



PROMISING  
PRACTICES  
FOR

# Increasing Diversity Among First Responders

Prepared for U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office

## SITE PROFILE

**Bay Area Youth  
Emergency  
Medical  
Technician  
Program**

PREPARED BY



Bethesda, Maryland



AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH®

AUTHORS

Abby Miller, Sue Clery, Samantha Richardson, and Amelia Topper, *Coffey Consulting, LLC*

Stephanie Cronen, Samantha Lilly, Emma Hinkens, and Michelle Yin, *American Institutes for Research (AIR)*

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## Site Visit Findings

First responder fields serve a crucial role in the safety and well-being of communities around the country. Public citizens and officials have placed a renewed focus on improving both the representativeness of first responders in relation to the populations they serve, and the agencies' relations with their local communities. The assumption underlying this focus is that a more representative first responder workforce will lead to better community relations and fairer treatment of the public served. *Promising Practices for Increasing Diversity Among First Responders*, conducted by Coffey Consulting, LLC on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor Chief Evaluation Office in 2016, was an exploratory study that involved five in-depth site visits and a literature review to identify promising practices that first responder agencies and organizations can leverage to increase the diversity of their workforces.

The following site profile is one of five available for the first responder departments and training providers that were selected for this study, based on both the extent to which their first responder workforce is representative of the local population, and their use of practices that align with the human resources literature as being effective for developing a diverse workforce:

- Atlanta Police Department (APD)
- **BAY EMT, Oakland, CA**
- Camp Fully Involved (CFI), Concord, NH
- Dallas Police Department (DPD)

- San Francisco Fire Department (SFFD)

The full study (available at <https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/CompletedStudies.htm>) details a number of common practices along the employment pipeline, from outreach and recruitment to the retention and advancement among those hired. In addition to promising practices, a number of challenges were identified to further diversifying first responders, including a negative public image of first responders in the community, low pay, and restrictive selection and hiring processes.

# Bay Area Youth Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Program

## Background

The Bay Area Youth EMT (BAY EMT) program was selected to participate in the study because of its unique approach to increasing diversity as a third-party training provider. The study team conducted interviews either one-on-one or in group settings with 30 persons of various involvement and positions with the program, including the executive directors of BAY EMT, Oakland and Alameda County Fire Department staff who serve as volunteer instructors in the program; Alameda County Superior Court judge who acts as a local advocate and partner; BAY EMT alumni; and current BAY EMT cadets. The site visit to BAY EMT was conducted in April, 2016.

BAY EMT is a nonprofit organization that offers free vocational training in the Oakland, California area with the mission of increasing the diversity of the local fire and EMS workforce. The program targets at-risk youth from foster homes and juvenile facilities who are between the ages of 18 and 24. BAY EMT offers two programs—the EMT program and the Fire Academy. The Fire Academy is operated with the support of Merritt College, the Oakland Fire Department, and the Alameda County Fire Department. In addition to completing fundamental lecture-style courses, students in the Fire Academy participate in physical training to practice fire skills hands-on. Additionally, all students are required to participate in volunteer events, such as school job fairs, community festivals, church events, and health fairs.

BAY EMT provides young adults with classroom instruction and hands-on physical training that prepares them to sit for any applicable required exams and become qualified candidates to apply for either a position within the field (for EMT) or within a fire department's academy (for fire). Enrollment for the EMT program allows for 35 students per session, and application for participation in the program is open to all interested individuals. BAY EMT fire academy enrollment is limited to 20-25 students per session and requires that applicants have taken one fire science technology course and have completed at least one EMT course. The EMT program is a five-month course offered twice a year, while the fire academy program is 18-weeks long and offered once a year.<sup>1</sup>

BAY EMT's founders conceptualized the program because they were particularly concerned with the lack of diversity in their community's EMT and firefighting fields—one of the most diverse communities in the country, but lacking in female, non-White, and bilingual staff. In the years prior to the program, some fire/EMT professionals at departments in local counties were less than 10 percent African American, less than 5 percent female, or, in one extreme, comprised only of men. These statistics were not representative of the diverse demographics of Oakland at the time, which was 36 percent African American, 22 percent Hispanic or

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<sup>1</sup> Exception during 2009 and 2010 when EMT sessions occurred once a year.

Latino of any race, 15 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 52 percent female.<sup>2</sup> In pursuing development of the program, the founders realized that the education requirements necessary for pursuing a career in fire/EMT contributed to the lack of diversity: disadvantaged groups lacked resources and accessibility to attend and afford the education or training. Accordingly, the BAY EMT program was established in 2002 to offer free training, education, and support to prepare students for a career in EMS for those underrepresented in the field.

Of the 259 BAY EMT program students between 2011 and 2014, 205 passed the BAY EMT Final Exam, 96 passed the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) exam, and 67 became employed in healthcare (e.g., at an ambulance agency or hospital). Approximately 30 percent of the EMT graduates obtain employment within a year after completing the program. In addition, of the 62 fire academy students who participated in the program from 2013 to 2016, 43 students passed the Firefighter I Final Exam, 13 obtained a paid internship at a fire department, 21 became employed in healthcare (e.g., at an ambulance agency or hospital), and 16 became employed as firefighters or are participating in a department's hiring process. The program was the topic of a documentary titled "In the Red," which followed some of the program's participants over a period of two years to portray the program's impact on their lives.

## Leadership

BAY EMT is managed primarily by its two founders, executive director Wellington Jackson and fire academy director Sean Gascie; both are firefighters at local departments who dedicate time outside of their own firefighting careers to voluntarily operate BAY EMT. The founders use their large professional, community, and social network to gain support and resources for the BAY EMT program.

### BAY EMT Highlight

An alumnus of the program shared his success story:

"I was in juvenile hall when someone introduced me to [the founding director]. I took a liking to [the program], I really enjoyed the curriculum, so I graduated from the program out of juvenile hall and moved on to BAY EMT. I got my license and started working at a detox center. [The founding director] single-handedly helped me along the way. He took me to Sacramento to speak about a senate bill. It was about allowing people with records to go on and get their EMT license in the State of California. He jumped through a lot of hoops here, and he does that for everyone. After that I went to the fire academy. I got a job as a reserve, now I'm in the academy program."

<sup>2</sup> Oakland city demographic data for this period obtained from: U. S. Census Bureau. (2000). American FactFinder fact sheet: Oakland City, California. Retrieved November 8, 2016, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/0653000/accessible>.

## Unique Practices

BAY EMT provides pre-cadet training to a segment of the population that may not otherwise receive it. BAY EMT's recruitment strategy is also unique in the field because the program recruits directly from foster programs and juvenile facilities and has less stringent entry requirements compared to fire academies. While most academies require all six fire science courses (offered through colleges or universities) be completed in order to enter a fire academy, BAY EMT only requires one of six fire science courses for program applicants to enter the program. This requirement was thoughtfully determined in an attempt to increase the diversity of the applicant pool by providing the opportunity to individuals – many of whom are from underrepresented groups – who start but have difficulty finishing an extended educational pathway. The program advocates for students and alumni by utilizing local networks and providing resources and tools to aid in placement into a fire academy with a department. The program also provides mentoring, tutoring, and professional advice. The large community network of local fire departments, employers, and organizations allows BAY EMT to share information, obtain support, and try to identify opportunities for students after program completion. The program supports students in personal obstacles as well, such as finding housing and managing family challenges. Due to the targeted focus of the program, students have often struggled with legal indiscretions in their youth that may otherwise serve as employment obstacles. BAY EMT partners with East Bay Community Legal Center to help in resolving students' legal matters.

Given the highly competitive nature of the field and industry demand, it is much more difficult to obtain employment in fire services than EMS. To aid in students' advancement, BAY EMT has established three paid part-time internships with local fire departments for fire academy students for the duration of their involvement in the program. This allows those students to gain first-hand experience and perhaps an advantage in obtaining a position in a department after completion of the program. BAY EMT also partners with a local ambulance provider to offer jobs to graduates in EMT occupations. Figure 1 displays where promising practices identified at BAY EMT fall along the employment pipeline.

**Figure 1. Overview of Diversity Efforts Along Key Points in the Employment Pipeline at BAY EMT**

