



PROMISING  
PRACTICES  
FOR

# Increasing Diversity Among First Responders

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

SITE PROFILE  
**Atlanta Police  
Department**

PREPARED BY



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## Site Visit Findings

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

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

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

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

# Atlanta Police Department

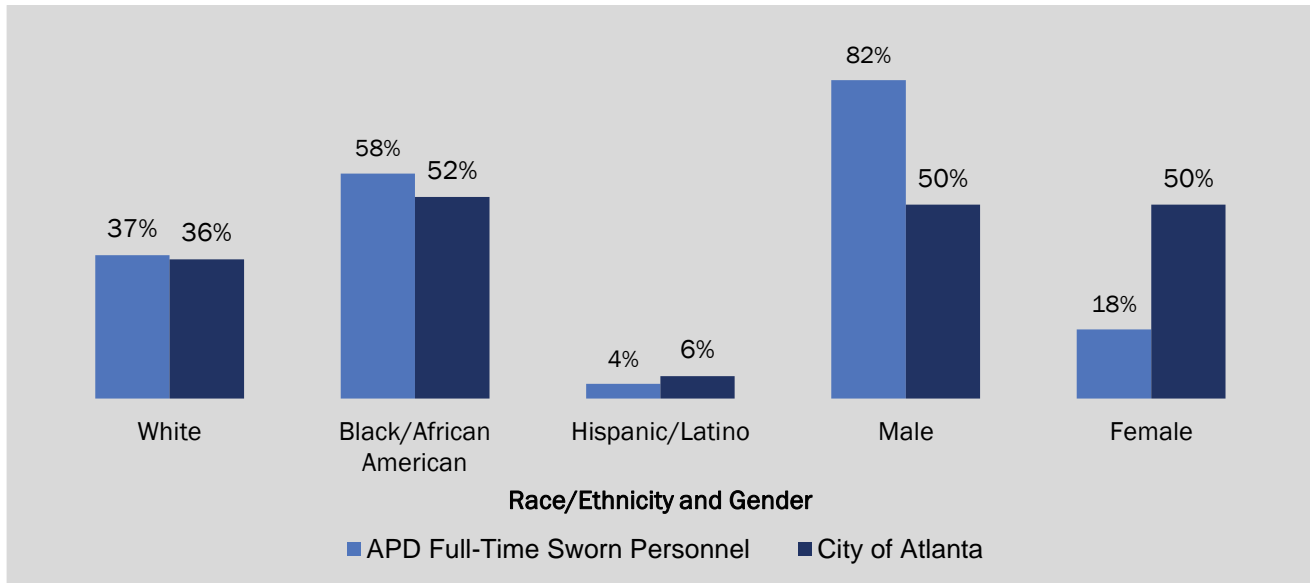
## Background

The Atlanta Police Department (APD) was selected as a study site based on its representation of the population, and results from the policy scan that highlighted recent recruiting efforts targeting local Spanish-speaking communities. The study team interviewed 18 line and command staff, including the Chief of Police, an Assistant Chief, a Deputy Chief, one Captain, four Majors, two Sergeants, one Investigator, six Police Officers, and one civilian employee. Among those interviewed were representatives from the Background and Recruitment Unit; the Training Academy; Special Projects; the Community-Oriented Policing Section; the internship program; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) and Hispanic liaisons; and the Atlanta Public Schools liaison. The site visit took place in April 2016.

Staff at the APD described the city of Atlanta as “the home of civil rights” where the “the discussion of race is always front and center.” Atlanta has been described as “the emerging capital of [B]lack America” (Lloyd, 2012, p. 485). In addition, Atlanta has garnered attention for being racially progressive within the South and previously adopted the city slogan “The City Too Busy to Hate” (Lloyd, 2012, p. 485).

The APD, like the city, is over 50 percent African American. Based on interviews with APD staff, the leadership appears to have an understanding of the benefits of diversity and the importance of diversity beyond race/ethnicity to include gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, and other background characteristics and experiences. One interviewee commented that staff “need an open mind” to work at APD; those who do not value diversity often leave. APD staff members are transparent about discussing the demographic representation of staff and any gaps that need to be addressed, both in the line staff and leadership. Figure 1 displays the demographic composition of APD sworn officers in comparison with the local population.

**Figure 1. Percentage Distribution of APD Full-Time Sworn Personnel vs. Atlanta General Population by Race/Ethnicity and Gender**



Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) 2013, U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2010-2014. Note that LEMAS data represent full-time sworn personnel, and ACS general population data reflect the total population, including all ages, of the city of Atlanta, Georgia. White and Black/African American categories exclude those of Hispanic or Latino origins and those reporting more than one race.

## Leadership

Based on site visit observations and interviews, historically underrepresented populations in the first responder profession (racial/ethnic minorities, females, and the LGBT community) appear to be particularly well-represented among the leadership ranks at APD, as well as throughout the line staff. Diverse leadership provides role models for current and prospective APD officers who can envision themselves in those positions.

Chief George Turner, who grew up in Atlanta, has been with APD for 35 years and was appointed to lead the department in 2010. He attended a local historically Black college and has a deep understanding of Atlanta’s racial climate, as well as the importance of having a diversified police force. He described his philosophy about diversity as “purposed,” especially within the command staff, and has made a deliberate effort to place women and underrepresented groups in top leadership positions. He is also a vocal supporter of the LGBT community.

Diversity is a priority throughout the leadership ranks, reflected in this comment from a leadership staff member interviewed: “We’ve made huge strides but we have much further to go.” The department’s leadership has a clear understanding of the benefits of diversity—“when we have diversity of individual, we have diversity of thought”—and why that is important for both APD and the city. This message from leadership trickles down to staff, who commented frequently on the importance of visibility of diversity—among command staff, individual units, officers, and in recruiting advertisements—for serving the community.

In addition to embracing diversity, interviewees noted that the Chief and Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed support “outside the box” thinking to achieve such goals as diversity. This innovation is reflected in the recruiting and community practices described below, including such recent staff-developed initiatives as *My Life Matters* (highlighted in “APD Highlight” text box). The APD leadership is closely involved in many aspects of the recruiting and hiring processes, including participation at local events and out-of-state recruiting trips.

### APD Highlight

“John”\* is a 22-year-old native of Atlanta who, as a homeless youth, was driven to gangs and crime because it was the only life he knew and saw as a possibility. Eventually, he was arrested for home robbery at age 14. A judge in the Superior Court of Fulton County gave John a second chance to succeed and connected him with mentors who encouraged him to continue with high school. After being released from prison, John attended school at nights and on weekends, and within one year, enrolled in college. The APD Deputy Chief offered to help John get a job with the APF, because he could not find employment with felonies on his record. As a result of John’s success, the judge and APD recently partnered with APF to create a grant-funded program, *My Life Matters* (MLM), to give other incarcerated youth like him a second chance in life. Currently, 14 minors with felonies are participating in the pilot program.

John now works for MLM as an employee of APF, serving as a mentor for the program along with three APD officers. They meet with participants regularly and intensively, and connect participants with individuals from the business community to teach life and job skills. The program partners with Atlanta Technical College to enroll participants in a GED program and with nonprofit organizations—including Habitat for Humanity, Big Brother/Big Sister, and Atlanta Job Corp—for community service opportunities. Participants are monitored closely to ensure they are making progress and meeting program goals.

This second chance program is representative of the innovative leadership of APD; its leaders are not afraid to take risks and try new approaches to reaching at-risk populations in the community. In addition, the program reflects the tendency of staff to take a holistic view of individuals and their circumstances in consideration of their future opportunities and potential contributions to the department. This is also a tenet of the background review process when hiring officers; minor offenses will be forgiven if enough time has passed and the applicant shows promise. MLM is an example of APD’s recognition that to connect with the community, they need staff who can relate to the community. Finally, demonstrating this commitment to the community will help instill trust and a more favorable opinion among segments of the population who may have previously viewed the police skeptically. Building this positive image among citizens will make a future career with the police force a more viable option.

\* A pseudonym has been used to protect the individual’s identity.

## Unique Practices

Diversity practices specific to APD include the use of population-specific liaisons (i.e., Hispanic, LGBT) and partnerships with the Atlanta Police Foundation (APF) and city agencies to provide financial incentives, including bonuses for Spanish-speaking officers. APD also places importance on recruiting in its budget, which enables a recruiting team of 17 officers to travel to areas outside the state. These and other promising APD practices, such as community engagement, are described in the full report. Figure 2 displays where promising practices identified at APD fall along the employment pipeline.

**Figure 2. Overview of Diversity Efforts Along Key Points in the Employment Pipeline at APD**

