



Thought Leadership Essay Competition

Recruitment, Retention, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion



Confirmed Judges

- Chief Trisha Wolford, Anne Arundel County FD (MD)
- Deputy County Manager Tony McDowell, Henrico County (MD)
- Chief David Wolf, Estes Valley FPD (CO)
- Chief Cheryl Horvath, Tubac FD (AZ)
- Chief John Buckman (ret), Past President IAFC, Past Chair VCOS (IN)
- LaRae Smiley Sliger and Rachael Stebell from Women in Fire
- Kerry Henderson, Battalion Chief at James City County (2022 essay winner)

Prizes

- 1st place – \$3,000
- 2nd place – \$2,000
- 3rd place – \$1,000

Recognition on Inside Darley video series, Darley Times newsletter, Darley media distribution, partner publications, and the InService Podcast

Timeline

April 17 – June 30, 2023

The Building Blocks of Recruitment Retention

The men and women of the nation's fire services are some of the best and brightest from communities across the country. The fire service is stronger because of diversity – in thought, background, experience, race, gender and sexual orientation. However, there is still significant work to be done.

The 2023 Fire Service Thought Leadership Essay Competition welcomes essays that address the continuing challenges in recruiting and achieving diversity and creating an inclusive collaborative workplace for career, combination, or volunteer FDs and with both uniformed and non-uniformed members of the fire service.

Participants can answer one of the following questions or write on another diversity and inclusion topic:

- Are the efforts by the fire service to promote diversity and inclusion working? What changes or improvements should be made?
- Are there new recruiting approaches the fire service should consider?
- What don't we understand about the problem of recruiting?



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Thought Leadership Essay Competition

2022 Lessons Learned & Insights

Quotes from 2022 Judges

"Everyone wants to influence those we know and those who are in our profession. Writing is one of several ways to influence others that are in your circle but also those outside of your circle. Ideas come in all sizes and shape. Putting those ideas in writing creates an interest and possibly change in others way of thinking. Submitting a paper for the Darley essay contest can help you to challenge the status quo of our profession. Your essay can be that paper that begins a movement. Become a entrant in the Darley essay contest. Stick your neck out there. YOU make a difference by becoming engaged."

— Chief John Buckman

"As the Fire Service continues to grow and evolve to meet the needs of our communities, we benefit from the sharing of ideas. The Darley Thought Leadership Essay Competition was a fantastic opportunity for leaders from across our nation's fire agencies to share their perspectives and lessons learned. I look forward to the next year of submissions and the chance to hear more thoughts and ideas on how we can continue to move our agencies forward to best perform for those we serve."

— Chief David Wolf

"As a judge for the inaugural Darley Thought Leadership Essay Competition I was inspired by the intentionality and drive of the participants. The fire service is evolving greatly. There is a need for leaders who challenge their teams to be innovative, while still holding a spirit of service to the community. This competition highlights ambitious leaders throughout the fire service, who truly embrace their duty."

— Amy Hanifan

Why Are We Doing This?

Good leadership requires good communications. Although there are many ways to become a better leader, writing is an undeniable leadership requirement since writing has the advantage of being deliberate and sustaining.

There are a multitude of challenges facing the fire service, none of which have easy straight-forward answers. Many of these require challenging the status quo in a manner which has the finesse to allow others to understand and visualize solutions beyond our current reality.

The most common approach for thought leadership articles would have articles written and published by Chiefs or Chief Fire Officers. But individuals within various functions and at all levels of a fire department can provide unique perspectives and deliver insightful solutions regardless of their rank or length of service.

"These days, we hear the terms "thought leader" and "thought leadership" a lot. Most people like the idea of becoming one, and would like to know how to become a thought leader (or at least how to be seen as one). Why? Because credibility is the calling card needed to lead and persuade."

— Jeff Berand, Red Flash Group

Thought leadership is the missing link which connects today with the excitement of tomorrow.

How Does It Contribute to the Development & Positioning of the Fire Service?

"Being a thought leader can be an ethereal experience, yet it is not always an academic exercise. Training and education certainly provide the developmental basis and methodology for the critical-thinking process, but it's up to current thought leaders to mentor those around us to become the next group of progressive leaders. The philosophic questions we should be asking don't require a doctorate, but they certainly do require the ability to think beyond...." — Chief Marc Bashoor, Executive Editor of FireRescue1 (September 2019.)



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