



# Toronto Fire Services Ambassador Program

## Myths and Tough Questions

### Theme 1: Why diversity?

#### 1. I'm tired of hearing about diversity. Why don't we simply hire the best candidates for the job/ shouldn't TFS be worried about fighting fires and saving lives, not diversity?

- Current efforts to increase diversity do not mean that the best person for the job is not being hired.
- The work being done is to encourage more individuals from diverse backgrounds to consider a career in the fire service and go about achieving the training necessary to do so. The efforts are to expand the applicant pool to be more diverse.
- Diversity is a vital part of any organization and can actually be a valuable tool for a team who is saving lives and fires. There is no sacrifice to training or the core business of TFS in the efforts to diversify the workforce.
- The academic research shows that there are many benefits that have been found to occur when the workforce is made up of unique individuals including: enhanced creativity and innovation, increased satisfaction of workforce, increased access to networks and information, and importantly for a fire service, increased customer service.

#### 2. Why is TFS stuck with City Council's priorities of diversity and inclusion when they aren't relevant to, and can even get in the way, of the goals and purpose of our work at TFS?

- As a division of the City, TFS follows corporate policies and aligns with corporate strategies, which include diversity and inclusion.
- This is a priority for the City and therefore a priority for TFS. TFS has created the Inclusion Plan to promote long-term change, and support the inclusion of all staff.
- Diversity and inclusion actions do not get in the way of TFS' core business. They actually enhance the services provided to the residents of Toronto by expanding innovation and creativity, and improving the customer service experience i.e., by making customers more comfortable, or being able to speak with them in their native language, etc.

### 3. Why won't you admit that "Diversity hiring" dilutes the quality of Toronto's firefighting force?

- TFS does not participate in diversity hiring.
- TFS has worked to increase the number of applicants from diverse backgrounds, but that does not automatically mean they will get hired.

#### Side note: Response to those people who hear answers to above questions and retort that it's just "politically correct" talk and doesn't reflect real world reality of firefighting?

- In the real world, firefighters are from all walks of life and can do their job. Fire departments around the world are able to effectively put out fires and handle emergencies, just as TFS does. How someone looks, their gender and/or their sexual orientation does not determine whether they have the skills to be a firefighter.

## Theme 2: Different/lowered selection criteria and/or preferred/fast track hiring for designated groups:

### 1. Why do you lower the standards for \_\_\_\_\_ entering the Fire service?

- There are no 'lowered standards' or an easier way to get into the fire service for some candidates.
- Physical capability testing that appears to have different expectations for different applicants are a result of accounting for differences in bodies. Testing such as that done in the CPAT test is to measure quality of muscle, rather than mass.
- Women have smaller bodies and hearts (on average) and therefore have less muscle mass and capacity so would not be able to do the same testing (Lewis, 2004). Lewis' (2004) study showed that comparing the muscle quality, NOT MASS, showed that women and men applicants were not much different with regards to strength. Differences in strength and power are a result of the quantity of muscle that men are able to amass which women cannot (or have a much harder time attain it naturally).
- The physical standard that women and men must meet is what is appropriate based on differences in muscle quantity is while still evaluating for the necessary amount of muscle quality needed to perform the duties of a firefighter.
- A man in good shape should be able to do x number of push-ups in a minute, but asking a woman to do the same is automatically asking her to be in better shape than the man.

### 2. Do \_\_\_\_\_ have a lower passing grade on the CPAT and in interviews?

- No.
- All candidates must pass the CPAT in 10 minutes regardless of their identity. The only reason people think that there is a difference is because there are two sizes of vests which are to account for the height of an individual (one is shorter to prevent people from tripping over the regular sized one). Both vests have the same amount of weight in them.
- All interviews are conducted by a panel with clear criteria and scoring rules for evaluation that makes it fair for all participants.

**3. Have TFS qualification standards have been lowered for \_\_\_\_\_?**

- TFS has never lowered the standards for any applicant. Everyone must have the same mandatory qualifications to even be considered for a position.

**4. I've heard there are two hiring lists, one for white men and one for others. Can you explain this?**

- Since 2015, HR has been collecting data from applicants entering into and moving through the TFS Operations Firefighter recruitment process. Applicants now complete a Pre-Screening Questionnaire (PSQ) that forms part of the online application process for TFS positions. The PSQ provides applicants with the opportunity to voluntarily self-identify with respect to being members of Designated Groups. HR and TFS have now incorporated this PSQ process into all TFS recruitment processes.
- There are not two lists that are used for hiring, but statistics that are compiled.
- After screenings for qualifications a list is created with all applicants ranked according to a matrix of additional qualifications. Everyone on this list has the qualifications required to become a firefighter. From this the top 130-150 (depending on how many hires are needed) are selected for an interview. Once the top candidates are identified for an interview, the same list is re-examined and any individuals who had self-identified are added to the interview list.

**5. HR people say that the CPAT isn't a lowered standard and that it's NFPA approved, but we all know that it's easier to pass than our old physical testing. Why won't anyone admit it?**

- The CPAT was created by a committee of technical experts (firefighters, labour officials, training officers, physicians, kinesiologists, attorneys, and exercise physiologists) through the [IAFF's Wellness Fitness Initiative](#) (WFI) to improve the testing used to find physically fit individuals to train to become firefighters. It was evaluated on the core competencies needed for a firefighter. From there the skills were put into a testable fashion. It may very well be different from what you entered the fire service with, but it is still producing firefighters who will be able to take on the challenges that come with being a firefighter.
- Much of the old testing was not relevant to firefighting specifically, which has been corrected by the CPAT (and ongoing improvements continue to be made).
- The OFAI Candidate Testing Services (CTS) administer the testing in a provincially standardized fashion.

**6. Are unqualified women and racialized minorities hired by TFS before qualified white male candidates?**

- Never.
- All applicants are screened for the same required qualifications before being invited to participate in further levels of testing or evaluation. Everyone therefore who enters the interview room is equally qualified to be there.

**7. Is there is a hiring quota for women/racialized minorities/others?**

- No.
- There has never been a quota for hiring any group of people at TFS.

**8. Why do white male candidates have a much more difficult time getting hired over other candidates? Are designated groups favoured over white men in hiring?**

- In recent years, white male firefighters may have felt that it was harder for them to get into the service because there are more people from other backgrounds applying who have the qualifications necessary. This increases the pool of potential hires and therefore changes the chances of getting hired for all applicants.
- The majority of new hires in recruit classes are white males, so they are not, not being hired.

## Theme 3: Religious/cultural/gender/race/etc. concerns

### 1. Can I grow my beard for religious purposes? What about during certain times or events?

- For health and safety considerations, operational firefighters must be clean shaven for every shift to ensure a tight seal on their SCBA mask.
- Operational firefighters are permitted to have a mustache as long as it does not interfere with the seal on the SCBA mask (per [SOG-E-SCBA](#)).
- Non-operational positions do not have restrictions on facial hair, just that it be kept neat.

### 2. Can I wear a skirt or do I have to wear pants?

- Operational Firefighters, Fire Inspectors, Emergency Vehicle Technicians and Investigators must wear standard issued pants (or shorts in summer). There are many positions where the uniform requirements allow for a standard issue skirt to be worn including Public Educators, and Call Taker/Dispatchers.

### 3. Can I wear a hijab and be a firefighter?

- Due to the helmet and SCBA health and safety-related requirements hijabs or head scarfs are not able to be worn under bunker gear.
- Individuals who wear hijabs would therefore not be able to be an operational firefighter, but would be able to work in one of the support divisions (communications, public education, fire inspections).

### 4. Are there any opportunities for religious accommodations?

- Religious accommodations are addressed on a case by case basis.
- Every effort will be made for accommodations provided there are no health and safety concerns and/or operational duty concerns present.

### 5. What if I need to use the bathroom at a fire scene?

- If a firefighter is going to be at a scene for an extended period of time, the rehab truck would be dispatched to the scene to provide firefighters with an opportunity to rest and use the washroom.

**6. Is there a training program where I am less likely to face discrimination? Are there some schools or colleges that provide fire training that are less racist/homophobic/etc.?**

- TFS does not endorse any college over another and would also have no way of knowing this.
- Individuals interested in attending a fire training program are urged to do their research on colleges and programs to find one that fits their needs, and the qualification requirements of TFS.
- *Note to Ambassadors:* As representatives of TFS in an official capacity, you are not able to recommend one school over another as the organization cannot appear to endorse it.

**7. Why aren't there more \_\_\_\_\_ (i.e. people like me) in the fire service? Are we not wanted?**

- While the fire service has historically not been represented by \_\_\_\_\_, there have been many changes in recent years that have started to increase the number of \_\_\_\_\_ applying and being hired.
- As these numbers increase, more young individuals will be able to see themselves in the workforce and aspire to the position.

**8. How many \_\_\_\_\_ (LGBTQ2S/Racialized/women) are on the trucks?**

- For confidentiality purposes, TFS is unable to keep the records related to an individual's personal identity after hiring.
- The only data that TFS does have is through self-identification of employees in a corporate survey. This is voluntary and therefore not representative of the population.
- TFS does record identifying attributes at the time of hiring and reports publicly on those bi-annually.

**9. I know there aren't many \_\_\_\_\_ (i.e. people like me) in the fire service? Will I feel included?**

- TFS provides an inclusive and welcoming work environment.
- The organization is team based and therefore close bonds are formed with your crew and coworkers.

**10. Will my career be limited because I am part of the \_\_\_\_\_ community?**

- If you work hard, and apply yourself to the job you have a greater opportunity of advancing. Your identity with a certain community will not hold you back.

## Theme 4: Operational specific questions

### 1. How heavy is the gear firefighters wear?

- To protect themselves, firefighters wear bunker gear, Self-Contained Breathing Apparatuses, and a helmet. This weighs more than 50lbs.
- Depending on the emergency, firefighters may also need to carry additional equipment with them such as axes, hoses, or thermal imaging cameras, which can add an extra 20-30lbs.

### 2. What other calls do firefighters go to/ why do they show up when I need an ambulance?

- Firefighters respond to a wide variety of calls on a daily basis. These include fire or alarm calls at residences, vehicular accidents, rescue operations, Hazmat, and medical calls.
- Fire stations are more widely spread across the city and therefore firefighters are often able to reach a medical emergency before the paramedics. Firefighters have first aid training and are able to provide primary care before passing the patient off to the paramedics if required.

### 3. What are firefighters doing in the halls all day when there are no fires?

- When not out on a call, firefighters may be doing any number of things. Filling out paperwork from previous calls, taking time to maintain their equipment, doing training drills to improve their skills and learn new ones, or taking time to take care of themselves by working out.

## Theme 5: Health Risks

### 1. How dangerous is this kind of work?

- The work of an operations firefighter is extremely dangerous. They put their lives on the line on a daily basis to serve and protect the residents of Toronto.

### 2. Will I get cancer if I become a firefighter?

- Firefighters have a higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer as a result of the harmful toxins they are exposed to in the line of duty. This risk is mitigated with Personal Protection Equipment, and extensive decontamination procedures.

### 3. What if I am trying to get pregnant or am pregnant?

- Individuals who are pregnant must consult with their personal physician and review their job duties to determine if there are any restrictions as a result of the pregnancy. They can continue working until such time that their personal physician or the individual identifies work restrictions. Once restrictions are identified, pregnant staff are required to submit forms that would facilitate their move to modified duty for the duration of their pregnancy.
- Staff are granted 18 months of maternity leave.

### 4. Will I bring dangerous chemical exposures home to my family?

- While there is a chance that trace amounts of dangerous chemicals could be brought home on the clothes or skin of a firefighter, TFS has many procedures in place to limit this through the decontamination process that is required after every incident. When these procedures are followed, the risks are limited.

### 5. What supports are available to firefighters to help deal with death at a scene?

- As a first responder, firefighters are often witness to people at their most vulnerable, and in some cases at the end of their life. How often a firefighter is witness to this varies for every firefighter with some being at traumatic scenes more than others. It is important that firefighters have strong support systems in place at their fire stations, and at home.
- TFS has many supports available to staff. These include an Employee Assistance Program and Peer Support Team, access to psychologists through CAMH, and chaplains.
- *Note to Ambassadors:* due to privacy regulations, you are not able to speak to a specific incident that resulted in death out of respect to the victim.

### 6. I know about firefighters. What other jobs are there?

- While operational firefighters make up the largest component of Toronto Fire Services' workforce, there are a number of other careers in Fire services. These include:
  - Call takers/dispatchers
  - Fire investigators
  - Financial and payroll staff
  - Public educators
  - Radio technicians
  - Quartermaster Store persons
  - Payroll Program Assistants
  - Fire inspectors
  - Administrative staff
  - Human resources
  - Emergency vehicle technicians
  - CAD/RMS technicians
  - Fire Prevention Clerks