) and the Alberta Women in Fire, Emergency Management and Wildfire Management (AFEW women) hosted a joint session to answer the question: *“Imagine the fire service of 2040 - what structural, cultural, managerial, and operational changes need to occur to enable more women to enter, stay and succeed in the fire sector”*.

Over forty women supporters, firefighters, company officers and chiefs from different parts of the country, and at different stages in their careers, participated in a one-day meeting. The results of this meeting provided awareness around areas that need to be addressed at the local and national level, as well as opportunities for provincial leaders and the CAFC to explore ways to help women succeed in the Fire Service. Two days later, the results of the session were presented at an “all allies” session of nearly 250 male and female fire service leaders.

The two meetings yielded several common themes. First, the time has come. There is very little resistance in principle to the needs, possibilities, and goals of a more inclusive fire service. In fact, one participant said the goal is to “make it a non-issue by normalizing the success of women in the fire service”. With such willingness, the overall theme changes from “whether” and “when” we diversify and include women and minorities in the fire service, to “how” we optimize our success.

This report summarizes in detail the feedback from the experts involved. There are recommendations at the local, regional, and national level. All of the items identified in the section on national support are seen as reasonable and important by the CAFC membership and Board. The question is where to start and how to do this in a manner that is sustainable and appropriate to the mission of the CAFC – an organization that seeks to achieve diversity and inclusion as part of its vision for public safety. To this end, the report examined the CAFC’s current mission, vision, and infrastructure, as well as the expertise of the many well-established provincial groups, and proposes an action plan with three near-term components. These are:

1. Celebration and Identification: This part of the Action Plan is to identify and recognize the current cadre of women leaders in the fire sector. In addition, there is a need to provide alternate images, data, and mentoring, as well as to recognize, acknowledge, and learn from departments with leading practices. You have to see it, to be it.

2. Emerging Leader and Ally Assistance: The second part of the Action Plan takes a deep dive into the specific issues that need to be addressed or for which guidance is needed with the goal, to help departments who want to succeed in this area. The plan will allow them to identify specific areas where guidelines would be helpful. This part of the action plan also identifies emerging leaders and offers them an opportunity to identify specific real time issues and request a mentor to help build their awareness and acumen in this area.

3. Best Practices and Evaluation: This portion of the Action Plan provides available tools and resources, as well as “Ten Tips” sheets that can help provide guidance on addressing diversity issues. The resources will be developed, adapted or adopted, implemented through supportive measures, and evaluated. This will enable us to measure progress over time.

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1. Background

The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) was founded in 1909 to “Unite Canada’s Fire Service Leaders”, and is an independent, not-for-profit organization representing approximately 3,500 fire departments across Canada. Its mission is to promote the highest standard of public safety in an ever-changing and increasingly complex world to ensure the protection of the public through leadership, advocacy, and active collaboration with key stakeholders. Although the CAFC is generally comprised of individual fire service leaders, it also aims to connect Canada’s provincial, territorial and allied associations and external stakeholders for the advancement of public and fire-fighter safety and houses the National Advisory Council (NAC), consisting of all related Provincial/Territorial Fire Chief Associations and National Affiliate organizations.

In 2017, the CAFC identified diversity and inclusion as a key strategic direction, viewing it as necessary to the sustainability of the fire service. The same year its members elected the first woman chief to its board of directors. To advance their vision, mission, and policy priorities, in late 2017 the Board of Directors adopted a new Operating Plan that set Diversity and Inclusion, including addressing culture and recruitment issues, as a 2018 Policy Focus for the Association.

In advancing this focus area, a dedicated Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Committee was formed under the leadership of Chief Keri Martens and Ret. Chief Laurie VandeSchoot. In 2018, the Board worked to meet the goals outlined by the Diversity and Inclusion Committee by establishing the Women Fire Chiefs and Company Officers Network of Canada (WFCCONC), under the auspice of the D&I Committee and co-chaired by Chiefs Martens and VandeSchoot. This Network has 21 founding members, many of whom are well-established fire chiefs, and their purpose is to help make CAFC, and the fire service as a whole, reflect the richness of Canadian society through policy leadership, mentorship, networking, education, and the celebration of female leaders.

2. Women In the Canadian Fire Service

Equality legislation¹ implemented in Canada since the 1970s has facilitated the influx of an increasing number of Canadian women into male-dominated occupations². However, this has not been the case in firefighting. While there are a few departments across Canada that exceed the norm, according to research done by the P-SEC Research Group (2019), only approximately 4.4% of firefighters, career, and volunteer, in Canada are women³. Considering that there are approximately 152,650 firefighters in Canada⁴, extrapolating that means that only about 6717 of them are likely women. The Fire Service is significantly underrepresented by women compared to peer groups where females constitute 20 percent of police officers or detectives, 21 percent of paramedics or EMTs, and 20 percent of the military⁵. Other professions such as the professions of lawyer, doctor and veterinarian that have traditionally been dominated by men (and at one time were 100 percent male) are now averaging a minimum of fifty percent female representation and in some cases, much higher. Some researchers have argued that the demanding physical nature of firefighting probably explains why women are underrepresented⁶. However, findings from Canada, the US and Australia suggest that there are a number of other factors that may be playing a key role in keeping women out of firefighting. Those factors include long-term health impacts, gender dimorphism, ill-fitting gear, and a lack of appropriate equipment, facilities, and PPE. Concerns surrounding on-the-job discrimination and sexual harassment stand out as additional key factors that may be impacting women's participation in the field⁷. The answer to why women are so underrepresented in the fire service remains unclear, however, because few studies have investigated the everyday experiences of female firefighters on the job, especially in the Canadian context and most of these studies do not include female volunteer firefighters.

Over the last 30-40 years that women have begun to be hired and accepted into the fire service, there have been many difficult adjustments for the fire service⁸. Some researchers have argued that the Fire Service is steeped in tradition and formalized paramilitary relationships, with many similarities in structure, culture, and operations to military organizations⁹. Much like military groups, fire departments have formed distinctive cultural characteristics as a direct result of the need of such teams to be prepared to perform high-risk, highly interdependent frontline operations. In doing so, the service has deliberate and powerful socialization systems and processes which create tight-knit communities that value strength, courage, and loyalty, but which can be resistant to change and in which in-groups undoubtedly develop¹⁰.

¹Through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 15

²Hughes, P. (1995). *Recognizing Substantive Equality as a Foundational Constitutional Principle*, Dalhousie University.

³Statistics Canada (2017). 2017: *The Year in Statistics*. Government of Canada.

⁴Haynes, H & Stein G (2018). *Canadian Fire Department Profile, 2014-2016*. National Fire Protection Association.

⁵Poulin, C., Gouliquer, L., & McWilliams, J. (2019). *Othering of full-time and volunteer women firefighters in the Canadian fire services*. Qualitative Sociology Review.


⁶Flynn, K. (2000). *Despite Recruiting, Few Women Do Well in Firefighting Tests*. The New York Times.

⁷Floren (1980, 1981); Murphy, Beaton, Cain, & Pike (1994); Rosell, Miller, & Barber (1995); Wang & Kleiner (2001); Yoder & Aniakudo (1996); Yoder & Berendsen (2001); Yoder & McDonald (1998)

⁸FEMA (1999). *Many Women Strong: A Handbook for Women Firefighters*. US Department of Homeland Security.

⁹Pinch, F. (2006). *Challenge and Change in the Military: Gender and Diversity Issues*. Canadian Forces Leadership Institute.

¹⁰Weiss, P (1998). *Fire/EMS Merger: An Examination of Cultural Differences*. Fire Engineering, Issue 9, Vol 151.



One of the intended consequences of these socializing influences is the development of the cohesive, highly motivated groups deemed necessary for group survival and successful missions. One unintended, and often negative, result however, is the emergence of norms, values, and stereotypes that exclude the “not like us” groups¹¹.

Traditionally, this “tight culture” has served the firefighting purpose well, as team members rely heavily on one another in life-threatening fire and rescue operations. Although this reliance still exists, the nature of fire service has changed and today, there is an ever-broadening range of roles including increased calls for community safety, public service, high quality emergency medical care and non-emergency assistance. This evolution has required the fire service to develop additional specialized skills, including interpersonal communications and interaction with diverse audiences and to recognize that an inclusive and respectful workplace is an essential element of a psychologically safe and mentally healthy work environment. Societal norms and expectations are also shifting, such as mental well being, human and equality rights, and accommodation of religious and cultural differences, which can sometimes intersect with our own traditions and historical practices and have a direct impact on how the organizational culture is expected to evolve.

3. Diversity, Inclusion and Equity

Although the terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘diversity’ are often linked together, they are not interchangeable. Chief Jona Olssen of Cultural Bridges to Justice¹², notes that ‘inclusion’ is about the environment and culture of the organization. It refers to the mindset and the social environment of the department. An inclusive environment is one that does not require anyone to hide who they are, to minimize their differences to protect themselves from insult or injury or coerce them to assimilate (which diminishes the uniqueness they bring). In an inclusive department the leadership, organizational structure, training, policies, and procedures remove barriers to full participation, while they protect and promote equal opportunity so everyone can succeed.

Diversity, at its core, represents the “people features” of the organization. Diversity manifests in the multitude of human differences in racial and ethnic identity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, spirituality, generation, education, socio-economic background, the presence or absence of a physical, emotional or mental disability, as well as experience, thought, approach, world-view, problem-solving, skill sets, language and communication styles, cultural norms, learning/teaching styles and more.

Olssen notes that too often in today’s emergency services, diversity is sought before the environment is inclusive. Diversity becomes a numbers game, a statistical measurement that induces a department to recruit members from “non-traditional” groups (i.e., other than white, heterosexual males) for the sole purpose of adding to their diversity numbers. A focus simply on numbers ignores the primary objective: to build a diverse workforce to better fulfill the mission of providing the best possible

¹¹Hulett, D., Bendick, M., Thomas, S., & Moccio, F. (2008). *A National Report Card on Women in Firefighting*. Women in Fire.

¹²Olsson, J. (2018). *United in Service: Leadership for Building a Healthy, Resilient and Inclusive Emergency Service*. Cultural Bridges to Justice.



service to the community while protecting the health and safety of fire service personnel. The numbers alone do not mean the work environment is inclusive, welcoming, or supportive of that diversity. In reality, across Canada, many of the fire departments are diverse but not inclusive¹³.

Finally, if we are to address issues of diversity and inclusion, we need to consider equity. Equity is the reason it is not only acceptable, but necessary to pay special attention to various groups who have traditionally been under-represented, or worse, discriminated against. Equity refers to “the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as in their distribution of resources. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society”¹⁴. We cannot create diverse and inclusive workplaces if we are not willing to address issues of equity which may be at the heart of diversion and inclusion challenges.

4. Women Chiefs and Company Officers 2019 Meeting

The inaugural meeting of the WFCCONC was held as a combined face-to-face and virtual lunch gathering during Fire Rescue Canada 2018. At this inaugural meeting, the group agreed that its primary goal would be to hasten the progress for incoming women leaders to enter, stay and succeed in the fire service and fire leadership roles.

Its second meeting was held September 13, 2019, when the CAFC and the Alberta Fire, Emergency management and Wildfire management Women (A FEW Women), hosted a nation-wide “Women Chiefs and Company Officers Meeting” at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Calgary at the prelude of Fire-Rescue Canada 2019. The meeting welcomed all women fire chiefs and company officers to network, plan and share information and was free to attend for both CAFC and non-CAFC women.

The gathering offered women a sense of community and camaraderie, as well as a safe space for sharing experiences and formulating strategies for achieving equity in the fire service. One desired

¹³Fielding, J (2017). *Corporate Management Team Address*. The City of Calgary.

¹⁴<https://independentsector.org/resource/why-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-matter/>



outcome of the meeting was to influence the CAFC 2020 strategic direction and, as decided in the 2018 session, to identify how women, as an underrepresented group, can enter, stay, and succeed in the fire service. The 2019 session aimed to provide education, mentorship, and networking opportunities while enhancing National policy leadership, putting forth resolutions and contributions to the sector, and celebrating the fire service's women leaders. Nearly 30 women, including career and volunteer chiefs and firefighters, started the day listening to an incredibly inspirational keynote speaker, Olympic Champion Georgette Reed, who has all her life taken a keen interest in the Fire Service, as well as sport, fitness, health and wellness. With over 43 years of competition and experience under her belt in bobsleigh, swimming and water polo, Georgette now puts all of this knowledge and expertise to good use as the Health and Wellness Coordinator for Edmonton Fire Rescue Services and as a Mental Health First Aid, Psychological First Aid and R2MR (first responder) instructor for the City of Edmonton. She holds a MA in Coaching Sciences, a BPE in Physical Education and a BA in Communications.



"Tradition is only as good as the character that builds it."
"Stay in the moment so you can move forward."
"You are unique, so just go out and be you."
"Use fear to expand your circle and step into your future."

Georgette Reed



Georgette's presentation was inspirational and genuine. Her enthusiasm and optimism shone through as she shared the positive lessons, values, and virtues of sport. Through relevant and humorous anecdotes, Georgette demonstrated and brought to life the trials and tribulations of her sporting life and how they have influenced the way she deals with the challenges of everyday life that she faces today. She also incorporated practical solutions from her experience in how to deal with home or workplace challenges. Her presentation motivated the women in attendance to frame an individual vision to overcome obstacles and barriers in order to succeed in whatever they decide to accomplish. The presentation was transformational and presented attendees with the inspiration to alter their own destiny through hard work and perseverance.

Following Georgette's session, each of the provincial or territorial associations were provided an opportunity to say a few words and provide an overview of their work to the other participants in



order to explore interprovincial alignments and opportunities. Presentations were made by Dr. Tina Saryeddine, Executive Director of the CAFC, President Pike Krpan of Fire Service Women Ontario, Chief Jeannine Caldbek from the Fire Chief's Association of BC Women and Minorities committee, and Chief Keri Martens of AFEW Women. The common message by each presenter was the need for the CAFC Women Fire Chiefs and Company Officers Network of Canada to continue the momentum already started and make it easier for women to enter, stay and succeed in the fire service of the future.

Following these remarks, the working session began, facilitated by Jennifer Beyer of the Community Development Unit, Alberta Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. In her role, Jennifer designs and delivers facilitation and public engagement processes to community groups, networks, non-profit and public organizations, and collaborative teams across Alberta. Her passion for civil society, social justice, equity, and lifelong learning were evident throughout the session.

The working session goal was to determine and prioritize actions to help advance women in the fire service by leveraging existing structures, supports and pockets of excellence that can be pursued in coordination by CAFC and provincial organizations.

To meet this objective, participants were guided through a facilitated process to outline a long-term vision for the future of the fire service and the women, allies and departments within, and then to brainstorm concrete ideas for action at local and national levels in order to move towards that vision over the next 5 years.

The session wrapped up with agreement by the participants on the top 3 recommendations they would make to fire departments to assist them in their diversity and inclusion goals focused on women, and agreement on the priority areas they would suggest that the CAFC include in their 2020 operating plan.

Three days later, at a plenary session of Fire Rescue Canada, CAFC hosted an "All Allies" session for all attendees of the conference to hear the results of the session and to join the women for a debrief discussion. This was an exciting opportunity to engage with allies, colleagues, friends, and other leaders interested in fostering a more inclusive fire service, while also celebrating our women leaders.

5. Participants

Over 30 women attended the working session. These included:

- Chief Keri Martens, Deputy Chief, Canmore Alberta; CAFC Board Member; Co-Chair Diversity and Inclusion Committee; Co-Chair CAFC Women Chiefs and Company Officers Network; Co-Chair Alberta Fire, Emergency Management, and Wildfire Management Women.
- Chief Laurie VandeSchoot (Ret), Co-Chair Diversity and Inclusion Committee; Co-Chair CAFC Women Chiefs and Company Officers Network; Co-Chair Alberta Fire, Emergency Management, and Wildfire Management Women.
- Chief Linda Masson, Deputy Chief, Airdrie Fire Department; Founding Member of Alberta Fire, Emergency Management, and Wildfire Management Women
- Chief Judy Unsworth, Deputy Chief, Strathmore Fire Department; Founding Member of Alberta Fire, Emergency Management, and Wildfire Management Women
- Chief Amber Coleman, Deputy Fire Chief, Parkland County Fire Services; Founding Member of Alberta Fire, Emergency Management, and Wildfire Management Women
- Chief Jeannine Caldbeck, Fire Chief, Thetis Island Volunteer Fire Dept
- Chief Debora Bergeson, Assistant Deputy Chief, Calgary Fire Department; Member of Alberta Fire, Emergency Management, and Wildfire Management Women
- A/Captain Mary Fischer, Calgary Fire Department; Member of Alberta Fire, Emergency Management, and Wildfire Management Women
- Nicole Galambos, Manager Wildfire Training, Alberta Forestry, Wildfire Management Branch, Government of Alberta; Member of Alberta Fire, Emergency Management, and Wildfire Management Women
- Chief Dawn Nash, Assistant Chief, Strathcona County Emergency Services; Member of Alberta Fire, Emergency Management, and Wildfire Management Women
- Councillor Cammie Laird, Clearwater County; Member of Alberta Fire, Emergency Management, and Wildfire Management Women
- Chief Sherry Colford, Fire Chief, St. John's Regional Fire Department
- Lieutenant Deborah Davies, Saskatoon Fire Department
- Deputy Chief Ivana Irwin, Leduc County Fire Services
- Angela Unger, Lead, Calgary Fire Department
- Pike Krpan, President, Fire Service Women Ontario; Firefighter, City of Hamilton
- Julie Petruzzellis, Board Member, Fire Service Women Ontario; Firefighter, Toronto Fire Service
- Councillor Michelle Swanson, Clearwater County
- Chief Laura Markewich, Assistant Chief, Regina Fire & Protective Services
- Chief Nina McCarthy, Deputy Chief, Fredericton Fire Department
- Chief Nadya-Lyse Pare, Assistant Chief, Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency
- Chief Karen Roche, Deputy Chief, Burlington Fire Department
- Janelle Schaalje, Project All In Foundation
- Kate Shippey, Director of Marketing and Business Development, FSET Information Technology
- Acting Captain Karen Sommerville, Calgary Fire Department; Member of Alberta Fire, Emergency Management, and Wildfire Management Women

- Charlene Jordan-Jones, Director of the Fire & Safety Division, Justice Institute of British Columbia
- Grace Temani, Program Director, Fire Management Programs, Dalhousie University
- Helen Tomasik, Director, Business Development, Prospector MMI
- Dr. Lori Campbell, Principal of the Colbourne Institute for Inclusive Leadership, NorQuest College
- Georgette Reed, City of Edmonton Fire Rescue Services
- Jennifer Beyer, Community Development Unit, Alberta Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women

6. The Vision

Participants were asked to imagine the fire department in the year 2040 and then to describe their high level goals for the future, including what improvements in physical infrastructure and social, cultural, and managerial practices would encourage women to enter, stay, and succeed in the fire service.

“For me, the fire service of the future is one where gender is no longer an issue, where all Canadians are represented in its make-up, and the idea of how the public envisions what a firefighter looks like has changed.”



The overall responses were incredibly varied, but when the participants imagined the fire service of the future, they envisioned a fire service where they have more allies, where they didn't have to use terms like 'safe space' and where their workplaces mirrored societal and cultural norms. They imagined a future when they could see people in the fire service from all walks of life, and they could be in a social setting where people were not surprised to learn that they are a firefighter. They see a future where there is inclusion, equity and equality, the treatment of women in the fire service is fair and acceptable, and gender is a non-issue. A future where the societal definition of a firefighter has changed and the stereotypical view of the 'perfect firefighter' has evolved so that women in the fire service are seen, visible, respected, and have strong female representation, and a new idea of what a firefighter can look like is created.

- The workplace of the future will mirror societal and cultural norms: gender will not be an issue and diversity will be the norm not the exception.
- Symbols of the fire service will reflect what is valued, and traditional symbols like the stereotypical 'firefighter calendar' or antiquated media representations will have been reimagined.
- There will be appropriate gear for women, feminine hygiene products in halls and trucks, and appropriate washroom accommodations on lengthy emergency scenes.
- Promotions will be competency-based, leadership training will be provided to all ranks, halls and services will be learning organizations, and there will be job sharing and flexible work options.



- Conversations between staff will be authentic and meaningful, and people will feel safe and able to speak up about concerns and ideas instead of feeling pressured to be complicit and silent.
- The “daily news cycle” will no longer include stories about only “the first” or “the worst” of the fire industry but will cover the full scope of women’s experience in the fire service.

These visions are lofty and transformational change is required; but it was also acknowledged that continuous small improvements will also vastly contribute to our forward momentum. The women were excited to imagine working collaboratively with their allies and partners to bring this vision into reality.

7. Local Changes

As first steps towards realizing this 2040 vision, participants identified the needs and gaps that local services have that must be addressed in the next 5 years. Participants identified 9 changes, grouped into 3 specific theme areas, they would recommend at the local level. While these recommendations were discussed within the framework of women in the fire service, participants unanimously agreed that not all of these ideas are gender specific. They will holistically improve the entire fire service and make it better for everyone.

These included:



“We need staffing that reflects the communities we serve; and infrastructure that reflects the people we are.”



1. Our People and Infrastructure

- Outreach & Recruitment.** There needs to be better recruitment outreach into diverse communities, including recruitment imagery that has men and women of all shapes, sizes, lifestyles, and colours. New ideas need to be considered like involving people outside of the fire profession in recruitment, opening public access to the fire hall, co-op programs through high schools, and public education focused on what fire fighters actually do. Leaders need to ask themselves “How can I make my department more attractive/safer to women” instead of “How can I recruit more women”.

- b. **Suitable Station Renovations** that include single-user gender neutral dorms and washrooms, and emergency scene washroom accommodations and supplies.
- c. **Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment, Gear & Uniforms** that are designed for the many different body shapes, genders, and sizes of the fire service's diverse workforce.

2. Our Social and Cultural Environment

"We need more inclusive cultures that have strong community support and municipal governments that actively support the fire service."



- a. **An Inclusive Culture** where everyone can bring their whole self to work and there is more acceptance, and less stigma, for women in the fire service. A respectful culture without suggestive overtones between male and female counterparts, and a culture where there is an overall competency attitude and behaviour balance so that success is not defined by the male perspective. A positive culture and democracy in the station, where collaboration is more important than competition and there is no stigma for women or men seeking mental health supports.
- b. **A Strong Network of Community Support** for plans, goals & actions that complement our organizations' strengths will raise all of us up. This requires leaders of departments to have strong relationships and communication with the communities we serve. The bigger our support systems, internally and externally, the greater impact we can have.
- c. **Municipal Governments That Actively Support Diversity and Inclusion** and invest in the fire service to provide direction, policies, and support for staff, including the inclusion of pregnancy policies.

3. Our Managerial Practices

"We need strong allies and accountable leaders who publicly and actively celebrate women and provide pathways for mentorship and succession."



- a. **Leadership Accountability** to encourage authentic meaningful connections between staff and management, which provides leadership training for all ranks, and has zero tolerance for any hazing or initiation rituals.
- b. **Public Celebration** of women in the fire service because people thrive in direct proportion to the support they receive, and women leaders need to receive positive reinforcement to encourage other women to pursue leadership opportunities.
- c. **Succession and Mentorship** is crucial to the development of all future leaders, and even more so for women. Mentoring helps women ideate about what they will become. For women to be more empowered in the workplace, it is crucial to have structured mentorship programs where women can learn from others and clear succession planning for fire leadership that demonstrates an understanding of diversity and inclusion.

8. National Support

Participants were also asked what CAFC could do at a national level, over the next 5 years, in the areas of education, mentoring & support; policy development, leadership & research; and celebrating and advancing emerging leaders.

In considering these areas, the participants said:

1. Mentoring, Education & Support

- a. **Launch a National Mentoring Program** for underrepresented leaders in the fire service. This would include encouraging women in the Fire Service to actively participate and share their stories so as to affect positive change; investigating how traditionally male models of mentorship exclude women (i.e. golf courses, locker rooms, boys club); and facilitating national networking opportunities for women in the fire service.
- b. **Develop a National Train-the-Trainer Education Program** and expand CAFC's focus on assisting local departments and allies with education and training. The program should focus on Diversity and Inclusion Leadership and explore topics such as self-reflection, internal and unconscious bias, and ways that allies can assist and promote D & I. The program would need to be delivered directly to individual fire departments, either face-to-face or through webinars, so each does not have to hire their own consultant. This could also include a National Bursary Program to support municipalities who do not have the budget for educational programs or replicating ideas such as the "Beyond Hoses and Helmets" model as a potential delivery method.
- c. **Support a National Strategy Focus on D & I** by encouraging, or recommending, National Advisory Council (NAC) members to move D & I strategy programmes forward in provinces and territories. Specific ideas included introducing community-based fire programs that encourage engagement of diverse and underrepresented firefighters in the community (face to face) to expand the image of a typical firefighter; exploring the potential of inter and intra-provincial exchange programs for paid-on-call firefighters to experience diverse communities; and leading a national competency review process to identify barriers and standardize entry tests to better identify what skills each candidate brings that are advantageous to the fire service. Ensuring that entry tests more accurately represent what makes a 'good' firefighter, rather than simply the 'strongest' one.

Consider as Priority: Developing a national mentoring program for under-represented leaders in the Fire Service and a national 'train-the-trainer' program to educate allies on ways to assist and promote diversity and inclusion.

2. Policy Development, Leadership, & Research

- a. **Assist in data collection, analysis, and database development** for the Canadian Fire Service by taking a leadership role in gender based information gathering, compilation, reflection, and communication; sponsoring research; and ensuring that research analysis can be applied in a meaningful way. Participants wanted focused research/review/update of existing literature

research on women and gender differences and, of the current state of women in the Canadian Fire Service. It was also suggested that a national program be established at post-secondary institutions across Canada to outline physical job requirements and functions based on current practices. All of this could include coordinating a directory of female firefighters/company officers and a database of valid up-to-date research.

Consider as Priority: Providing local departments and provincial agencies with research and data, development support, best practice guidelines, and policy examples for inclusion and diversity.

- b. **Lead a National campaign to reframe the picture of women firefighters** and the Canadian Fire Service. In this area, participants suggested that CAFC focus their communications and marketing to intentionally promote women leaders in the fire service, put women in front of media cameras and have them share their stories, and launch a national campaign to encourage marginalized/under-represented people to consider a career in the fire service.

Consider as Priority: Advocating for, and fundamentally reframing, the media and societal picture of “what is a firefighter” and “what is the Fire Service”.

- c. **Provide policy examples and best practice guidelines** to the Canadian Fire Service, with a specific emphasis on inclusion across the entire organization. Participants also suggested that it would be beneficial for CAFC to provide guidance and support to departments as they develop better policies, procedures, and practices. Policy development should focus on encouraging and guaranteeing equal voice, removing gendered language, providing parental leaves and support, and addressing pregnancy and breast feeding. Explore innovative ways to encourage and promote inclusive physical workspaces, such as architectural competitions or similar ideas, to share more inclusive firehall designs among departments.

3. Celebrating & Advancing Emerging Leadership

- a. **Immerse women in the full scope of CAFC**, including the Fire Rescue Canada Conference and the Executive Chief Fire Officer Program. Promote these programs beyond the traditional audiences, offer apprenticeship programs and scholarship programs (like the ECFO program does) to cut financial and logistical barriers to having female participation in all development programs, and encourage departments to do the same. Participants also asked that CAFC include women’s issues in their national government relations and political lobbying work and to facilitate more networking opportunities for women chief officers and company officers.
- b. **Celebrate those who have shown commitment to promoting D & I** through a national recognition award and by encouraging participation and mentoring in CAFC events.
- c. **Ensure Diversity & Inclusion is a permanent foundational piece of CAFC’s focus** by revisiting pillars annually, committing a portion of every FRC session to best practice of D & I, using an inclusion lens when planning Fire Rescue Canada conference, and requiring FRC Conference speakers to include D & I in every session.

Consider as Priority: Plan CAFC’s annual conference with a more inclusive lens.



9. Women Making The Commitment

At the conclusion of the session, participants were asked to consider not only what the local departments and the national association should do, but to also consider how they would personally encourage and support other women who are entering, staying and succeeding in fire and fire leadership roles. In this vein, the women committed to:

- 1. Build each other up** - In the workplace, women committed to empowering and celebrating each other and highlighting the accomplishments of other women. They committed to supporting each other more publicly and ensuring they receive due credit for their work and ideas. When other women are interrupted, they suggested helping bring the attention back to them and ensuring the appropriate attribution occurs. Participants believe that when they are in each other's corners, and have each other's backs, they cannot lose. The women in attendance were steadfast in their desire to equally support women who have made their careers in the fire service, and those who made the commitment to serve as a volunteer or paid on call. By normalizing the success of women, they were determined in their commitment to treat others how they wish to be treated.
- 2. Help each other out** – Participants agreed that a critical factor in furthering diversity and inclusivity for women in the Canadian fire industry was to offer unwavering support of each other. Some participants committed to creating or being a part of a network of women that would support each other; while other participants committed to be a mentor for other women. Participants agreed that they each had individual strengths which they can, and should, share with each other. The group recognized that competition is healthy and that success of one is a success for all. They committed to helping develop other women firefighters and fire officers, rather than seeing them as competitors.
- 3. Talk to each other** – Participants committed to asking other women in their departments about their experiences, recognizing that the collective narrative often becomes the only story that is told, which can be isolating. By sharing stories and talking about the experience of being a women firefighter, the women believed that they could normalize the experience of other women in the

Empower and celebrate other women, supporting them openly and publicly.

Create or be a part of a network of women and be a mentor for other women.

fire service. Participants also committed to educating, applauding, and empowering their allies and leveraging those allies to increase awareness to the challenges of women in the fire service. The group recognized that if they speak up and use their voices to educate their allies, they can create a ripple that spreads far beyond the women in their small circles of influence. The participants committed to using their voices to be active bystanders and speak up when they see inappropriate behaviour. There is as strong desire to change myths about women being hired into the fire service, while avoiding the use of gendered language.

Educate, applaud,
and empower allies.

10. Allies Making the Commitment

Research evidence outlined in the Harvard Business Review clearly shows that when allies are deliberately engaged in gender inclusion programs, 96% of organizations see progress, compared to only 30% of organizations where allies are not engaged¹⁵. However, too many organizations still focus gender initiatives solely on changing women — from the way they network to the way they lead. This approach overlooks systemic structural causes and reinforces the perception that these are “women’s issues”, effectively telling allies that they do not need to be involved. As stated in the Harvard Business Review, without the avid support of allies, significant progress toward ending gender disparities is unlikely.

With this in mind, a plenary session for All Allies was held as a part of the National Conference. In that session, the women participants presented their vision and recommendations to other Fire Service leaders who share the goal of making the necessary changes to support women leaders in the workplace.

We defined¹⁶ male allies as members of the fire service who are committed to:

- Building professional relationships with women;
- Reducing as much bias in their own behavior as possible;
- Understanding the social advantage conferred by their gender; and
- Demonstrating active efforts to address gender inequities at work and in society.

These allies are catalysts for change, challenging organizational structures that disadvantage women while remaining committed to the success of the organization. In “Becoming An Ally”, Washington & Evans define allies as people who are members of the dominant or majority group who work to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with, and for, the oppressed population.

At the All Allies session, the approximately 250 male allies in attendance had the opportunity to hear and discuss the findings from the women chiefs and company officers’ meetings. CAFC’s allies

¹⁵ John, B. & Smith, D. (2020). *Good Guys: How Men Can Be Better Allies for Women in The Workplace*. Harvard Business Review Press.

¹⁶ Adapted from Intel’s Male Allyship program.

committed to being allies, not only in words, but also in action. At the conclusion of the session, the male allies were asked “As an ally to women in the fire service, I will...”.

Here are some of their responses grouped by theme:

1. **I will... listen to women and amplify their voices.**
 - I will be available and personally support women in the fire service.
 - I will listen, learn, and act.
 - I will be a good leader for female firefighters and be a good follower for female leaders.
 - I will treat women the same as everyone else – with respect!
2. **I will... mentor and sponsor more women.**
 - I will support and promote women into leadership roles, and I will mentor one future fire chief.
 - I will create more opportunity in my department and beyond by actively seeking, encouraging, and promoting diverse candidates to ensure opportunities for success.
 - I will commit dedicated resources and financially support our existing women leaders to allow them to network and foster the next generation wherever possible.
3. **I will... change culture.**
 - I will call out sexism, discrimination, incivility, and inappropriate behaviour and comments whenever I see it.
 - I will work actively with the D&I provincial committees and promote the change in culture for the entire fire service.
 - I will strive to eliminate the “Old Boys” culture in the fire industry and support existing women firefighters.
4. **I will... create a safe, healthy, and resilient workforce.**
 - I will be an ally and do my best to create and foster a welcoming culture of safety and respect.
 - I will advocate for Fair Workplace Policies, locally, provincially, and nationally and bring this conversation to the Canadian Volunteer Fire Service Association.

11. Towards an Action Plan

Based on both sessions, the key takeaways are:

Key Takeaway #1

It is important to foster community and discussion. Underrepresented and marginalized groups in the fire service need opportunities to find solidarity and strength from one another through opportunities to connect, discuss and share ideas about how to make the role they are committed to better each day for the community and fire service as a whole.

Key Takeaway #2

The vision of changing the culture of fire service to be gender inclusive is not a women’s issue, or a men’s issue - it is a Fire Service issue and all members of the fire service need to be involved in realizing this vision. Developing Allies is the first step to creating systemic change.



Key Takeaway #3

Departments cannot make all the changes alone and creating “a fire service for all” requires national support and leadership. A national body that can create guidelines and standards, provide evaluation tools and support for fire service as they move through cultural change is a requirement for success.

12. A Proposed Action Plan for CAFC

The old adage tells us that knowledge is power. However, that is only true if we translate it into action. It is for this reason that the CAFC was committed from the onset to translate the results of these meetings into meaningful next steps. The translation was essential for several reasons.

First, the fire sector is by nature, action oriented. We do not want to lose momentum by not putting actions behind our words. Second, there may be industry partners who are willing to give the CAFC women chiefs initiatives the boost it needs with resources to help generate a critical mass of action. Initial conversations have already begun. Third, the association will be entering into its 2020 operating plan which will include strategic planning for 2021-2025. This document will provide solid guidance and stimulate further discussion.

All of the items identified in the section on national support are reasonable areas for the CAFC to engage. The question is where to start and how to do this in a manner that is sustainable and appropriate to the mission of the CAFC – an organization that seeks to achieve diversity and inclusion as part of its vision for public safety.

As such, keeping in mind the current mission, vision and infrastructure at the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, as well as the expertise of many well-established groups at the provincial level, the following is a proposed plan of action with rationale for the CAFC. There are three recommended near-term actions to start.

1. Celebration and Identification interviews. This part of the action plan is to identify and recognize the current cadre of women leaders in the fire sector as part of the call from the session to provide alternate images, data, and mentoring:

Action 1.1 Conduct interviews and/or webinars with the current cadre of women fire service leaders asking not only about career paths and advice, but also about key issues and proposed solutions.

Action 1.2 Increase enrollment in the Women Chiefs and Company Officers Network as a database of who and where women leaders are located, asking if they are available to partake as mentors.

Action 1.3 Identify specific women leaders within the Network who are willing to accept a mentee.

Action 1.4 Explore consideration of a diversity and inclusion award for departments showing leadership related to section 2.1 below.

Action 1.5 Provide one annual FRC award to allow a women leader to attend FRC and one annual ECFO bursary to encourage women leadership in the Executive Chief Fire Officer Program.

2. Emerging Leader Ally-Assistance. The second part of the action plan allows fire departments to identify specific areas where guidelines would be helpful so that these can then be responded to. This part of the action plan also identifies emerging leaders and offers them an opportunity to identify specific real time issues and request a mentor.

Action 2.1 Conduct a survey of all CAFC members on current D&I practices.

Action 2.2 Conduct a survey of all CAFC member on areas where assistance is top of mind.

Action 2.3 Create a drop box for emerging women leaders to request a mentor and/or advice.

Action 2.4 Explore needs and development of a firefighter mental health program for women.

3. Best Practices Tool Kits. This portion of the Action Plan actions the guidance in areas identified by emerging women leaders and by fire departments. It collates available tools and resources, as well as “Top Ten Tips” sheets, that can help provide guidance on addressing diversity issues. The tip sheets will be the product of the diversity and inclusion committee which will provide a first cut at the tips and then seek to test or validate them. The subject of the tip sheets will be determined by the needs and request of the allies and emerging leaders as well as by the issues of the day.

Action 3.1 Have all submissions at Fire Rescue Canada include a diversity and inclusion discussion or component to promote dialogue.

Action 3.2 Identify and develop “10 Tip” format, template, and development and testing procedure, as well as the prioritize list of topics to focus on.

Action 3.3 Collate existing resources on a designated webpage as part of the toolkit.

Action 3.4 Disseminate and evaluate the tool kits to establish a baseline and monitor impact of the project and guidance.

13. Conclusion

The 2019 September 13 joint meeting of the Alberta Fire, Emergency Management and Wildfire Management Women (A FEW Women), and the Canadian Association of Fire Chief's Women Fire Chiefs and Company Officers Network of Canada was an important step towards CAFC's goal of providing the ways and means for women to enter, stay and succeed in the Fire Service. With a series of tangible goals and recommendations provided directly by women who currently work in the Fire Service, CAFC can look towards providing tangible results-based recommendations to Fire Service leaders in order to make the necessary changes. This accomplished group of women leaders are committed to working with CAFC and other allies to advance issues related to D & I for the betterment of the Fire Service as a whole. Although this was only the second meeting of this group, there were many exceptional outcomes that proved the need for the continued development of this group.

Members of the CAFC Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee

Special thanks to the members of the CAFC's Diversity and Inclusion Committee (2020) for their unwavering commitment to inspiring positive change in the fire service and building a better, more inclusive fire service for all. Collectively, this committee supports the women fire chiefs and company officers' network; identifies shared issues and facilitates exchange of best practices across departments; and focuses on Indigenous Diversity.

- Directeur Adjoint Richard Amnotte, Sécurité Incendie - Ville de Lévis
- Deputy Chief Todd Binkley, Brantford Fire Department
- Division Chief Michael Boyle, Kennebecasis Valley Fire Department
- Deputy Chief Amber Coleman, Parkland County Fire Service
- Captain Scott Cowan, Calgary Fire Department
- Deputy Chief Danny Freeman, Okotoks Fire Department
- Deputy Chief Keri Martens (Co-Chair), Canmore Fire Rescue
- Deputy Chief Broderick Moore, City of Leduc Fire Services
- Deputy Chief Jeremy Parkin, Rama Fire Rescue Service
- Assistant Chief Nadya-Lise Paré, Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency
- Chief Deryn Rizzi, Vaughan Fire & Rescue Service
- Deputy Chief McGregor Saunders, City of North Bay
- Chief Michael Seth, Cape Breton Regional Fire Services
- Chief Ken Stuebing, Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency
- Assistant Chief Anthony Tataryn, Saskatoon Fire Department
- Deputy Chief Ken Uzeloc, Calgary Fire Department
- Ret. Chief Laurie VandeSchoot (Co-Chair)
- Dr. Tina Saryeddine, CAFC Executive Director
- Ms. Anabel Therrien, Manager of Membership Services and Special Projects