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Demographic Outcomes of the City's Hiring and Promotions within the Chicago Fire Department

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Acronyms

ARC	Applicant Review Committee
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
CFD	Chicago Fire Department
ChIPPS	Chicago Integrated Personnel and Payroll Systems
CORDI	Community Outreach, Recruitment, Diversity, and Inclusion
CPAT	Candidate Physical Abilities Test
CPFTA	Chicago Police and Fire Training Academy
CPS	Chicago Public Schools
DHR	Department of Human Resources
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
EMT	Emergency Medical Technician
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
IAD	Internal Affairs Division
LODD	Line of Duty Death
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OPSA	Office of Public Safety Administration

City of Chicago Office of Inspector General (OIG)

OIG reviewed the City's Firefighter/EMT hiring and promotional processes, evaluating the race/ethnicity and gender outcomes across key phases.

For the 2022 Firefighter/EMT Entrance Exam:

Application



- The applicant pool's racial/ethnic demographics mostly reflected those of the city.
- Women made up 17.6% of applicants, which does not reflect the gender demographics of the city. Asian applicants were underrepresented, with certain exceptions.
- More than 15,000 people applied. The City limited the number of people who could take the exam by using a lottery system and applying hiring preferences.*

Hiring Preferences



- The City's use of hiring preferences likely impacted demographics of the applicant pool.
- After the Department of Human Resources applied hiring preferences, the percentage of Hispanic or Latino applicants invited to test rose by 5.1% and the percentage of Black or African American applicants fell by 5.3%.

Exam Outcomes



- The City chose a scoring method which resulted in approximately 50% of applicants passing across race/ethnicity and gender.

Processing



- Processing was a key point of attrition for women across race/ethnicity (63.4% disqualified).
- Asian applicants (60% disqualified) and Black or African American candidates (50.3% disqualified) were disqualified from processing at the highest rates.
- Documentation gaps make reasons for disqualification unclear.

Hiring



- As of May 2025, the City had hired 302 applicants.
- These new hires' demographics differ than the city's.
- 42.7% were Hispanic or Latino, 33.1% were white and 16.2% were Black or African American.
- Women made up 6.0% of new hires.

Promotions



- Across all promotional ranks, over 95% of candidates are male, and promotional outcomes remain overwhelmingly white and male.

*Hiring preferences include current paramedics, Chicago Public School graduates, military veterans, among others



I | Executive Summary

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted an evaluation of the demographic outcomes of the City's hiring and promotions for firefighting positions.

This report provides transparency into the experience of applying for fire service positions with the Chicago Fire Department (CFD). The multiple entities involved in the hiring and promotion processes, the variations from one cycle to the next, and the length of the processes can create confusion and otherwise frustrate applicants. This report describes the City's processes for CFD hiring and promotions and provides an analysis of their demographic outcomes; it does not evaluate their quality or efficiency.

The objectives of OIG's evaluation were to,

- describe CFD's hiring and promotion processes for fire service members;
- determine the demographic outcomes of the current Firefighter/EMT hiring process (initiated in 2022) and the two preceding processes (2006 and 2014); and
- determine the demographic outcomes of the most recent promotional processes for Battalion Chief (2023 and 2019), Captain (2023 and 2017), and Lieutenant (2019-2020 and 2009).

OIG found that the diversity of the initial applicant pool for the City's Firefighter/EMT entrance exams increased from 2006 to 2022, but that representation of some groups declined during that period. During the hiring process for the 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam, the City's use of hiring preferences may have decreased representation of Black or African American applicants.¹ The Department of Human Resources (DHR) stated that it has not examined the effect of the hiring preferences on CFD's goal that its demographics reflect the demographics of Chicago. OIG also found that representation of female applicants declined across categories of race/ethnicity as they moved through the onboarding process for officially entering the Fire Academy.

Regarding CFD's promotional processes, OIG found that a majority of the most recently completed rounds of promotions into the ranks of Lieutenant, Captain, and Battalion Chief went to white candidates and male candidates. As the promotional rank increased, the proportion of white candidates also went up. While white CFD members made up more than 60% of the candidate pools, they also had higher promotional exam scores on average, which may have contributed to their higher rate of promotion.

¹ "Hiring preferences" are considerations used by the City to prioritize job applicants who meet certain eligibility requirements, such as being a current Paramedic, a graduate of Chicago Public Schools, or a military veteran. Hiring preferences are discussed in this report's analysis of the Firefighter/EMT recruitment and hiring process.

I | Background

The Chicago Fire Department (CFD) promotes fire safety, extinguishes fires, and provides emergency medical services (EMS) throughout Chicago.² CFD is the City's second-largest department. As of December 2025, it had 5,032 employees, constituting 14.7% of the City workforce. Sworn members working in fire service account for 4,116, or 81.8%, of CFD's employees. Sworn fire service members are trained and certified to perform both firefighter duties and EMS, as opposed to sworn paramedics who are trained and certified exclusively in EMS. Sworn fire service members fill three categories of ranks, as reflected in Figure 1.

Figure 1: CFD's sworn fire service members fall into three broad categories.

Category	Rank	Requirement
Entry-level	Firefighter/EMT	Entrance exam
Promotional	- Engineer³ - Lieutenant - Captain - Battalion Chief	Promotional exam
Appointed	- Deputy District Chief - District Chief - Assistant Deputy Fire Commissioner - Deputy Fire Commissioner - First Deputy Fire Commissioner	Direct appointment by the Fire Commissioner

Source: CFD, "Our Structure."

Each sworn fire service member enters CFD as a Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) following an entrance exam and graduation from the Fire Academy.⁴ To sit for the entrance exam, an applicant must be 18 years old and have a high school diploma or GED. In addition, an applicant cannot be more than 38 years old by the time they enter the Fire Academy.⁵

Once a Firefighter/EMT has held their position for four and a half years, they become eligible for a promotion. In the past, CFD promoted candidates through an internal nomination or recommendation-based approach known as the Performance Selection Process. However, CFD abandoned that practice more than two decades ago. Now, each CFD member seeking promotion must sit for the relevant rank's promotional exam. CFD's promotional ranks are detailed below.

- **Lieutenant** - After four and a half years, a Firefighter/EMT is eligible for promotion to Lieutenant. A Lieutenant leads a company of Firefighter/EMTs for 24-hour shifts. A

² City of Chicago CFD, "Our Structure," accessed July 17, 2026, <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/cfd.html>.

³ Because achieving the rank of Engineer is not required for subsequent promotions, OIG did not consider that rank in its analysis.

⁴ New Firefighters who are already Paramedics receive the title Firefighter/Paramedic. EMTs and Paramedics both provide emergency medical care; Paramedics have more extensive training and credentials than EMTs. Upon hire, both Firefighter/Paramedics and Firefighter/EMTs start as "recruits."

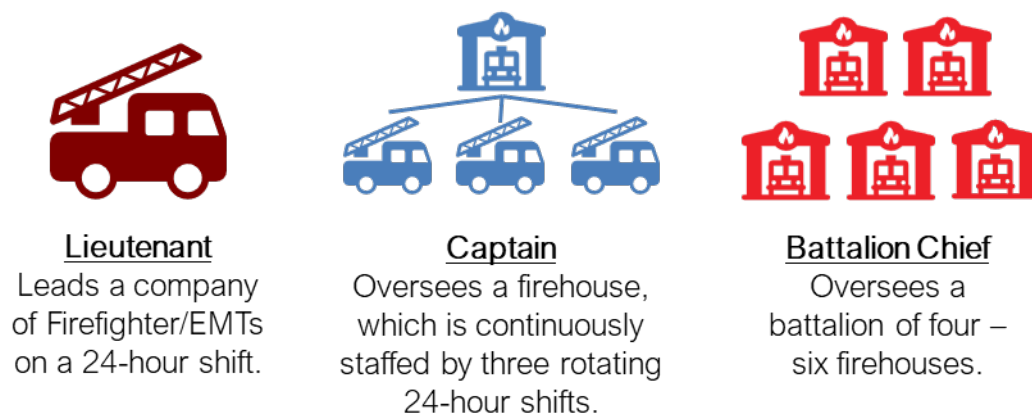
⁵ MCC § 2-152-410 states that "[n]o person above the age of 38 may receive initial appointment as a probationary career service firefighter or firefighter/EMT."

company includes a fire engine or truck, which is typically staffed by five Firefighter/EMTs. Lieutenants also provide training to the Firefighter/EMTs in their company.

- **Captain** - After two and a half years as a Lieutenant, a CFD member is eligible for promotion to Captain. A Captain is responsible for managing a firehouse. This includes planning shifts, responding to fires, and managing personnel. Staff at each firehouse work on rotating 24-hour shifts.
- **Battalion Chief** - After two and a half years as a Captain, a CFD member is eligible for promotion to Battalion Chief, which is the highest promotional rank achievable by examination alone. A Battalion Chief manages the resources and operations of a fire battalion, which consists of four to six firehouses.

Figure 2 shows how the three promotional ranks fit into the fire service overall.

Figure 2: As CFD members move up the ranks, their responsibilities increase.



Source: City documentation and departmental interviews.

The demographics across CFD's entry level, promotional, and appointed ranks are displayed in Figure 3. CFD members in the fire service are predominantly white and male. In addition, white members are more highly represented in CFD's promotional ranks than in the entry-level Firefighter/EMT rank. The representation of Black or African American members is greater among the appointed ranks than within the fire service overall.

Figure 3: As of December 2025, the sworn ranks of CFD were predominantly male and white.⁶

Demographic Category ⁷		Entry Level Rank Members	Promotional Rank Members	Appointed Rank Members	All Ranks
White	Male	1,345 (53.5%)	876 (67.4%)	23 (54.8%)	2,244 (58.2%)
	Female	68 (2.7%)	31 (2.4%)	1 (2.4%)	100 (2.6%)
Hispanic or Latino	Male	617 (24.6%)	184 (14.2%)	3 (7.1%)	804 (20.9%)
	Female	30 (1.2%)	6 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	36 (0.9%)
Black or African American	Male	325 (12.9%)	179 (13.8%)	12 (28.6%)	516 (13.4%)
	Female	24 (1.0%)	7 (0.5%)	2 (4.8%)	33 (0.9%)
Asian	Male	47 (1.9%)	14 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	61 (1.6%)
	Female	2 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.1%)
Two or More Races	Male	49 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	49 (1.3%)
	Female	1 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.0%)
	Non-Binary	1 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.0%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	Male	2 (0.1%)	2 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (0.1%)
	Female	1 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.4%)	2 (0.1%)
Totals by rank		2,512	1,299	42	3,853

Source: Chicago Integrated Personnel and Payroll Systems (ChIPPS, the City's human resources database).

Three City departments play roles in the hiring and promotion of sworn fire service members—the Department of Human Resources (DHR), the Office of Public Safety Administration (OPSA), and CFD. Each department handles different aspects of the processes.

- Based on staffing attrition and the date of the most recent hiring or promotional exams, CFD determines its staffing needs, which inform the timing of future exams. CFD also participates

⁶ This figure omits CFD members with unknown race/ethnicity and gender demographic data according to the City's human resources information system.

⁷ The City recorded demographic data using merged race and ethnicity. That is, individuals who identified as Hispanic or Latino are recorded according to their ethnicity even if they also reported a racial identity such as white or Black or African American. Individuals who did not identify as Hispanic or Latino were recorded according to their reported race. For example, the City did not identify individuals who identify as both Black or African American **and** Hispanic or Latino. Those individuals would appear as only Hispanic or Latino in the City's data systems.

in recruiting applicants to take the hiring entrance exams and providing departmental expertise to the third-party vendors engaged by the City to develop the promotional exams.

- DHR manages the administrative work of hiring and promotions. This includes contracting with vendors to develop and administer both hiring and promotional exams and selecting applicants to take hiring exams.
- OPSA manages the onboarding steps, referred to as “processing,” completed by applicants prior to entering the Fire Academy.⁸

Legal Considerations in CFD Hiring and Promotions

The City has a long history of litigation and contract negotiations regarding CFD hiring and promotions. Some of the key decisions and provisions are discussed below.

As part of the settlement order in the case of *Shakman et al. v. City of Chicago, et al.*, the City developed a CFD Hiring Plan for Uniformed Positions.⁹ That plan detailed the City’s obligations related to conducting hiring and promotional examinations and committed the City to providing equal employment opportunities to all qualified applicants.

As an employer, the City is subject to certain federal civil rights laws. These include Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, which requires the equal application of laws to all people.

In perhaps the most prominent case regarding CFD hiring, Black Firefighter/EMT applicants brought a Title VII action in 1998 alleging that the 1995 written Firefighter/EMT entrance examination had a negative disparate impact on Black applicants. After many years of litigation, the federal courts agreed.¹⁰ In 2011, the City was ordered to hire 111 Black applicants, commonly referred to as the “*Lewis* class.”

Two other prominent cases in the 2010s regarding CFD hiring involved female Firefighter/EMT applicants who challenged CFD’s physical abilities test.¹¹ They alleged that the test discriminated against women and was unlawful because it was not related to job performance or predictive of who would succeed as a Firefighter/EMT. The City agreed to discontinue the use of that test, replacing it with the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT) developed by the International Association of Firefighters.¹²

⁸ Prior to 2019, CFD’s human resource section engaged with applicants and candidates on the hiring and promotional lists. In 2019, the City moved these functions into a new department, OPSA.

⁹ City of Chicago Department of Human Resources, “City of Chicago Fire Department Hiring Plan for Uniformed Positions,” accessed July 17, 2026, https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dhr/supp_info/HRpolicies/CFD_Hiring_Plan_with_apx.pdf.

¹⁰ See *Lewis v. City of Chicago, Ill.*, 130 S. Ct. 2191 (2010) and *Lewis v. City of Chicago, Illinois*, 702 F.3d 958 (7th Cir. 2012).

¹¹ See *Vasich et al. v. City of Chicago*, No. 11-cv-04843 (N.D. Ill. 2013) and *Godfrey et al. v. City of Chicago*, No. 12-cv-08601 (N.D. Ill. 2015).

¹² International Association of Firefighters, “Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT),” accessed July 17, 2026, <https://www.iaff.org/cpat/>.

From 1980 until 2022, the City was subject to a consent decree regarding promotions within CFD.¹³ The “*Albrecht* Decree” stemmed from a 1980 complaint filed by the United States alleging that CFD’s promotional practices violated Title VII’s prohibitions against discrimination based on race and national origin. The City agreed to seek to promote Black and Hispanic Firefighter/EMTs in a manner that would substantially increase their representation in each of the promotional ranks.¹⁴ In 2022, the Court dissolved the *Albrecht* Decree, finding that minority representation in each rank had substantially increased, that the City had made good faith efforts to comply with the decree, and that dissolution would not limit future legal challenges alleging discrimination in CFD promotions.¹⁵

During the time the *Albrecht* Decree was in effect, the City was subject to a number of lawsuits over promotional practices. In multiple cases from 1998 through 2004, white Firefighters challenged CFD’s plan to promote minority members in an effort to remedy past discrimination.¹⁶ In all but one case (namely, *Biondo v. City of Chicago*, decided in 2004), the courts held that the City’s plan to promote Black and Hispanic Firefighters did not violate Title VII or the Equal Protection Clause because it was narrowly tailored to remedy CFD’s past unlawful discrimination.

In 1980, after the Firefighters’ strike, CFD set a goal for its hiring and recruitment programs of achieving a force in which approximately 30 percent of its members were Black and 15 percent Hispanic. This goal, among others, was outlined in Appendix G to the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between Chicago Fire Fighters Union Local 2 and the City.¹⁷ Throughout its history, the legality of enforcing Appendix G has been the subject of much debate.

¹³ A consent decree is a federal judicial order that settles a dispute. It typically embodies terms agreed upon by the parties as a compromise in lieu of litigation.

¹⁴ *United States v. Albrecht*, No. 80 C 1590, 1985 WL 2400, at *1 (N.D. Ill. Aug. 23, 1985).

¹⁵ *United States v. Albrecht*, No. CV 80-C-1590, 2022 WL 2253972, at *1 (N.D. Ill. June 16, 2022).

¹⁶ See *Chicago Fire Fighters Union Local No. 2 v. City of Chicago*, Nos. 87 C 7295, 89 C 7984, 93 C 5438, 93 C 6175, 96 C 808, 1999 WL 1289125 (N.D. Ill. 1999) and *McNamara v. City of Chicago*, 138 F.3d 1219 (1998). See also *Chicago Firefighters Local 2 v. City of Chicago*, 249 F.3d 649 (2001) and *Biondo v. City of Chicago, III*, 382 F.3d 680 (2004).

¹⁷ City of Chicago, “Labor Contract between the Chicago Fire Fighters Union, Local No. 2 International Association of Fire Fighters A.F.L.-C.I.O.-C.L.C. and the City of Chicago, Illinois Effective July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2021” (accessed July 17, 2026), https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dol/supp_info/city_of_chicago_collectivebargainingagreements.html#docaccess-5b9750a0d2af059872bb0a0afaf199f9.

II | Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

A | Objectives

The objectives of this evaluation were to,

- describe the processes for hiring and promoting fire service members in CFD; and
- determine the demographic outcomes of each phase of the City's 2006, 2014, and 2022 Firefighter/EMT hiring processes and the 2019 & 2023 Battalion Chief, 2017 & 2023 Captain, and 2009 & 2019-2020 Lieutenant promotional processes.

B | Scope

This project describes the City's hiring and promotional processes for sworn fire service members and quantifies the demographic outcomes of recruitment, hiring, and promotional processes for sworn fire service positions. OIG reviewed recruitment efforts broadly with a focus on the 2022 entrance exam. OIG's hiring analysis included the 2006, 2014, and 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exams. The promotional analysis included the two most recent exams for each of the following positions: Lieutenant (2009 & 2019-2020), Captain (2017 & 2023), and Battalion Chief (2019 & 2023).

OIG did not evaluate CFD's recruitment, hiring, and promotional processes against performance criteria. Further, the review and analysis did not include non-sworn CFD staff, such as civilian administrative and legal positions, or emergency medical services positions.

C | Methodology

To understand the City's recruitment, hiring, and promotional processes for CFD, OIG interviewed management and staff from CFD, DHR, and OPSA, and reviewed both internal and publicly available documentation. OIG also met with community groups to incorporate people's experiences with these processes.

To determine the demographic outcomes of CFD hiring and promotional processes, OIG reviewed data from DHR and OPSA and interviewed staff from each department. To identify the demographic characteristics of applicants at each phase of hiring following the 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam, OIG analyzed applicant, preference, and exam score data from DHR, as well as processing and hiring data from OPSA.

Due to historical data limitations, OIG conducted a similar, but less extensive, analysis of the 2014 and 2006 Firefighter/EMT entrance exams. To identify the demographic outcomes of the hiring processes following those exams, OIG analyzed applicant, exam, processing, and hiring data for the 2014 exam, as well as applicant and exam data for the 2006 exam.

To determine the demographic and scoring outcomes of promotional exams, OIG analyzed promotional eligibility lists provided by DHR and lists of promoted candidates provided by OPSA.

E | Authority and Role

The authority to perform this evaluation is established in the City of Chicago Municipal Code § 2-56-030, which states that OIG has the power and duty to review the programs of City government in order to identify any inefficiencies, waste, and potential for misconduct, and to promote economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and integrity in the administration of City programs and operations.

The role of OIG is to review City operations and make recommendations for improvement.

City management is responsible for establishing and maintaining processes to ensure that City programs operate economically, efficiently, effectively, and with integrity.

III | CFD's Firefighter/EMT Recruitment and Hiring Process

In CFD, each sworn fire service member begins their career as a Firefighter/EMT by passing an entrance exam. Historically, the City tested tens of thousands of applicants for each entrance exam. This mass testing resulted in long lists of qualified applicants for open positions. Due to high interest far exceeding the number of entry-level vacancies, the City has administered exams as infrequently as once per decade. An applicant could therefore pass an entrance exam but wait for years before learning whether they might be hired. As a consequence of these long wait times, many qualified applicants accepted work elsewhere. Figure 4 depicts how applicants move through the CFD hiring process.

Figure 4: Applicants must pass through many steps and face uncertain wait times to become Firefighter/EMTs.



Source: City documentation and departmental interviews.

To provide transparency into the Firefighter/EMT hiring process and how it has changed over time, the following section describes the most recent recruitment and hiring cycle in 2022 based on City documents; OIG observations; and interviews with DHR, CFD, and OPSA.

A | CFD supplemented its year-round recruitment through a short-term campaign in advance of its 2022 entrance exam.

In its 2023 Racial Equity Action Plan, CFD stated a goal that its workforce would “reflect the communities [it] serve[s].”¹⁸ To help achieve this goal, CFD engages in year-round recruitment by attending events at places such as churches, college job fairs, and trade shows. However, the City has no specific recruiting targets related to race, ethnicity, or gender.

In the lead-up to the 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam, CFD’s dedicated recruitment team included the District Chief over the Community Outreach, Recruitment, Diversity, and Inclusion (CORDI) division, and CORDI’s two full-time staff.¹⁹ CFD stated that as part of this recruitment effort, it consulted the *Guide for Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Department* published by the

¹⁸ Racial Equity Action Plans were strategic documents created by City departments that articulated how they would strive to achieve equitable outcomes in their work. Chicago Fire Department 2023 Racial Equity Action Plan, “Define Your Department’s Opportunity,” 3, accessed July 17, 2026, https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/sites/oerj/cohort-1-reaps/CFD_REAP_2023.pdf.

¹⁹ CFD’s 2023 Racial Equity Action Plan committed to maintaining CORDI as a permanent unit within CFD’s Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. CORDI’s purpose is to promote community engagement with CFD, particularly among young people interested in career opportunities. CFD 2023 Racial Equity Action Plan, 4.

International Association of Fire Chiefs. CORDI conducted outreach that focused on encouraging applications from Black and Hispanic communities. The District Chief stated that they also created a team of volunteer CFD members to act as community ambassadors and that CFD worked with community groups to promote the exam.

DHR and CFD also contracted with Brown Farmer Media Group to conduct a 21-day active recruitment campaign immediately preceding the exam application period.²⁰ During this campaign, Brown Farmer and CFD's recruitment team attended events such as community parades and festivals in a short-term push to increase the number of applicants taking the exam. The City paid Brown Farmer \$427,000 for this work.

B | For the 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam, the City made significant changes to its application process.

Prior to 2022, the City invited all eligible applicants to take the Firefighter/EMT entrance exam. The entrance exams in 1995, 2006, and 2014 each seated over 25,000 applicants at mass testing sites such as McCormick Place. Following these entrance exams, DHR assigned a random lottery number to each person who passed, then used a combination of this lottery number and a variety of hiring preferences to determine the order in which qualified applicants would move forward in the process.²¹ After the 2006 and 2014 exams, the resulting hiring lists included thousands of names, far exceeding CFD's needs for new Firefighter/EMTs; CFD management stated that it hires about 200 new Firefighter/EMTs each year.



The City uses hiring preferences to prioritize hiring from certain groups.

To increase the frequency of opportunities to take the exam and decrease the expense of mass testing, the City changed the hiring process by limiting the number of applicants invited to the 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam. DHR announced it would limit the invitation to the exam by using the combination of a lottery and hiring preferences to select 4,500 applicants. For those who passed the exam, DHR then used the original lottery numbers and applied the hiring preferences a second time to determine the order in which it would refer qualified candidates for processing and hiring into open positions. In short, the 2022 process limited the number of test-takers and created an additional instance for DHR to apply hiring preferences.

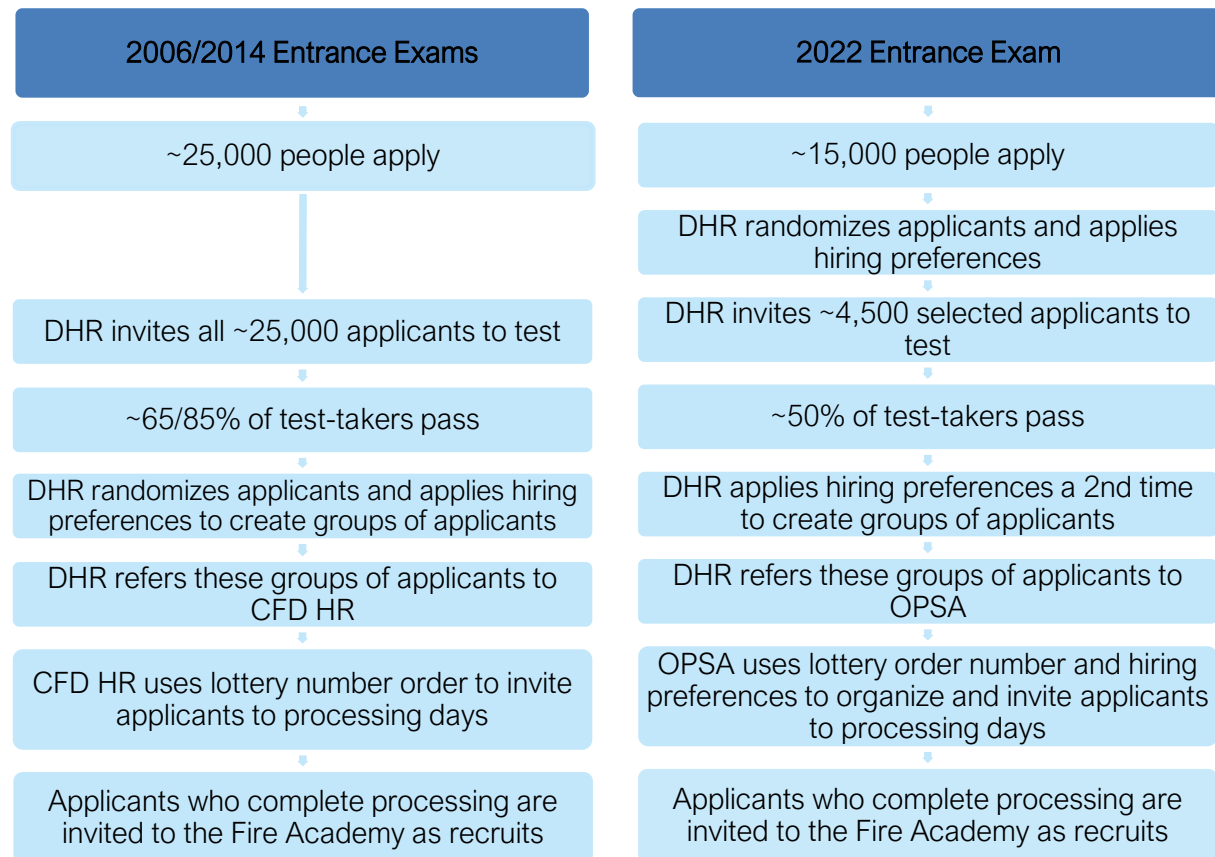
The decision to limit the number of invitations to the exam surprised some community groups, union members, and elected officials, who were used to a system where every applicant had the opportunity to take the exam. Some applicants and community groups expressed concerns to OIG about poor communication and inadequate transparency surrounding this change, which eroded their trust in the hiring process. Members from one community group expressed a belief that the lottery was introduced to limit the number of Black or African American applicants.

²⁰ City of Chicago, "Contract Number 191170," June 6, 2022, accessed August 26, 2026, <https://webapps1.chicago.gov/vcsearch/city/contracts/191170>.

²¹ "Hiring preferences" are considerations used by the City to prioritize job applicants who meet certain eligibility requirements, such as being a current Paramedic, a graduate of Chicago Public Schools, or a military veteran.

The differences between the City's processes for the 2006 and 2014 Firefighter/EMT hiring cycles and the 2022 cycle are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: For the 2022 entrance exam, DHR limited exam invitations and applied hiring preferences twice.



Source: City documents and departmental interviews.

C | DHR randomly assigned lottery numbers to applicants and manually verified their hiring preferences.

The application for the 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam was available on the City's career portal, Taleo, for a period of 21 days—from Saturday, September 24 through Monday, October 17, 2022. In addition to the required general personal information, each applicant could submit proof of their eligibility for one or more hiring preferences that would increase their likelihoods both of being selected to take the exam and ultimately being hired. While applicants could submit proof for more than one preference, DHR applied only one preference per person. The hiring preferences DHR used to determine whom to invite to the 2022 exam are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Applicants for the 2022 Firefighter/EMT hiring process could claim one or more City hiring preferences.

Preference	Requirements
LODD	Applicants with immediate family who died in the line of duty in police, fire, or combat-zone service
Paramedic Crossover	Applicants who were current CFD paramedics
Veterans'	Applicants who served in the United States Armed forces and received an honorable or general discharge; current military personnel with at least six months of active-duty status
CPFTA	Applicants who successfully completed the CPFTA
CPS	Applicants who graduated from a CPS high school
Residency	Current Chicago residents

Source: DHR, "Entry Level Firefighter/EMT Frequently Asked Questions ('FAQs')." ²²

Information on the DHR Fire Department webpage stated that DHR would apply preferences to ensure that veterans, graduates of the Chicago Police and Fire Training Academy (CPFTA), and graduates of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) each represented at least 20% of those sitting for the 2022 entrance exam. ²³

Additionally, applicants who were current CFD Paramedics or who had a family member who died in the line of duty were entitled to sit for the entrance exam. These applicants did not count towards the 4,500 places awarded using the lottery and the other preferences. That is, the intended total number of test-takers was 4,500 plus all qualifying line of duty death (LODD) and Paramedic Crossover applicants. Finally, DHR further stated that it would apply a residency preference to the invitation list to ensure that the overall testing population was made up of at least 80% Chicago residents. ²⁴ As discussed below in the Analysis section, DHR stated that these preferences and percentages were created individually over time without consideration of their cumulative effect.

After the application period closed, DHR used a computerized randomization function to assign a lottery number to each complete application. Then, DHR staff and temporary workers from City contractor William Everett Group manually verified whether information submitted by the applicants proved their eligibility for claimed hiring preferences. Again, while applicants were able to submit proof for more than one preference, DHR applied only one preference per applicant.

DHR's data shows whether it verified an applicant's supporting documents, but does not show which *specific* verified preference it used to adjust the applicant's position on the initial lottery list. Therefore, while it is possible to determine the outcomes of DHR's *verification* of preference documentation (i.e., verified or rejected), it is not possible to determine demographic representation among applicants who actually *received* a specific preference. For example, where the data shows

²² City of Chicago DHR, "Entry Level Firefighter/EMT Frequently Asked Questions ('FAQs')." September 23, 2022, accessed July 17, 2026, https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dhr/general/CFD-FAQs_9-23-2022r.pdf.

²³ CPFTA is a two-year high-school career preparation program for students interested in public safety roles. Approximately 100 students per year complete the CPFTA program. For more information see, Chicago Public Schools, "Chicago Police and Firefighter/EMT Training Academy (CPFTA)," accessed July 17, 2026, <https://www.cps.edu/academics/work-based-learning/chicago-police-and-fire-training-academy/>.

²⁴ The Chicago Residency Preference is discussed below in the "Analysis of Outcomes of the 2022 Firefighter/EMT Entrance Exam" section of this report.

that an applicant qualified for both the Veterans' and the CPS preference, it is unclear which preference DHR used to determine the applicant's position on the list.

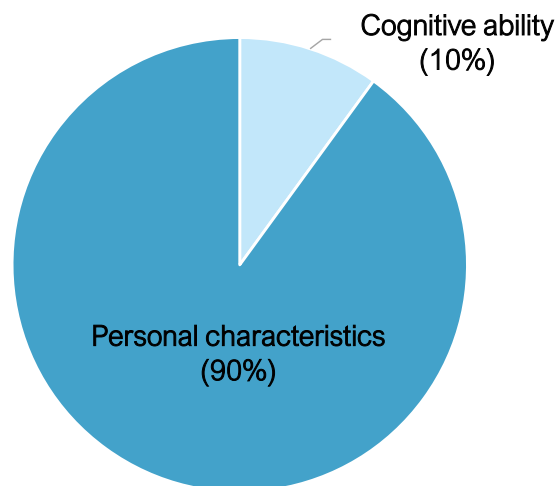
DHR also relied on the preferences (with the exception of the Chicago residency preference) at a second point in the hiring process to adjust the order in which applicants who passed the exam were referred for processing and hiring.

D | The 2022 entrance exam was a standardized test that primarily evaluated applicants' personal characteristics.

For fire-service hiring, the City uses a standardized entrance exam that is used by other fire departments across the country and based on industry-wide job requirements. Over the years, DHR has worked with multiple test development and administration vendors. In the 2022 Firefighter/EMT hiring process, the City used a standardized exam that was developed by a company called Talogy and administered by a separate City vendor called CPS HR Consulting.²⁵

The 2022 entrance exam consisted of three components: an ability test (35 questions), a work styles questionnaire (135 questions), and a life experience survey (75 questions). For scoring purposes, these components were grouped into 35 items related to cognitive ability (10%) and 210 items related to personal characteristics (90%), as seen in Figure 7. Cognitive ability questions included elements such as reading comprehension and spatial reasoning; personal characteristics questions evaluated traits such as rule-following and attention to detail.

Figure 7: The 2022 entrance exam consisted of a cognitive ability portion and a personal characteristics assessment.



Source: OIG visualization of information provided by DHR.

The exam was administered over three days, from December 17-21, 2022, at several testing sites around the city.

²⁵ CPS HR Consulting is a California-based human resource consulting firm that is not affiliated with Chicago Public Schools.

After applicants completed the exam, DHR worked with Talogy to determine the scoring methodology. There was no pre-determined passing score for the exam before it was administered. DHR stated that this is typical of employment exams, which must consider factors such as federal equal employment requirements and the number of new hires needed.

Talogy presented DHR with multiple scoring options that assigned a variety of weights to the different exam components. The vendor also provided statistics showing the theoretical demographic breakdown that would result from each scoring option. The methodology chosen by the City resulted in a pass-fail determination rather than a ranked score. DHR consulted with the Mayor's Office before finalizing the scoring approach. In late March 2023, Talogy provided the exam results to the City.

After the administration of the December 2022 CFD entrance exam, DHR discovered that temporary workers from William Everett Group had made errors in their manual review of some applicants' hiring preference documentation. As a result of those errors, some applicants who were entitled to take the exam were not invited. Consequently, across two days in August 2023 (which was after some applicants who passed the December exam had already begun the next steps in the hiring process), the City administered a make-up exam for applicants who mistakenly had not been invited to the original exam. DHR management stated that roughly 450 applicants in total were invited to the August 2023 make-up exam, and that approximately 250 ultimately attended. According to DHR, Talogy used the same pass-fail scoring methodology to score the August 2023 make-up that it used to score the December 2022 exam.

E | As of August 2026, processing and hiring on the basis of the 2022 exam cycle remains ongoing. Applicants must complete multiple administrative steps before starting at the Fire Academy.

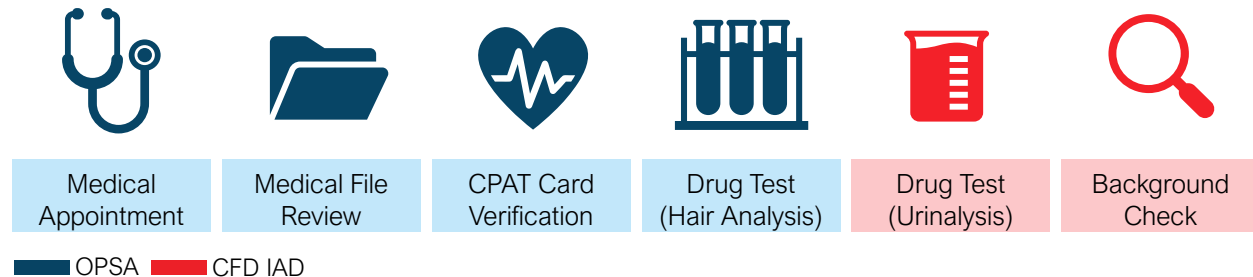
After finalizing the exam results, DHR began to create groups of passing applicants to refer for processing by OPSA. Specifically, DHR organized passing test-takers by their original lottery numbers, then applied hiring preferences, except the Chicago residency preference, a second time to ensure that each group included 20% veterans, CPFTA graduates, and CPS graduates. Further, all applicants with an LODD preference were included in the first group, and DHR also aimed to ensure that current Paramedics represented at least 10% of each group.²⁶ The first few groups that DHR referred to OPSA included 200 applicants each. As time passed after the exam, DHR included between 300 and 500 applicants in each group to compensate for lower interest among the remaining applicants, who may have accepted other jobs in the interim.

OPSA requires that applicants complete multiple administrative steps. These administrative steps—collectively referred to as “processing”—include paperwork, medical examinations, drug tests, and a background check. Applicants must also schedule and complete a Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT) with a certified testing facility and present proof of completion at the time of

²⁶ In creating these groups, DHR assigned each applicant a “processing number” (separate from their lottery number) reflecting the order in which they would be referred to OPSA. City of Chicago Fire Department, “Firefighter/EMT posting#: 8801-CFD-2022-FF-EMT Eligibility List,” May 2025, accessed July 17, 2026, https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dhr/supp_info/Reports/8801-CFD-2022-FF-EMT_Eligibility_List_for_Internet_Posting.pdf.

processing. Figure 8 depicts the steps an applicant must successfully complete before entering the Academy as a recruit.

Figure 8: Applicants must complete processing steps with both OPSA and CFD IAD.



Source: City documents and departmental interviews.

Each referred applicant must attend an in-person “processing day” at the City’s Public Safety Headquarters. OPSA invites applicants to processing days via email and disqualifies those who do not attend. OPSA stated that applicants may waive processing invitations three times and be considered for hiring at a later date, but that additional waiver requests result in disqualification. Further, if too much time has elapsed since the completion of a processing step, such as a background check or passing the CPAT, an applicant may be required to repeat the step. Applicants who have reached the maximum age of 38 before hiring are also disqualified.

During processing day, OPSA collects applicants’ paperwork and takes a hair sample for a drug test. CFD IAD is also on site to fingerprint applicants and collect urine samples for an additional drug test. CFD IAD uses documentation collected by OPSA to conduct a background check for criminal offenses or conduct that would disqualify an applicant.²⁷ The background check typically takes three to four weeks. Applicants whose background checks identify potentially disqualifying information are permitted to present further details about the circumstances to CFD’s Applicant Review Committee (ARC). ARC reviews these applicants’ files, and votes on whether their applications should be approved or denied.

Applicants are also required to complete several processing steps that are self-directed and can be done in any order. For example, applicants must independently schedule and pass the CPAT within one year before entering the Academy. Applicants must also schedule and appear for interviews with CFD IAD to discuss their personal histories and background checks. Because these steps are applicant-driven and may occur in any order, the sequence and length of time for processing varies. OPSA stated that each applicant spends about six months to one year completing processing.

Finally, each applicant who completes all steps of initial processing must attend a second and final processing day before receiving their invitation to the Fire Academy. Activities at this final day include an introductory address from the Academy’s Training Division, the collection of a urine

²⁷ CFD IAD’s background investigation guidance provides a non-exhaustive list of factors that may disqualify applicants, including convictions for criminal offenses that would impair a firefighter’s ability to maintain public trust—for example, crimes of violence, theft, or dishonesty. Other examples of reasons for disqualification include convictions by military courts, records of consistently unsafe driving over the previous five years, discharges for cause from previous employment, false statements, and indebtedness to the City.

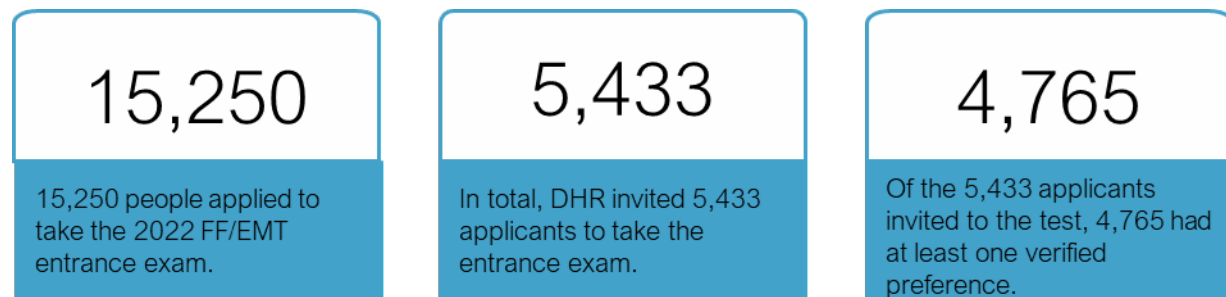
sample for an additional drug test, and the completion of hiring forms. Once OPSC confirms an applicant's eligibility, it sends their information to CFD and DHR. At this point, an applicant officially becomes a CFD employee.

Hiring based on the 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam began in March 2024 and is ongoing as of August 2026.

IV | Analysis of Outcomes of the 2022 Firefighter/EMT Entrance Exam

OIG analyzed data provided by DHR and OPSA to determine demographic outcomes at multiple stages in the 2022 Firefighter/EMT hiring process. The following analysis incorporates observations related to data quality, documentation, and communication that may have impacted the public transparency of the process.

A | Application Process and Invitation to the Entrance Exam



Source: DHR data.

The exact number and demographics of applicants are not certain because DHR did not have controls to prevent applicants from creating multiple Taleo accounts. However, the number of duplicate applications is likely low.

DHR did not have measures in place to prevent an applicant from creating multiple Taleo accounts, creating an opportunity for an individual to receive multiple lottery numbers. As discussed above, after applicants applied for the Firefighter/EMT position, DHR used a computer program to randomly assign a lottery number to each completed application. DHR then used these numbers to create the initial list for invitation to the exam, with lower numbers receiving priority. Next, DHR manually adjusted each applicant's position on the list based on hiring preferences, a process referred to both by DHR and in this report as "applying preferences." Even with the preferences applied, however, the random lottery number assigned to each application remained a key determinant of whether an applicant continued in the hiring process.

If an individual applicant completed more than one Taleo application, the randomization process would have assigned them more than one lottery number. Prior to the application period, DHR addressed the possibility of duplicated Taleo accounts in a published FAQ document, excerpted in Figure 9. DHR stated that it would delete all duplicate entries and that multiple Taleo accounts would therefore not increase an applicant's chances of being invited to the exam. Nevertheless, OIG found several instances in DHR's data that appear to reflect individual applicants with duplicate applications. DHR confirmed that several of the examples identified by OIG were possible duplicates and stated that it, in fact, did not take steps to identify duplicate Taleo applications before implementing the lottery.

Figure 9: DHR stated that it would delete duplicate applications for the Firefighter/EMT role but did not do so.

12. Can I create multiple accounts to increase my chances of being higher on the eligibility list?

No. You can only have one application on file. We will delete all duplicates.

Source: DHR, "Entry Level Firefighter/EMT Frequently Asked Questions ('FAQs')," 4.

Based on the relatively small number of applications showing signs of duplication—for example, the same name, race/ethnicity, and gender—OIG believes the number of duplicate accounts was likely low and did not materially impact exam invitation rates. Nevertheless, the fact that DHR did not check for duplicates after explicitly stating it would do so has the potential to undermine trust in the process. Due to these discrepancies in DHR's data and the lack of another unique identifier for each application, the number and demographics of applicants discussed in the analysis below may not precisely represent the applicant pool. OIG reports the demographic outcomes of the hiring process based on the best available data from DHR.

The lottery successfully randomized applicants.

The race/ethnicity demographics of the overall applicant pool for the 2022 entrance exam closely resembled those of the applicants who received the first 4,500 lottery numbers—that is, the applicants who would have been selected to test solely by lottery, without the use of hiring preferences. The randomization did have a small effect on the percentage of female applicants who received one of the first 4,500 lottery numbers. Overall, OIG concludes that the lottery was not a source of major demographic impact on who was invited to test. The demographics of all applicants for the 2022 entrance exam are shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: DHR data suggests that the lottery successfully randomized applicants in terms of race/ethnicity demographics but slightly decreased the percentage of female applicants compared to the original applicant pool.

Race/Ethnicity	All Applicants	First 4,500 Lottery Numbers	Invited to Exam
White	4,991 (32.7%)	1,481 (32.9%)	1,798 (33.1%)
Hispanic or Latino	4,928 (32.3%)	1,438 (32.0%)	2,034 (37.4%)
Black or African American	3,952 (25.9%)	1,179 (26.2%)	1,118 (20.6%)
Undisclosed Race	748 (4.9%)	226 (5.0%)	262 (4.8%)
Two or More Races	333 (2.2%)	91 (2.0%)	96 (1.8%)
Asian	213 (1.4%)	64 (1.4%)	93 (1.7%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	70 (0.5%)	16 (0.4%)	26 (0.5%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	15 (0.1%)	5 (0.1%)	6 (0.1%)
Total	15,250	4,500	5,433

Gender	All Applicants	First 4,500 Lottery Numbers	Invited to Exam
Male	12,331 (80.9%)	3,678 (81.7%)	4,366 (80.4%)
Female	2,687 (17.6%)	751 (16.7%)	982 (18.1%)
Undisclosed Gender	232 (1.5%)	71 (1.6%)	85 (1.6%)
Total	15,250	4,500	5,433

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Compared to the original applicant pool, DHR's application of hiring preferences increased representation for Hispanic or Latino applicants at the exam and decreased representation for Black or African American applicants.

OIG found that DHR's application of hiring preferences likely affected demographic representation among applicants invited to the 2022 entrance exam. To apply the preferences, a single DHR staff member manually moved applicants up and down on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, seeking to ensure that the invitation list included the required percentages of applicants with confirmed a LODD preference, Veterans' preference, CPFTA preference, CPS preference, and Chicago residency preference.

As noted above in the Background section of this report, DHR allotted 20% of exam seats for each of the Veterans', CPFTA, and CPS preferences. With a planned testing population of 4,500, this amounted to 900 applicants per preference. However, due to the different sizes of the groups seeking the preferences, the effects of the CPFTA and Veterans' preferences differed from that of the CPS preference. Given that only approximately 100 high school students graduate from CPFTA each year, the 900 CPFTA-dedicated seats were more than the number of applicants who could claim that preference. And, in fact, far fewer than 900 applicants did so. The CPFTA preference therefore effectively guaranteed an invitation to attend the exam. Veterans were similarly guaranteed a seat, because fewer than 900 applicants sought that preference. In contrast, there were far more than 900 applicants with a verified CPS preference, and it did not guarantee an invitation to the exam.²⁸

As shown in Figure 19, 5,433 (35.6%) of the 15,250 applicants were invited to test. Black or African American applicants were invited to test at a lower rate than the overall pool (1,118 of 3,952, or 28.3% of the group), whereas Hispanic or Latino applicants were invited to test at a higher rate (2,034 of 4,928, or 41.3%). White applicants were invited to test at a rate comparable to the overall pool (1,798 of 4,991, or 36.0%). Of 213 Asian applicants, 93 were invited to test (43.7%).

OIG found that these demographic differences in who was invited to test occurred after DHR applied hiring preferences. Compared to the initial applicant pool, the percentage of Hispanic or Latino applicants invited to test rose by 5.1% and the percentage of Black or African American applicants fell by 5.3% (Figure 10). This shift could be related to a number of factors, such as disparities in applicants' qualifications for preferences, DHR's verification of them, or the different percentage thresholds applied to preferences of varying sizes. As shown in Figure 11, the rates at which applicants qualified for each preference varied by race/ethnicity.²⁹

²⁸ Applicants who qualified for the LODD or Paramedic Crossover preference did not count towards the 4,500 places awarded using the lottery and the other preferences.

²⁹ The approved applicant totals for each preference do not represent unique applicants, with some applicants receiving approvals for multiple preferences. For example, if DHR approved an applicant for the Veterans' and Residency preferences, that applicant would be included in the totals for both columns. For applicants with multiple preferences, OIG could not determine which preference DHR applied to invite that applicant to test.

Figure 11: Representation within one or more hiring preferences varied by race/ethnicity.

Approved Preference	White	Hispanic or Latino	Black or African American	Undisclosed Race	Two or More Races	Asian	American Indian or Alaska Native	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Total
Residency	1,229 33.5%	1,408 38.3%	728 19.8%	175 4.8%	55 1.5%	56 1.5%	16 0.4%	5 0.1%	3,672
CPS	471 16.4%	1,427 49.6%	798 27.7%	68 2.4%	42 1.5%	53 1.8%	13 0.5%	7 0.2%	2,879
Veterans'	235 30.3%	327 42.1%	137 17.7%	37 4.8%	16 2.1%	21 2.7%	3 0.4%	0 0.0%	776
CPFTA	54 20.4%	106 40.0%	91 34.3%	5 1.9%	6 2.3%	1 0.4%	2 0.8%	0 0.0%	265
Paramedic Crossover	97 60.6%	40 25.0%	7 4.4%	8 5.0%	3 1.9%	4 2.5%	1 0.6%	0 0.0%	160
LODD	17 56.7%	1 3.3%	8 26.7%	1 3.3%	3 10.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	30

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

The CPFTA preference had 265 verified applicants. The demographic representation in this preference differed from the overall applicant pool by,

- an increase of 7.7% for Hispanic or Latino applicants;
- a decrease of 12.3% for white applicants; and
- an increase of 8.4% for Black or African American applicants.

Though this group was comparatively small, all 265 applicants with the CPFTA preference received an invitation to the exam. The likelihood of one of these applicants being Hispanic or Latino, or Black or African American, was higher than the corresponding likelihood in the overall applicant pool.

The Veterans' preference had 776 verified applicants. The demographic representation in this preference differed from the overall applicant pool by,

- an increase of 9.8% for Hispanic or Latino applicants;
- a decrease of 2.4% for white applicants; and
- a decrease 8.2% for Black or African American applicants.

Here, too, all 776 applicants with a Veterans' preference received an invitation to the exam. The likelihood of one these applicants being Hispanic or Latino was higher than the corresponding likelihood in the overall applicant pool.

The CPS preference had 2,879 verified applicants, more than 10 times as many as CPFTA. This number far exceeded the 20% threshold for awarding the preference (i.e., 900 test invitations). Thus, the CPS preference was not as strongly associated with invitation to test. Ultimately, 61.3% of the applicants with at least a verified CPS preference received an invitation to the exam.

The demographics of the CPS preference differed from the applicant pool by,

- an increase of 17.3% for Hispanic or Latino applicants;
- a decrease of 16.3% for white applicants; and
- an increase of 1.8% for Black or African American applicants.

The likelihoods of applicants claiming the CPS preference being Hispanic or Latino, or Black or African American, were higher than the corresponding likelihoods in the overall applicant pool.

Turning to gender demographics, the application of preferences had a small impact on the percentage of female applicants invited to the exam—applicants who were women made up 17.6% of the applicant pool and 18.1% of those invited to test. As for gender representation within each preference, women were more highly represented among the applicants with verified CPS, CPFTA, and LODD preferences than they were in the overall applicant pool. Conversely, female representation among applicants approved for the Veterans' preference was 11.0% less than in the overall application pool.

In summary, City decisions regarding the percentages allotted to each preference likely impacted the racial and ethnic demographics of the applicants ultimately invited to take the 2022 entrance exam. The Chicago residency preference (discussed below) also impacted which applicants DHR invited to test.

DHR's documentation requirements for the Chicago residency preference omitted the vast majority of applicants who stated they were residents; this likely affected demographic representation among those invited to test.

In applying the Chicago residency hiring preference, DHR did not necessarily prioritize residents to the exclusion of non-residents, but rather gave preference to applicants who successfully uploaded residency documentation. Community organizations told OIG that applicants experienced difficulty navigating the career portal's upload function, potentially impacting some applicants' success in receiving the preference. The low rate of document submission meant that a verified Chicago residency preference virtually guaranteed an invitation to the exam.

Prior to the exam, DHR informed applicants that it would apply the LODD, Veterans', CPFTA, and CPS preferences in that order. Chicago residency was not included as one of the preferences that would affect an applicant's placement in the invitation list. Rather, DHR stated that "[t]he City Resident preference [would] be applied to the overall list" to ensure it was composed of at least 80% city residents.³⁰

DHR management anticipated that a very high number of applicants would qualify for the Chicago residency preference. Management's expectation was correct; DHR estimated that 90% of applicants provided a Chicago address in their contact information, easily meeting the planned 80% threshold. Participation at this level would have obviated the need to use the residency preference to invite anyone to the exam who was not already selected by the lottery and/or one of the other preferences. However, only 30.2% of applicants uploaded supporting documentation for the residency preference with their applications. DHR management told OIG they were surprised by how few applicants uploaded documentation.

³⁰ City of Chicago DHR, "Entry Level Firefighter/EMT Frequently Asked Questions ("FAQs"), 7.

In an FAQ document, DHR wrote, “To qualify for Chicago resident preference [. . .] you must upload a valid state driver’s license or government issued ID with a Chicago address. No other documentation will be accepted.”³¹ However, applicants reported difficulties in uploading IDs into Taleo. The website would not accept image files; it required applicants to upload documentation in PDF form. Community groups and City staff stated that this created a challenge most acutely felt by applicants using a phone or a tablet to apply; applicants were not able to simply take photos of their IDs and upload them to the system.

DHR approved 3,672 applicants (24.1% of the pool of 15,250) for the Chicago residency preference (alone or in addition to one of the other preferences). With only 24.1% of the applicant pool having the verified preference, the lottery could not produce an invitation list that reached the 80% Chicago resident threshold. DHR decided to move many applicants with residency preference documentation onto the invitation list. Ultimately, DHR invited all but one applicant with a verified Chicago residency preference to the exam, including many with unfavorable lottery numbers. In fact, some applicants with lottery numbers higher than 14,900 (out of 15,250) and only one verified preference—Chicago residency—were invited to the 2022 entrance exam.

In effect, the 80% threshold for the Chicago residency preference allowed applicants to move up thousands of places on the list, passing applicants who had better lottery numbers but no preferences (or only the CPS preference).

The demographics of applicants with a verified Chicago residency preference differed from the racial/ethnic makeup of the applicant pool at large. Among applicants approved for the residency preference,

- the proportion of Hispanic or Latino applicants was larger by 6.0% compared to the initial applicant pool,
- the proportion of white applicants was larger by 0.8%, and
- the proportion of Black or African American applicants was smaller by 6.1%.

The sheer size of the 80% Chicago residency preference, and DHR’s implementation of it, gave it a large impact on who received an invitation to the exam. As a result of lower Black or African American representation within the 3,672 applicants with verified residency preferences, the application of the Chicago residency preference may have contributed to the overall decrease in Black or African American representation between application and invitation to the entrance exam.

In summary, due to administrative choices, the City did not necessarily prioritize Chicago residents over non-residents, but rather gave preference to applicants who successfully uploaded residency documentation.

DHR has not analyzed the effects of hiring preferences on demographic representation in the Firefighter/EMT hiring pool.

DHR’s use of hiring preferences has not included an implementation plan or evaluation of the preferences’ demographic impacts.

³¹ City of Chicago DHR, “Entry Level Firefighter/EMT Frequently Asked Questions (“FAQs”), 8.

According to DHR, the City did not formulate its hiring preferences for any specific purpose, such as increasing the diversity of the applicant pool. The City also did not consider how preferences would be applied from a practical perspective, leading DHR staff to rely on ad hoc manual processes..

The hiring preferences vary in both their formality and their uniqueness to CFD. The most formal preferences are the LODD, Veterans', and Paramedic Crossover preferences. The LODD and Veterans' preferences each apply to all City jobs and are required by the City of Chicago Personnel Rules.³² The Paramedic Crossover preference is documented in of the City's CBA with the Union, which establishes a hiring preference for emergency medical services personnel (i.e., Paramedics). Specifically, the contract states, "Each candidate Fire Fighter Class, [...], shall include a minimum of 10% (ten percent) of [...] Emergency Medical Services Personnel on the Fire Fighters eligibility list."³³

The CFD Hiring Preference webpage refers to both the CPS and CPFTA preferences, but does not describe their origins.³⁴ DHR stated that the CPS preference originated from a mayoral press release. According to contemporaneous news reports, Mayor Emanuel established it in 2012.³⁵ The preference, which individual departments could choose whether to apply, required DHR to ensure that at least 20% of City job applicants were CPS graduates. CFD applicants have been able to apply for the CPS preference since the 2014 hiring cycle. As for the CPFTA preference, CFD and DHR could not provide any information about when or where it originated, or how it was decided to allot 20% of test invitations for applicants with this preference.

DHR stated that the Chicago residency preference was introduced for the 2022 entrance exam at the request of City Council. CFD does not include the Chicago residency preference on its Hiring Preference webpage; the preference is listed only in its Entrance Exam FAQs.³⁶ DHR could not provide documentation regarding how this preference came to exist or how it was decided to reserve 80% of test invitations for applicants who claimed it.

³² City of Chicago Department of Human Resources, "City of Chicago Personnel Rules," August 2025, 17-18, accessed July 17, 2026, https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dhr/supp_info/POLICIES/2025-08-01_PERSONNEL_RULES_FINAL.pdf.

³³ City of Chicago, "Labor Contract with the Chicago Fire Fighters Union, Local No. 2," Section 16.4.

³⁴ City of Chicago, "CFD Hiring Preferences," accessed July 17, 2026, https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/cfd/supp_info/hiring_pref.html.

³⁵ "Rahm Announces New Initiative to Help CPS Grads," NBC Chicago, September 29, 2012, accessed July 17, 2026, <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/rahm-announces-new-initiative-to-help-cps-grads/1940594/>.

³⁶ City of Chicago, Department of Human Resources, "Entry Level Firefighter/EMT Frequently Asked Questions ("FAQS")," 6, accessed July 17, 2026, https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dhr/general/CFD-FAQs_9-23-2022r.pdf.

B | Entrance Exam Scoring



Source: DHR data.

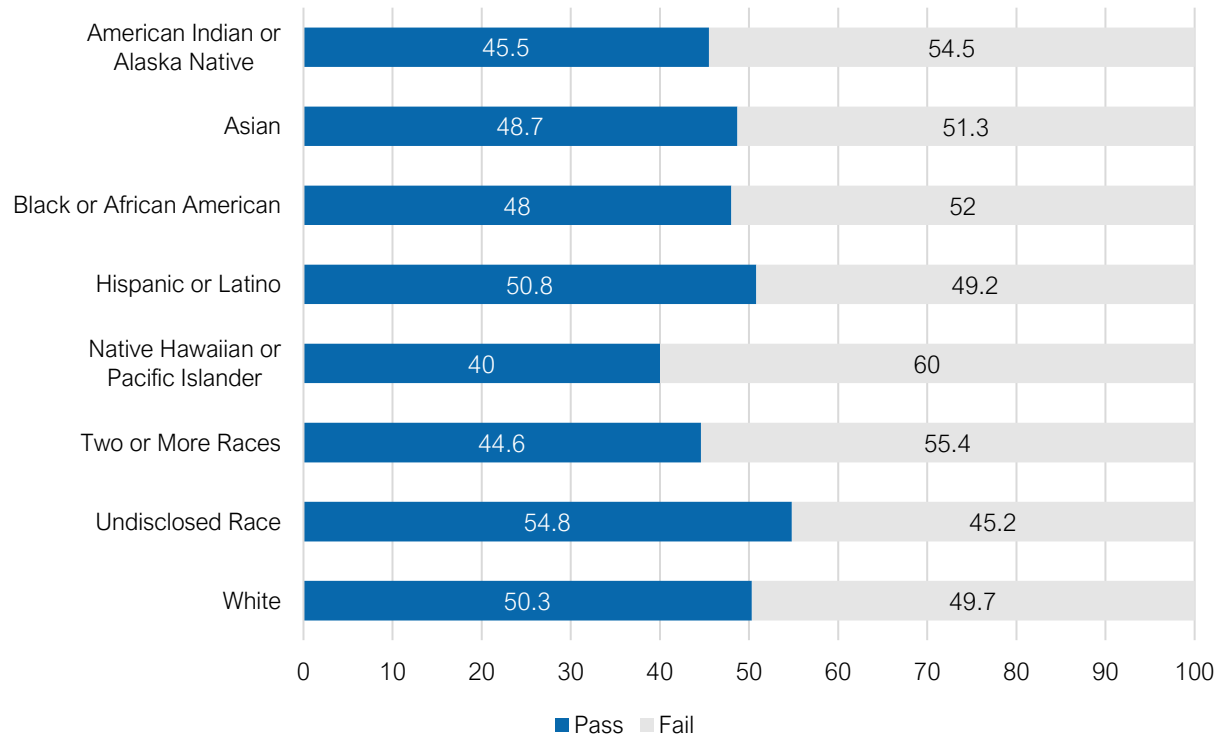
Attendance at the exam varied by race/ethnicity and gender.

Not all applicants who were invited to the entrance exam actually attended. More than a quarter (26.6%) of Black or African American applicants invited did not attend, with the number slightly higher (31.6%) among Black female applicants. For the other racial and ethnic groups, 12.2% to 18.3% of applicants did not attend the exam. DHR's data reflects that out of 5,433 invitations, 4,465 applicants attended.

The pass rate for the exam was similar across race/ethnicity and gender.

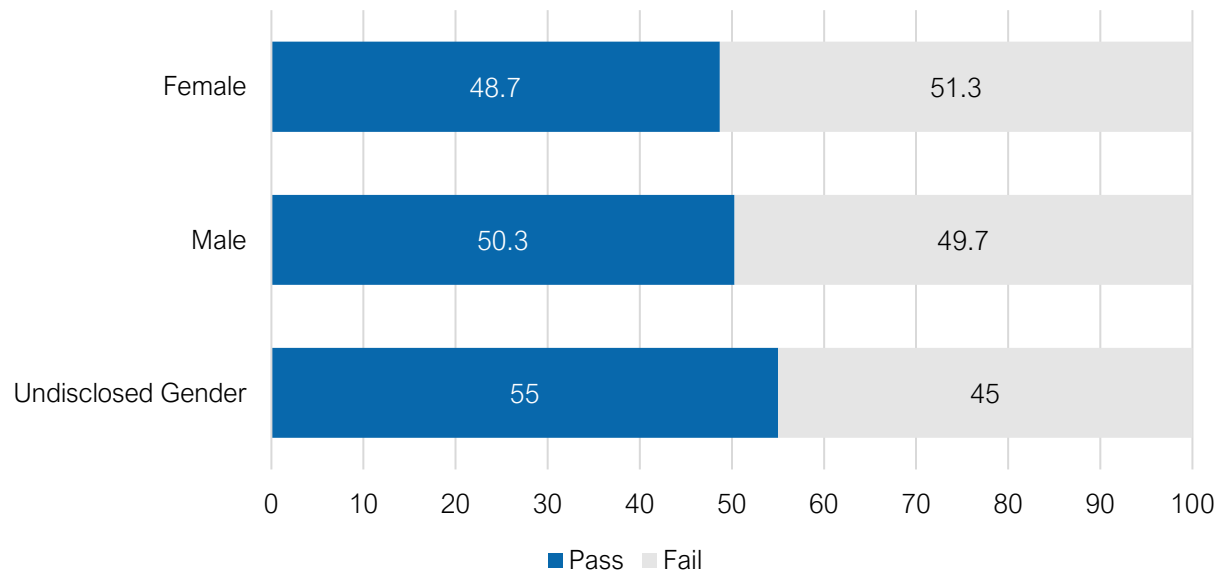
The pass rate for the 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam was roughly 50%, a figure that was consistent across categories of race/ethnicity and gender. In total, 2,238 test-takers passed the entrance exam. Appendix A of this report provides more detail on the counts of test-takers and their results.

Figure 12: 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam pass rate by race/ethnicity.



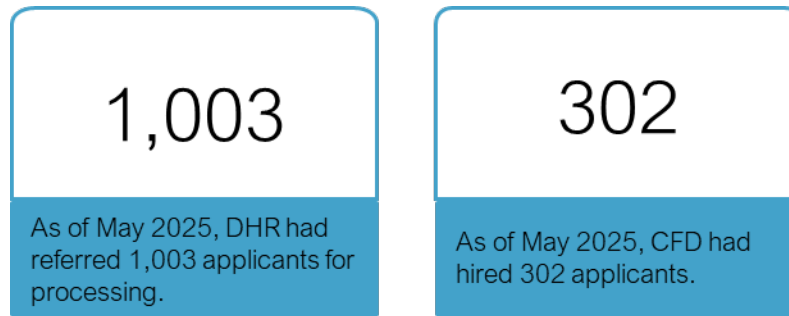
Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Figure 13: 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam pass rate by gender.



Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

C | After the Entrance Exam: Processing and Hiring



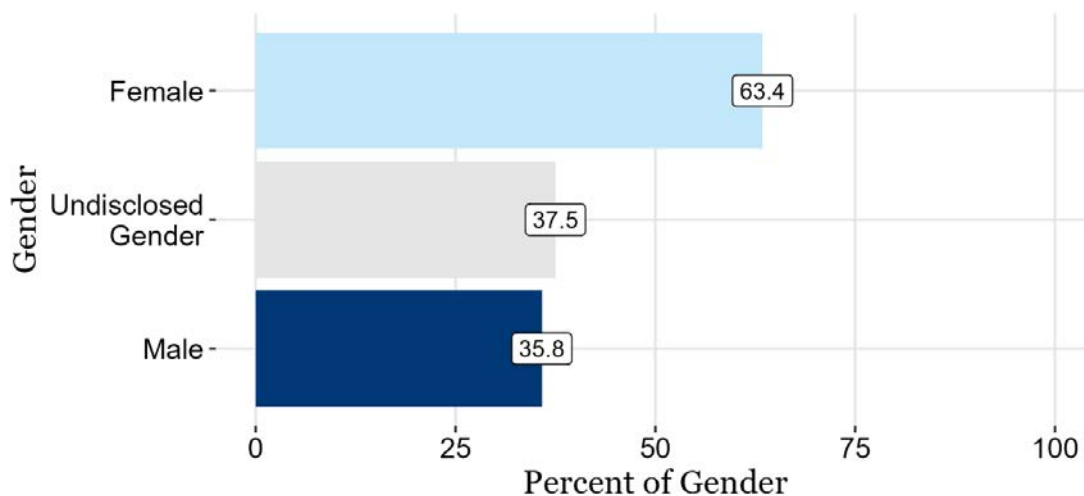
Source: DHR data.

Female and Black or African American applicants were disqualified from OPSA processing at higher rates than male and white applicants.

At the time of OIG's data analysis, DHR had referred 44.8% of applicants who passed the 2022 entrance exam for processing at OPSA. The rates of referral to processing were similar across race/ethnicity and gender.

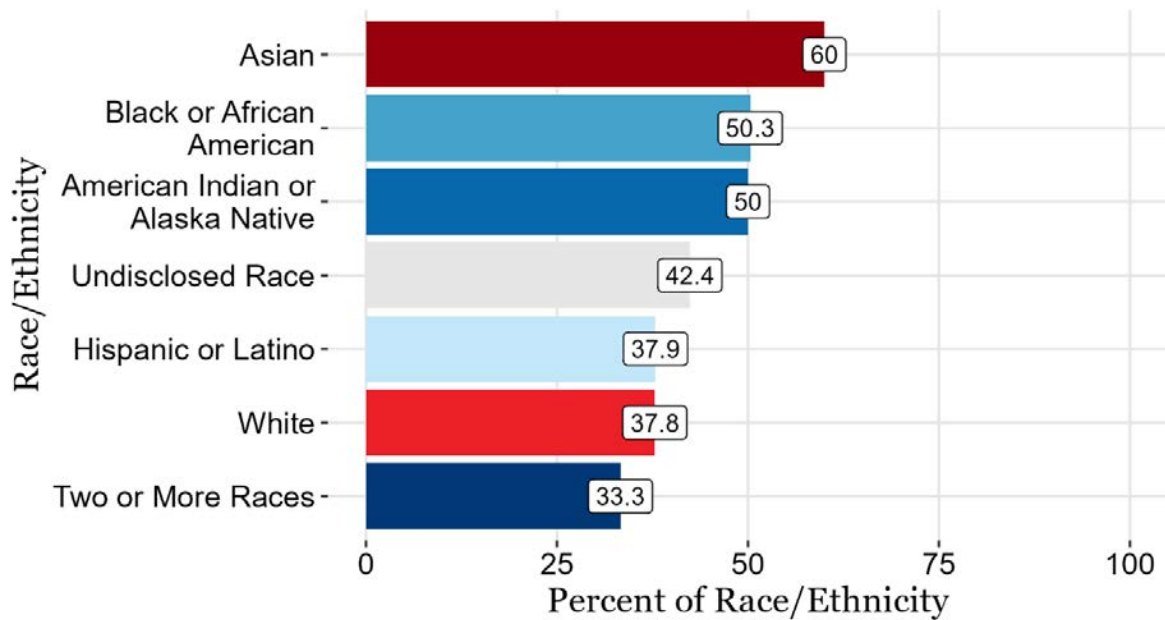
Once applicants began processing, however, rates of disqualification varied by race/ethnicity and gender. Of 172 female applicants referred for processing at the time of OIG's data analysis, 109 (63.4%) had been disqualified from processing, compared to 292 of the 815 referred male applicants (35.8%) (see Figure 14). Of 183 Black or African American applicants referred for processing, 92 (50.3%) had been disqualified from processing, compared to 145 of 383 of Hispanic or Latino applicants (37.9%) and 128 of 339 of white applicants (37.8%) (see Figure 15).

Figure 14: Female applicants were disqualified from processing at a higher rate.



Source: OIG analysis of OPSA data.

Figure 15: Asian and Black or African American applicants were disqualified from processing at the highest rates.



Source: OIG analysis of OPSA data.

Due to OPSA's inconsistent documentation, OIG was unable to determine whether certain processing steps had greater demographic impacts on CFD's hiring of Firefighter/EMT recruits. For example, OPSA used catch-all categories like "Failed Pre-Employment Screening" to refer variously to failed drug tests, failed background checks, and improper documentation. OPSA also used the highlighting, bolding, and commenting features in Excel spreadsheets to indicate applicants' statuses, but this practice was not consistent enough to be definitive. Finally, as shown in Figure 16, OIG observed missing data within columns designating processing steps such as Urine Screen, Hair Screen, CPAT Card, Status (of background check), and Medical Status. Because applicants can complete processing steps in any order, OIG could not determine whether blank fields reflected an ongoing process or a step that was not complete due to the applicants' disqualification for other reasons.

Figure 16: Blank fields and notes in OPSA processing data create difficulty in understanding points of attrition.

Processing Date	Reported	Urine Screen	Hair Screen	CPAT Card	Date CPAT Rec'd	CPAT Agency	Agency Contact	Sent to IAD	Date Returned	Status	Medical Appt. Date	Cleared Date	Medical Status
		Passed	Passed	Yes	1/12/2024	NTN		7/10/2024	10/3/2024	Approved	3/2/2024	6/3/2024	Cleared
		Passed	Passed	Yes	2/1/2025	NIPSTA		2/20/2025	4/2/2024	Approved	4/4/2024	6/3/2024	Cleared
7/10/2024	Yes			Yes	11/9/2024	NTN		8/22/2024	10/18/2024	Approved	7/17/2024	4/8/2025	Cleared
7/10/2024	Yes			yes	4/7/2025	naperville		7/16/2024	9/4/2024	Approved	7/22/2024	8/1/2024	Cleared
Waived	7/10/2024							7/19/2024	10/3/2024	Approved	7/29/2024	9/5/2024	Cleared
Waived	7/10/2024			Yes	4/9/2025	NTN		7/17/2024	9/4/2024	Approved	7/23/2024	8/1/2024	Cleared
		Passed	Passed					4/1/2024	4/29/2024	Approved	4/18/2024	5/2/2024	Cleared
		Passed	Passed					4/3/2024	4/29/2024	Approved	4/9/2024	4/22/2024	Cleared
		Passed	Passed					3/12/2024	4/18/2024	Approved	4/17/2024	6/3/2024	Cleared
		Passed	Passed					3/21/2024	4/24/2024	Approved	4/18/2024	7/19/2024	Cleared
		Passed	Passed					6/5/2024	9/5/2024	Approved	3/25/2024	7/5/2024	Cleared
		Passed	Passed					3/21/2024	4/4/2024	Approved	4/1/2024	5/2/2024	Cleared
		Passed	Passed					3/14/2024	4/4/2024	Approved	3/22/2024	9/11/2024	Cleared
		Passed	Passed					3/12/2024	4/22/2024	Approved	3/22/2024	9/23/2024	Cleared
		Passed	Passed					3/12/2024	4/15/2024	Approved	3/25/2024	4/12/2024	Cleared
		Passed	Passed					3/15/2024	4/10/2024	Approved	3/21/2024	4/2/2024	Cleared
		Passed	Passed					3/28/2024	4/2/2024				
		Passed	Passed					3/15/2024	Application resent on 04/11/2025.		3/27/2024		
Waived		Passed	Passed					3/29/2024			3/20/2024	e-mail sent 04/11/2025.	
		Passed	Passed								3/25/2024		
		Passed	Passed					3/12/2024	4/15/2024	Approved	4/4/2024	8/27/2024	Cleared

Source: OIG screenshot of OPSA processing data. OIG redacted identifying information.

Both City staff and community organizations that support applicants expressed frustration with the quality of communication during, and the perceived fairness of, OPSA's processing steps.³⁷ CFD IAD, which is responsible for conducting applicants' background checks, was not aware of what relevant paperwork was collected and held by OPSA. CFD's CORDI expressed frustration with OPSA's non-standard outcome descriptions, which made it difficult to discern at which point in the hiring process a particular applicant left or was disqualified. (These are referred to as "attrition points," and are discussed in further detail below.) Community members stated that OPSA's processes were inefficient, to the detriment of applicants, a concern echoed by CFD CORDI. OIG observed deficiencies in OPSA's data quality, as described above. Although OPSA has recently begun using Salesforce-based case management to improve processing, CFD management stated that this has not yet resolved problems with internal and external communication.

Among applicants hired as of May 2025, 42.7% were Hispanic or Latino, 33.1% were white, and 16.2% were Black or African American. 6.0% of new hires were female.

As of May 2025, from the pool of 15,250 original applications, the City had hired 302 people as Firefighter/EMT recruits. Figure 17 provides a demographic breakdown of these hires.

³⁷ For example, in a May 2024 joint meeting of the City Council Committees on Workforce Development and Police and Fire, City officials discussed OPSA's erroneous notification to dozens of applicants that they had failed a drug test. Although the error was ultimately corrected, it created confusion and eroded trust in the City's hiring process.

Figure 17: Demographics of new Firefighter/EMT recruits as of May 2025.

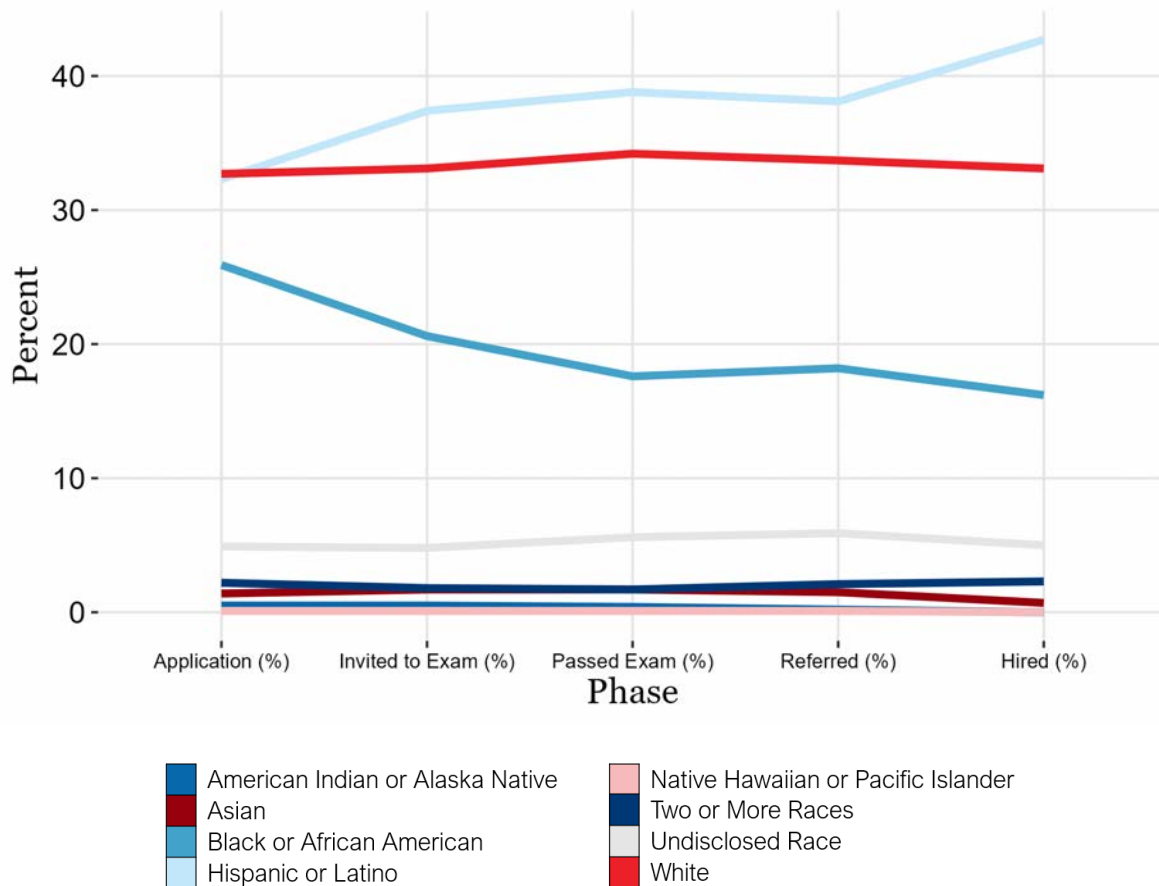
Race/Ethnicity*	Gender†	Number of Applicants Hired	Percent of All Applicants Hired
Hispanic or Latino	Male	121	40.1%
Hispanic or Latino	Female	6	2.0%
Hispanic or Latino	Undisclosed Gender	2	0.7%
White	Male	91	30.1%
White	Female	9	3.0%
Black or African American	Male	46	15.2%
Black or African American	Female	3	1.0%
Undisclosed Race	Male	11	3.6%
Undisclosed Race	Undisclosed Gender	4	1.3%
Two or More Races	Male	6	2.0%
Two or More Races	Undisclosed Gender	1	0.3%
Asian	Male	2	0.7%
Total		302‡	100.0
* Other City data indicates that the 15 hired individuals who did not disclose their race at the time of application all identified as white during hiring, which would revise the percentage of white applicants hired to 38.1% (115 individuals). The data in this figure reflects hiring information as provided to OIG by DHR. † Other City data indicates that 6 of the hired individuals who did not disclose their gender at the time of application identified as male during hiring, which would revise the percentage of male applicants hired to 93.7% (283 individuals). The data in this figure reflects hiring information as provided to OIG by DHR. ‡ This total represents hiring as of May 2025; hiring is ongoing.			

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Across the phases of the 2022 hiring cycle, representation of Hispanic or Latino applicants increased while representation of Black or African American applicants decreased.

The racial/ethnic demographics of applicants throughout the phases of the 2022 Firefighter/EMT hiring process are shown in Figure 18.

Figure 18: Demographic outcomes of 2022 Firefighter/EMT hiring phases, as of May 2025.



Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Over the course the 2022 Firefighter/EMT hiring cycle as of May 2025, the percentage of Hispanic or Latino applicants increased while the percentage of Black or African American applicants decreased.

The processing phase was a primary point of attrition for female applicants across all categories of race/ethnicity.

As shown in Figure 19, Black or African American applicants experienced attrition during processing, falling from 18.2% of the processing group to 16.2% of the hired group. This attrition was driven primarily by the attrition of Black female applicants.

Figure 20 shows that female applicants made up 17.6% of the original applicant pool. That percentage remained relatively consistent through the application of hiring preferences, passing of the exam, and referral for processing. However, between the referrals of applicants for processing and the dates of hire, the percentage of female applicants dropped from 17.1% to 6.0%. This attrition of female applicants during the processing phase was consistent across categories of race/ethnicity, as illustrated by Figure 21.

Figure 19: Outcomes of the 2022 Firefighter/EMT hiring process by race/ethnicity, as of May 2025.

Race/Ethnicity	Application	Invited to Exam	Passed Exam	Referred for Processing	Hired
White	4,991 (32.7%)	1,798 (33.1%)	765 (34.2%)	339 (33.7%)	100* (33.1%)
Hispanic or Latino	4,928 (32.3%)	2,034 (37.4%)	869 (38.8%)	383 (38.1%)	129 (42.7%)
Black or African American	3,952 (25.9%)	1,118 (20.6%)	393 (17.6%)	183 (18.2%)	49 (16.2%)
Undisclosed Race	748 (4.9%)	262 (4.8%)	125 (5.6%)	59 (5.9%)	15* (5.0%)
Two or More Races	333 (2.2%)	96 (1.8%)	37 (1.7%)	21 (2.1%)	7 (2.3%)
Asian	213 (1.4%)	93 (1.7%)	37 (1.7%)	15 (1.5%)	2 (0.7%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	70 (0.5%)	26 (0.5%)	10 (0.4%)	2 (0.2%)	NA
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	15 (0.1%)	6 (0.1%)	2 (0.1%)	1 (0.1%)	NA
Total	15,250	5,433	2,238	1,003	302†
* As noted in Figure 17, other City data indicates that the 15 hires who did not disclose their race at the time of application all identified as white during the hiring process. This would increase the percentage of white hires to 38.1% (115 individuals). The data in this figure reflects the hiring information provided to OIG by DHR. † This is the total as of May 2025; hiring is ongoing.					

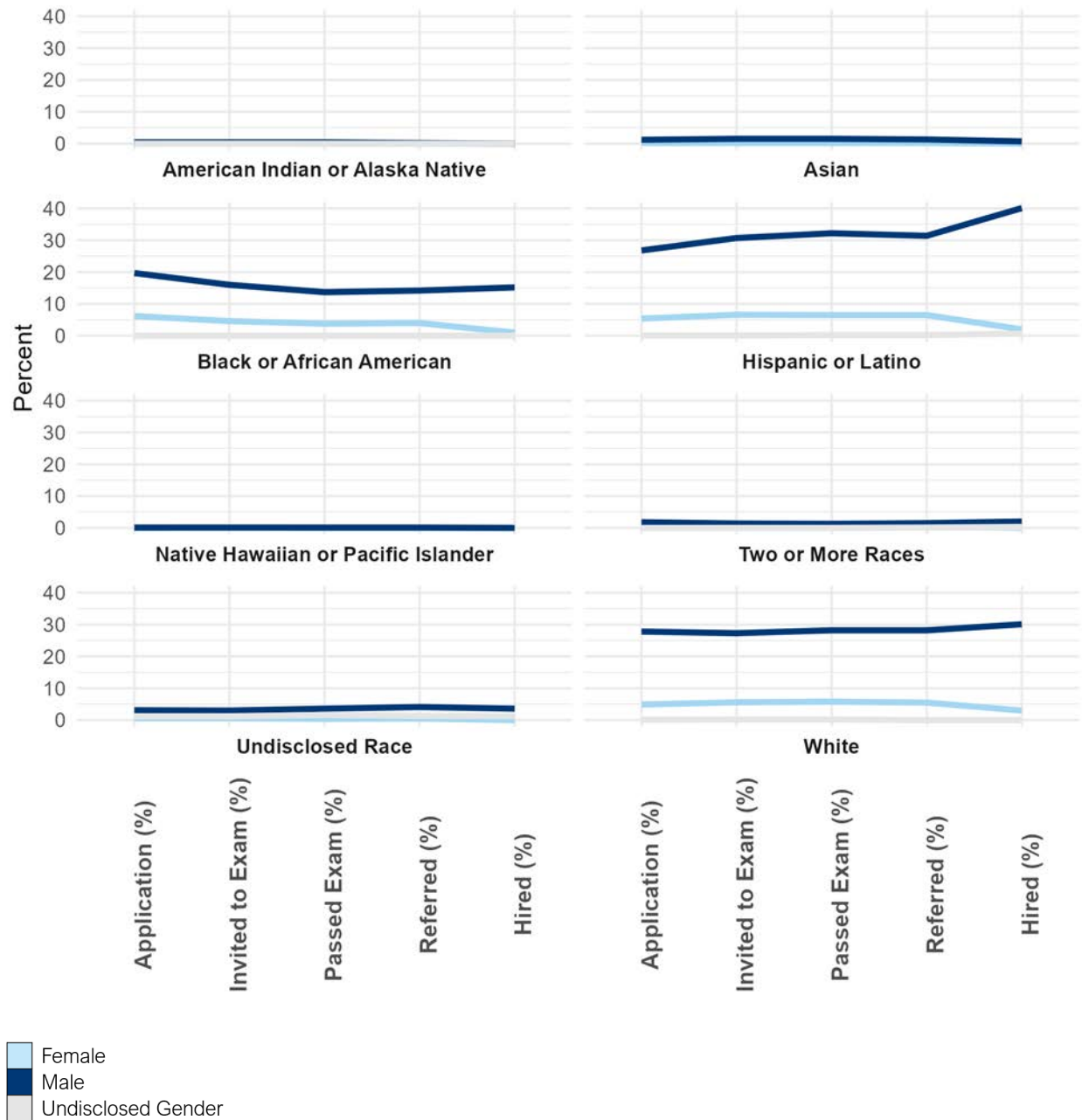
Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Figure 20: Outcomes of the 2022 Firefighter/EMT hiring process by gender, as of May 2025.

Gender	Application	Invited to Exam	Passed Exam	Referred for Processing	Hired
Male	12,331 (80.9%)	4,366 (80.4%)	1,811 (80.9%)	815 (81%)	277* (91.7%)
Female	2,687 (17.6%)	982 (18.1%)	383 (17.1%)	172 (17.1%)	18 (6.0%)
Undisclosed Gender	232 (1.5%)	85 (1.6%)	44 (2.0%)	16 (1.6%)	7* (2.3%)
Total	15,250	5,433	2,238	1,003	302†
* As noted in Figure 17, other City data indicates that 6 of the hires who did not disclose their gender at the time of application identified as male during the hiring process. This would increase the percentage of male hires to 93.7% (283 individuals). The data in this figure reflects hiring information as provided to OIG by DHR. † This is the total as of May 2025; hiring is ongoing.					

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Figure 21: Representation of female applicants declined during processing across categories of race/ethnicity.



Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

D | Comparison to Demographics of Chicago

While the original 2022 Firefighter/EMT applicant pool generally met CFD's goal of reflecting the demographics of Chicago by race/ethnicity, Hispanic or Latino applicants completed the hiring process at a higher rate, and Black or African American applicants completed the process at a lower rate.

The percentages of Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and white applicants for the 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam resembled the demographics of the city of Chicago, but the percentage of Asian applicants was significantly below Chicago's percentage of Asian residents. The demographics of new Firefighter/EMT recruits did not resemble the initial applicant pool or the demographics of Chicago; specifically, the proportion of Black or African American applicants decreased, as did the proportion of Asian applicants.

Figure 22: Compared to city demographics, Black or African American applicants and Asian applicants were underrepresented in the Fire Academy classes resulting from the 2022 entrance exam.

Race/Ethnicity	Chicago 2023	2022 FF/EMT Application	2022 FF/EMT Hiring (ongoing)
White	31.7%	32.7%	33.1%*
Black or African American	27.4%	25.9%	16.2%
Hispanic or Latino	29.5%	32.3%	42.7%
Asian	7.6%	1.4%	0.7%
Two or More Races	3.3%	2.2%	2.3%
American Indian or Native Alaskan	0.1%	0.5%	N/A
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%	N/A
Undisclosed Race	N/A	4.9%	5.0%*

* As noted in Figure 17, other City data indicates that the 15 hires who did not disclose their race at the time of application all identified as white during the hiring process. This would increase the percentage of white hires to 38.1% (115 individuals). The data in this figure reflects the hiring information provided to OIG by DHR.

Source: OIG analysis of DHR hiring data and Chicago Health Atlas, Chicago Population by Race/Ethnicity, Single Time Period (2023), <https://chicagohealthatlas.org/indicators/POP?tab=chart>, accessed July 17, 2026.

As discussed in Section A, the use of hiring preferences impacted Black or African American applicants; after the preferences were applied, their representation dropped by 5.3% from the initial applicant pool. Black or African American applicants also attended the entrance exam at a lower percentage—26.6% of Black or African American applicants did not attend the exam, compared to 15.3% of Hispanic or Latino applicants and 15.0% of white applicants. Black or African American applicants also experienced a higher rate of attrition during processing, specifically among women.

E | Analysis Across Hiring Cycles

Although the racial and ethnic demographics of CFD's applicant pools have come to more closely resemble Chicago's over the past 20 years, CFD has consistently lost female and Black or African American applicants during the hiring process.

Changes to the process between 2006 and 2022, such as the introduction of the pre-exam lottery, make it difficult to draw conclusions regarding demographic trends across the last three hiring cycles. DHR also changed its demographic data collection practices. DHR previously recorded race and ethnicity as two separate fields. Starting with the 2022 entrance exam, however, DHR combined race and ethnicity into a single field. When an applicant recorded their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino, the system used that entry to replace their racial category selection. This

presents challenges to identifying hiring trends for applicants who both identify as Hispanic or Latino and as belonging to a different racial category such as white and Black or African American.

The available information regarding the 2006 hiring process is limited. DHR's documentation of 2006 testing and hiring data consists of a single spreadsheet of exam scores, and current DHR staff could not confirm the relationships between those scores, the exam results, and the hiring outcomes. Further, applicants who took the 2006 exam but were not hired during that round may also have taken the 2014 exam, but with the existing data, it is not possible to determine the relationship between each exam's results and discrete hiring outcomes.

Another limitation to identifying demographic trends over the last three hiring rounds is the ongoing status of the 2022 hiring process. With no imminent plans for administering the next entrance exam, CFD may continue hiring from the 2022 list for the next several years. Hiring outcomes will continue to evolve, which could affect observed trends across hiring phases. Nonetheless, OIG bases its conclusions on the hiring completed as of May 2025.

Broadly speaking, the racial/ethnic diversity of the applicant pool for the Firefighter/EMT entrance exam has increased since 2006. As shown in Figure 23, over the past three hiring cycles, the percentage of white applicants has decreased, and the percentage of Hispanic or Latino applicants has increased.

Figure 23: The proportion of white applicants has decreased over the last three CFD entrance exams.

Group	2006 Applied	2014 Applied	2022 Applied
White	12,456 (49.6%)	11,199 (44.1%)	4,991 (32.7%)
Hispanic or Latino	5,282 (21.0%)	6,018 (23.7%)	4,928 (32.3%)
Black or African American	6,466 (25.7%)	5,707 (22.5%)	3,952 (25.9%)
Asian	485 (1.9%)	320 (1.3%)	213 (1.4%)
American Indian or Native Alaskan	13 (0.1%)	96 (0.4%)	70 (0.5%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	NA	43 (0.2%)	15 (0.1%)
Two or More Races	NA	594 (2.3%)	333 (2.2%)
Missing Data/Undisclosed	419 (1.7%)	1,402 (5.5%)	748 (4.9%)
Total	25,121	25,379	15,250

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

In addition, the proportion of female applicants for the 2022 entrance exam increased relative to the previous two hiring rounds, as shown in Figure 24.

Figure 24: The proportion of female applicants increased for the 2022 entrance exam.

Gender	2006 Applicants	2014 Applicants	2022 Applicants
Male	21,605 (86.0%)	21,537 (84.9%)	12,331 (80.9%)
Female	3,400 (13.5%)	3,506 (13.8%)	2,687 (17.6%)
Missing Data/Undisclosed	116 (0.5%)	336 (1.3%)	232 (1.5%)
Total	25,121	25,379	15,250

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

This increased representation of Hispanic or Latino and female *applicants* demonstrates progress towards CFD's goal of achieving a workforce that reflects the demographics of Chicago. However, as shown in Figures 25 and 26, the demographics of the initial applicant pools do not necessarily match those of Firefighter/EMT *hires* over the last two hiring cycles.

Figure 25: In both 2014 and 2022, the percentage of Black or African American applicants decreased throughout the hiring process relative to white and Hispanic or Latino applicants.

Race/Ethnicity	2014		2022	
	Application	Hiring	Application	Hiring*
White	44.1%	61.7%	32.7%	33.1%
Hispanic or Latino	23.7%	22.7%	32.3%	42.7%
Black or African American	22.5%	12.9%	25.9%	16.2%

* As noted in Figure 17, other City data indicates that the 15 hires who did not disclose their race at the time of application all identified as white during the hiring process. This would increase the percentage of white hires to 38.1% (115 individuals). The data in this figure reflects the hiring information provided to OIG by DHR.

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Figure 26: In both the 2014 and 2022 hiring cycles, female applicants constituted approximately 6.0% of new Firefighter/EMT recruits.

Gender	2014 Hiring Process		2022 Hiring Process (ongoing)	
	Application	Hiring	Application	Hiring
Male	84.9%	94.1%	80.9%	91.7%*
Female	13.8%	5.9%	17.6%	6.0%
Undisclosed	1.3%	NA	1.5%	2.3%*

* As noted in Figure 17, other City data indicates that 6 of the hires who did not disclose their gender at the time of application identified as male during the hiring process. This would increase the percentage of male hires to 93.7% (283 individuals). The data in this figure reflects hiring information as provided to OIG by DHR.

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

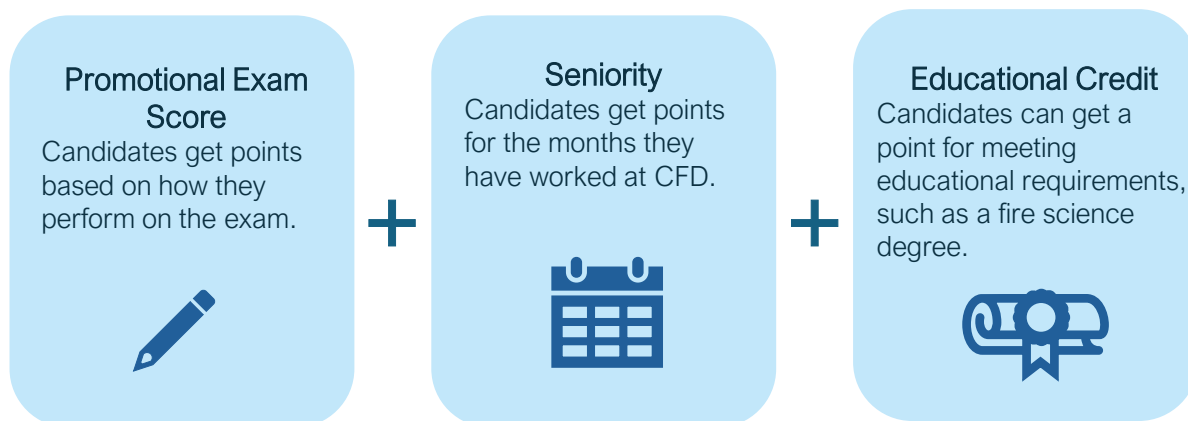
Application of hiring preferences and processing were recurring points of attrition across all rounds. Appendix A provides detailed information on attrition throughout the 2022 and 2014 Firefighter/EMT hiring cycles. Specifically, Figure 36 shows that, in 2022, the main point of attrition for Black or African American applicants was the first application of preferences, during the period between applying for the job and receiving an invitation to the exam. In contrast, Figure 39 shows that, in 2014, the main point attrition for Black or African American applicants occurred between passing the exam and hiring, a period which, at that time, encompassed both processing and the application of preferences. For female applicants, in both 2014 and 2022, the main point of attrition occurred between referral for processing and date of hire, as shown in Figures 37 and 40.

V | CFD's Promotional Process

Compared to its hiring process, CFD's promotional process has remained more consistent over time and across promotional ranks. As noted in the Background, CFD does not currently use a nomination-based process to promote candidates and has not done so for more than two decades.³⁸ Rather, as explained in the Background, candidates must sit for an exam to be eligible for a promotion to Lieutenant, Captain, and Battalion Chief. This requirement is included in the City's CBA with the Union.³⁹

CFD's promotional process results in an eligibility list of candidates, from which CFD fills promotional rank vacancies. The eligibility list ranks candidates in order based on a combination of points earned from their promotional exam scores, their length of service with CFD, and their educational credits, as shown in Figure 27. Eligibility lists can include between 100 and 1,000 eligible candidates. Historically, CFD has promoted members from its most recent list for many years, until the next promotional exam creates a new eligibility list. Every promotional exam is unique, with content specific to the relevant rank. CFD offers promotions to candidates in the order they appear on the list, and promotional exam scores play a large part in determining that order. As such, a candidate's score on the promotional exam largely determines if and when they receive a promotion.

Figure 27: CFD promotes candidates based on three key factors.



Source: City documentation and departmental interviews.

The 2009 and 2019-20 Lieutenant, 2017 and 2023 Captain, and 2019 and 2023 Battalion Chief promotional rounds followed similar processes, each beginning with CFD identifying the need to create a new exam.

A | DHR contracts with vendors to develop promotional exams.

To anticipate when to administer its next promotional exam for a particular rank, CFD monitors the number of candidates remaining on the relevant current eligibility list. The length of time between promotional exams varies, but CFD's Hiring Plan states that CFD may not use an eligibility list for

³⁸ The 2017-2021 CBAs allowed for a merit-based promotion process. The merit-based process was removed entirely from the recently negotiated CBA.

³⁹ City of Chicago, "Labor Contract with the Chicago Fire Fighters Union, Local No. 2," Section 9.3.f

longer than eight years.⁴⁰ Once CFD determines the promotional exam timeline, DHR takes over the process until the eligibility lists are finalized.

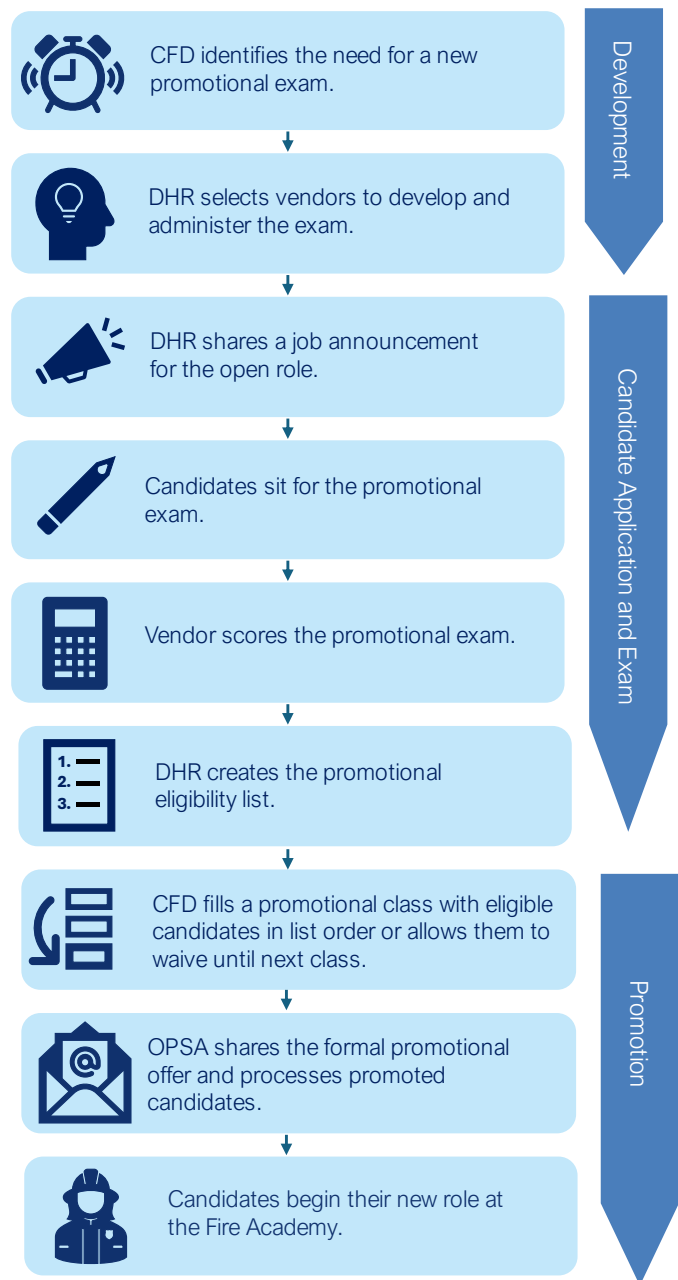
DHR contracts with vendors to develop, administer, and score promotional exams.⁴¹ In contrast to CFD's entrance exam, which is a standardized exam used across the country, DHR's test development vendors create a unique exam for each promotional round. The vendor determines the content of an exam by reviewing relevant departmental documentation and consulting with CFD members with experience in the relevant promotional rank.

Once an exam is developed, DHR shares a job posting notifying candidates of the upcoming promotional exam. To help candidates prepare for the exam, DHR provides candidates with a study guide and reading materials.

Each promotional exam has a written and an oral section, which are administered by a test administration vendor.⁴² Candidates complete these sections on separate days. The written section tests candidates' knowledge of the promotional rank. In the most recent promotional exams, this section included between 100 and 130 multiple-choice questions. The written section of the 2019 and 2023 Battalion Chief exams also included a few open-ended response questions requiring written responses.

The oral section takes the form of a structured interview in which candidates respond to hypothetical on-the-job scenarios. In the most recent promotional exams, candidates sat at individual testing booths and recorded audio responses to each question. The recorded responses were then assessed by a panel consisting of Firefighters from other

Figure 28: DHR develops promotional exams and eligibility lists.



⁴⁰ The Hiring Plan allows an eligibility list to remain open for longer than eight years under limited circumstances, i.e., only when "there is a lack of available funds for testing and/or low utilization of the Eligibility List due to the lack of promotional opportunities."

⁴¹ DHR contracted with four different test development vendors over the six promotional exams reviewed for this report: I/O Solutions, Inc.; SHL, LLC; Morris & McDaniel, Inc.; and HRNavigator Consulting, Inc.

⁴² DHR contracted with test administration vendor, CPS HR Consulting, for the five most recent promotional exams reviewed in this report. Ernst & Young, LLC was the test administration vendors for the 2009 Lieutenant exam.

municipalities with experience in the relevant promotional ranks. These panelists received training from the vendor to standardize their evaluations.

In previous promotional exams, each candidate presented their responses to the same panel of CFD members. Because the panel could only assess one candidate at a time, this process took significantly longer. It also raised questions regarding the consistency of the assessments from candidate to candidate, and pulled panelists away from their normal duties for periods exceeding a month.

Technical issues during the 2019-2020 Lieutenant Exam interrupted the oral section for some candidates and delayed the promotional round overall.

The City had major technical problems during the 2019-2020 Lieutenant promotional process—specifically, with the administration of the oral section of the exam. Candidates took the written section in December 2019, and the oral section was scheduled to be administered over two days in January 2020. Candidates scheduled for the first day were able to complete the oral section. Then, on the second (and final) day of the oral section, the computers set up by the test administration vendor, CPS HR Consulting, stopped working. DHR and CPS HR Consulting were unable to fix this technical issue, and DHR sent the candidates home. Across both days,

- 781 candidates started or completed the oral section;⁴³ and
- 585 candidates did not begin the oral section.

As a result of these errors, candidates' testing experiences varied. Some candidates completed the oral section, while others saw the material but did not complete the section, and finally others did not see the material at all.

Following this event, DHR worked with its test development vendor, Morris & McDaniel, Inc., to create a new version of the oral section. Despite the new version, candidates expressed concern that those who had seen the January oral section would have an unfair advantage over those who did not. To mitigate this risk, DHR provided optional "exposure sessions" for those candidates who had not seen the section. These sessions allowed candidates to view the content of the January oral section, but not to take notes.

DHR then scheduled a new date for candidates to complete the oral section in August 2020. Any candidate who did not complete the section in January was automatically scheduled to test. DHR also invited the 781 candidates who had already completed the test—but did not yet know their scores—the opportunity to retake the section. Of those invited, 251 candidates chose to retake.

The 2019-2020 Lieutenant promotional process experienced additional delays due to exam scoring errors that were not identified until after the eligibility list was approved for promotion. One error occurred when Morris & McDaniel misapplied a scoring formula. Another issue arose when the vendor used incorrect dates to calculate candidate seniority scores. While DHR eventually corrected and reissued the list, mistakes like the ones that occurred throughout the 2019-2020 Lieutenant promotional process, could cause candidates to lose confidence in the process.

⁴³ The technical report from the test development vendor, Morris & McDaniel, Inc., did not document the breakdown between the number of candidates who completed and those who had only started the oral section.

The seniority score errors only affected members of the “*Lewis* class.” By court order, that group of candidates was entitled to retroactive seniority credit dating back to June 1, 1999, for virtually all purposes, with limited exceptions. One of those exceptions included seniority for purposes of the promotional eligibility lists required by Section 9.3 of the CBA. On the first version of the list, DHR miscalculated the *Lewis* class members’ seniority scores by giving them more service time than they should have received.

B | Based on exam scores, seniority, and educational credits, DHR creates a list of candidates eligible for promotion.

Once the candidates complete both sections of the promotional exam, the test development vendor scores it. The vendor also creates a technical report detailing its processes for both creating and scoring the exam. This report includes an adverse impact assessment, in which the vendor demonstrates how it ensures that the exam and its scoring methodology do not negatively impact any demographic group.

The CBA sets minimum weights for the different exam components, meaning it sets a floor for how much the written section, oral section, and seniority can impact the overall promotional score. The CBA requires that the oral and written sections of the exam each make up at least 25% of the total score, and that seniority makes up at least 30%. It also requires that DHR include these weights in the announcement of each exam.⁴⁴

In practice, DHR defines the overall score for each promotional exam as comprising 35% for the written section, 35% for the oral section, and 30% for seniority.⁴⁵ Additionally, some candidates receive an extra point for meeting certain education criteria, such as having a fire science degree or EMT certification.

Generally, the vendor scores the written and oral sections out of 100 points, gives them each a weight of 35%, and adds the weighted scores to the seniority score and the education point. However, vendors are not required to score the sections on a 100-point scale. For some exams, vendors have used relative scoring methods, calculating each section’s score in comparison to the overall average for the section across all test takers, rather than simply a percentage of correct answers. Under this scoring method, if the sections had different average scores across the testing population, a candidate could get the same percentage of correct answers in each section but receive different numbers of points toward their total score.

Some members have claimed that this scoring methodology violates any exam announcement stating that the written and the oral sections will have the same weight. However, an arbitrator

⁴⁴ City of Chicago, “Labor Contract with the Chicago Fire Fighters Union, Local No. 2,” Section 9.3.

⁴⁵ DHR scores seniority on a 30-point scale. The CBA requires awarding full seniority points to candidates who have served specific amounts of time with CFD: at least 96 months when applying for Lieutenant, at least 144 months for Captain, and at least 204 months for Battalion Chief. For each rank, candidates receive a proportion of the possible seniority points based on the ratio of their time with CFD to the time required to earn full points. For example, someone with 72 months of service applying to be a Lieutenant would receive 75% of the possible seniority points (72/96), or 22.5 points.

denied a grievance from the Union on this issue after the 2016 Battalion Chief exam, finding that the relative scoring methodology did not violate the CBA.⁴⁶

DHR creates the promotional eligibility list by ranking the list of candidates from highest to lowest score. Only candidates who have completed both the written and oral sections of the exam are included on the eligibility list. It also includes certain personal information, such as each candidate's race and gender.

Pursuant to the CBA, prior to sharing the eligibility list with CFD, DHR allows the Union a period of 30 days to review both the eligibility list and the vendor's technical report. During this review, the Union may raise concerns with the eligibility list, including any claimed inaccuracies in the list. The CBA prohibits CFD from promoting from the eligibility list until this review period is over. Once the Union has reviewed eligibility list, DHR cancels the existing one and certifies the new one, allowing CFD to begin promoting from it.⁴⁷



Eligibility lists are a spreadsheets of current employees who completed each promotional exam, ranging from more than 100 candidates for Battalion Chief to nearly 1,500 candidates for Lieutenant.

C | CFD offers candidates promotions from the eligibility lists.

CFD promotes candidates by rank in groups to allow the Fire Academy to train all promoted members at the same time. Promotions typically occur in cycles; CFD starts with the highest rank (Battalion Chief) and ends with the lowest (Lieutenant). As the candidates move into their promoted ranks, CFD calculates the number of vacancies requiring promotions into each subsequent rank. For example, when CFD promotes a class of Battalion Chiefs from the eligibility list made up of current Captains, it results in Captain vacancies that CFD must then fill by promoting current Lieutenants. Based on CFD's organizational structure, the rank of Lieutenant typically has the largest class sizes, and the Battalion Chief the smallest.

To fill promotional vacancies, CFD makes offers to candidates on the relevant promotional eligibility list, starting with the highest scoring candidate and moving down the list in order. Pursuant to the *Albrecht* Decree, CFD previously promoted lower-ranked candidates to address racial and ethnic disparities in department membership that had resulted from unlawful past discrimination. This was required under the terms of that legal settlement. However, since the expiration of the decree, CFD has no longer promoted candidates in this manner.

Not all candidates on the eligibility list have served the minimum number of months in their current rank that are required to receive promotional offers. For example, this may occur where a candidate scores high enough on the written and oral sections to earn a place high on the eligibility list, despite a low seniority score. In such situations, CFD does not offer a promotion to the candidate; it skips over them until they meet the minimum service requirement.

⁴⁶ Arbitration between the City of Chicago and Chicago Fire Fighters Union Local 2, Grievance No. 108710 et al. (2016 Battalion Chief Exam and Promotions).

⁴⁷ City of Chicago, "Labor Contract with the Chicago Fire Fighters Union, Local No. 2," Section 9.3.

Candidates may either accept an offered promotion or waive it and wait for a future promotional round. After waiving an offer three times, a candidate is removed from the eligibility list. Once CFD identifies a full class of candidates for promotion, OPSA makes the official promotional offers and takes the administrative steps to register the promotions in CHIPPs, the City's personnel database. Candidates who accept promotional offers then begin training for their new ranks at the Fire Academy.

Finally, prior to a candidate formally receiving a promotion, CFD requires them to obtain the state-level certification corresponding to their promoted rank. CFD verifies each candidate's certification through the Illinois State Fire Marshal. If a candidate accepts a promotional offer but has not yet obtained certification, CFD provides them with the necessary courses at the Fire Academy in the weeks before their promotional class training starts.

VI | Analysis of Outcomes of CFD Promotional Exams

OIG analyzed data provided by DHR and OPSA to determine demographic representation among candidates who completed a promotional exam, as well as those who received promotions in the most recent promotional rounds, specifically:

- the 2009 and 2019-20 Lieutenant's exams;
- the 2017 and 2023 Captain's exams; and
- the 2019 and 2023 Battalion Chief's exams.

The results below are intended to provide transparency into demographic outcomes throughout the promotional process.

A | Most promotional candidates are white and male.

A majority of candidates in the most recent promotional rounds were white. Across the eligibility lists for the Lieutenant, Captain, and Battalion Chief ranks, white candidates comprised at least 60.0% of the candidate pool.

Moving up the ranks, the percentages of white candidates in the pools increased. The Battalion Chief rank had the largest proportion of white candidates on its eligibility lists—85.3% on the 2019 list and 80.6% on the 2023 list.

Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American representation on the eligibility lists has changed over time. In the earliest promotional rounds in OIG's scope, (i.e., 2009 Lieutenant, 2017 Captain, and 2019 Battalion Chief), Black or African American candidates were the second largest demographic group on eligibility lists. However, in the most recent rounds (i.e., 2019 Lieutenant, 2023 Captain, and 2023 Battalion Chief), Hispanic or Latino candidates made up a larger proportion of the eligibility lists than Black or African American candidates. The race/ethnicity of candidates in the most recent promotional rounds are shown in Figure 29.

Figure 29: Moving up the promotional ranks, the representation of white candidates increases.

Race/Ethnicity	Lieutenant		Captain		Battalion Chief	
	2009	2019	2017	2023	2019	2023
White	65.7% (969)	63.7% (873)	74.0% (304)	73.8% (284)	85.3% (99)	80.6% (83)
Black or African American	20.5% (303)	15.8% (217)	14.6% (60)	11.4% (44)	8.6% (10)	5.8% (6)
Hispanic or Latino	12.5% (185)	18.8% (258)	10.7% (44)	13.0% (50)	6.0% (7)	12.6% (13)

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Gender representation was similar across promotional ranks. In general, the majority of candidates on eligibility lists were male. As shown in Figure 30, male candidates made up over 95% of overall promotional candidates.⁴⁸ Notably, following the 2023 Battalion Chief exam, all 103 candidates on the eligibility list were male.

Figure 30: The representation of male candidates was consistent across promotional ranks.

Gender	Lieutenant		Captain		Battalion Chief	
	2009	2019	2017	2023	2019	2023
Male	97.6% (1440)	95.3% (1307)	97.3% (400)	96.4% (371)	96.6% (112)	100% (103)
Female	2.4% (36)	4.7% (64)	2.7% (11)	3.6% (14)	3.5% (4)	0% (0)

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

B | Across promotional rounds, the percentages of white candidates increased more than any other race/ethnicity between the creation of eligibility lists and the ultimate promotions. This was in line with exam results.

As in hiring, the demographics of the promotional candidate pools evolve over the course of the promotional process. There is a direct correlation between exam scores and the order in which candidates on a particular eligibility list are promoted, because those who score the highest are offered promotions first and are therefore most likely to receive promotional offers before the list is retired. Consequently, the outcomes of promotional exams directly impact who is ultimately promoted. In line with exam results, white candidates experienced the greatest increase in representation between testing for and receiving promotions.⁴⁹

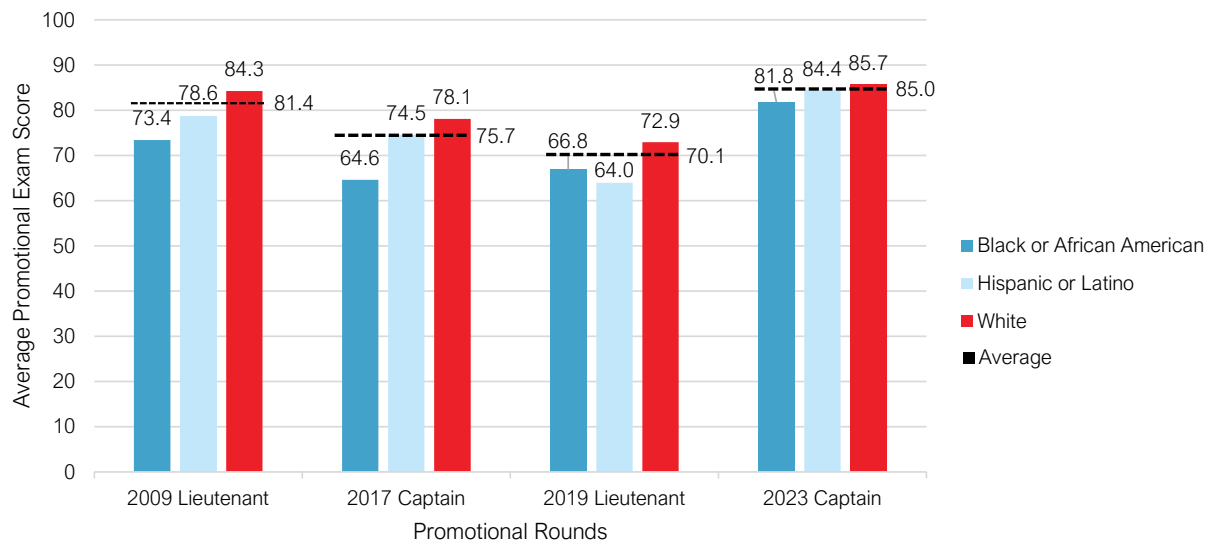
On the most recent Lieutenant and Captain promotional exams, white candidates were the only group with average scores that exceeded the overall averages on the exams.⁵⁰ As groups, both Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American candidates scored below the exam averages, as seen in Figure 31.

⁴⁸ Due to the small percentage of female candidates across promotional candidate pools, OIG does not include a breakdown of exam scores by gender or promoted candidates by gender.

⁴⁹ At the time of OIG's analysis, CFD was in the process of promoting candidates from the 2019 Lieutenant, 2023 Captain, and 2023 Battalion Chief eligibility lists. Because only a small number of candidates had been promoted from those lists, the analysis focuses on the completed eligibility lists from the 2009 Lieutenant, 2017 Captain, and 2023 Battalion Chief promotional rounds.

⁵⁰ OIG did not report on scoring outcomes for demographic groups comprising less than 2 percent of the overall testing population.

Figure 31: On average, white candidates scored the highest on the last two Lieutenant and Captain promotional exams.



Source: OIG analysis of exam scores provided by DHR.

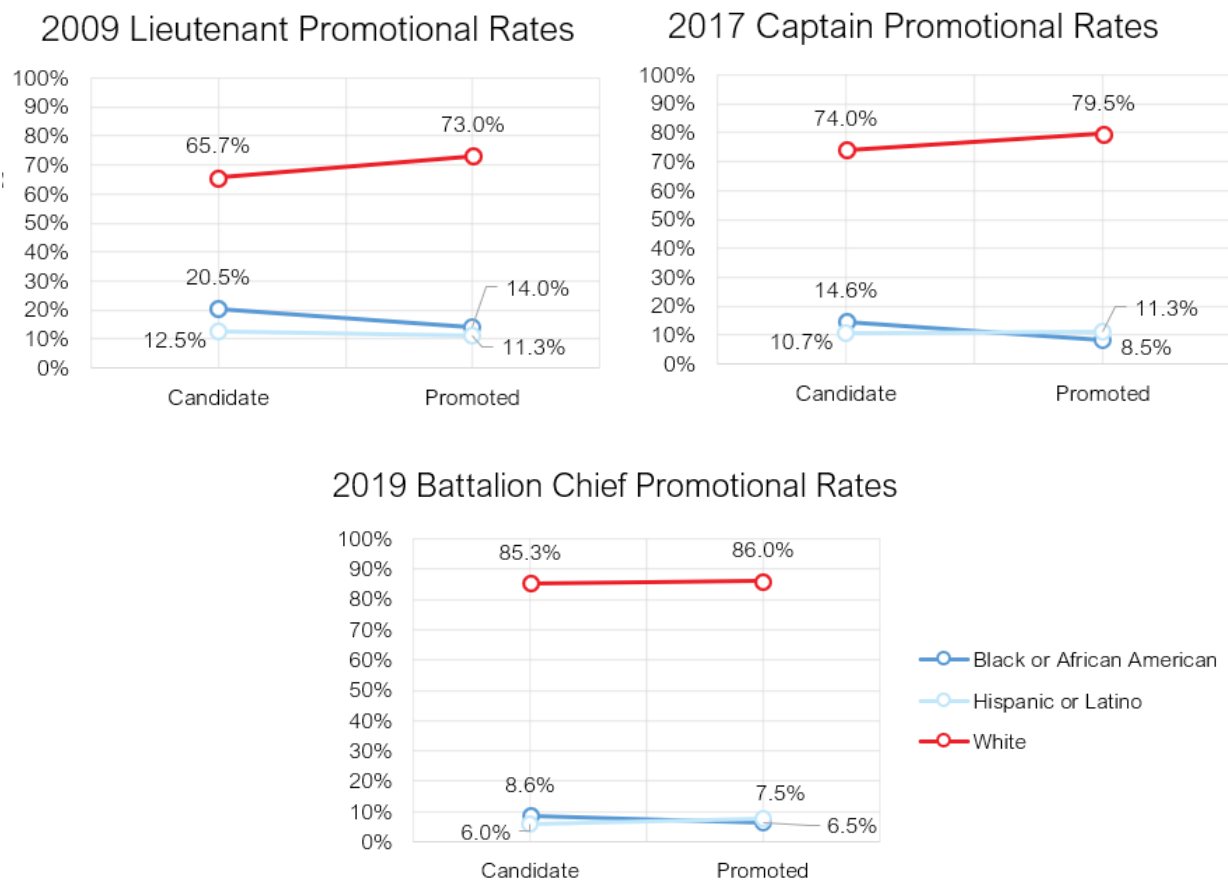
Turning to the Battalion Chief exams, the groups of white candidates and Hispanic or Latino candidates scored above average on the 2019 exam. However, of these three groups on the 2023 exam, only the group of Black or African American candidates scored above the overall average.

These demographic scoring trends on the promotional exams impacted the demographics of the candidates CFD ultimately promoted. For all three ranks, the representation of white candidates increased during the period between the exams to the promotions. In the most recent Lieutenant, Captain, and Battalion Chief promotional rounds, the representation of white candidates from exam to promotion increased by 7.3, 5.5, and 0.7 percentage points, respectively.

While representation of white candidates increased as the promotional processes moved forward, representation of the other race/ethnicity demographic groups decreased. For all three ranks, the rates of promotion for Black or African American candidates were lower than their rates of representation in the original candidate pools. By the same token, the proportions of Black or African American candidates decreased in the periods between the exams and the promotions. For example, in the 2009 Lieutenant promotional round, Black or African American candidates made up 20.5% of the initial candidate pool but only 14.0% of the total promoted population. And in the 2017 Captain promotional round, Black or African American candidates made up 14.6% of those taking the exam, but only 8.5% of those ultimately promoted.

The race/ethnicity demographic shifts between exam and promotion for each of the most recently completed promotional cycles can be seen in Figure 32.

Figure 32: Across the most recently completed promotional cycles, the proportion of white candidates increased between taking the exams and receiving promotions, which is in line with exam results.

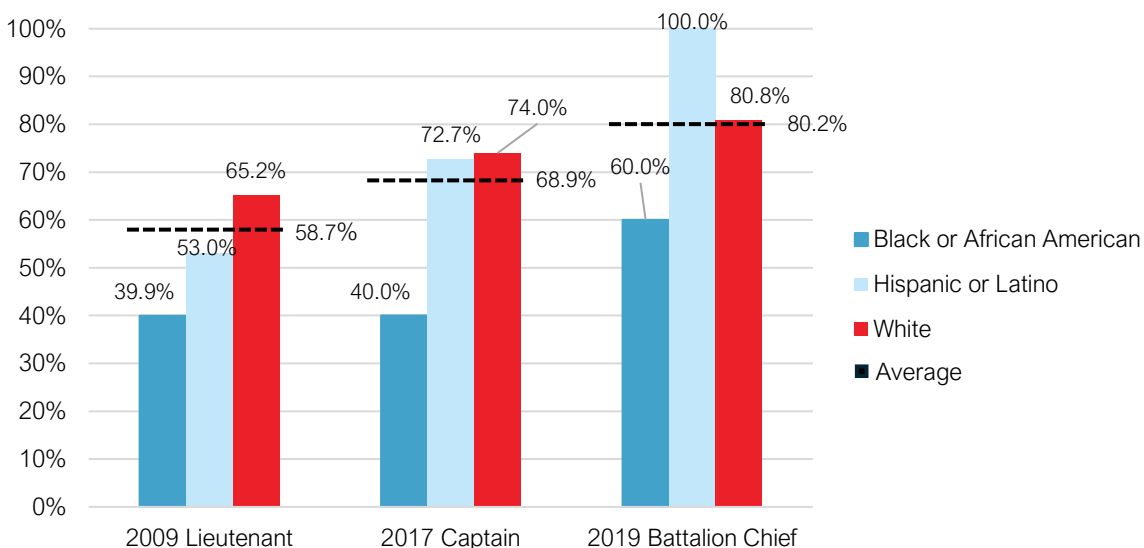


Source: Promoted candidate data from OPSA.

The increase in white candidate representation was much larger for the Lieutenant and Captain ranks, which had many more candidates for many more open positions.

Another perspective on the demographic shift between exam and promotion can be seen in the promotional rates within groups. In two of the three cycles OIG analyzed, within categories of race/ethnicity, both white and Hispanic or Latino candidates were promoted at rates above the average for the overall eligibility lists. CFD promoted 68.9% of candidates on the 2017 Captain list. Among white candidates, 74.0% were promoted, and among Hispanic or Latino candidates the figure was 72.7%. In contrast, Black or African American candidates were promoted at a rate of 40.0%, well below the list average. Likewise, Black or African American candidates had a lower promotional rate in the 2009 Lieutenant cycle—only 39.9% of such candidates received a promotion, compared to 53.0% of Hispanic or Latino candidates and 65.2% of white candidates. The promotional rates within race/ethnicity are shown in Figure 33.

Figure 33: Within eligibility lists, the population of Black or African American candidates are promoted at a lower rate than the population of white and the population of Hispanic or Latino candidates.



Source: Promoted candidate data from OPSA.

VII | Conclusion

The diversity of the initial applicant pool for the City's Firefighter/EMT entrance exam has increased over time, but representation has declined for some demographic groups during the hiring process. For example, in both 2014 and 2022, the primary point of attrition for female applicants occurred during processing. Additionally, the City's use of hiring preferences affected hiring outcomes for Black or African American applicants.

This raises the question of whether CFD, DHR, and OPSA could provide additional support to help applicants avoid obstacles during processing, and whether the City could improve its efforts to encourage diversity through recruitment. Supporting underrepresented applicants through processing would align with intentions expressed in CFD's 2023 Racial Equity Action Plan.⁵¹

DHR made major changes to the 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam process in an effort to increase the frequency of testing. Despite this, DHR does not have plans to conduct another entrance exam in the near future. This creates the risk that neither the City nor prospective Firefighter/EMTs will experience the intended benefits of reduced costs and more frequent hiring opportunities.

A majority of the most recently completed rounds of promotions into the ranks of Lieutenant, Captain, and Battalion Chief went to white candidates and male candidates. As the promotional rank increased, the proportion of white candidates also increased. While white CFD members made up more than 60% of the candidate pools, they also had higher promotional exam scores on average, which may have contributed to their higher rates of promotion. Due to the recency of

⁵¹ As explained in the Background, Racial Equity Action Plans (REAPs) were strategic plans created by City departments that articulated how each department would improve equitable outcomes in its work.

these promotional rounds, however, OIG is unable to make connections across this promotional analysis and the analysis of the 2014 and 2022 hiring cycles.

Appendix A | Additional Data Tables

This appendix contains additional results of OIG's analysis of DHR hiring and referral data from Firefighter/EMT entrance exams.

Figure 34: 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam pass-fail rate and counts by race/ethnicity.

Race/Ethnicity	Count of Test-takers	Count of Test-takers Who Passed Exam	Pass Rate by Race/Ethnicity
American Indian or Alaska Native	22	10	45.5%
Asian	76	37	48.7%
Black or African American	818	393	48.0%
Hispanic or Latino	1,712	869	50.8%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	5	2	40.0%
Two or More Races	83	37	44.6%
Undisclosed Race	228	125	54.8%
White	1,521	765	50.3%
Total	4,465	2,238	Overall pass rate: 50.1%

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Figure 35: 2022 Firefighter/EMT entrance exam pass-fail rate and counts by gender.

Gender	Count of Test-takers	Count of Test-takers Who Passed Exam	Pass Rate by Gender
Female	786	383	48.7%
Male	3,599	1,811	50.3%
Undisclosed Gender	80	44	55.0%
Total	4,465	2,238	Overall pass rate: 50.1%

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Figure 36: Attrition or gain by 2022 hiring round phase, race/ethnicity as of May 2025.

Race/Ethnicity	Applied (%)	Invited to Exam +/-	Passed Exam +/-	Referred +/-	Hired +/-	Hired (%)
White	32.7	0.4	1.1	-0.5	-0.6	33.1
Hispanic or Latino	32.3	5.1	1.4	-0.7	4.6	42.7
Black or African American	25.9	-5.3	-3	0.6	-2	16.2
Undisclosed Race	4.9	-0.1	0.8	0.3	-0.9	5
Two or More Races	2.2	-0.4	-0.1	0.4	0.2	2.3
Asian	1.4	0.3	0	-0.2	-0.8	0.7
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.5	0	-0.1	-0.2	-0.2	0
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.1	0	0	0	-0.1	0

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Figure 37: Attrition or gain by 2022 hiring round phase, gender as of May 2025.

Gender	Applied (%)	Invited to Exam +/-	Passed Exam +/-	Referred +/-	Hired +/-	Hired (%)
Female	17.6	0.5	-1	0	-11.1	6
Male	80.9	-0.5	0.5	0.1	10.7	91.7
Undisclosed Gender	1.5	0.1	0.4	-0.4	0.7	2.3

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Figure 38: Attrition or gain by 2022 hiring round phase, race/ethnicity, and gender as of May 2025.

Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Applied (%)	Invited to Exam +/-	Passed Exam +/-	Referred +/-	Hired +/-	Hired (%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	Female	0	0.1	-0.1	0	0	0
American Indian or Alaska Native	Male	0.4	0	0	-0.2	-0.2	0
American Indian or Alaska Native	Undisclosed Gender	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asian	Female	0.2	0	0	0	-0.2	0
Asian	Male	1.2	0.3	0	-0.2	-0.6	0.7
Black or African American	Female	6.2	-1.6	-0.8	0.2	-3	1
Black or African American	Male	19.7	-3.7	-2.3	0.5	1	15.2
Black or African American	Undisclosed Gender	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hispanic or Latino	Female	5.4	1.2	-0.1	0	-4.5	2
Hispanic or Latino	Male	26.8	3.9	1.5	-0.8	8.7	40.1
Hispanic or Latino	Undisclosed Gender	0.1	0	0.1	0	0.5	0.7
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Female	0	0.1	-0.1	0	0	0
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Male	0.1	0	0	0	-0.1	0
Two or More Races	Female	0.4	-0.1	0.1	0.1	-0.5	0
Two or More Races	Male	1.8	-0.4	-0.1	0.2	0.5	2
Two or More Races	Undisclosed Gender	0	0	0	0.1	0.2	0.3
Undisclosed Race	Female	0.6	0	-0.2	0.1	-0.5	0
Undisclosed Race	Male	3.1	-0.1	0.6	0.5	-0.5	3.6
Undisclosed Race	Undisclosed Gender	1.2	0	0.4	-0.3	0	1.3
White	Female	4.9	0.7	0.2	-0.3	-2.5	3
White	Male	27.8	-0.5	0.9	0	1.9	30.1
White	Undisclosed Gender	0.1	0.1	0	-0.2	0	0

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Figure 39: Attrition or gain by 2014 hiring round phase, race/ethnicity.

Race/Ethnicity	Applied (%)	Tested +/-	Passed Exam +/-	Hired +/-	Hired (%)
White	44.1	-0.1	2.3	15.4	61.7
Hispanic or Latino	23.7	0.8	-0.2	-1.6	22.7
Black or African American	22.5	-0.4	-2.4	-6.8	12.9
Asian	1.3	-0.1	0.1	0.8	2.1
Two or More Races	2.3	-0.1	0	-1.9	0.3
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.2	0	0	0	0.2
Missing Data	NA	0	0	0.2	0.2
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.4	0	0	-0.4	0
Undisclosed Race	5.5	0	0.2	-5.7	0

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.

Figure 40: Attrition or gain by 2014 hiring round phase, gender.

Gender	Applied (%)	Tested +/-	Passed Exam +/-	Hired +/-	Hired (%)
Female	13.8	-0.5	0.4	-7.8	5.9
Male	84.9	0.5	-0.5	9.2	94.1
Undisclosed Gender	1.3	0	0.1	-1.4	0

Source: OIG analysis of DHR data.



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