

Office of the City Attorney
NORA FRIMMAN, CITY ATTORNEY

Via Email
September 15, 2025

The Honorable Julie A. Emede
Presiding Judge
Santa Clara County Superior Court
191 North First Street
San Jose, CA 95113
CGJ@scscourt.org

Re: Grand Jury Report

Dear Judge Emede:

Pursuant to California Penal Code section 933, et seq., please accept the City's response to the 2024-2025 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury Report, "Turning Up the Heat: Time for Recruitment and Culture Change in the San José Fire Department." The City Council approved the City's response to the Grand Jury Report on September 9, 2025. The approved City response and the Grand Jury's Report are enclosed for your review.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

Nora Frimann
Nora Frimann (Sep 12, 2025 13:44:17 PDT)

NORA FRIMMAN
City Attorney

Attachments:

San José Fire Department Response to the Civil Grand Jury Final Report
2024-25 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury Final Report

CITY OF SAN JOSE RESPONSE TO
THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
2024-2025 SANTA CLARA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY REPORT,
“TURNING UP THE HEAT: TIME FOR RECRUITMENT AND CULTURE
CHANGE IN THE SAN JOSE FIRE DEPARTMENT”

Finding #1

The SJFD has made progress in some areas since the 2020 Civil Grand Jury Report, which the Civil Grand Jury commends.

Agree.

Recommendation #1

No recommendation

Not Applicable.

Finding #2

The SJFD is still struggling to hire and recruit more women.

Agree. According to 2020 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, females represented approximately 4.4% of professional firefighters nationally. Since 2020, females have represented 10.73% of firefighters hired in SJFD, resulting in female representation of 4.6% of firefighters. While the SJFD has found success in building a more diverse applicant pool, qualified female applicant numbers remain far below actual population representation.

Recommendation #2a

The City should dedicate more resources to SJFD recruiting more women, including increasing staffing resources currently dedicated to SJFD recruiting. This should be accomplished by September 30, 2025.

Requires further analysis. The City allocated funding for the SJFD to work with Matrix Consulting Group to develop a strategic plan to improve diversity, recruitment, outreach, and retention practices. This work was initiated in June 2025 and with the draft plan expected to be presented to SJFD by the end of 2025. Implementation of the plan’s initiatives will require dedicated focus that cannot be absorbed by existing personnel without affecting recruitment efforts. To address this and prepare for implementation, the SJFD will require an additional resource in the Human Resources/Employee Services unit to manage the program, which will provide the Senior Analyst with more bandwidth to focus on recruitment efforts, specifically related to women in the fire service. Allocation of additional budget resources for this item will be evaluated through the budget process, in the context of the City’s overall fiscal condition and other departmental program needs.

Recommendation #2b

The City should provide additional funding for the Women’s+ Boot Camp to host monthly drop-in work outs with the goal of creating a continuously building pipeline for potential applications. This should be accomplished by September 30, 2025.

Requires further analysis. The City allocated funding for the SJFD to work with Matrix Consulting Group to develop a strategic plan to enhance diversity, recruitment, outreach, and retention practices. This work was initiated in June 2025, with the draft plan expected to be presented to SJFD by the end of 2025. Allocation of additional budget resources for the implementation of monthly drop-in workouts will be evaluated through the budget process, in the context of the City's overall fiscal condition and other departmental program needs. Plan development, logistical coordination, and cost estimates for staffing and equipment will be available by September 30, 2025, to determine the feasibility of implementing this recommendation.

Finding #3

The SJFD has knowledgeable employees who could provide the administration and HR with ideas for ways to interest more members of underrepresented groups in attending paramedic school and/or pursuing careers in the fire service.

Agree. The SJFD employs 801 personnel from diverse backgrounds, inclusive of 680 filled sworn positions, 33 non-sworn uniformed, and 88 civilian positions across seven bureaus that are committed to the SJFD's mission to serve the community by protecting life, property, and the environment through prevention and response. Through the Racial and Social Equity Action Plan, the SJFD collected scholarship information from more than a dozen local paramedic institutions to promote racial equity by coordinating with academic institutions, scholarship programs, and community outreach to attract a diverse paramedic workforce. This information will be incorporated into the SJFD's recruitment and outreach efforts. The SJFD will continue to explore opportunities to engage personnel to identify ideas that expand access for underrepresented groups to attend paramedic school and pursue careers in the fire service.

Recommendation #3

While the SJFD has an internal racial equity action planning committee of staff to focus on recruiting and outreach strategies, the Fire Chief should ask the committee to provide specific recommendations on how to increase interest and pipeline among women, particularly in becoming paramedics. The committee should seek input from other sworn staff members who may have ideas. The SJFD should provide direction to the committee by September 1, 2025.

Will be implemented. The Racial Equity Action Plan: Recruitment and Outreach Committee was established in March 2024 and is comprised of 12 employees representing the backgrounds and experiences of SJFD and the community. The Committee meets on the third Thursday of each month, with the next meeting scheduled for September 16, 2025. The Fire Chief will meet with the Committee to discuss this recommendation and request support in identifying strategies to increase interest and strengthen the pipeline for women, particularly in becoming paramedics.

Finding #4

Five years after the first Civil Grand Jury report, the SJFD still does not have a detailed timeline beyond FY 25-26 for retrofitting or providing privacy barriers in the remaining stations that do not have dedicated dorms for women or individual sleeping quarters. The SJFD also does not provide regular public updates on its continuing efforts regarding properly fitting turnouts and uniforms for female firefighters.

Disagree. As of August 2025, 32 of 34 fire stations have private or designated female locker rooms and bathrooms. This was accomplished by converting legacy fire station Officer Quarters into designated

female locker rooms and bathrooms (Fire Station 3, 5, 10, and 30). Fire Station 8 is newly constructed with private dorms and bathrooms (scheduled to open October 2025). Of the stations that were originally identified as having no separate dorms for women: two fire stations converted legacy fire station Officer Quarters into designated female dorms (Fire Station 3 and 5); two fire stations converted one open dormitory to designated female dorms (Fire Station 10 and 29); and five legacy open sleeping dorms received privacy enhancements in the form of six foot semi-permanent finished walls being installed which created greater visual and audio privacy for individual firefighters. The SJFD continues progress on providing enhanced semi-permanent privacy walls at the remaining legacy dorm fire stations. The new Fire Station 8 is under construction and is estimated to be operational in 2025 while the construction at the existing Fire Station 29 is also slated to be completed in 2025.

The SJFD provides quarterly updates through the Racial and Social Equity Action Plan that is inclusive of the status of its continuing efforts regarding properly fitting turnouts and uniforms for female firefighters. These updates are posted and accessible via the City's website.*

**The Office of Racial and Social Equity's public-facing racial equity plans dashboard is temporarily offline while updates are being performed.*

Recommendation #4

The SJFD should add updates on installing privacy barriers in sleeping quarters and obtaining correctly fitting uniforms/turnouts to its regular monthly report for the City Council's Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee until it has achieved success. This should be added to the regular monthly report by September 1, 2025.

Implemented. The SJFD agrees that regular reporting is important, however, information updates on installation of privacy barriers in sleeping quarters and obtaining correctly fitting uniforms/turnouts are provided quarterly through the Racial and Social Equity Action Plan and SJFD believes that frequency and reporting mechanism is more appropriate than the Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee that meets six times per year rather than monthly. The Racial and Social Equity Action Plan is inclusive of the status of its continuing efforts to create an equitable and private fire station living/sleep quarters for sworn personnel, provide safe and form-fitting uniforms and personal protective equipment for sworn personnel that is comfortable and customized based on individual needs. These updates are posted and accessible via the City's website.*

**The Office of Racial and Social Equity's public-facing racial equity plans dashboard is temporarily offline while updates are being performed.*

Finding #5

The City and the SJFD leadership need to acknowledge that transforming the fire service culture must happen on a daily basis and be reinforced by captains at all stations and leadership at all levels.

Agree. The SJFD is an ever-evolving organization where approximately 30% of its workforce is replaced every 8 to 10 years. Growth and development are constant with employees at varying career stages. SJFD is guided by its rules and regulations, policies and procedures, City policies, and long-established core values, which include high customer service standards, mutual respect, and joy of service. Individually, the SJFD's core values are modeled by each SJFD employees through integrity, professionalism, trust, compassion, and pride. Career journeys are long, and navigating through time can be challenging. Continuous improvement, professional development, and alignment with values must be reinforced each day, individually and by leadership at all levels of the SJFD. For example, in July 2024, the SJFD provided department-wide training, which covered workplace behavior, supervisor responsibilities, accountability for and risk and consequences of behaviors, mutual accountability, fire service-related case studies, and tools for prevention and intervention.

Recommendation #5

The City should provide specific annual training for captains on enforcing City and the SJFD policies related to a diverse workforce, promoting mentorship and professional development, modelling accountability, and encouraging open dialogue about the need for the SJFD staff to represent the community it serves. The first training should be created and completed by January 2026.

Implemented. In July 2024, the SJFD provided department-wide training, which covered workplace behavior, supervisor responsibilities, accountability for and risk and consequences of behaviors, mutual accountability, fire service-related case studies, and tools for prevention and intervention. Each employee is also eligible to participate in the citywide mentorship program and the SJFD Senior Staff maintains open door mentoring throughout the year. A refresher training will be provided annually. SJFD is an Accredited Local Academy under the California State Fire Marshal's Office, providing professional development courses that support certification tracks toward meeting minimum qualifications for promotion with SJFD ranks. The coursework equips prospective captains with foundational knowledge in the administrative and human resources principles and is reinforced by training SJFD specific information where policies, procedures, rules, and regulations are covered. The Racial and Social Equity Action Plan: Recruitment and Outreach Committee was established, amongst other goals, to ensure ongoing dialogue about equity and diversity.



2024-2025 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury

Turning Up the Heat:

**Time for Recruitment and Culture Change in
the San José Fire Department**

June 16, 2025

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TURNING UP THE HEAT

SUMMARY

The 2019-2020 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury (2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury) recommended that the San José Fire Department (SJFD) develop, fund, and implement a plan to increase the number of female firefighters. More than five years later, the City of San José (City) is only now hiring a consultant who will recommend a strategic plan to achieve a diversified candidate pool with a focus on increasing gender diversity.

The 2024-2025 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury (2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury) commends the SJFD for making progress and the City for committing money to hire external consultants, but gains have been slow.

The City and the SJFD leadership understand the need for the fire department's staff to reflect the community it serves. Now the City and the SJFD need to operationalize that understanding. Recruiting is only part of the battle. San José must also create a fire service culture that welcomes a diverse staff.

The need for change and the specific steps required must be clearly stated and understood by everyone within the SJFD and the City. Leadership must be relentless in creating a culture in which all members of the SJFD can thrive, regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury recognizes that change does not happen overnight. The SJFD and the City have made some progress over the last five years, but the most difficult steps lie ahead.

BACKGROUND

The 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury examined the staffing levels and recruitment efforts of nine fire departments in Santa Clara County and released a report titled “[Why Aren’t There More Female Firefighters in Santa Clara County?](#)” Of those nine, the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury focused more specifically on four departments to geographically represent Santa Clara County (County). The departments were Mountain View, Palo Alto, San José, and the Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District.

The report recommended four changes to increase the recruitment and hiring of female firefighters in the County:

- Create and fund a recruitment process for female firefighters,
- Ensure an unbiased hiring process for female firefighter candidates,
- Ensure an equitable working environment for female firefighters with properly fitting gear, appropriate living conditions, and opportunities for promotion, and
- Provide mentoring for prospective, new, and current firefighters.

Recent news reports have suggested that departments are still struggling to significantly increase the percentage of women in firefighting positions (Gutierrez, Bott, and Carroll, 2024; Gutierrez, Bott, Bozovic, and Horn, 2024; Gutierrez, Bott, Carroll, and Bozovic, 2024). Recognizing that recruiting, hiring, and retaining women in the fire service is a challenge nationwide, the 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury wanted to find out what progress had been made in the last five years.

The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury decided to focus on the SJFD, the largest department in the region and the department with the lowest percentage of female firefighters in the 2019-2020 report. The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury was interested in whether the SJFD had increased its percentage of female firefighters over the last five years and how it compared to the three other departments studied by the prior Civil Grand Jury.

METHODOLOGY

The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury conducted interviews with multiple City and SJFD officials, as well as fire officials and advocacy groups in other jurisdictions. It reviewed reports made to city councils and studied statistics on department recruiting. The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury also reviewed work plans, salary surveys, and publicly reported data on hiring in addition to outside studies and literature on women in the fire service.

Updated data on percentages of sworn female staff was requested from the four departments that the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury focused on to determine progress made since the previous report. Sworn staff in a fire department refers to firefighters, captains, battalion chiefs, chief, and emergency personnel.

INVESTIGATION

Why the Fire Service is Different

Firefighting is not your typical day job. The work is physically, mentally, and emotionally challenging. It requires risking your own safety for others. Firefighters are always on call during their 48-hour shifts and the work itself is unpredictable.

They may be sweeping the fire station floor or grocery shopping at one point and dealing with a medical emergency or putting out a fire at another point. They experience regular sleep disruption and spend days away from family.

Firefighters live together, work together, eat together, and sleep at the fire stations during their shifts. They rely on each other for safety in ways co-workers in most jobs do not and they must work as a team. Station culture is hierarchical, and male dominated. The vast majority of firefighters in the United States are male (Fahy, Evarts, and Stein, 2022).

The SJFD Should Reflect the Community It Serves

Currently, 49 percent of San José's population is female (United States Census Bureau, 2024), yet only 4.6 percent of the SJFD's sworn staff is female. The Civil Grand Jury learned that a fire department that more closely resembles its community is more likely to provide effective service to that community during both emergency and non-emergency situations (Turner, 2025).

Why Aren't There More Female Firefighters: The First Civil Grand Jury Report

While acknowledging that firefighting is a male-dominated occupation, the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report cited the recommendation of the 2008 *National Report of Women in Firefighting* that women should "comprise 17% of the first responders' work" (Hulett, Bendick, Thomas, and Moccio).

To increase the number of female firefighters, the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury made the following recommendations to the City:

- San José Fire Department should develop, fund, and implement a plan to increase recruiting efforts to grow their number of female firefighters. Plans should be developed by June 2021.

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- San José Fire Department should develop, fund, and implement mentoring programs. Mentors should advise and guide potential recruits, new recruits, and current firefighters. Plans should be developed by June 2021.
- Because San José 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. This plan should be developed by June 2021.
- To address the unique challenges of promoting a gender-inclusive work culture for women in the setting of a fire department, San José 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 June 2021.
- All fire departments in the Santa Clara County 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 at the time they begin work. This plan for procurement should be implemented by June 2021.

The 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury reviewed updates provided by the City through the end of 2021, at which time 3.7 percent of the department's sworn staff was female (Sapien, 2021), up from 2.4 percent at the time of the original 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report.

The majority of recommendations from the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report were still in progress a year later. For example, the SJFD stated at the end of 2021 that it would develop revised recruitment strategies for the next recruitment cycle in 2022. It reported it had conducted a privacy review of all stations and had developed a workplan focused on strengthening privacy in common area sleeping quarters. In addition, the SJFD stated that employee concerns about privacy were solicited through an anonymous survey.

The SJFD said its overall workplan included:

- Strengthening recruitment efforts and resourcing,
- Continuing and progressing employee development and processes,
- Improving fire station privacy conditions,
- Adopting equity,
- Including methodologies in budgeting and program development, and
- Expanding gear and sizing options.

The SJFD also reported that it would add updates on recruiting and hiring activity, and marketing and communications to the City Council's Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee (PSFSS) starting in the spring of 2022.

Making Progress, Slowly

Since the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report's findings, the SJFD has increased the number of women hired from 2.4 percent to 4.6 percent in 2025. Figure 1 shows the progress made by the four fire departments reviewed in the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report between 2019 and 2025.

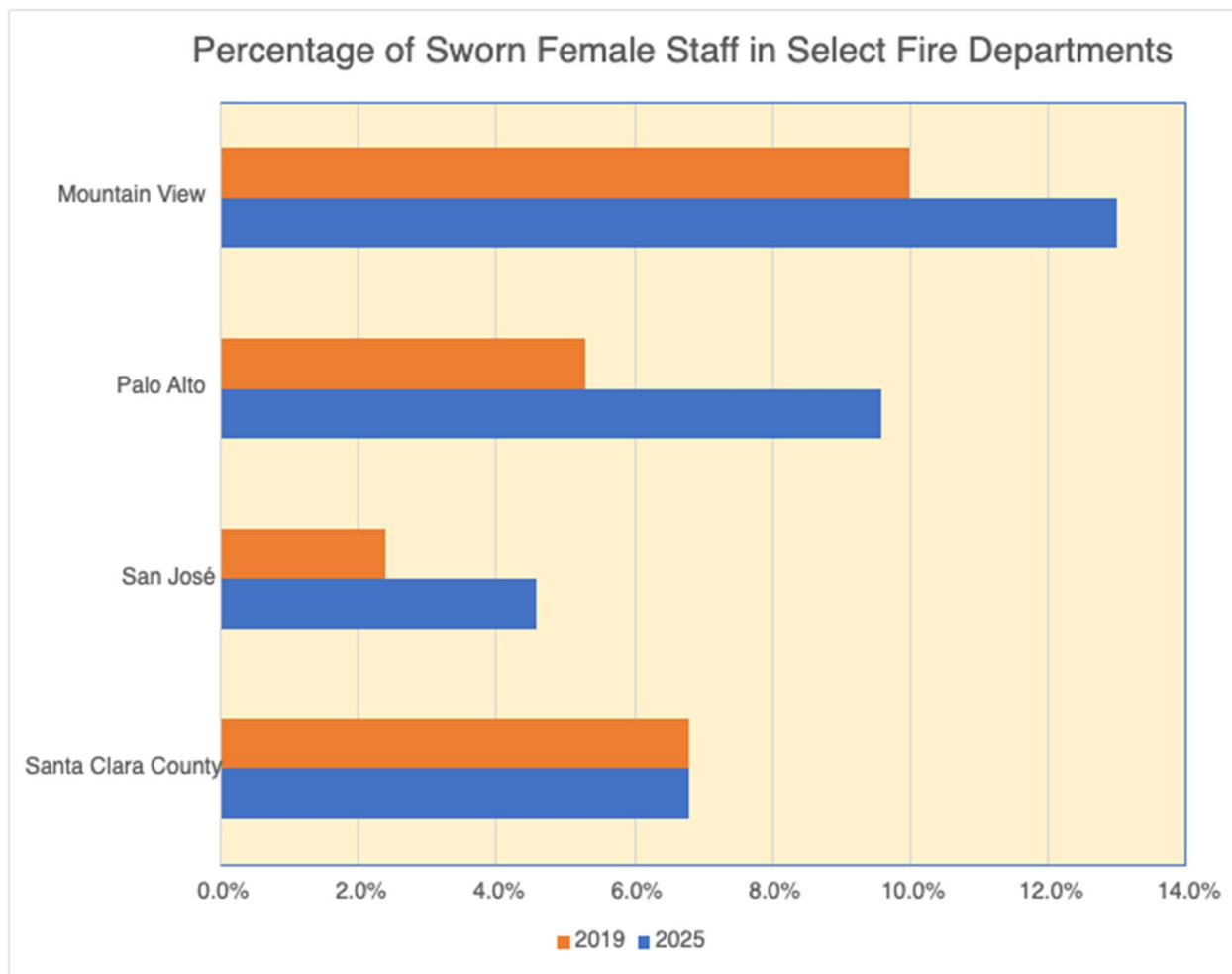


Figure 1: Percentage of Sworn Female Staff in Select Fire Departments in 2019 and 2025 (Data provided by individual departments).

The SJFD has added a staff specialist to its administrative team with the goal of boosting recruiting efforts. The SJFD reports it has increased appearances at career and job fairs by 63 percent. In 2018, with the support of SJFD, women firefighters started a boot camp with the goal of expanding the number of female applicants for entry-level firefighting positions. The SJFD reports that it has since expanded participation in its Women's+ Boot Camp.

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At the time of the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report, 14 stations out of 34 did not have dedicated women's dorms or private sleeping quarters for female firefighters. In early 2025, there were 12 that did not have dedicated women's dorms or private sleeping quarters. The SJFD reports it has identified options to retrofit them to individual dorms or semi-private areas by erecting six-foot semi-permanent walls and doors.

In 2023, the SJFD said it began providing custom fitted structural turnouts and helmets. Turnouts are the protective clothing firefighters wear when responding to calls. The SJFD said it planned to continue researching solutions for customizable uniforms and wildland turnouts. Wildland turnouts are used for outdoor blazes, such as wildfires and uncontrolled brush fires. Wildland turnouts are a problem that the SJFD has yet to solve since the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury report.

The City issued a request for proposals in late 2024 for a consultant specializing in fire service recruitment to recommend a strategic plan to achieve a qualified diverse candidate pool, with particular focus on increasing gender diversity (City of San José, 2024). The contract was awarded to Matrix Consulting Group in Mountain View. Work is expected to begin later this year once the contract is finalized.

Additionally, as a retention measure, the SJFD has implemented flexible scheduling that allows any firefighter to request a 24-hour shift schedule for family reasons. Standard shifts are 48 hours.

The Civil Grand Jury acknowledges the progress the SJFD has made but notes that none of the prior recommendations have been fully completed. There is still much to be done to ensure that the SJFD has a firefighting staff that reflects the community it serves.

Progress on 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury Recommendations as of May 2025

2019-2020 Recommendation	Results
San José Fire Department should develop, fund, and implement a plan to increase recruiting efforts to grow its number of female firefighters.	Some progress. The SJFD has increased the percentage of women on its sworn staff by 1.9 percentage points since 2020.
San José Fire Department should develop, fund, and implement mentoring programs.	Some progress. The SJFD has no formal mentorship program for current employees but continues to fund Women's+ Boot Camp.

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2019-2020 Recommendation	Results
Because San José 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.	Some progress. Plan developed, but there are still 12 stations without dedicated women's dorms or private sleeping quarters, with no firm timeline for completion.
To address the unique challenges of promoting a gender-inclusive work culture for women in a fire department, San José should develop plans that focus on remedies to those challenges.	Some progress. Consultant to be hired.
SJFD 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 at the time they begin work.	Some progress. The SJFD says it provides fitted structural turnouts and helmets.

Figure 2: Summary of Progress on Recommendations from the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury Report.

Recruiting and Culture: The Hard Stuff

The SJFD has begun to tackle the easier and less controversial changes recommended by the 2019-2020 Civil Grand Jury. However, almost no movement has been made on remedies to the unique challenges of promoting a gender-inclusive department.

Recruiting requires strategy, staff, budget, sustained effort, and creativity

The SJFD does not lack applicants for firefighter positions. What the SJFD lacks is a diverse pool of applicants that reflects the city they serve. This problem is not unique to San José and the Civil Grand Jury understands that the solution is more complex than simply hiring more women.

Firefighting is a male-dominated profession. Women today remain a minority in U.S. fire departments. In 2020, men accounted for 95.6 percent of all firefighters while women made up just 4.4 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Recruiting, in any industry, requires a sustained investment. This is particularly important in the fire service because the process of becoming a recruit is a long one. In San José, applicants must first have a certificate of physical ability and a valid EMT certificate or paramedic license before registering with the Firefighter Candidate Testing Center (City of San José, Firefighter Qualifications, n.d.), and then moving on to complete a challenging 20-week, entry-level academy (City of San José, Firefighter Selection Process, n.d.).

Complicating the recruitment challenge is the fact that the vast majority of fire department calls now are medical calls. For that reason, there has been a growing need for advanced life support capabilities within the SJFD resulting in an increased need to recruit paramedic firefighters. However, women tend to be underrepresented in paramedic schools. In combination, the growing demand for paramedics, reduced supply due to the pandemic when paramedic schools shut down, and women being underrepresented in paramedic schools means the pool of women paramedics is extremely small.

Women's+ Boot Camp

To address the challenge of attracting more women to the fire service, a female firefighter in San José created The Women's+ Boot Camp in 2018 and received support from the SJFD to host an event.

Now held once a year, the free, one-day boot camp is conducted by women firefighters and includes a question-and-answer session, a workout, and demonstrations of equipment and tools. The boot camp has been very popular and has expanded to allow 100 participants. The Civil Grand Jury commends the initiative of the SJFD's women for working to build a pipeline of potential recruits.

Enough time has passed that some former boot camp attendees have now been hired by SJFD and other Bay Area departments. Building on this success, the City could – for a small investment – host monthly drop-in workout sessions for women through the boot camp program. This could further expand the recruiting pipeline and build ongoing relationships with boot camp attendees.

Plans and Goals

SJFD has no shortage of goals and workplans that reflect the need for a diverse workforce. In 2016, the City Council adopted an SJFD strategic plan, now known as Vision 2023 (Jacobson, 2016). That plan has five focus areas, one of which is a sustainable workforce. The first goal of the sustainable workforce area is to actively recruit, train, support, and retain a talented and diverse workforce.

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Like other departments in the City, the SJFD also now has a two-year racial and social equity action plan, which includes an objective to achieve diversity, create equitable and private sleeping quarters for sworn personnel, and provide safe and well-fitting personal protective equipment, among other things (City of San José, Racial and Social Equity Plans, 2025). Each of those items were the subject of Civil Grand Jury recommendations in 2019-2020. Department equity plans were created in 2024.

Yet, these plans have resulted in minimal progress for SJFD.

Despite the City and the SJFD having the objective of achieving diversity for years, the City is just now hiring a consultant to provide a recruiting strategy with a specific focus on gender for the SJFD. This suggests that the SJFD either does not have an adequate strategy or that its existing strategy has not been sufficient. Further, the SJFD's equity plan indicates it will identify a recruitment outreach committee and develop a recruitment and outreach workplan in the last quarter of FY 2024-25. This is occurring five years after the first Civil Grand Jury report identified this need.

Insufficient Recruiting Staff

Although the SJFD added a full-time position to its Human Relations team, there is still not one person in the SJFD who is dedicated full-time to recruiting. As discussed above, there are unmet recruiting efforts to improve the pool of female candidates. Given that the overall percentage of women in SJFD remains among the lowest in the county, this does not seem to be an adequate level of staffing and/or dedication of resources for the recruiting challenge at hand.

At least one administrative staff member should be devoted to recruiting full-time. In addition, building a diverse pipeline will require ideas from the SJFD's dedicated, experienced women firefighters who will have suggestions about how the SJFD can make recruiting inroads.

Unfortunately, recruitment is just one part of the challenge.

Fitting in Is Very Important

When women join SJFD, there is strong pressure to 'go along to get along' and be part of the team. Women do not always feel empowered to speak up or try to change the culture given their small numbers and their fear of drawing attention to themselves.

It's difficult for any firefighter to leave once they join a department. The SJFD, like most California fire departments, typically requires experienced hires transferring from other fire departments to go through a new hire academy and start over at an entry level. This is a significant career barrier for any firefighter wanting to change departments.

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To be successful, among other things, women who are part of the SJFD sworn staff need to:

1. Conform to the existing culture to be accepted and successfully advance,
2. Accept that the culture is male-dominated and hierarchical, and
3. Know that complaining can make you a target of discrimination and harassment.

That said, it is important to note that while women do conform, some are also actively, although quietly, working to change the culture and create a more inclusive environment for all firefighters.

Fire Station Culture

The best aspects of fire station culture include among other things: commitment to training and tactics, pride in operations, camaraderie and teamwork, continuous improvement, and strong leadership (Eskwitt, 2021; Brown, 2025).

These positive aspects of fire station culture contribute to the overall effectiveness and cohesion of fire departments, enabling them to provide excellent service to their communities.

The Civil Grand Jury learned that there are other aspects that are not as positive. The masculine culture can be challenging for women. Women still do not have separate sleeping quarters or bathrooms in some stations. This compromises their privacy. Bad behavior is not always called out or addressed by ranking staff when it occurs in front of them. Not all women feel comfortable raising concerns.

The good news is that the aspects of a healthy fire station culture are not in conflict with a culture that is welcoming for women.

Creating Change – Looking Beyond Facilities and Uniforms

To change its culture and make it more comfortable for women, the SJFD can implement any number of strategies, including:

- fostering a culture where all team members feel safe expressing ideas and concerns,
- providing equitable training and development opportunities,
- focusing on recruitment,
- encouraging qualified women to pursue promotions, and
- ensuring women have trusted leaders they can talk to (Pieper, 2018; Hanifan, 2020; Turner, 2025).

San José fire captains can play a pivotal role in shaping and transforming firehouse culture for everyone—and this influence is especially important for women at the SJFD. The captains can do this by:

- setting the tone at the station,

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- enforcing department policies,
- promoting mentorship and professional development,
- driving team cohesion,
- modeling accountability, and
- encouraging open dialogue (StreetWise, 2023; Fleeup, 2024; Fire Force, 2023).

Another Consultant

The Civil Grand Jury learned that the City intends to re-issue a request for proposals for a second consultant who will examine living arrangements, schedule, and other issues that may affect culture and recruitment of a diverse workforce, including women. The City Manager's Office will manage the consultant once a contract is completed.

Bottom Line

Culture within SJFD needs to improve. Senior leadership can set the tone at the top, but it will be the captains who make the change happen. The captains are instrumental in making the SJFD firehouses more inclusive and supportive for women. The captains need to call out any bad behavior that could make any team member uncomfortable. They need to ensure that everyone is treated with respect. Their positive influence will encourage other firefighters to follow suit, drive structural improvements, and help cultivate a resilient, respectful team environment in which all firefighters can thrive.

CONCLUSION

The Civil Grand Jury found that while the SJFD has made progress in addressing the less complex recommendations made in the 2019-2020 report about women firefighters, there is significant room for improvement in the more challenging areas of recruiting and culture.

Programs such as the Women's+ Boot Camp and informal mentors are a good start, but women should be at the table where decisions are made to provide their input and perspectives on the workplace, recruiting, and culture.

Being a firefighter is a unique career, a calling that is in service to the community. Communities benefit most when they are served by individuals whose diverse backgrounds and experience mirror the population. In San José, women make up nearly half the population, yet they make up less than 5 percent of the SJFD's sworn staff. The Civil Grand Jury understands that firefighting is a tough job and that there is a long-held image of what a firefighter looks like and does. But if you can't see it, you can't be it (Marques, 2022).

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1

The SJFD has made progress in some areas since the 2020 Civil Grand Jury Report, which the Civil Grand Jury commends.

Recommendation 1

No recommendation.

Finding 2

The SJFD is still struggling to recruit and hire more women.

Recommendation 2a

The City should dedicate more resources to SJFD recruiting more women, including increasing the staffing resources currently dedicated to SJFD recruiting. This should be accomplished by September 30, 2025.

Recommendation 2b

The City should provide additional funding for the Women's+ Boot Camp to host monthly drop-in work outs with the goal of creating a continuously building pipeline of potential applicants. This should be accomplished by September 30, 2025.

Finding 3

The SJFD has knowledgeable employees who could provide the administration and HR with ideas for ways to interest more members of underrepresented groups in attending paramedic school and/or pursuing careers in the fire service.

Recommendation 3

While the SJFD has an internal racial equity action planning committee of staff to focus on recruiting and outreach strategies, the Fire Chief should ask the committee to provide specific recommendations on how to increase interest and pipeline among women, particularly in becoming

paramedics. The committee should seek input from other sworn staff members who may have ideas. The SJFD should provide direction to the committee by September 1, 2025.

Finding 4

Five years after the first Civil Grand Jury report, the SJFD still does not have a detailed timeline beyond FY 25-26 for retrofitting or providing privacy barriers in the remaining stations that do not have dedicated dorms for women or individual sleeping quarters. The SJFD also does not provide regular public updates on its continuing efforts regarding properly fitting turnouts and uniforms for female firefighters.

Recommendation 4

The SJFD should add updates on installing privacy barriers in sleeping quarters and obtaining correctly fitting uniforms/turnouts to its regular monthly report for the City Council's Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee until it has achieved success. This should be added to the regular monthly report by September 1, 2025.

Finding 5

The City and the SJFD leadership need to acknowledge that transforming the fire service culture must happen on a daily basis and be reinforced by captains at all stations and leadership at all levels.

Recommendation 5

The City should provide specific annual training for captains on enforcing City and the SJFD policies related to a diverse workforce, promoting mentorship and professional development, modelling accountability, and encouraging open dialogue about the need for the SJFD staff to represent the community it serves. The first training should be created and completed by January 2026.

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REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to California Penal Code § 933(b) et seq. and California Penal Code § 933.05, the County of Santa Clara 2024-25 Civil Grand Jury requests responses from the following governing body:

Responding Agency	Findings	Recommendations
The City of San José	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	2a, 2b, 3, 4, 5

GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

EMT

An Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) is a first responder trained to rapidly assess, stabilize, and transport sick or injured patients using basic life support techniques.

Paramedic

A paramedic is an advanced pre-hospital clinician who performs invasive procedures, administers a wide range of emergency medications, interprets cardiac rhythms, and makes complex treatment decisions to deliver hospital-level care at the scene and enroute to definitive care.

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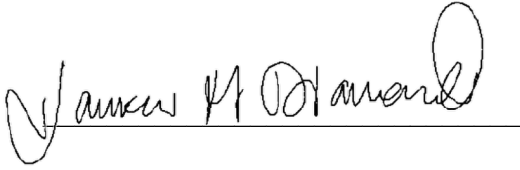
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This report was **ADOPTED** by the County of Santa Clara 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury on this 16th day of June, 2025.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lauren M. Diamond", written over a horizontal line.

Lauren Diamond
Foreperson