Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
in the U.S. Volunteer and Combination Fire-rescue Service

International Association of Fire Chiefs

May 2022

Table of Contents

Research Goals

This project had two research goals:

1. To obtain actionable information that will enable the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) to help volunteer and combination departments in the U.S. improve their recruitment and retention efforts, particularly as they relate to groups that traditionally have been underrepresented in the fire-rescue service.

2. To identify actions those agencies may take to create and maintain inclusive, equitable, and diverse work environments.

Introduction and Executive Summary

This research project involved surveying members of volunteer and combination fire departments in the U.S. The results offer insights into how the 1,311 respondents view diversity, inclusion, and equity (DEI) in their departments, what their agencies are doing or not doing to foster inclusion and fairness, and some of the challenges that face their organizations.

On the positive front, the respondents report various types of diversity within their departments. Many believe their department leaders act fairly, they feel included, and they believe in the value of various DEI initiatives.

Overall, many are satisfied with leadership and communication and find meaning in their work. On the other hand, respondents in some minority groups report a less positive experience in several domains.

Many respondents do not believe their department's DEI initiatives have been effective, and over half the respondents report they have had personal experience with discrimination, bullying, and/or hazing.

Additionally, some open-ended comments reflect common misperceptions about DEI, such as the following:
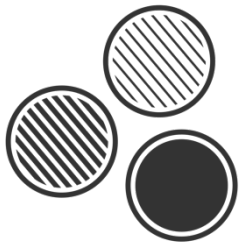
> Diversity is limited to demographic characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender).

> The way to have a diverse workforce is to recruit more applicants from traditionally underrepresented groups; equity and inclusion (the other elements of DEI) are not relevant.

> A demographically homogeneous community cannot be or become "diverse."

> Individuals in groups traditionally underrepresented in the U.S. fire-rescue service may be unqualified.

> DEI initiatives may put the safety of fire-rescue professionals and their communities at risk.

Let's consider the reality:

> There is a critical shortage of volunteers in the U.S. fire-rescue service.

> DEI initiatives typically represent good management practices. Regardless of their backgrounds, most people want to be treated fairly and to feel a sense of belonging.

> In some cases, staffing shortages can be eased by implementing practices that result in workplaces in which people feel they belong and are treated fairly.

> The U.S. workforce continues to become more diverse demographically. A 2019 Pew Research Center

study[1] found that 48% of Generation Z members – the fire-rescue service's current and future applicant pool – are ethnic minorities, and they tend to be accepting of differences.

A second survey with 10,810 members of the public was conducted to explore that group's motivations for volunteering in general, their awareness of volunteer fire departments in their local areas, and their interest in volunteering with those departments. The results of this survey indicate that awareness of opportunities to volunteer with fire departments is low, yet over half the respondents (51%) express an interest in volunteering with a fire department in a variety of roles. This finding highlights a potential untapped market of volunteers, particularly in certain minority groups that express higher rates of interest than other groups.

Descriptions of each DEI element used for this study are those found in the IAFC's *Guide for Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department:*[2]

DIVERSITY

appreciating the many ways in which people differ. Beyond demographic characteristics, examples of other characteristics on which people differ include talents, skills, perspectives, communication preferences, and interests.

EQUITY

ensuring that people are treated fairly and have equal opportunities to be who they are.

INCLUSION

enabling people to feel welcome, respected, trusted, and valued so they feel they belong.

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[1] Dimock, Michael (2019). *Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/

[2] International Association of Fire Chiefs (2020). *Guide for Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department.* https://www.iafc.org/topics-and-tools/resources/resource/guide-for-creating-a-diverse-and-inclusive-department

Methodology

Achieving the stated research goals involved surveying two different audiences:

1. Fire-rescue professionals who currently serve in volunteer and combination departments about their (a) agencies' practices that directly or indirectly affect diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and (b) perceptions of the initiatives' effectiveness in recruiting and retaining volunteers ("Department survey").

2. Community members who live in areas served by volunteer or combination departments about what factors they consider in making choices about where to direct their volunteer time and efforts ("Public survey").

Department Survey: Sample and Quantitative Results

The Department survey was developed in consultation with fire-rescue professionals who served as subject matter experts and with IAFC staff members. A pilot test that was conducted before launching the survey nationwide resulted in several changes. The survey link was e-mailed to over 18,000 individuals at volunteer and combination departments in the United States. Those addresses came from a vendor's mailing list as well as from the IAFC's distribution list for its Volunteer and Combination Officers Section. Because the recipients were asked to share the link with others, the number of people who received the survey invitation is unknown. This effort resulted in 1,311 usable responses. Aside from the information about respondents' department and individual characteristics, the survey questions addressed people's perceptions of their workplace, with a particular emphasis on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This sample represents a very small fraction of the estimated 722,800 volunteer fire personnel in the U.S.[3]

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[3] National Fire Protection Association (2019). *U.S. Fire Department Profile.* https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/Emergency-Responders/US-fire-department-profile

Any survey represents a snapshot in time and the views of the individuals who choose to respond. None of the questions in the Department survey were required, and others offered a "Prefer not to answer" option, so the number of responses varied across items. The sample of respondents who completed the Department survey are described in the Tables 1 and 2 below. Of note: 45% of respondents are in volunteer departments, 96% are White, 89% are male, and 54% are volunteers who receive no pay or stipends. The average age of participants is 52, and they have spent an average of 20 years with their departments.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics: Department Features

	Number	Percentage
Type of Department		
Combination	612	54%
Volunteer	509	45%
Services Offered*		
Fire suppression	1,111	97%
Public Education/community outreach	858	75%
EMS – first responder	819	72%
Specialty services (e.g., HazMat, swift water)	607	53%
Fire prevention/code enforcement	590	52%
EMS – hospital transport	421	37%
*respondents could choose multiple categories		
Number of Members		
1-20	186	17%
21-50	499	45%
51-100	289	26%
101-150	80	7%
151-200	20	2%
200+	47	4%
Location (IAFC Region)		
Eastern	337	30%
Southeastern	202	18%
New England	200	18%
Great Lakes	158	14%
Western	127	11%
Missouri Valley	75	7%
Southwestern	39	3%
Area Served		
Rural	434	38%
Suburban	405	36%
Urban	89	8%
Mixed/Multiple	205	18%

Table 2. Sample Characteristics: Individual Features

	Number	Percentage
Current Role*		
Firefighter	419	39%
Fire Chief	367	34%
EMT	260	24%
Company Officer	153	14%
Administrative Staff	150	14%
Chief Officer (not fire chief)	123	11%
Support Staff (e.g., driver, logistics)	105	10%
Paramedic	55	5%
Currently Inactive	31	3%
*respondents could choose multiple categories		
Type of Member		
Volunteer (no pay/stipend)	641	54%
Career (fully paid)	280	25%
Stipend	101	9%
Paid-on-call	88	8%
Race/Ethnicity*		
White	1,036	96%
Hispanic or Latino	26	2%
Black/African American	19	2%
Native American/Alaskan Native	17	2%
Asian	6	1%
Middle Eastern	5	< 1%
*respondents could choose multiple categories		
Gender Identification		
Male	985	89%
Female	126	11%

Table 2. Sample Characteristics: Individual Features (continued)

	Number	Percentage
Age		
15-23	29	3%
24-32	86	8%
33-41	111	10%
42-50	224	20%
51+	663	60%
Years with Department		
1-3	170	15%
4-6	132	12%
7-10	117	10%
11-15	123	11%
16-20	106	9%
21+	487	43%
Disability requiring accommodation		
No	1,064	96%
Yes	43	4%

The non-demographic questions on the survey were organized into ten relevant topic areas. See Table 3 for the topic areas, their average scores, and sample questions that respondents assessed with an agreement scale (a 5-point scale from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree"). The closer an average score is to 5.0, the more desirable its outcome. For example, the higher scores on *Inclusion – Individual* indicate more positive perceptions of feeling included, valued, and respected at one's department. The higher the scores on *Communication*, the stronger respondents' agreement with items related to communicating with department leaders. The topics with the highest scores were *Meaning*, which is an indicator of the importance or connection individuals feel to their department and the fire service in general, and *Satisfaction* with their department. The topic with the lowest average score was *DEI Success*, which indicates respondents' perceived success of the department's DEI initiatives, if any.

The correlations among all the topic areas are significant and positive, indicating that they tend to co-occur. For instance, the results indicate that individuals who find a strong sense of meaning in the fire service also tend to be highly satisfied with their experiences at their departments. Similarly, those who believe their department's practices are equitable tend to describe the agency as inclusive. Additionally, those who have positive views of their department's leadership are inclined to perceive greater success in their department's DEI initiatives. Descriptive statistics for all survey items may be found in Appendix A; the specific items included in each of the ten topic areas may be found in Appendix B.

Table 3. Department Survey: Average Scores by Topic Area

Average Score (5-point scale)	Topic Area	Example Question
4.51	*Meaning*	The fire service has a great deal of meaning for me
4.01	*Satisfaction*	I experience a great deal of satisfaction from my role at my department
3.93	*Equity*	I am treated fairly in my department
3.83	*Inclusion – Individual*	In my department, I feel welcome, valued, and respected
3.70	*Leadership*	My department's leaders seriously consider options and inputs of all members, regardless of their backgrounds
3.69	*Communication*	Leaders communicate my department's vision, mission, and values clearly and often
3.57	*Diversity*	People of diverse backgrounds serve in all ranks and positions throughout my department
3.48	*Inclusion – Department*	My department maintains a welcoming work environment for all members
3.47	*Department Climate*	Good performers tend to stay with my department
3.28	*DEI Success*	Overall, the initiatives my department has implemented have resulted in a more welcoming, fair, and/or diverse environment.

In addition to the above ten topic areas, respondents answered several questions related to their perceptions of diversity, equity, and inclusion at their departments. First, they were asked to report on the ways diversity is represented in their department. Table 4 indicates that respondents tend to see diversity related to age, talents, skills, competencies, and education. They report less diversity on characteristics such as disability, language spoken, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality.

Table 4. Perceptions of Department Diversity

	Number	Percentage
My department is diverse in the following ways:*		
Age	1,151	91%
Talents, skills, competencies	1,026	81%
Education level	1,007	80%
Family responsibilities	900	71%
Career goals	711	56%
Race/ethnicity	683	54%
Religious beliefs	666	53%
Socioeconomic class	626	50%
Nationality	491	39%
Sexual orientation	462	37%
Gender identification	406	32%
Language(s) spoken	320	25%
(Dis)ability	237	19%
***Respondents could choose multiple categories**		

Participants also reported on their perceptions of fairness and equity within their departments. Table 5 shows that they view many agency practices as fair, particularly those related to offering training and distributing resources. Relatively fewer participants believe that practices related to evaluating performance (57%) and distributing work (64%) are fair.

Table 5. Perceptions of Department Equity

	Number	Percentage
My department acts fairly when it comes to:*		
Offering training opportunities	1,061	88%
Distributing resources such as gear	1,002	83%
Applying standards and rules	920	76%
Promoting or electing members	884	73%
Recognizing members' contributions	864	72%
Resolving conflicts	848	70%
Distributing work	766	64%
Evaluating performance	690	57%
***** **Respondents could choose multiple categories**		

Participants were asked to report on the types of DEI initiatives their departments have implemented. A parallel question provided the same list of DEI initiatives and asked which ones, if any, the respondents think would help to improve the levels of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their department. Results appear in Table 6. The most common initiatives participants cite as being implemented at their departments include social activities that allow members to get to know each other (48%), marketing materials that appeal to a wide variety of people (38%), and training that promotes understanding of diverse groups (23%). Twenty to thirty percent of respondents perceive most initiatives as being useful for promoting a more welcoming, fair, and diverse environment.

The ideas endorsed by the most respondents as likely to improve DEI include **marketing materials** that appeal to a wide variety of people (39%), **recruitment efforts** targeting underrepresented groups (38%), and **social activities** that allow members to get to know each other (38%).

Interestingly, two of the top three types of initiatives believed to be useful are most frequently reported as being implemented.

Other notable findings include the differences between the initiatives departments have implemented and those their members think would be useful for enhancing the levels of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The largest discrepancies between the perceived usefulness of those initiatives and their implementation by the department include (a) recruitment efforts targeting underrepresented groups (23% higher perceived usefulness), (b) community training programs to prepare underrepresented groups for hiring (20% higher perceived usefulness), and (c) mentoring programs for underrepresented groups (19% higher perceived usefulness). Although social activities are provided by 48% of departments, only 38% of respondents perceive them as useful for DEI purposes. These gaps identify opportunities for departments to pursue initiatives that respondents believe are useful for enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusiveness.

Table 6. DEI Initiatives: Implementation and Perceptions of Usefulness

DEI Initiatives*	Department has Implemented		Perceived as Useful for Improving DEI	
	Number	%	Number	%
Social activities that enable members to get to know one another personally	601	48%	466	38%
Marketing materials that appeal to a wide variety of people	476	38%	476	39%
Training that promotes understanding of diverse groups in the community	287	23%	441	36%
Mentoring programs for members in underrepresented groups (e.g., women, people of color)	223	18%	450	37%
Advisory groups, committees, or task forces whose focus is on helping the department become more welcoming to all, fair, and representative of the community	214	17%	361	29%
Outreach activities in the community that target people in underrepresented groups	203	16%	405	33%
Recruitment efforts that target people from underrepresented groups	192	15%	468	38%
Programs to increase inclusiveness	190	15%	366	30%
Programs to increase fairness	179	14%	273	22%
Programs to increase diversity	166	13%	378	31%
Community training programs to help potential candidates from underrepresented groups prepare for the hiring process	132	11%	380	31%
Extra support or services as needed to members from underrepresented groups	105	8%	243	20%
Marketing materials in language(s) used in the community other than English	94	8%	251	20%
None of the above	342	28%	231	19%

* Respondents could choose multiple categories

An analysis of subgroup members' responses (based on department and individual characteristics) to the ten topic areas yielded the following differences:

▶ Department characteristics
- Department type
- Number of members
- Area served (urban, rural, suburban)
- Location (region of the U.S. as defined by IAFC regions)

▶ Individual characteristics
- Role
- Type of member
- Years with the department
- Race/ethnicity
- Gender
- Disability
- Years with the department
- Personal experience with discrimination/hazing/bullying

Analyses of the topics by group membership yielded the results displayed in Table 7 below. The shaded boxes indicate a statistically significant difference between members within given groups for each topic area. For example, male and female respondents have different perceptions about six of the topic areas, whereas their perceptions about the remaining four are similar. Perceptions of respondents by their racial/ethnic identity are not significantly different among the groups. While this outcome may seem counterintuitive, it may have occurred due to the small number of non-White respondents, who represent heterogeneous groups with varying experiences. Their responses were combined into a single group because the sample sizes in those groups were not large enough to examine each one separately.

Table 7. Topic Area Comparisons by Group

Topic Area*

Group	Diversity	Inclusion - Dept.	Inclusion - Individual	Equity	DEI Success	Dept Climate	Leader-ship	Commun-ication	Satis-faction	Meaning
Role	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Location	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Personal experience with discrimination/ hazing/bullying	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Type of member	□	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Age	□	■	■	■	□	■	■	■	■	■
Disability	■	■	■	■	■	□	■	□	■	□
Number of members	■	■	■	■	□	□	■	■	■	□
Gender	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	■
Area served	■	■	□	■	□	□	■	□	■	□
Department type	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	■	■
Years with department	□	□	□	■	□	■	□	■	■	■
Race/ethnicity	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

* A list of the items that comprise each of the scales may be found in Appendix B.

Color Code:

Blue boxes = significant differences in responses based on group membership

White = no significant differences in responses based on group membership

Reading down the columns of the table shows where there are significant differences based on group membership in perceptions about each topic area. For example, all groups except race/ethnicity report significant differences among their members in the areas of equity and satisfaction. In cases where there are significant differences, scores tend to be <u>higher</u> for:

- Respondents in volunteer departments than for those in combination departments

- Respondents in rural areas than for those in urban or suburban areas

- Fire chiefs than for respondents in other roles

- Career members than for volunteer members

- Males than for females

- Older respondents than for younger respondents

- Respondents without a disability than for those with a disability

More specifically, several groups of respondents (often those who are underrepresented in the fire service) report more negative experiences related to feeling included, being treated fairly, and being satisfied with their experiences at their department. For example:

- 79% of male respondents report being treated fairly in their departments, whereas 64% of female respondents report fair treatment.

- 74% of male respondents report feeling that their voices are heard and their ideas are seriously considered, whereas only 51% of females agree with that statement.

- 74% of respondents without disabilities perceive that their department maintains a welcoming environment for all members, whereas only 49% of respondents with disabilities agree with that statement.

> 78% of respondents without disabilities report that their co-workers value their talents, whereas only 58% of respondents with disabilities agree with that statement.

Exploring differences between respondents who had personal experience with discrimination, bullying, and/or hazing in their department and those who did not reveals that over half of the sample (53%) report having had at least one of such experiences. Table 8 below shows more details about these incidents. Additionally, respondents reporting personal experience with discrimination, bullying, and/or hazing have significantly lower scores on all ten topic areas than those without such experiences. That is, those who have experienced discrimination, bullying, or hazing report more negative perceptions of fairness, inclusion, department leadership, and communication than those who had not. They also tend to be less satisfied with their experience at their departments and to find less meaning in their work. Additional details about group differences appear in Appendix C.

Table 8. Personal Experience with Discrimination, Bullying, and Hazing

	Discrimination		Bullying		Hazing	
Experience*	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Witnessed it personally	276	24%	301	26%	174	15%
Heard stories of others' experiences	325	28%	343	30%	239	21%
Experienced it personally	151	13%	174	15%	112	10%
Engaged in it myself	23	2%	23	2%	51	4%

 * Respondents could choose multiple categories

In addition to the survey's quantitative questions with rating scales, respondents had an option to provide written comments. Many individuals took advantage of that opportunity. For example, in response to the survey's last question ("Is there anything related to this survey or its content that you want the researchers to know?"), 470 people (41%) provided sometimes extensive comments. Following the identification of the three overall themes described below, the findings are presented by issue. As the examples indicate, there are a variety of opinions about each one.

Overall Themes

Survey respondents' written feedback indicates three clear, overarching themes.

1. **The respondents care deeply about the work they do.**
   This was demonstrated by their statements and confirmed by their universally strong agreement with survey items designed to assess the degree to which the fire service has a great deal of meaning for them. As reported in the previous section, the overall average score for *Meaning* is 4.51 out of 5, by far the highest agreement with any of the topic areas, notwithstanding the fact that there are significant differences among members of some sub-groups, as noted earlier.

2. **The respondents are very concerned about the viability and continued relevance of the U.S. volunteer fire service.**
   Some respondents express despair about the declining number of volunteers, citing reasons such as people's busy lives, the high cost of living in some areas, a sparse local population from which to draw, and perceived changes in people's willingness to volunteer. Others look more locally at their own departments, generalizing their experiences and observations to the fire service. References to factors such as the "old boys' network," racism, sexism, and poor leadership often were cited and perceived by some, rightly or wrongly, as symptomatic of the profession.

3. **While some respondents perceive diversity, inclusion, and equity as tools to help the volunteer fire service thrive, others view them as irrelevant and even harmful to the safety of firefighters and their communities.**

   Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives reflect good management practices. They often require changes, both large and small, to current practices. Some respondents indicate they embrace the necessary changes, others suggest they will tolerate changes they see as necessary for the future of the department and the volunteer fire service, and still others reject DEI-related changes altogether.

It is important to keep in mind that volunteer firefighters are a microcosm of the U.S. population. Thus, it is not surprising that same divisive issues that are roiling the country now are present in their departments. The results of this survey, taken collectively and viewed with an open mind, offer an opportunity to learn from each other and to make choices about the most effective ways to enhance recruitment and retention in the volunteer fire service.

Inclusion

Respondents report both general environments of exclusion and specific behavioral examples they have experienced or observed. One perspective is that being inclusive is a biased method used to exclude others. The majority of statements center on the extent to which volunteers experience and perceive exclusion at the hands of career staff. Examples range from volunteers' treatment by governing body members to leaders who favor career personnel over career staff on the fire ground such as by refusing to let volunteer firefighters engage on-scene. Many comments allude to cliques and politics within the department that effectively create "in" groups and "out" groups. There are a few examples of ways in which civilian staff feel excluded, such as being welcomed yet not feeling they belong there.

Other respondents support the creation of environments in which people feel they belong. They point out how dependent their departments are on volunteers, and as a result, they believe it is in everyone's best interest for the agency to create a culture that attracts, accepts, and values people for who they are and what they can contribute. They suggest that leaders be open to staffing or creating non-firefighter and EMS positions staffed by civilians with the necessary expertise. Importantly, they note that an environment that leaders perceive to be inclusive may not feel welcoming to all potential or current volunteers.

Equity

Many comments indicate that respondents believe "equity" and "equality" mean the same thing. They do not. In fact, treating everyone the same in the name of "equality" often results in real or perceived unfair outcomes. For example, requiring all volunteers to undergo the same training regardless of their roles is wasteful and non-productive. Providing the training that volunteers need to be successful in their respective roles, on the other hand, results in a competent workforce able to achieve the department's mission.

Respondents provide more examples of inequity than of equity. Some of the examples cited as being unfair include treating "in" and "out" group members differently, playing favorites based on irrelevant criteria, targeting people for extra scrutiny because of race or gender, and selecting officers based on popularity rather than on their skills and competency.

Respondents offer only a few examples of being treated equitably. These include departments providing opportunities to excel to those who aspire to do so; treating everyone fairly and impartially; and distributing a copy of the department's policies and procedures to all members, then holding everyone accountable for adhering to them.
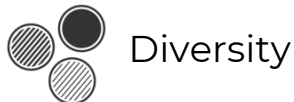
Diversity

Respondents commonly define or describe diversity very narrowly, reflecting only demographic characteristics such as race/ethnicity, gender, and age rather than other characteristics on which people differ. As a result, some respondents declare their departments cannot be diverse because the residents of the community they serve are homogenous. Others cite civil service regulations and/or union contracts as excuses for excluding people. Some comments express concern that others will look upon their department poorly if it is not diverse, even if the surrounding community exhibits very little demographic diversity. Some respondents note the prevalence of White males in their department and the lack of women and/or people of color. Going beyond external characteristics, a few respondents indicate that firefighting and EMS skills are required to join the agency. Others question why the department should spend resources trying to convince "underrepresented" people to join.

A few comments indicate an understanding of the broad meaning of diversity. For example, they describe volunteers who represent a variety of religions, sexual orientations, ethnicities, and skills as enriching the department. Several respondents emphasize that they look for people who can do the job, regardless of the type(s) of diversity they represent. There are some suggestions of various bases of diversity beyond the examples on the survey, such as political leanings, professional or working class status, thought, and the mentality about who belongs in the volunteer fire service and who doesn't.
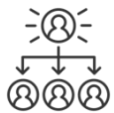
Leadership – Department

The topic of leadership generated a very large number of comments throughout the survey, the majority of which are critical. The most commonly cited leadership shortfalls include creating and/or tolerating a toxic environment; resisting change; clinging to the notion that because they had to do things a certain way in the past, everyone else should have to do so even when there is a new and better way; acting as a bully; engaging in retribution; not "letting go" when their time is up; and losing sight of the reason for the department's existence.

Other respondents state their strong belief that good leadership is critical to the well-being of a department. They cite behaviors at their departments such as welcoming new members from the time they walk in the door, creating an inclusive environment that values people and inspires them to be part of the department's mission, providing the support volunteers need to be successful, and ensuring there are roles for those who want to join even if those roles don't exist at that moment.

Leadership – Governing Body

Although most respondents addressed leadership with respect to their own department, there are several examples of poor leadership by members of the governing body (e.g., county or state government, Board of Directors). These behaviors include being out of touch with today's fire service, bullying volunteers, treating volunteers as "lesser than" career staff, talking down to volunteers, creating a toxic relationship with members, making it difficult for volunteers with day jobs to meet training and other requirements, providing resources to career staff and not to volunteers, and overstepping their bounds into operational settings.

Teamwork

As the saying goes, "A team is only as strong as its weakest link." Respondents identify both the challenges to teamwork that they have experienced as well as the elements that make it effective. Most of the former reference the way career staff treat volunteers, such as by not training together, criticizing volunteers, ignoring them, limiting them to cleaning chores around the station instead of engaging on the fire ground, and generally treating them as second-class people.

A few respondents note that a team has a common goal that requires a variety of skill sets and perspectives to achieve it. **Their positive examples of teamwork include a lack of favoritism, a welcoming environment, a prohibition on discrimination, and zero tolerance for bad behavior.**

Conflict

It should come as no surprise that nearly all of the comments about conflict center on those between volunteer and career members. For example, some volunteers describe experiencing disrespect, distrust, treatment as second-class people, and accusations of "stealing" jobs that could go to career firefighters. The volunteers' resentment comes through clearly, and there were no positive comments. One respondent suggests that leaders are unable to address the differences between volunteer and career members because they are not trained to be "peace keepers."

Training

The issues most often generating comments are the amount of training required of volunteers and its accessibility. Respondents repeatedly emphasize that training requirements have a big impact on the recruitment and retention of volunteers. They cite challenges such as the limited availability of training, such as having one night for training that volunteers with day jobs cannot attend, and the increasing amount of training required. Note that respondents recognize and agree that operations-related training is critical for firefighters; the issue seems to be how many of the additional requirements are necessary for all volunteers.

Several respondents focus on the importance of being respectful of volunteers' time
when it comes to training and events, and of providing quality, timely training that is
accessible to members. In addition to operations-related training, one suggestion to help
retain current volunteers is to train both leaders and members how to be more inclusive,
welcoming, and supportive.

Recruitment

There are several striking themes in respondents' comments related to recruitment. For
example, some state that Civil Service regulations and/or union contracts prohibit their
departments from treating people differently, ignoring the fact that neither one prevents
them from dealing with people fairly or from creating an environment in which people feel
they belong. The fact that some respondents protest that they shouldn't have to lower
performance standards to recruit volunteers – even though the survey did not suggest
that they do so – may indicate an underlying assumption about the qualifications of
individuals in certain groups. Finally, several respondents indicate that they would
welcome potential volunteers "should they present themselves." This approach is likely to
be ineffective, in light of the public survey finding that 47% of respondents are unsure
whether there is a volunteer fire department in their local area.

**Factors that respondents perceive as preventing people from volunteering for their
departments include both issues that are controllable by the department and those that
are not.** Some of the latter factors include the high cost of living in the area, lack of
financial stability, and location (e.g., in sparsely populated areas, in areas whose residents
are primarily retired). The controllable factors include the community's awareness about
the department's need for volunteers, the accessibility of training, the flexibility of shift
schedules, the agency's culture (e.g., whether it is welcoming), and the willingness to fill
positions or roles outside of those of firefighter and EMS.

Retention

**As is the case with recruitment, the ability to retain qualified volunteers depends on
factors that are and are not controllable by the department.** Non-controllable factors
include the high cost of living in the area and increased training requirements mandated
by state or local organizations. However, there are many more factors that department
leaders *can* control. Examples include addressing the conflicts between volunteer and
career members, ensuring members feel they belong at the department, implementing

zero-tolerance policies for discrimination, bullying, and hazing, providing supportive leadership, offering training opportunities that fit volunteers' schedules, fostering teamwork, especially between volunteers and career staff, establishing a mentoring program, and hiring people to keep up with increasingly greater paperwork requirements so the volunteers can do what they signed up to do – i.e., help people. One additional factor is that longer-tenured members sometimes feel that they are not wanted or needed anymore despite their years or decades of experience and their wealth of knowledge.

Opportunities for Growth

The comments in this category arise from respondents' stated frustrations with what they view as **challenges to their department's – and in some cases the fire service's – ability to attract qualified volunteers and retain the ones they have.** Given firefighters' reputation for creativity and proficiency in solving problems, those frustrations are re-framed here as growth opportunities.

Many of the respondents report challenges related to favoritism and unprofessional behaviors, describing them by terms such as "the good ol' boys' system," breaking down "old school" barriers, and the "dinosaur" culture. One respondent points out that although change is hard for those who engage in such behaviors, it cannot be used as an excuse to continue them.

Cliques are mentioned frequently as a source of exclusion. Although most respondents convey that their members engage in practices and behaviors that result in differential treatment, one respondent comments that while members of the department's tight clique aren't bullies, neither are they welcoming or helpful to others.

Other challenges address specific groups that are treated differently; women and people of color are identified most frequently. A few respondents share that when they reported the unprofessional behaviors, the incidents were discounted for reasons such as, "That's just what it's like in the fire service." Hazing is described by one person as a tradition that is "completely normal" in the fire service. Another expresses a desire for the fire service to "support or at least be accepting of" members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Support for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The comments in this section indicate that respondents view the creation of an inclusive work environment in which all people are treated fairly as important. They report indicators such as accepting all individuals who meet the department's entry requirements, embedding inclusive and equitable practices into the recruitment process, establishing and enforcing zero-tolerance policies against discrimination and harassment, and hiring a recruitment and retention coordinator.

Misconceptions about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The comments in this section indicate that **some respondents do not see a connection between creating an inclusive work environment in which all people are treated fairly and the ability of their department to thrive.** There are many examples that demonstrate their own and/or others' lack of understanding of this relationship. Some are very direct, such as stating that their priority is to staff their shifts and serve the community rather than to address inclusivity – while in the same sentence acknowledging they lack an adequate number of volunteers. Many comments state clearly that firefighters are there to do a job for which there is no room or need for diversity, equity, or inclusion. Several respondents note that these elements are not relevant to their small departments. The most extreme comments use inflammatory language and assert that diversity, equity, and inclusion put firefighters' and the community's safety at risk and will result in the demise of the volunteer fire service in the U.S.

Satisfaction

The comments in this section reflect the responses to questions related to participants' satisfaction with various aspects of their departments. **Often they cite a caveat associated with the level of satisfaction that identifies specific behaviors that taint their experience.** Examples include people who say they love their department/the fire service but: they feel like an outsider; they have only mistakes recognized, not successes; they want to recruit more volunteers so the department can remain a volunteer department; and personal conflicts and drama have a negative effect.

Public Survey: Sample Description and Quantitative Results

Respondents of the Public survey are residents who live in communities served by volunteer fire departments in the U.S. The Public survey data came from a separate IAFC project whose purpose was to determine (a) what factors community members consider when deciding whether to volunteer, both for organizations in general and specifically for volunteer or combination departments, and (b) whether those factors differ by demographic group membership. Although this survey did not address DEI directly, as the Department survey does, several of the items relate to the issues of inclusiveness and equity. The results may provide insights for volunteer fire departments seeking qualified applicants about what is important to potential volunteers in their communities.

The findings in this section are based on responses from 10,810 survey participants. The demographic characteristics for this sample may be found in Table 9 below. Of note is that over half of the sample is from a racial/ethnic minority group, 65% identify as female, and 33% report being over age 51.

Table 9. Public Survey Sample Characteristics

	Number	Percentage
Race/Ethnicity*		
White	5,064	47%
Black/African American	2,524	23%
Hispanic or Latino	1,988	18%
Asian	1,048	10%
Native American or Alaskan Native	625	6%
Middle Eastern	47	<1%
Other	227	2%
Gender Identification		
Female	7,029	65%
Male	3,627	34%
Transgender, non-binary, other	154	1%
Disability requiring accommodation		
No	7,374	68%
Yes	3,436	32%
Age		
18-23	1,722	16%
24-32	1,850	17%
33-41	1,879	17%
42-50	1,749	16%
51+	3,610	33%

Respondents could choose multiple categories.

Tables 10 through 13 below display the Public survey results on the following topics:

- **Drivers of volunteering:** the importance of factors people consider when deciding whether to volunteer in general (not for fire departments specifically)

- **Reasons to stay:** factors that cause them to stay at an organization where they spend or spent the most time volunteering

- **Reasons to leave:** factors that caused them to leave their volunteer role in an organization

- **Volunteer fire department (VFD) enablers:** factors that would enable them to join a VFD

- **VFD barriers:** factors that would prevent them from volunteering for a fire department

- **Interest in roles:** possible interest in three different VFD roles

- **Awareness of opportunities to volunteer at a local fire department:** how they found out about volunteer opportunities at their local fire department

In addition to examining the overall percentage of participants selecting each response, the data were analyzed to see what significant differences, if any, there are among several subgroups: race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, and age. The color codes in the following tables indicate responses three percentage points or more *above* the overall average (yellow), three percentage points or more *below* the overall average (gray), and one or two percentage points *above or below* the overall average (white). The highlighted (yellow and gray) results are all statistically significantly different, indicating differences among groups.

Table 10 below shows that overall, the top two drivers of respondents' decisions to volunteer are "fits personal values or needs" (67%) and "personal interest or connection" (61%). Reading across the rows (factors), the endorsement rate for "personal interest or connection" is markedly higher than the overall rate for all race/ethnic groups except White, females, and respondents aged 33 and older. On the other hand, the endorsement rate is notably lower for White respondents. Reading down the columns (group

characteristics), Hispanic respondents' endorsement rates are notably higher than for the overall sample for all but one factor, "sense of being appreciated by others."

Table 10. Drivers of Volunteering: Importance of Factors in Decision to Volunteer

Overall Avg*		Race/Ethnicity					Gender		Dis-ability Status	Age				
		BLK	WH	HISP	ASN	NAT AM	F	M	Dis-ability	18-23	24-32	33-41	42-50	51+
67%	Fits personal values or needs	49%	65%	70%	68%	67%	68%	65%	64%	64%	66%	68%	70%	67%
61%	Personal interest or connection	65%	61%	66%	64%	64%	64%	62%	62%	60%	63%	64%	66%	65%
47%	Able to use current talents/skills or learn new ones	55%	42%	50%	49%	48%	48%	46%	42%	56%	53%	48%	46%	40%
38%	Able meet new people & interact with others	45%	32%	42%	41%	39%	38%	38%	37%	44%	41%	38%	37%	33%
34%	Sense of being appreciated by others	41%	32%	36%	39%	32%	34%	34%	32%	43%	42%	36%	42%	27%
30%	Career or educational advancement	43%	21%	37%	36%	32%	31%	29%	23%	53%	42%	34%	28%	14%

* Overall average reflects percentage of respondents who answered "very" or "extremely" important

Color code:

Yellow = responses 3 percentage points or more ABOVE the overall average

Gray = responses 3 percentage points or more BELOW the overall average

White = responses 1 or 2 percentage points above OR below the overall average

Table 11 indicates that although the top two reasons why respondents *stayed* at a previous volunteer assignment are "good relationships" (44%) and "assignments fit my interests" (38%), the remaining factors follow closely behind. There are three factors (good relationships, good communication, good leadership) with markedly higher endorsement rates for five subgroups. The *reasons to stay* endorsement rate of respondents in the 18-23 age range is notably higher than in the other age categories.

The reasons why respondents *left* a previous volunteer assignment also have overall responses that are very close to one another. The *reasons to leave* endorsement rate of respondents in the 24-32 age range is notably higher for all factors except COVID.

Table 11. Reasons to Stay and to Leave Volunteer Organizations

Overall Avg		Race/Ethnicity					Gender		Disability Status	Age				
		BLK	WH	HISP	ASN	NAT AM	F	M	Disability	18-23	24-32	33-41	42-50	51+
Reasons to Stay														
44%	Good relationships	47%	40%	49%	49%	49%	43%	45%	43%	48%	46%	43%	42%	42%
38%	Assignments fit interests	40%	35%	40%	46%	41%	40%	35%	37%	39%	41%	37%	37%	37%
36%	Felt included	38%	34%	39%	38%	38%	36%	35%	38%	43%	38%	34%	31%	34%
34%	Good morale	37%	31%	36%	38%	40%	34%	34%	35%	36%	36%	35%	32%	33%
33%	Good communication	43%	25%	38%	34%	37%	32%	33%	30%	46%	39%	31%	27%	24%
30%	Assignments fit my skills	35%	27%	32%	34%	36%	31%	30%	31%	32%	31%	31%	28%	30%
30%	Good leadership	36%	26%	33%	32%	35%	30%	30%	28%	37%	33%	30%	26%	26%
24%	Organizational support	28%	19%	26%	28%	24%	24%	23%	23%	27%	26%	24%	23%	20%
17%	Collaboration among groups	19%	13%	20%	24%	21%	17%	15%	15%	22%	19%	17%	15%	13%
21%	Reason not listed	14%	30%	10%	16%	19%	22%	19%	27%	16%	18%	21%	24%	25%

Table 11. Reasons to Stay and to Leave Volunteer Organizations (Continued)

Overall Avg		Race/Ethnicity					Gender		Disability Status	Age				
		BLK	WH	HISP	ASN	NAT AM	F	M	Disability	18-23	24-32	33-41	42-50	51+
Reasons to Leave														
22%	COVID	26%	18%	26%	27%	23%	23%	20%	21%	33%	23%	20%	19%	17%
18%	Poor leadership	15%	17%	22%	17%	23%	17%	19%	18%	17%	21%	19%	17%	16%
17%	Poor communication	18%	15%	20%	15%	20%	17%	16%	15%	19%	20%	19%	16%	12%
15%	Work/personal reasons	26%	14%	17%	18%	15%	15%	15%	15%	19%	19%	15%	14%	11%
13%	Lack of organizational support	13%	11%	15%	16%	18%	13%	12%	13%	13%	16%	14%	12%	10%

Color codes:

Yellow = responses 3 or more percentage points ABOVE the overall average

Gray = responses 3 or more percentage points BELOW the overall average

White = responses 1 or 2 percentages points above OR below the overall average

Table 12 shows that overall, the top two factors that could *enable* respondents to join a VFD are flexible scheduling (30%) and having the necessary training and equipment (30%). Native Americans/Alaskan Natives are the only subgroup with a notably higher likelihood of endorsing "opportunity to give back to my community" than the overall endorsement rate. The only notable difference between females and males is "no interest in volunteering," which is lower for males than females (29% vs. 33%).

Overall, the top two factors that present *barriers* to respondents' ability or interest in joining a VFD are "don't have the training" (43%) and "can't see myself as a firefighter" (40%). Males have lower endorsement rates than the overall rate for all the factors except "unaware of opportunity" and "too old."

A formidable potential *barrier* to qualified volunteers' joining their local fire department is represented by a single item that asked respondents if there is a volunteer fire department in their local area. Results show that 47% of the respondents are unsure whether there is. The endorsement rates of several subgroups are notably higher than 47%: Black, Hispanic, Asian, female, and 18-41 year-olds.

Table 12. Enablers and Barriers to Joining a Volunteer Fire Department

Overall Avg		Race/Ethnicity					Gender		Disability Status	Age				
		BLK	WH	HISP	ASN	NAT AM	F	M	Disability	18-23	24-32	33-41	42-50	51+
VFD Enablers														
30%	Flexible scheduling	30%	25%	39%	35%	32%	29%	30%	23%	35%	35%	34%	30%	22%
30%	Training & equipment	28%	27%	37%	36%	32%	29%	30%	24%	33%	34%	35%	32%	22%
25%	Opportunities to learn new skills	27%	19%	34%	32%	28%	25%	26%	19%	30%	30%	30%	26%	17%
24%	Welcoming environment	24%	21%	27%	27%	29%	24%	23%	21%	30%	26%	26%	25%	18%
21%	Opportunity to give back to community	20%	19%	23%	20%	24%	20%	21%	19%	19%	19%	21%	23%	21%
17%	Clear understanding of my volunteer role	16%	17%	18%	21%	21%	18%	15%	17%	17%	17%	17%	17%	17%
32%	No interest in volunteering	31%	39%	21%	21%	27%	33%	29%	40%	22%	24%	26%	30%	44%
VFD Barriers														
43%	Don't have training	39%	44%	44%	47%	42%	44%	40%	41%	48%	46%	42%	44%	39%
40%	Can't see myself as FF	40%	40%	37%	47%	35%	44%	32%	37%	47%	42%	40%	38%	37%
33%	Don't have physical fitness	25%	39%	29%	34%	35%	36%	26%	46%	34%	30%	28%	31%	38%
23%	Can't see myself as EMS	18%	27%	22%	28%	19%	25%	20%	24%	23%	23%	21%	23%	25%
23%	Unaware of opportunity	25%	18%	31%	29%	24%	23%	23%	17%	26%	25%	24%	24%	18%
23%	Too old	14%	29%	18%	15%	24%	21%	27%	33%	1%	3%	11%	26%	47%
47%	Unsure whether local area has a volunteer fire dept	55%	37%	57%	61%	45%	50%	43%	44%	58%	54%	50%	48%	37%

Color codes:

Yellow = responses 3 or more percentage points ABOVE the overall average

Gray = responses 3 or more percentage points BELOW the overall average

White = responses 1 or 2 percentages points above OR below the overall average

As shown in Table 13, 17% of sample respondents say they are "likely or very likely" to be *interested* in becoming firefighters, 27% in an EMS role, and 42% in an administrative role. Subgroups whose endorsement rates are higher than the average overall for all three roles include Black, Hispanic, Native American/Alaskan Native, and 24-41 year-olds. Overall, 35% of respondents report that their *awareness of volunteer opportunities* comes from general knowledge in the community. All three sources of awareness involve personal contact.

Table 13. Interest in Volunteer Roles and Awareness of Volunteer Opportunities

Overall Avg		Race/Ethnicity					Gender		Disability Status	Age				
		BLK	WH	HISP	ASN	NAT AM	F	M	Disability	18-23	24-32	33-41	42-50	51+
Interest in roles*														
17%	FF role	22%	12%	27%	19%	24%	14%	22%	12%	25%	24%	22%	17%	9%
27%	EMS role	34%	20%	33%	33%	33%	28%	26%	21%	38%	37%	37%	25%	25%
42%	Administrative role	50%	37%	47%	47%	47%	45%	38%	37%	42%	46%	47%	45%	38%
*Overall average reflects percentage of respondents who answered "likely" or "very likely" interested														
Awareness of volunteer opportunities														
35%	General knowledge in community	34%	36%	34%	29%	37%	33%	39%	39%	26%	33%	36%	39%	38%
25%	Friend/family member	24%	25%	27%	28%	25%	25%	25%	25%	35%	32%	23%	23%	20%
23%	Someone in department	24%	22%	25%	20%	27%	21%	26%	22%	29%	26%	25%	23%	18%
20%	Did not know there are opportunities to volunteer	17%	23%	12%	17%	20%	23%	16%	22%	14%	14%	18%	22%	26%

Color code:

Yellow = responses 3 percentage points or more ABOVE the overall average

Gray = responses 3 percentage points or more BELOW the overall average

White = responses 1 or 2 percentage points above OR below the overall average

Summary of Survey Findings

Because the results from both the Department and the Public surveys represent the perceptions and experiences of a small sample of their respective populations, we cannot conclude that the results are generalizable to the entire populations. The overrepresentation of White, male, older, and highly tenured respondents to the Department survey mirrors the composition of departments today. Nonetheless, these results provide much food for thought as well as some possible next steps that departments may take to enhance their recruitment and retention efforts and outcomes.

Overall, respondents to the Department survey tend to perceive diversity, equity, and inclusion as positive. However, certain groups have significantly different perceptions of several topics (e.g., women and respondents with disabilities have more negative perceptions of equity, inclusion, and leadership). These meaningful differences among perceptions of many subgroups suggest that there is work to do to improve the experiences of all.

With respect to equity, most respondents feel that their departments act fairly, although many believe that performance is not evaluated fairly. Additionally, one troubling finding is that over half of respondents report having had personal experience with discrimination, bullying, and/or hazing, and their satisfaction and perceptions of DEI are more negative than those without this experience. This fact suggests that such bad behaviors need to be addressed.

The data reveal strong positive relationships among the Department survey's factors, which indicate that diversity, equity, and inclusion are related to important outcomes. For instance, respondents who have more positive perceptions of DEI tend to be more satisfied with the department, its leadership, and its communication. Although it's not possible to determine causality in this study, the positive correlations among these factors is notable.

Over one-third of the Department survey respondents support the ideas of (a) recruiting underrepresented minorities, (b) providing mentoring programs for underrepresented minorities, and (c) conducting training to promote understanding of diverse groups, which suggests an openness to and support for DEI. However, those whose departments have implemented DEI initiatives often do not believe they have been effective.

The results of the Public survey indicate a low awareness of volunteer opportunities at fire departments along with a relatively high interest in such opportunities. Some subgroups (particularly certain racial/ethnic minorities) report more interest in the volunteer fire department roles yet less awareness than other groups. Together, these results suggest an important opportunity to improve recruiting efforts and success by increasing the community's awareness of the department's needs.

Public survey respondents' most common barriers to volunteering at a fire department include not having the appropriate training, not seeing themselves as a firefighter, and not having the appropriate level of physical fitness. The most common enablers to volunteering at a fire department include flexible scheduling, training, and opportunities to learn more skills. Together, these findings indicate that departments' recruiting efforts could be more successful if they focus on educating their communities about factors that are not common knowledge among the public. For example, departments could identify specific skills volunteers could learn or use, explain what training is provided, provide examples of typical (flexible) schedules, highlight non-firefighter volunteer opportunities, and describe how the community benefits from volunteers.

Discussion and Recommendations

When we are no longer able to change a situation...we are challenged to change ourselves.[4]

- Viktor Frankl, Austrian psychiatrist and survivor
of Nazi concentration camps during World War II

If the U.S. volunteer fire service is to survive and even thrive going forward, it must address the realities with which it is faced, namely the critical shortage of volunteers and the increased (and increasing) diversity of the population. Many departments must

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[4] Frankl, Viktor (1959). *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press.

contend with the fact that what they've been doing to date to recruit and retain qualified volunteers no longer is effective. Human beings are hard-wired to resist change, and fire rescue professionals are no different. Yet the latter are exceptional problem-solvers, which engenders optimism that they will apply their creativity to address the formidable opportunities that present themselves.

The following recommendations are based on the results of the Department and Public surveys (including many suggestions from Department survey respondents), consultation with fire-rescue professionals who served as subject matter experts for this project, the researchers' experience, and prior research.

🎓 Education

Education is the first step in the journey to improve the outcome of departments' recruitment and retention efforts and outcomes. Based on the surveys' combined results, some of the key learning points that should be addressed by leaders who wish to create and maintain inclusive, equitable, and diverse work environments include:

▶ Clearly define the terms *inclusion*, *equity*, and *diversity*. People often have no idea what "DEI" stands for, let alone understand what the words mean and what their implications are for the future of the fire-rescue service.

▶ Diversity goes beyond demographic characteristics.

▶ Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives represent good management practices and are powerful tools for individual and department success. They are not the enemy; they are the enablers of the fire service's ability to continue to achieve its mission and to keep its personnel and the communities they serve safe.

▶ Current and future realities require the fire service – in general, not only volunteers – to change the way it operates. Unless department leaders can answer the question, "How are your recruitment and retention efforts going?" by saying "Great!", their agency has room for improvement.

▶ Leaders must be active advocates for the changes that are to come. For best results, all members should become change agents.

▶ Statements that a department "cannot" be or become diverse because of the homogeneity of the community are often inaccurate. Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ. Even if community members are all or nearly all the same race, they surely differ in terms of characteristics such as their education, interests, talents, family situations, and socio-economic status.

▶ Saying that Civil Service regulations and/or union contracts prohibit departments from treating people differently is a smokescreen. There is no discrimination inherent in making decisions based on job-related criteria. While both Civil Service regulations and union contracts must be respected, neither one forbids treating people fairly. Neither one is a barrier to recruitment efforts such as visiting high schools in all areas of the community, providing recruitment materials in languages other than English, or offering programs or demonstrations that enable the community – including prospective qualified volunteers – to understand what it takes to be a member of a volunteer department and what opportunities are available. At a bare minimum, leaders should ensure that people in the community know their fire department is staffed completely or in part by volunteers, and that there are many opportunities available for those who are interested and qualified.

Setting a Foundation for Success

▶ Implementing DEI initiatives need not be costly: leaders can change the way they engage in some current practices and processes. For example, holding people accountable for bad behaviors such as bullying doesn't have a direct financial cost. However, the indirect costs of allowing such behaviors are likely to be substantial, such as causing staffing shortages as volunteers leave and potential applicants look elsewhere. Similarly, there is no financial cost to treating people fairly and respectfully. Neither the size nor the type of the department has anything to do with how people treat each other.

▶ Educate members by identifying the connection between diversity, equity, and inclusion and the recruitment and retention of qualified volunteers.

➤ Define "diversity" very broadly. Every community is diverse, even those whose residents share the same racial/ethnic identities.

➤ Review the IAFC's *Guide to Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department* for "how-to" information that will increase the ability to attract and retain qualified volunteers.

➤ Banish the "This is how we've always done it" mentality. A new reality requires creative thinking. Retain what works well; stop or change what does not support the department's and members' success. Leverage members' creativity and problem-solving skills to devise ways to improve.

➤ Incorporate new thoughts and ideas that are aligned with the mission of saving lives and protecting property. Consider different ways of accomplishing the mission. Adopt new ways of doing things when they are better and safer than the current ones. Don't get stuck in the past.

➤ Use familiar analogies to help people see the many ways in which diversity has been ingrained in some fire-rescue service practices and successfully has helped keep them safe for decades. For example, good Incident Commanders get a variety of perspectives so they can direct their crews effectively. Hot washes (i.e., after-action discussions following incidents) seek out diverse perspectives to enhance learning and prevent or mitigate future undesirable behaviors or outcomes.

➤ Remember that firefighters know how to create an inclusive environment and foster a sense of belonging. They have been doing so successfully for decades, such as by engaging in banter at the kitchen table, using dark humor, and debriefing together so they don't have to burden their families.

➤ Creating an inclusive culture is a safety issue that is necessary for the successful achievement of the department's mission. Excluding certain members degrades trust, which is critical both on scene and off.

➤ Become part of the communities that are underrepresented at the department. There is no shortcut to building relationships.

Recruitment

▶   Take advantage of the fact that there are people in the community who are interested in becoming volunteers. Nearly half (47%) of the Public survey respondents are unsure whether their local area has a volunteer fire department. Additionally, a substantial portion indicate that they are likely or very likely interested in one or more volunteer fire department roles (firefighter: 17%, EMS: 27%, administrative or support: 42%). Yet only 30% of the respondents of the Department survey report that their department makes it a priority to meet with and learn about people in the community from different cultures. Together, these findings highlight an untapped market for volunteers and an opportunity to engage with communities to increase awareness of the volunteer roles. Informing the community that its fire department is seeking qualified volunteers is a critical first step in improving its recruitment success.

▶   Diversity, equity, and inclusion begin well before the department starts accepting applications. Take a close look at pre-recruitment and recruitment processes to ensure they enable the agency to attract qualified applicants.

▶   Make sure everyone in the community knows that the department relies on volunteers to keep them safe.

▶   Let community members know how they could support the department in a volunteer role.

▶   Take a look at those who are recruiting. Will potential qualified applicants "see" themselves in those individuals? Don't let a mismatch of demographic characteristics between members and potential volunteers be a deterrent: White males are capable of recruiting women and people of color. Focus on similarities among people, such as a passion for giving back to the community or the ability to learn new skills. The results of the Public survey provide insights into what community members report would enable them to volunteer for a fire department.

▶   Every time members engage with the community, they represent the department and set the tone for how the public perceives the agency – and sometimes the entire fire-rescue service. Train them to see every interaction with

the public as a potential opportunity for engaging, educating, and recruiting qualified community members.

▶ Volunteer fire professionals are the "billboards" for their departments every time they engage with the public. Leaders must ensure they understand that every engagement represents an opportunity to recruit new members, contribute to the department's image, and educate the community.

▶ Get to know people in the community from different cultures. Only 30% of Department survey respondents report their agency prioritizes developing relationships with those from other cultures. Learning others' customs and beliefs and discovering what motivates them are key to recruiting qualified people successfully.

▶ Consider hiring a volunteer recruitment and retention coordinator to conduct outreach, programs, and marketing to the entire community.

▶ Offer mentoring, tutoring, and other supportive interventions such as language support to increase the ability of potential volunteers to qualify for department roles.

▶ Offer programs in high schools to attract potential qualified volunteers.
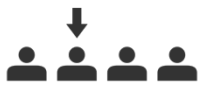
Selection

▶ Maintain performance standards. Seek candidates who have the physical and mental ability to do the required jobs, regardless of their external appearance or their beliefs.

▶ Make room for people who want to volunteer and whose skill sets do not include fire suppression and EMS.

▶ Create a formal hiring process that focuses on the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the job. Center the entire process around identifying the job-relevant skills that are needed at the time of entry to the department (excluding competencies that will be acquired during training or on-the-job).

➤ Use a consistent process for hiring. All candidates should have the same opportunity to showcase their competency for the role.

➤ If candidates are interviewed as part of the hiring process, maintain consistency and fairness by conducting structured interviews with consistent questions and rating scales across candidates.

➤ Train those who serve as interviewers or on hiring committees, emphasizing the selection criteria and identifying potential pitfalls (e.g., biases, tendencies to focus on criteria that are not job-relevant).

➤ Evaluate the effectiveness of hiring process and practices. Do they result in volunteers who can be successful in their assigned roles? If not, make changes as necessary.

Work Environment and Retention

➤ Create a culture that values and accepts people for who they are and what they can offer.

➤ Focus on inclusion and equity for existing members. Work environments in which people feel they belong and are treated fairly will attract a wide variety of applicants and enable retention of existing talent.

➤ Assess the inclusiveness of the department. Do all personnel feel they belong? Is the workplace free of cliques, bias, and discrimination? If not, take action to make it more welcoming to all individuals.

➤ Create a safe environment for people to talk about individual differences so they can get to know each other personally and respect each other's boundaries and needs.

➤ Identify the department's core values, define them in behavioral terms at the agency, work unit, and individual levels, and communicate them widely. This will enable a common understanding of which behaviors are acceptable and which are not. Conducting this exercise with all personnel gives everyone a stake in ensuring the core values truly do define them as a department and as individuals.

➤   Emphasize the characteristics that members have in common, such as a passion for what they do and their shared goal of keeping each other and the community safe.

➤   Consider these three guidelines for determining whether a given behavior crosses the line: (1) "Pranks" cannot be unkind, malicious, or done to exert power over others. (2) They cannot involve PPE (personal protective equipment) or cause safety issues. (3) They must stop the moment the person says "No."

➤   Create an inclusive culture by focusing on behavior and on "intentional civility." Discourage inconsiderate behaviors that undermine civility such as telling sexist or racist jokes, using unwanted nicknames, and engaging in hazing/initiation rites that involve humiliation.

➤   Define or re-define "Everyone goes home safely" to mean that in addition to returning physically safe, every person goes home emotionally, mentally, and spiritually safe.

➤   As indicated by the results of the Department survey, meaning and personal values are the top two reasons that respondents say they stay on the job (i.e., their "why"). Focus on the commonalities that members share. Remind them often of their own "why."

Leadership and Management Practices

▶ Review the department's policies, procedures, programs, practices, and systems to ensure they are fair, both in practice and in members' perceptions.

▶ Be flexible in enabling members to meet their training requirements. For example, consider scheduling training so it accommodates the needs of volunteers with full-time jobs and/or families and those whose religious beliefs prevent them from working on certain days.

▶ Ensure individual performance standards are tied directly to the applicable job descriptions rather than to irrelevant personal characteristics.

▶ Develop formal processes and procedures for assessing performance. Conduct performance reviews with members on a regular basis. Pay attention to their individual preferences: treating everyone "equally" by engaging in once-a-year evaluations will not work for everyone.

▶ Hold all personnel accountable for meeting the stated performance standards. Provide the resources they need to do so.

▶ Review long-standing department practices and traditions to make sure they still contribute to the agency's and to personnel's success. If they are not, drop or change them as needed. Communicate any changes to everyone in the department.

▶ Just as officers would not walk by someone engaging in a behavior that would cause physical harm, neither should they look the other way when they see or know of someone engaging in psychologically unsafe behaviors. Hold them accountable for ensuring the physical and psychological safety of all members.

▶ Discourage and discipline those who engage in bullying behaviors.

▶ To help bridge the gap between volunteer and career members, make it clear that all are part of the same team that shares a common mission. Divisiveness can endanger the safety of both personnel and the community and exacerbate any staffing shortages.

➤ Hold members who engage in disrespectful or unprofessional behaviors accountable for their choices. Communicate the consequences to all members in advance, and implement them as needed.

➤ Dismantle existing barriers (as perceived by members, not only by leaders) and create an even playing field. Promote, train, and evaluate everyone fairly.

➤ Provide more on-line resources for training as appropriate.

➤ Follow the same steps to implement inclusion initiatives as would be used to create and execute an action plan on-scene:

  o Conduct a size-up using a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) of department policies to ensure they meet the agency's goals.

  o Create a plan of attack: identify goal(s), budget, and accountabilities.

  o Implement the plan.

  o Evaluate the progress and results, adjusting the plan as needed.

➤ Ensure all leaders have and implement the training needed to manage conflicts and address behavioral problems effectively, such as how to have difficult conversations.

In short, there are many opportunities for departments to adapt their practices to enhance their recruitment and retention efforts and outcomes. In some cases, uncontrollable factors that have resulted in volunteer shortages will require leaders and communities to make tough choices and decisions. For factors that are controllable, however, there is every reason to believe that volunteer fire-rescue professionals' passion for what they do and concern about the future of the volunteer fire service as well as their creativity and problem-solving skills will enable them to make the adaptations and changes needed for their departments to survive and thrive.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who contributed significantly to this project, including those identified below. We thank them all for their assistance.

Researchers:

- Dr. Pat Lynch

- Dr. Amanda Koch

Subject matter experts:

- Karen McQuaid, Volunteer Program Manager, Loudoun County Combined Fire and Rescue System (VA)

- Fire Chief (retired) Ed Rush, Hartsdale Fire Department (NY) and Past Chief and 44-year member, Elmsford Volunteer Fire Department (NY)

- Lieutenant Tina Takahashi, Westminster Fire Department (CO)

- Deputy Chief Laurie VandeSchoot (retired), Calgary Fire Department (Alberta)

IAFC staff:

- Kaitlin Lutz, Volunteer Workforce Solutions Program Manager

- Abena Bonso-Bruce, Assistant Director, Volunteer Workforce Solutions

Special thanks to Spencer Cheatham, Volunteer Workforce Solutions Project Manager, and his VWS Research team for developing and administering a general public survey and allowing us to use the data to inform this report.

Pilot survey participants: their feedback resulted in improvements to the Department survey before it was distributed nationwide.

Survey participants: the responses of the 1,311 people who took the survey provided the primary content for this report. Special thanks to those who took extra time to provide thoughtful comments. Your voices have been heard and appreciated.

Layout and graphic design: https://www.yourgotogirls.com/

Diversity

My department is diverse in the following ways:*	Number	Percentage
Race/ethnicity	683	54%
Nationality	491	39%
Age	1,151	91%
Career goals	711	56%
Talents, skills, competencies	1,026	81%
Gender identification	406	32%
Sexual orientation	462	37%
Language(s) spoken	320	25%
(Dis)ability	237	19%
Religious beliefs	666	53%
Socioeconomic class	626	50%
Family responsibilities	900	71%
Education level	1,007	80%
* Respondents could choose multiple categories		
The demographics of my department are similar to those in our community		
Disagree	232	18%
Neutral	129	10%
Agree	908	72%
People of diverse backgrounds serve in all ranks and positions throughout my dept		
Disagree	322	25%
Neutral	304	24%
Agree	641	51%
My department actively seeks candidates who have skills or talents in areas other than fire suppression or EMS		
Disagree	346	27%
Neutral	357	28%
Agree	566	45%
I work alongside people whose backgrounds are different than mine		
Disagree	61	5%
Neutral	71	6%
Agree	1018	89%

Equity

	Number	Percentage
My department acts fairly when it comes to:*		
Promoting or electing members	884	73%
Resolving conflicts	848	70%
Distributing work	766	64%
Applying standards and rules	920	76%
Offering training opportunities	1,061	88%
Recognizing members' contributions	864	72%
Distributing resources such as gear	1,002	83%
Evaluating performance	690	57%
* Respondents could choose multiple categories		

	Number	Percentage
I am treated fairly in my department		
Disagree	141	12%
Neutral	125	11%
Agree	885	77%

Inclusion

	Number	Percentage
My department maintains a welcoming work environment for all members		
Disagree	200	16%
Neutral	137	11%
Agree	932	73%
My department uses inclusive language in its communications and documents, such as recruitment materials and policies		
Disagree	196	15%
Neutral	369	29%
Agree	703	55%
My department's members demonstrate that they value all of our co-workers, regardless of individual differences		
Disagree	228	18%
Neutral	171	13%
Agree	872	69%
In my department we make it a priority to meet with and learn about people in our community from different cultures so we can serve them better		
Disagree	437	34%
Neutral	457	36%
Agree	375	30%
I feel excluded from my co-workers because they see me as different in some way		
Disagree	770	67%
Neutral	201	17%
Agree	178	15%
In my department, I feel welcome, valued, and respected		
Disagree	149	13%
Neutral	133	12%
Agree	869	75%
In my department, I feel my voice is heard and my ideas are considered seriously		
Disagree	182	16%
Neutral	144	13%
Agree	824	72%
In my department, my co-workers value the talents I bring to the team		
Disagree	113	10%
Neutral	150	13%
Agree	887	77%

DEI Initiatives

	Number	Percentage
To increase its ability to attract, retain, and ensure members' success, my department has implemented the following types of initiatives:*		
Programs to increase fairness	179	14%
Programs to increase inclusiveness	190	15%
Programs to increase diversity	166	13%
Training that promotes understanding of diverse groups in the community	287	23%
Mentoring programs for members in underrepresented groups (e.g., women, people of color)	223	18%
Community training programs to help potential candidates from underrepresented groups prepare for the hiring process	132	11%
Recruitment efforts that target people from underrepresented groups	192	15%
Marketing materials that appeal to a wide variety of people	476	38%
Marketing materials in language(s) used in the community other than English	94	8%
Extra support or services as needed to members from underrepresented groups	105	8%
Social activities that enable members to get to know one another personally	601	48%
Outreach activities in the community that target people in underrepresented groups	203	16%
Advisory groups, committees, or task forces whose focus is on helping the department become more welcoming to all, fair, and representative of the community	214	17%
None of the above	342	28%
***Respondents could choose multiple categories**		

	Number	Percentage
What actions do you think would help your department create a more welcoming, fair environment that attracts and retains a diverse group of members?*		
Programs to increase fairness	273	22%
Programs to increase inclusiveness	366	30%
Programs to increase diversity	378	31%
Training that promotes understanding of diverse groups in the community	441	36%
Mentoring programs for members in underrepresented groups (e.g., women, people of color)	450	37%
Community training programs to help potential candidates from underrepresented groups prepare for the hiring process	380	31%
Recruitment efforts that target people from underrepresented groups	468	38%
Marketing materials that appeal to a wide variety of people	476	39%
Marketing materials in language(s) used in the community other than English	251	20%
Extra support or services as needed to members from underrepresented groups	243	20%
Social activities that enable members to get to know one another personally	466	38%
Outreach activities in the community that target people in underrepresented groups	405	33%
Advisory groups, committees, or task forces whose focus is on helping the department become more welcoming to all, fair, and representative of the community	361	29%
None of the above	231	19%
***Respondents could choose multiple categories**		

	Number	Percentage
Overall, the initiatives my department has implemented have resulted in a more welcoming, fair, and/or diverse environment.		
Disagree	197	16%
Neutral	554	44%
Agree	515	41%

Department Climate

	Number	Percentage
Good performers tend to stay with my department		
Disagree	203	16%
Neutral	237	19%
Agree	827	65%
My department has trouble recruiting new members		
Disagree	291	23%
Neutral	242	19%
Agree	732	58%
My department provides the resources necessary for members to be successful in their roles		
Disagree	167	13%
Neutral	174	14%
Agree	929	73%
My department provides the training that allows members to be successful in their roles		
Disagree	116	9%
Neutral	124	10%
Agree	1026	81%

Leadership

	Number	Percentage
Through their actions, my department's leaders show that diversity is important		
Disagree	235	18%
Neutral	383	30%
Agree	653	51%
My department's leaders seriously consider options and inputs of all members, regardless of their backgrounds		
Disagree	236	19%
Neutral	152	12%
Agree	882	69%
In my department, my direct supervisor values the talents I bring to the team		
Disagree	124	11%
Neutral	191	17%
Agree	833	73%
Leaders in my department recognize and appreciate my work		
Disagree	125	11%
Neutral	157	14%
Agree	867	75%

Communication

	Number	Percentage
Leaders communicate my department's vision, mission, and values clearly and often		
Disagree	286	23%
Neutral	271	21%
Agree	710	56%
I feel comfortable sharing my concerns or negative feedback with my direct supervisor		
Disagree	151	13%
Neutral	116	10%
Agree	883	77%
I feel comfortable sharing my concerns or negative feedback with higher level leaders		
Disagree	184	16%
Neutral	107	9%
Agree	858	75%

Satisfaction

	Number	Percentage
My experience at my department has been consistent with what I expected before I joined		
Disagree	208	18%
Neutral	211	18%
Agree	732	64%
My department generally accommodates my scheduling needs		
Disagree	63	5%
Neutral	190	17%
Agree	895	78%
I would recommend my department to my family and friends as a good place to volunteer		
Disagree	127	11%
Neutral	97	8%
Agree	927	81%
I experience a great deal of satisfaction from my role at my department		
Disagree	66	6%
Neutral	94	8%
Agree	987	86%
If I were to leave my department, the main reason(s) would be:*		
Retirement	702	62%
Family, work, or other responsibilities	414	37%
Poor health or injury	550	49%
Feeling excluded	117	10%
My values are different than those of my department	105	9%
Poor leadership	266	24%
Problems with my direct supervisor	78	7%
Experiencing discrimination, bullying, or hazing	85	8%
Requirements for volunteers changed	188	17%
My expectations were not met	90	8%
Being treated unfairly	160	14%
To join another department	200	18%

*Respondents could choose multiple categories

Meaning

	Number	Percentage
The fire service has a great deal of meaning for me		
Disagree	11	1%
Neutral	25	2%
Agree	1115	97%
People who know me understand that being a member of my department is part of who I am		
Disagree	21	2%
Neutral	61	5%
Agree	1068	93%
I feel a strong sense of belonging to my department		
Disagree	74	6%
Neutral	103	9%
Agree	971	85%

Discrimination, Bullying, Harassment

	Number	Percentage
My department has an established process for members to report incidents of discrimination, bullying, or hazing		
Yes	938	74%
No	195	15%
Don't know	138	11%
Regardless of their rank or position, all department members are held accountable if they engage in discrimination, bullying, or hazing		
Yes	974	77%
No	185	15%
Don't know	111	9%

Personal Experience with Discrimination, Bullying, Hazing*	**Discrimination**		**Bullying**		**Hazing**	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Witnessed it personally	276	24%	301	26%	174	15%
Heard stories of others' experiences	325	28%	343	30%	239	21%
Experienced it personally	151	13%	174	15%	112	10%
Engaged in it myself	23	2%	23	2%	51	4%

*Respondents could choose multiple categories

Appendix B: Department Survey Scale Items

Diversity

> The demographics of my department are similar to those in our community

> People of diverse backgrounds serve in all ranks and positions throughout my department

> My department actively seeks candidates who have skills or talents in areas other than fire suppression or EMS

> I work alongside people whose backgrounds are different than mine

Inclusion – Department

> My department maintains a welcoming work environment for all members

> My department uses inclusive language in its communications and documents, such as recruitment materials and policies

> My department's members demonstrate that they value all of our co-workers, regardless of individual differences

> In my department we make it a priority to meet with and learn about people in our community from different cultures so we can serve them better

Inclusion – Individual

> I feel excluded from my co-workers because they see me as different in some way

> In my department, I feel welcome, valued, and respected

> In my department, I feel my voice is heard and my ideas are considered seriously

> In my department, my co-workers value the talents I bring to the team

Equity

▶ I am treated fairly in my department

DEI Initiative Success

▶ Overall, the initiatives my department has implemented have resulted in a more welcoming, fair, and/or diverse environment.

Department Climate

▶ Good performers tend to stay with my department

▶ My department has trouble recruiting new members

▶ My department provides the resources necessary for members to be successful in their roles

▶ My department provides the training that allows members to be successful in their roles

Leadership

▶ Through their actions, my department's leaders show that diversity is important

▶ My department's leaders seriously consider options and inputs of all members, regardless of their backgrounds

▶ In my department, my direct supervisor values the talents I bring to the team

▶ Leaders in my department recognize and appreciate my work

Communication

▶ Leaders communicate my department's vision, mission, and values clearly and often

▶ I feel comfortable sharing my concerns or negative feedback with my direct supervisor

➤ I feel comfortable sharing my concerns or negative feedback with higher level leaders

Satisfaction

▶ I experience a great deal of satisfaction from my role at my department

▶ My experience at my department has been consistent with what I expected before I joined

▶ My department generally accommodates my scheduling needs

▶ I would recommend my department to my family and friends as a good place to volunteer

Meaning

▶ The fire service has a great deal of meaning for me

▶ People who know me understand that being a member of my department is part of who I am

▶ I feel a strong sense of belonging to my department

Personal Experience with Discrimination, Bullying, and/or Hazing

▶ I have witnessed one or more of these behaviors personally

▶ I have heard others' stories about one or more of these behaviors

▶ I have experienced one or more of these behaviors personally

▶ I have engaged in one or more of these behaviors myself

Figure 1. Department Type: Average Scores by Topic
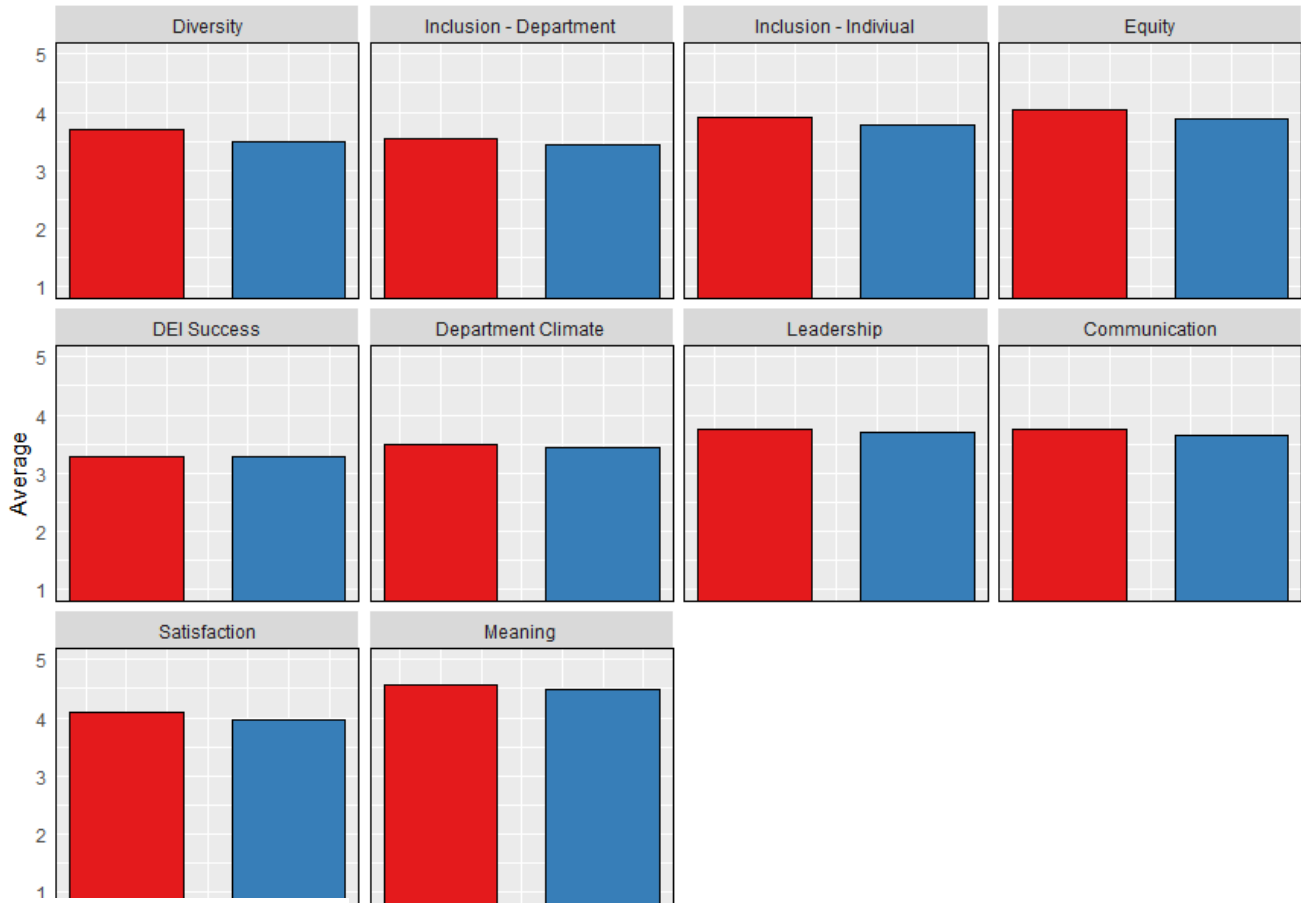
Group differences are statistically significant for *Diversity, Inclusion – Department, Inclusion – Individual, Equity,* and *Satisfaction.*

Figure 2. Number of Members: Average Scores by Topic
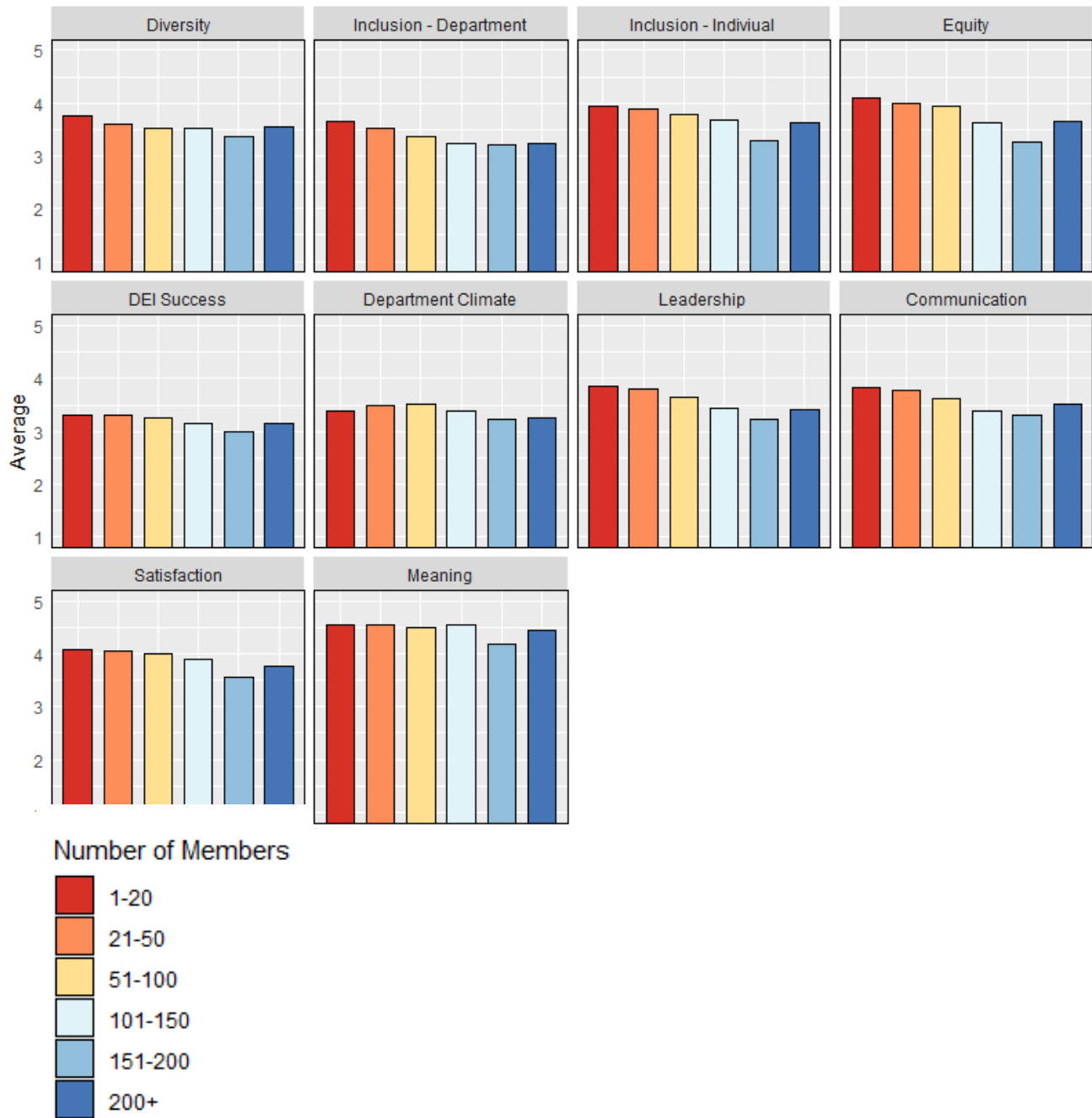
Group differences are statistically significant for *Diversity, Inclusion – Department, Inclusion – Individual, Equity, Leadership, Communication*, and *Satisfaction*.

Figure 3. Area Served: Average Scores by Topic
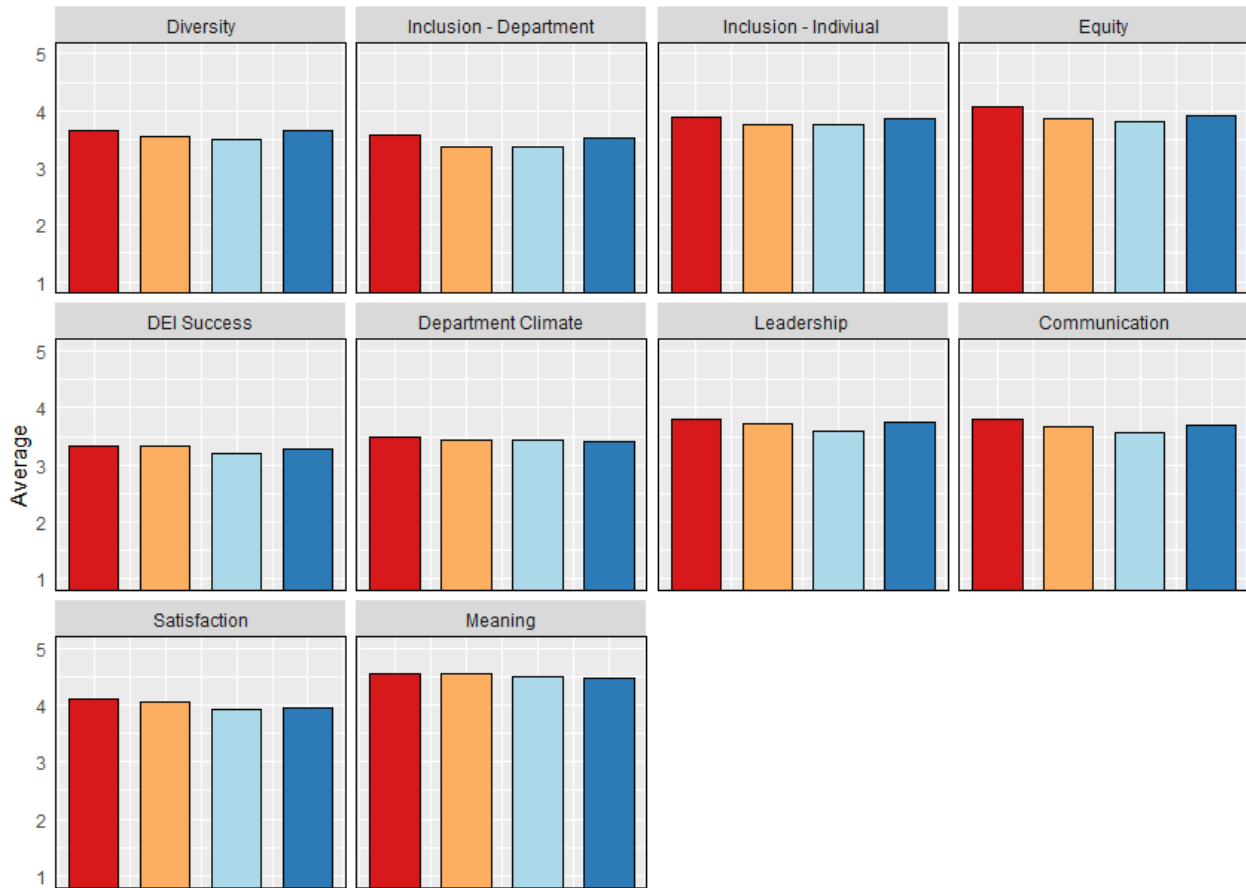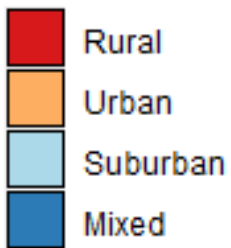
Group differences are statistically significant for *Diversity, Inclusion – Department, Equity, Leadership, Communication,* and *Satisfaction*.

Figure 4. Location: Average Scores by Topic
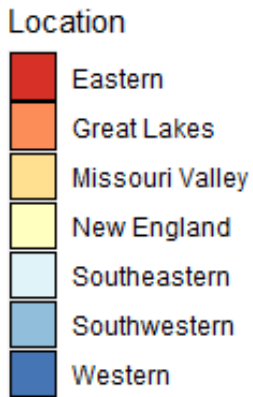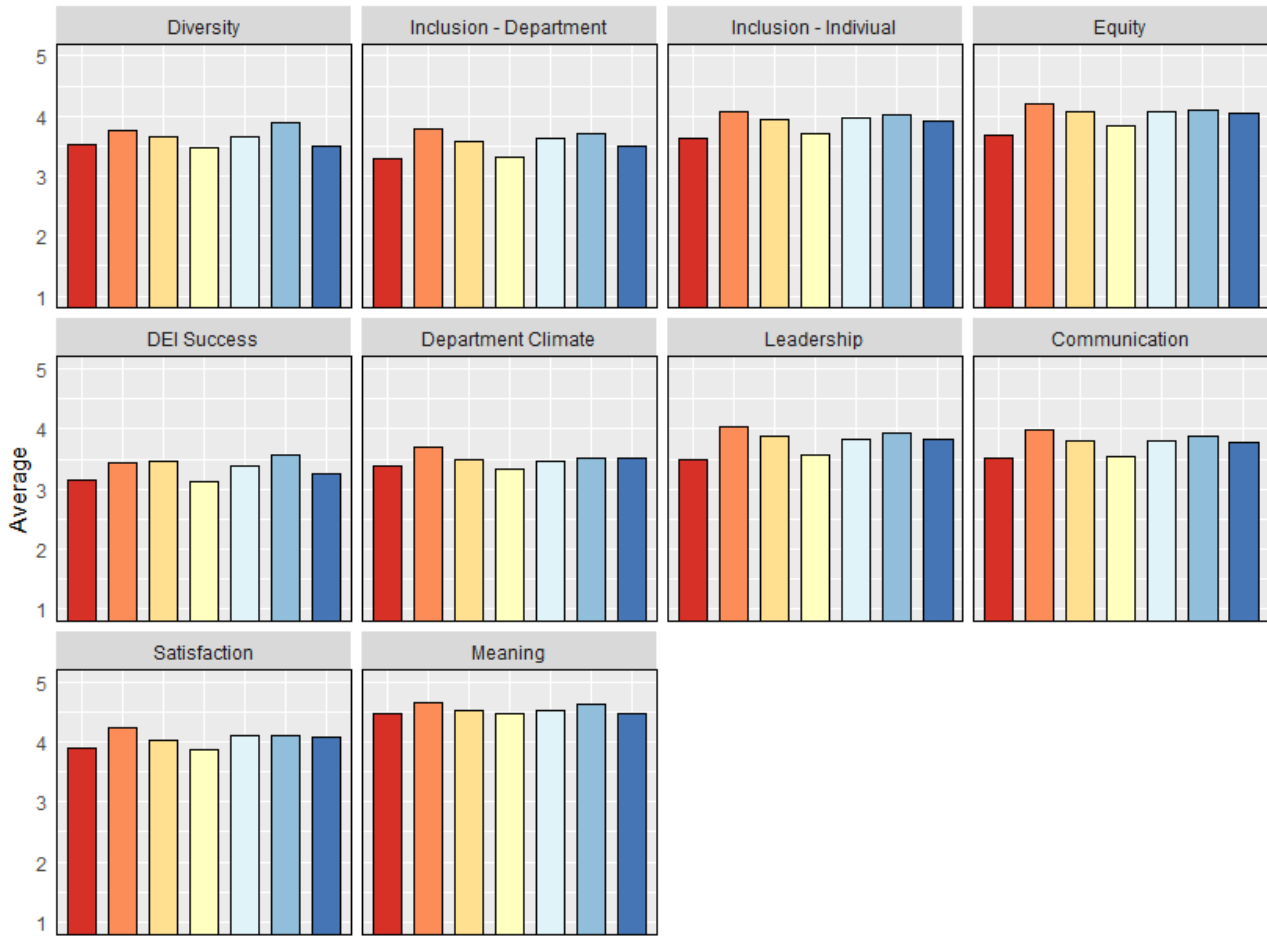
Group differences are statistically significant for all ten topic areas.

Figure 5. Role: Average Scores by Topic
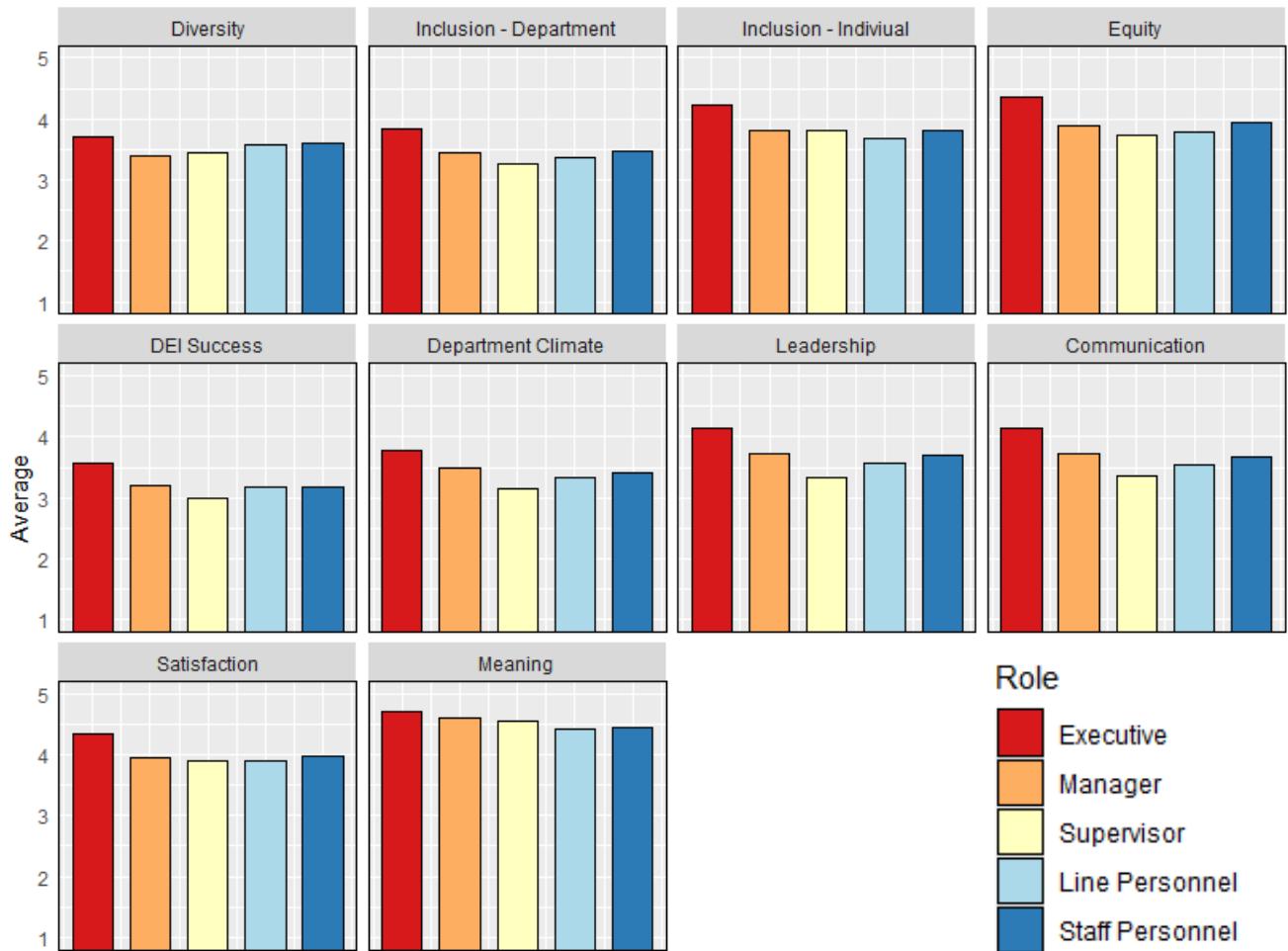
Group differences are statistically significant for all ten topic areas.

Note: There were nine response options for this question on the survey, and respondents could select more than one. Firefighter (39%), Fire Chief (34%), and EMT (24%) are the top three roles selected. For purposes of analysis, the roles were combined as follows:

> Executive = Fire Chief

> Manager = Chief Officer

> Supervisor = Company Officer

> Line Personnel = Firefighter, EMT, Paramedic

▶ Staff Personnel = Administrative and Support

Figure 6. Type of Member: Average Scores by Topic
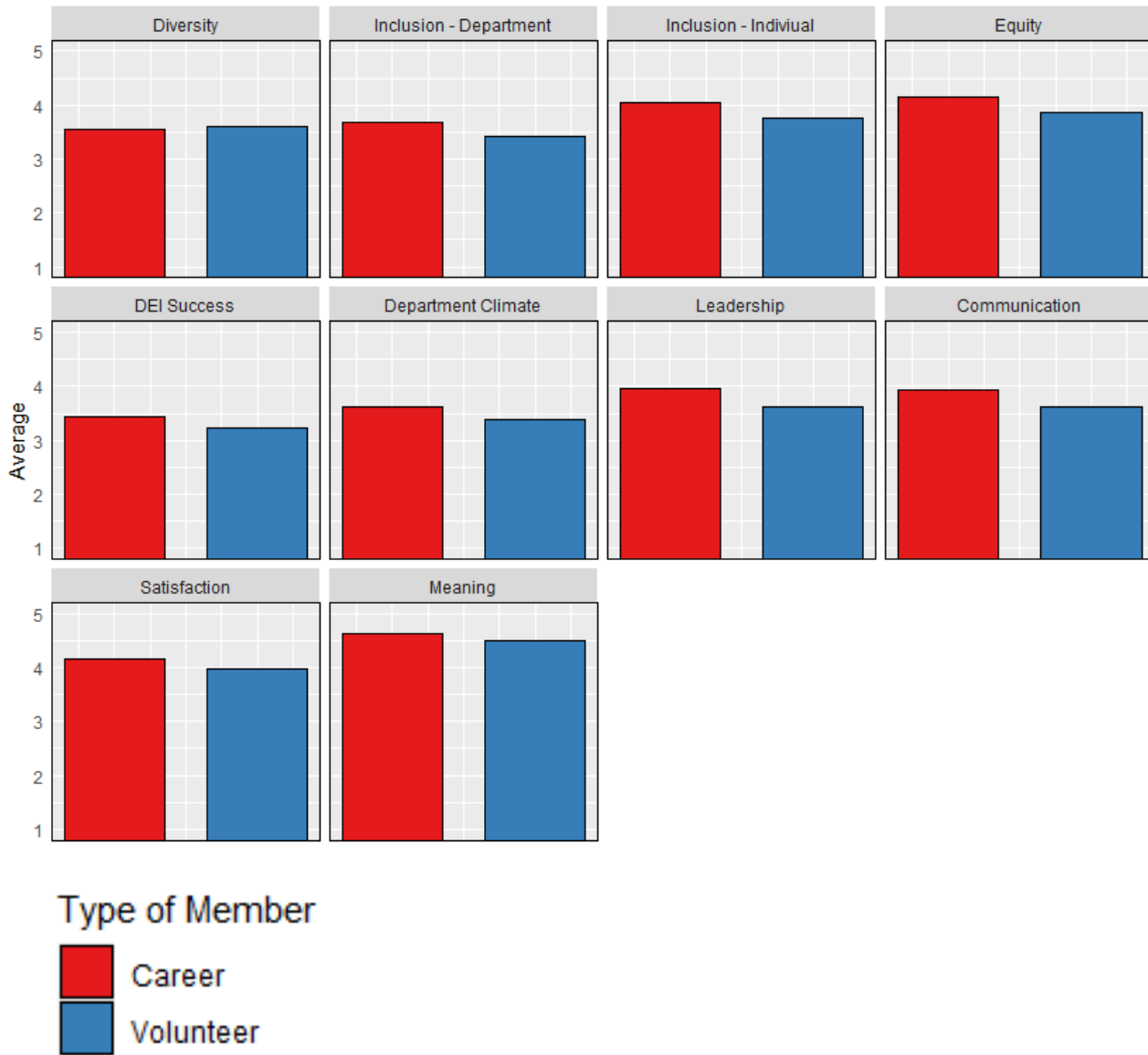
Group differences are statistically significant for all topic areas *except Diversity*.

Note: The survey was sent to individuals at both volunteer and combination departments. Of the 1,110 individuals who answered this question, 75% are volunteers (i.e., no pay, stipend, and paid on-call members) and 25% are career (fully paid).

Figure 7. Race/Ethnicity: Average Scores by Topic
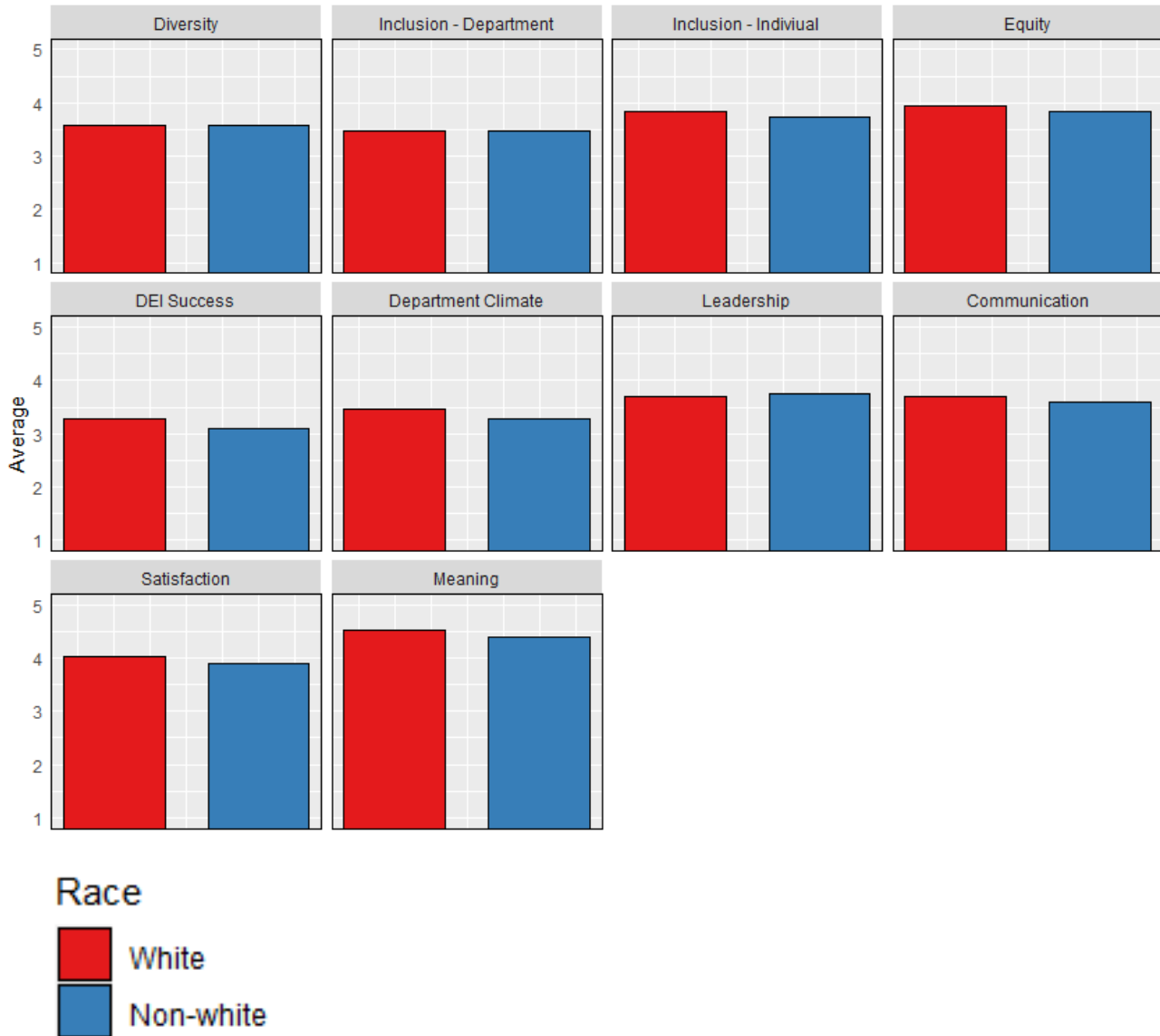
Group differences are not statistically significant for any topic area.

Note: There were six response options for race/ethnicity, and respondents were permitted to check all that apply. Of the 1,036 individuals who responded to this item, 96% checked White. For purposes of analysis, the 4% of non-White respondents were consolidated as a single group.
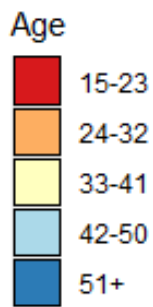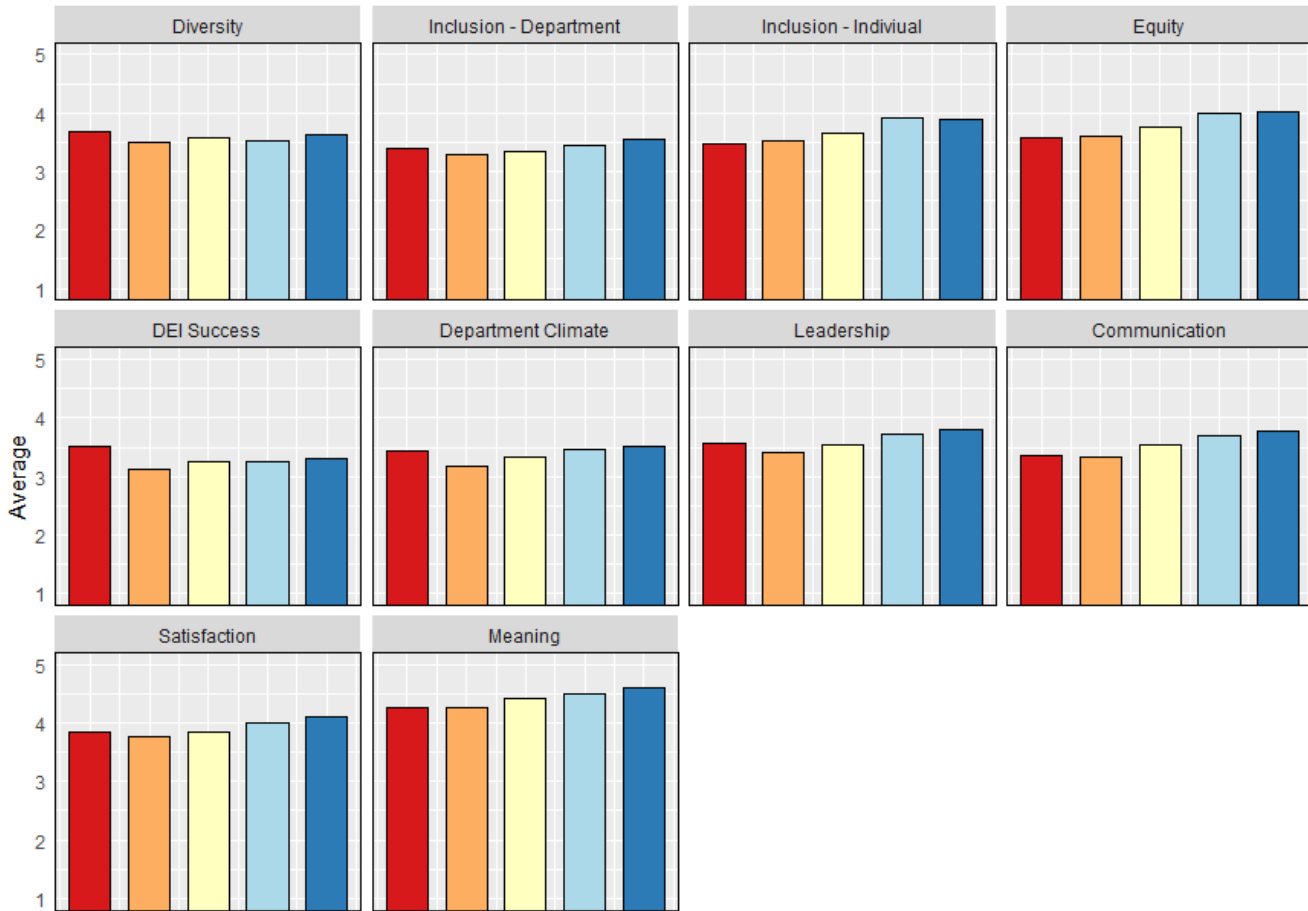
Figure 8. Gender: Average Scores by Topic
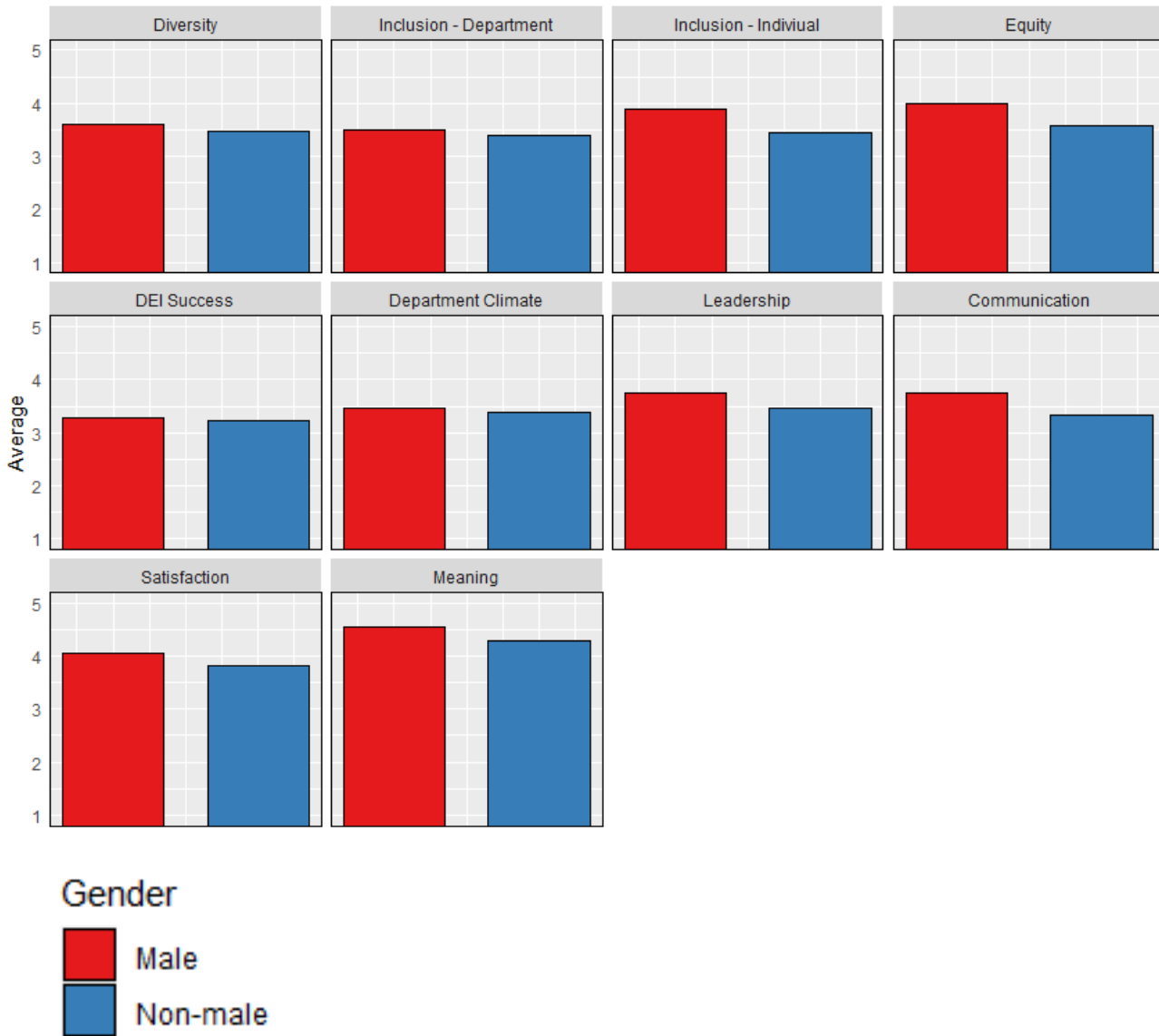
Group differences are statistically significant for *Inclusion – Individual, Equity, Leadership, Communication, Satisfaction,* and *Meaning.*

Note: The survey provided five response options (female, male, transgender, non-binary, and prefer not to answer) and allowed written comments. Due to the small number of respondents selecting transgender and non-binary, we grouped them with females and created a non-male group (representing underrepresented genders in the fire service).

Figure 9. Age: Average Scores by Topic

Group differences are statistically significant for *Inclusion – Department, Inclusion – Individual, Equity, Department Climate, Leadership, Communication, Satisfaction*, and *Meaning*.

Figure 10. Disability: Average Scores by Topic
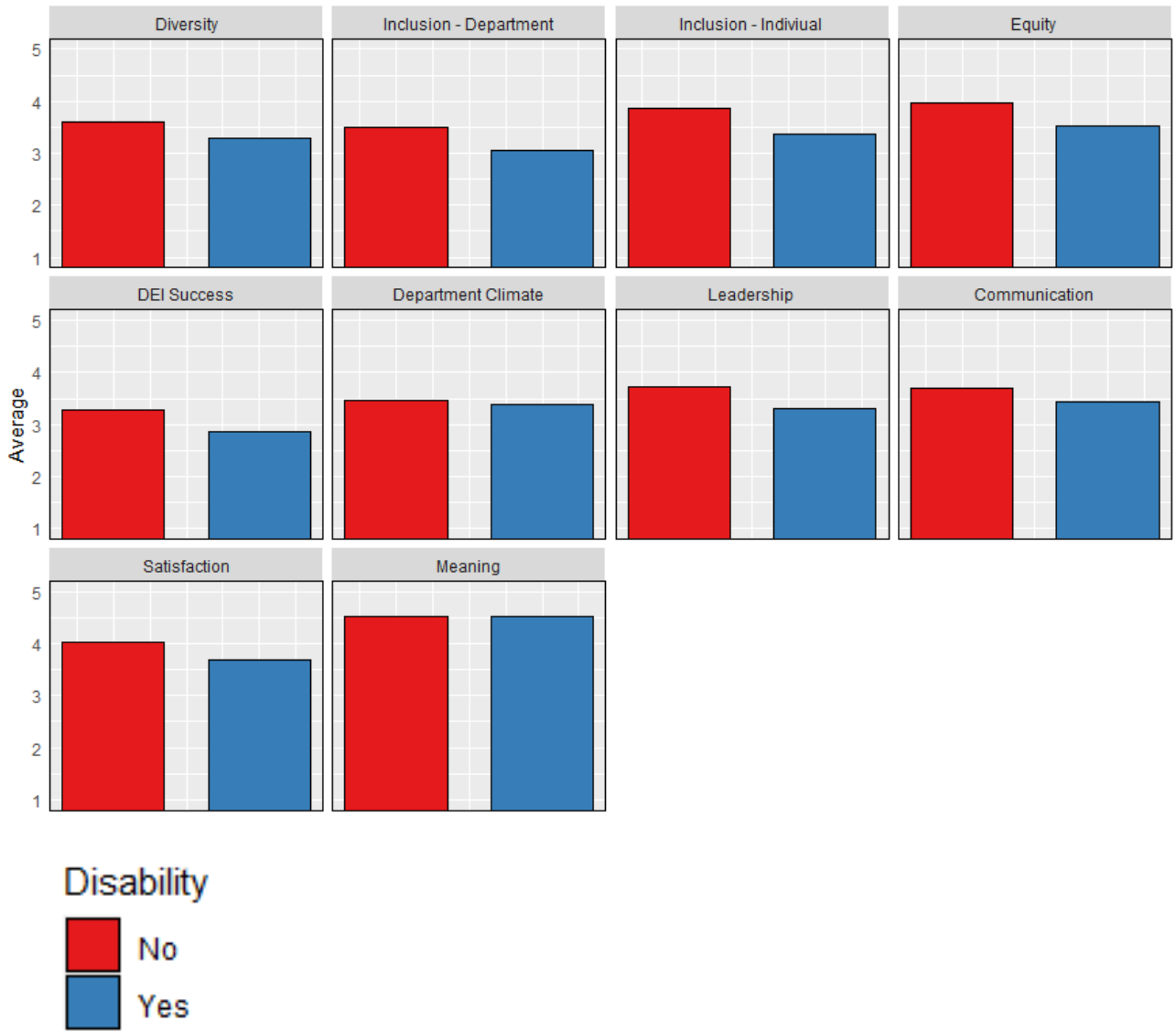
Group differences are statistically significant for *Diversity, Inclusion – Department, Inclusion – Individual, Equity, DEI Success, Leadership,* and *Satisfaction*.

Figure 11. Personal Experience with Discrimination/Hazing/Bullying: Average Scores by Topic
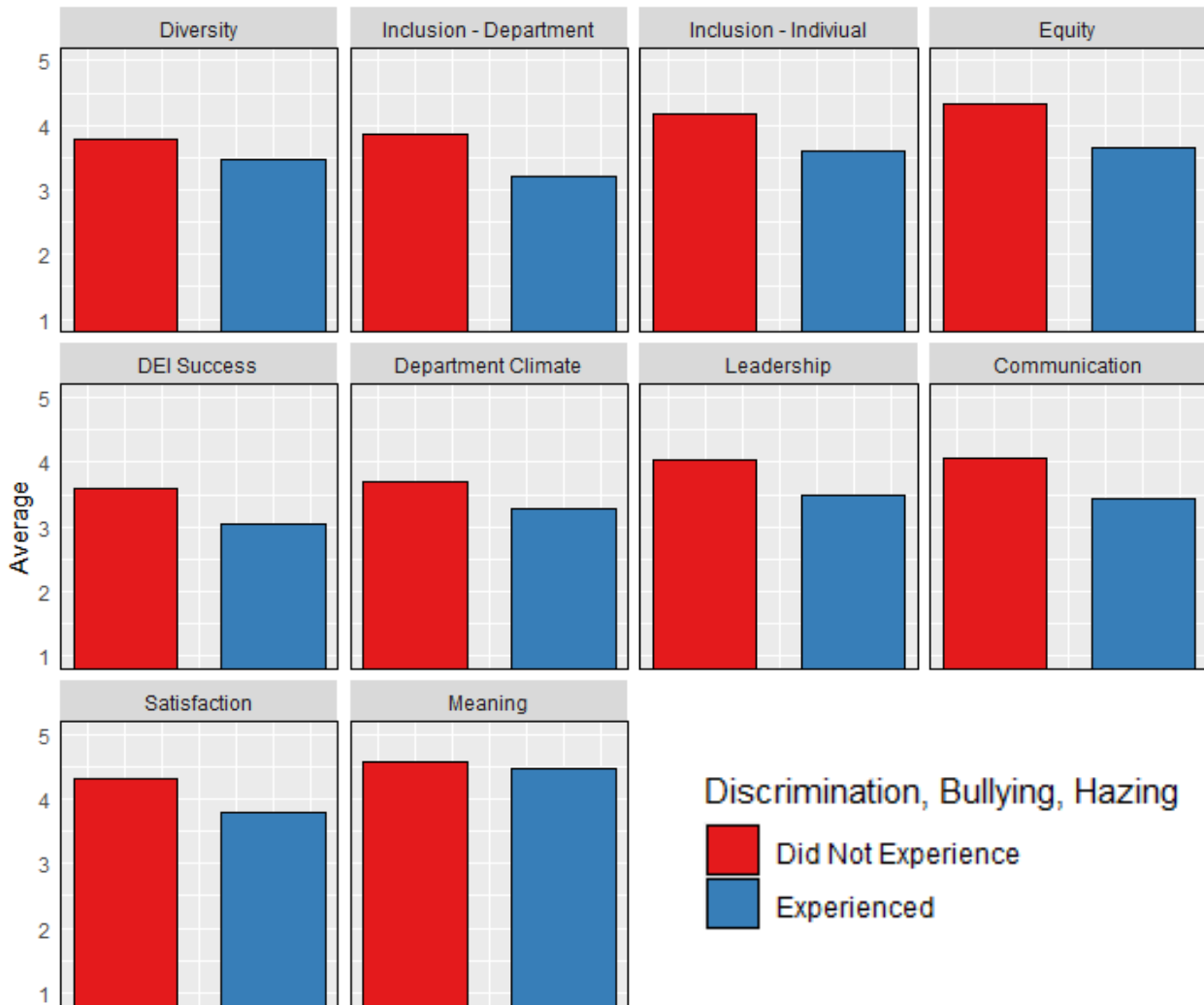
Group differences are statistically significant for all ten topic areas.

Note: Respondents were asked if they ever had (a) seen instances of discrimination, bullying, or hazing, (b) heard stories about others' experiences, (c) experienced them personally, (d) engaged in them personally, or (e) none of the above.

In the survey, *discrimination* was defined as treating people differently based on non-relevant characteristics. *Bullying* was defined as seeking to intimidate, harm, or coerce others physically, verbally, or emotionally. *Hazing* was defined as an initiation process or ritual meant to cause humiliation, harassment, embarrassment, or harm.