



CITY OF SAN DIEGO FIRE CHIEF RECRUITMENT 2024 REPORT OF COMMUNITY FORUMS

INTRODUCTION

With the upcoming August 2024 retirement of current Chief of the Fire-Rescue Department, Colin Stowell, and under the authority of the City of San Diego, on March 18, 2024, Bob Murray and Associates (BMA), an executive recruiting firm, began a nationwide recruitment process for the recruitment of the City's next Chief. Moving beyond the minimum job qualifications described in the employment brochure, the recruitment process, as designed, focuses on inclusion and transparency with the goal of recruiting and selecting a well-rounded candidate with demonstrated knowledge, skills, abilities, and characteristics needed to head San Diego's Fire-Rescue Department with its diverse communities that include a mix of established neighborhoods, a booming City center with high rises, an expansive coastline and industrial corridors.

On April 3 and 4, 2024 the City and BMA co-hosted community forums at the Martin Luther King Recreation Center and the Kearny Mesa Recreation Center. All of San Diego was invited to learn about the recruitment process, and to provide insight into the characteristics of a successful Chief, and the issues facing communities and the Fire-Rescue Department. Attendees were given four questions to consider in small groups with report outs by group after each question.

Attendees were also invited to complete a written survey, with the same questions, to ensure their individual responses were considered. Attendees were informed that the same survey was available on the City's website, in English and Spanish, and could be completed at a later time.

Following is a summary of the data collected at the community forums. Said data, along with data collected from other stakeholder groups, will assist BMA and the City in evaluating candidate readiness to become the Fire Chief in the nation's eighth largest City.

The City used its communication plan to invite participation. While rsvp's were requested, walk-ins were welcome. Attendees were given the same information and asked the same questions at both forums. Attendees were encouraged to sign in but were not required to do so. In total, 43 persons signed in as present at the forums.

Attendance By Forum:

Venue	Number of Participants
Martin Luther King Recreation Center	15
Kearny Mesa Recreation Center	28

RESPONSES BY FORUM

Forum participants were asked four questions:

1. What are the most important characteristics and qualities that the next Chief of Fire-Rescue should have?
2. In your community what are your biggest priorities for the Fire-Rescue Department?
3. How would you like Fire-Rescue personnel (Firefighters and Lifeguards) to engage with your community?
4. What are your priorities for the next Chief of Fire-Rescue?

Responses were given verbally, in group summary form through a table spokesperson. Attendees were provided and encouraged to complete the paper version of the questionnaire to ensure that their thoughts were fully captured. They were also informed that the multiple-choice responses included with each question on the paper version could be used to stimulate group discussions. City staff and BMA received and recorded the community forum attendee comments. The responses herein are a summary of the comment by forum. Attendee responses sometimes included an alphabetical reference to the multiple-choice responses included on the paper (and on-line) version of the survey (i.e. #A is important). To assist readers in understanding attendee comments, the multiple-choice responses are included with each question. Again, participants were not limited to the multiple-choice responses.

FORUM 1: MARTIN LUTHER KING RECREATION CENTER

Forum 1

Attendees - 15

Responses

Question 1: *What are the most important characteristics and qualities that the next Chief of Fire-Rescue should have?*

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Has proven, established, credible and competent track record and experience in Fire-Rescue and lifeguard management.B. Deep awareness of and respect for different cultures in the community.C. Personifies integrity, trustworthiness, honesty, ethical decision making, and fairness.D. Strong leadership with the ability to build and maintain credibility within the SDFD and community.E. Ability to identify and address public safety issues facing our communities.F. Understands the complexities and technological changes affecting fire and lifeguard services locally, regionally, and nationally.G. Professional representative and transparent communicator on behalf of the City when speaking on public safety issues. |
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- All options equally important, candidate should have them all
- Competence and track record/experience especially matters
- Need to build credibility through the department and the community
- More proactive and genuine involvement with the community, such as community meetings, instead of just appearances at events – not just parades
- For F: need to pay attention more on understanding the complexity of technology locally, regionally and national don't matter as much
- As a leader, make sure to connect with all people in the community
- Experience with diverse communities and practice understanding
- B: Deep awareness and respect of different cultures: lived experience
- Having a strong grasp of their position and an understanding of the trickledown effect of decisions (i.e. Layoffs)
- Strong decision-maker
- Good judge of character
- Understanding internal and external stakeholders and being able to not only work politically, but for the people
- Communicate up, down and across
- #D: lead up and down
- Creates programs for diversity and actively tries to support them
- Wants and is open to criticism from the community
- Needs someone who has awareness of equitable practices and can think outside of the box to strengthen them
- Looks to other areas for new ideas
- Follows national best practices related to representation, diversity, and health outcomes.

- Creative, willing to try new things
- Inspirational
- Optimistic, personable, adaptable

Question 2: *In your community what are your biggest priorities for the Fire-Rescue Department?*

- A. Fire suppression.
- B. Brush management for fire prevention.
- C. Fast emergency medical services response and transport.
- D. Coastal, cliff, and water rescues.
- E. Community services such as Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) training services and community safety classes.
- F. Providing aid in local, national, and international emergency situations.
- G. Fire Marshal inspection and community risk reduction services.
- H. Addressing concerns about the safety of abandoned structures.
- I. International border area emergency responses, including along the border fence and nearby international water areas.
- J. Having enough fire stations for residents in every neighborhood/community.
- K. Community awareness and plans for disaster and emergency preparedness.

- Providing resources to those communities like CPR and tools that will allow communities to respond in an emergency until first responders arrive
- Provide basic First Aid knowledge to communities in case of response delays
- Having enough fire stations: look at the service areas
- Having enough staff to support the stations and pay them fairly
- Stress a culture of quick response
- Fire Chief who creates a good work ethic that encourages people
- Fire Prevention
- Understand the importance of internal equity
- Creates a culture of respect
- Understands EMS within San Diego
- Encanto needs a fire station
- Keeping lifeguards staffed at all times especially during peak tourist seasons
- Fire suppression and brush management
- Fast emergency medical services and response times especially in communities of color
- Understaffing
- Community awareness for disaster and emergency preparedness, education the community on how to respond to disaster
- Making sure our fire department is proportionally big enough for our city – the City is ranked 8th in the nation but 14th in fire departments nationally
- Communities like Skyline need a place they can go to in case of shelter in place orders
- Leader who is able to bring the community together, can speak different languages and communicate with many people

- Needs to be a leader and somebody unafraid to stand up against leadership
- Create change to retain staff
- Knowledge of budgeting
- Know of EMS (Emergency Medical Services) and unique response time criteria for medical calls: 80% of calls are medical
- Increase base pay to stop attrition and so that employees can afford to live here
- Expand the recruitment pool

Question 3: How would you like Fire-Rescue personnel (Firefighters and Lifeguards) to engage with your community?

- A. Strong, visible presence of SDFD within the community.
- B. Understanding cultural sensitivities of all communities of San Diego.
- C. Developing partnerships within the community.
- D. Fostering relationships with local and regional partners.
- E. Hosting community education events related to fire and water safety.
- F. Having a deep understanding of unique needs of diverse communities.

- Be culturally sensitive and willing to adapt their strategy for communities as it serves them best
- B and F are the same – you cannot have one without the other and a strong visible presence will be organic
- Fire and water safety events: prioritize community education and engagement
- Needs to be a leader across all communities and present instead of having communities have to figure stuff out on their own
- Out and more visible in the community
- Advocate for the people
- Enable and empower their firefighters to help to fill those gaps on visibility
- Bring back CERT (Community Engagement Response Team) in all communities
- Create positions equivalent to the Police Department’s Community Service Officer
- Establish community education and make sure there’s actual funding and commitment to these programs, they shouldn’t just be there to check a box
- Make sure these resources are equally present in all communities and equally funded in all communities
- Advocating job opportunities to attract people from communities of color
- Relatable and preferably local
- Someone local is better so they can hit the ground running with knowledge on San Diego and things relating to the job
- Foster empowerment in the department
- Commitment and authenticity
- Metrics to measure success
- The tone at the top sets the mood in the middle and creates buzz at the bottom

Question 4: *What are your priorities for the next Chief of Fire-Rescue?*

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Recruiting people who represent the communities they serve, including more women.B. Improving retention of SDFD personnel.C. Improving salaries of the SDFD personnel.D. Prioritizing training of SDFD personnel.E. Motivating, inspiring, commanding, and leading personnel in the SDFD.F. Effective budget and financial management.G. Implementing new technologies and assets (e.g. specialized water boats or improved radio/dispatch systems).H. Expansion of fire and lifeguard cadet programs for entry-level employee focus.I. Maintenance and improvement of Fire-Rescue facilities.J. Deploying innovative and alternative services to meet the needs of the public. |
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- Compensation, recruitment, retention
- Ability to lead and motivate personnel
- Create a succession plan and prepare staff to assume administrative levels
- Motive employees
- Future Fire-Chief should have a good succession plan and prepares their department well
- Creates a culture that is respectful and not misogynistic or racist
- Especially encourage women so they can feel safe and comfortable to thrive in the department
- Leave behind institutional knowledge, so when they leave the next chief and the department doesn't have to restart
- Try to recruit people who are exiting the military
- Recruit for diversity, not numbers
- Promoting from within
- Looking at the minimum qualifications, evaluate the barriers to hiring paramedics/EMTs (Emergency Medical Technicians)
- Create or reassess testing metrics for promotions

FORUM 2: KEARNY MESA RECREATION CENTER

Forum 2

Attendees - 28

Responses

Question 1: *What are the most important characteristics and qualities that the next Chief of Fire-Rescue should have?*

- A. Has proven, established, credible and competent track record and experience in Fire-Rescue and lifeguard management.
- B. Deep awareness of and respect for different cultures in the community.
- C. Personifies integrity, trustworthiness, honesty, ethical decision making, and fairness.
- D. Strong leadership with the ability to build and maintain credibility within the SDFD and community.
- E. Ability to identify and address public safety issues facing our communities.
- F. Understands the complexities and technological changes affecting fire and lifeguard services locally, regionally, and nationally.
- G. Professional representative and transparent communicator on behalf of the City when speaking on public safety issues.

- A-G are very important
- Person who has a proven track record of diversity equity and inclusion
- No history of misconduct and is willing to hold others accountable for misconduct
- Approachable and friendly
- If service is beneath you, leadership is behind you
- Holistic view of response, not just response time
- Utilizes empirical data, data-driven
- Creative
- Slow down and redirect bad practices
- Bold, innovate
- 21st century leader
- Passionate
- Unafraid to call out systemic racism
- Willing demote, reprimand, and fire when needed
- Good public speaker
- Public safety advocate, willing to pushback on lobbyists and corporate shareholders
- Loyal to personnel, department, and community
- Humble
- Nonbiased
- Good listener
- Understand demographics of the community and the underserved
- Implement best practices and efficiency
- Use data and best practices to drive actions

Question 2: *In your community what are your biggest priorities for the Fire-Rescue Department?*

- A. Fire suppression.
- B. Brush management for fire prevention.
- C. Fast emergency medical services response and transport.
- D. Coastal, cliff, and water rescues.
- E. Community services such as Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) training services and community safety classes.
- F. Providing aid in local, national, and international emergency situations.
- G. Fire Marshal inspection and community risk reduction services.
- H. Addressing concerns about the safety of abandoned structures.
- I. International border area emergency responses, including along the border fence and nearby international water areas.
- J. Having enough fire stations for residents in every neighborhood/community.
- K. Community awareness and plans for disaster and emergency preparedness.

- Diversifying lifeguards
 - Recruiting neighborhood children
 - 90-day plan for diversity, equity, inclusion
- Diversifying fire service
- Intentionally lean into diversity equity and inclusion
- Ensuring there are enough stations to serve our communities
- A-K all important, it depends on the community
- Make sure to serve every community based on its particular needs, adapting services
- Collaborating with other services such as mental health
- Social media presence, reach out to communities
- Community training for CPR and first aid
- Brush management, fire prevention
- Faster medical response times
- Awareness on plans for disasters
- Recruitment from diverse communities
- Pay does not go below the national average
- Have a disaster plan that includes inspections and coordination before events occur
- Upkeeping infrastructure proactively
- Leave a postcard after a response to create the ability for those that are serviced to recognize the responders
- State of the art equipment

Question 3: How would you like Fire-Rescue personnel (Firefighters and Lifeguards) to engage with your community?

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|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Strong, visible presence of SDFD within the community.B. Understanding cultural sensitivities of all communities of San Diego.C. Developing partnerships within the community.D. Fostering relationships with local and regional partners.E. Hosting community education events related to fire and water safety.F. Having a deep understanding of unique needs of diverse communities. |
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- Send good communicators to outreach, make public presentations, and educate communities
- Have Fire Safe Councils in more communities
- Active social media presence that reaches out to the community and offers educational content
- Record/upload events and presentations so they are accessible
- Build partnerships and have dedicated resources to engage with the community
- Fire representatives at town council meetings, etc.
- Open-houses to show how shifts are, what the job is like
- Pancake fundraisers at every station
- Workout Wednesdays
- Being more involved with the schools and creating partnerships
- Active at community events and known throughout their areas
- Help with recruitment
- Active in schools
- Relatable and approachable
- Providing training in all communities through programs like CERT
- Creating a modern culture
- Diversifying fire-rescue, there isn't a single black woman in Fire-Rescue
- Creating safe, supportive spaces for firefighters, making sure they feel support mentally, emotionally, and physically
- Creating an open space that doesn't scare firefighters to speak out on misconduct they've witness or the department or incidents of racism, sexism, etc.
- 21st Century standards including data, health, wellness and inclusion
- Well trained
- Adequate equipment
- Mandatory misconduct reporting
- Don't be afraid of communities

Question 4: *What are your priorities for the next Chief of Fire-Rescue?*

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Recruiting people who represent the communities they serve, including more women.B. Improving retention of SDFD personnel.C. Improving salaries of the SDFD personnel.D. Prioritizing training of SDFD personnel.E. Motivating, inspiring, commanding, and leading personnel in the SDFD.F. Effective budget and financial management.G. Implementing new technologies and assets (e.g. specialized water boats or improved radio/dispatch systems).H. Expansion of fire and lifeguard cadet programs for entry-level employee focus.I. Maintenance and improvement of Fire-Rescue facilities.J. Deploying innovative and alternative services to meet the needs of the public. |
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- Make sure Deputy Chief Robbie Logan is in the top two, has been overlooked
- Picking the chief should be a fair process
- Diverse Chief regardless of being from within or not
- Someone who is going to bring more diverse people to the department
- Makes sure that youth can see themselves within the department
- Actually stand behind and see the importance of diversity, with a proven track record
- Give opportunities to people of color and support them
- Someone from the community who knows the community and can hit the ground running
- Not look for the best fit, but the best qualified
- Stay away from politics when hiring the Chief
- Fight for resources and push back against lobbyists and political agendas which don't serve the public
- Someone who is empathetic