



Milwaukee Fire & Police Commission

RECRUITMENT AND HIRING

2025 Strategic Plan - Police Officer & Firefighter





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Introduction

This report provides a detailed, comprehensive overview of the Fire and Police Commission's (FPC's) strategic plan and efforts to recruit and hire dedicated and qualified police officers and firefighters to serve the city of Milwaukee.¹ One of the FPC's top priorities is to increase the size of both the police and fire departments. At the same time, we seek to maintain the high standards that currently exist within our testing and vetting process, while also strengthening our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Doing so will not only strengthen the departments and improve public safety, it will create additional family supporting jobs and ensure the city remains compliant with the legal requirements of [2023 Wisconsin Act 12](#).

While this report provides an overview of the FPC's recruiting and hiring plan, it is important to keep in mind that most, if not all, of the plan's components have previously been presented to and discussed at numerous public meetings. Those presentations have been tailored to the various communication files requested by the Common Council's Public Safety & Health and Finance & Personnel Committees, as well as the FPC Board and FPC's Testing & Recruiting Committee. Members of the public can view recordings of those communication files through the [Milwaukee Legistar System](#). A non-exhaustive list of some of those communication files includes:

- File No. FPC211984 – Communication from FPC staff relating to advertising and recruiting plan for the police officer position (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 3/11/25).
- File No. FPC211904 – Communication from FPC staff relating to police officer recruitment and hiring efforts in 2024, and recruitment and hiring strategies and plan for 2025 (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 1/7/25).
- File No. FPC211859 – Communication from FPC staff relating to police officer recruitment efforts and strategy (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 11/21/24).
- File No. 241084 – Communication from the Fire and Police Commission relating to their recruitment strategy and plan to fill the three 2025 Police Department classes of 65 recruits each (Public Safety & Health Committee, 11/14/24).
- File No. 240001 – FPC Budget Hearing (Finance & Personnel Committee, 10/18/24).
- File No. 240887 – Communication from the Fire and Police Commission and the Milwaukee Police Department relating to efforts and progress with recruiting new police officers and police aides (Public Safety & Health Committee, 10/3/24).

¹ This report is also responsive to Common Council File No. 240001, Amendment 22, which states: "Add footnote to the Fire and Police Commission Executive Director instructing the FPC to create a long-term recruitment plan for the Police and Fire Departments and report the plan to the Common Council."

- File No. FPC211612 – Communication from Fire and Police Commission staff and the Milwaukee Police Department relating to efforts and progress with recruiting new police officers and police aides (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 9/12/24).
- File No. FPC211633 – Communication from the Milwaukee Police Department relating to operations of the Office of Community Relations, Engagement and Recruitment (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 5/16/24).
- File No. 211408 – Communication relating to recruitment strategies and objectives for the police officer position (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 11/9/23).
- File No. 230001 – FPC Budget Hearing (Finance & Personnel Committee, 10/11/23).
- File No. 211324 – Communication relating to FPC recruitment strategies and efforts (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 9/14/23)
- File No. FPC211155 – Communication from the Fire and Police Commission Department relating to summer 2023 firefighter recruitment (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 6/1/23).
- File No. FPC211026 – Communication relating to police officer and firefighter recruitment efforts, objectives, and strategies (FPC Testing & Recruiting Committee, 3/9/23).

Strategic Plan Overview – Police Officer

The FPC’s strategic plan for increasing the size of Milwaukee’s police force consists of two main components – **recruiting** and **testing and hiring**.

Recruiting. For the recruiting component, the FPC seeks to increase and maximize the number of applications we receive to ensure a broad, diverse, and high-quality pool of applicants for the police officer position. To accomplish this goal, the FPC employs a number of tactics, including:

- Conducting robust recruiting at community events, job fairs, and other strategic locations;
- Using targeted advertising and social media outreach;
- Maximizing opportunities for candidates to apply and targeting all potential applicant populations, including new and under-leveraged populations; and
- Utilizing hiring incentives, where possible.

Testing & hiring. With respect to our testing and hiring efforts, we seek to increase the percentage of applicants who are ultimately hired into the training academy. The strategic aims of this goal include improving and modernizing our testing and hiring process to reduce unnecessary friction and barriers, while at the same time:

- Maintaining high testing standards;
- Ensuring a fair, competitive, and merit-based hiring process; and
- Increasing the diversity of recruit classes.

To accomplish these goals, FPC staff work closely with the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners, the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD), and other city leaders and organizations to maximize our effectiveness. Our efforts include several tried-and-true tactics, as well as a number of newly implemented or planned initiatives.

In addition, we continually assess and evaluate the effectiveness and success of our work. And, we are always looking for new ideas and ways to improve our operations. As the landscape of the workforce continues to change and evolve, the FPC has continued to develop and implement new recruitment strategies to grow the size of MPD's officer corps.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts have been, and will continue to be, at the forefront of the FPC's work. We are committed to bridging the gap between the people of Milwaukee and MPD by increasing our presence within the community, encouraging positive interactions between the community and MPD members, and striving to increase diversity within the department itself. It is no secret that community-police relations are likely to improve when the department *looks* like the community it serves.

The FPC also understands the importance of recruiting and hiring qualified candidates for the department. But, we cannot ignore the reality that despite recruitment efforts increasing across the nation, hiring and retention has continued to decline.² To respond to this challenge, the FPC has recently implemented several new initiatives to build upon our more traditional efforts. A few examples include moving to a more applicant-focused, continuous recruitment model; expanding our recruiting and testing staff; increasing our advertisement partnerships and budget; and offering online testing options to candidates to reduce some of the barriers within the hiring process.

Recruiting for the position of police officer poses unique challenges that recruiting for other civilian positions does not. Law enforcement careers are not just an employment opportunity—they are a request for individuals to make a commitment to protect and serve their community, to place their lives on the line, and put the mission of the department above their own. With this in mind, the FPC has begun to pivot in its approaches to police officer recruitment and hiring. The shift began during the 2023 recruitment campaigns. Ideas that proved effective in the past were implemented again, while efforts that did not yield results were either modified or discarded altogether. All of this is done in an effort to build a dedicated, high performing, and diverse police force to serve the people of Milwaukee.

The following reports provide a detailed overview of the FPC's recruiting and hiring strategies and tactics, our key performance indicators, and our plan to improve our efforts moving forward.

² See Police Executive Research Forum, August, 2023, "Responding to the Staffing Crisis: Innovations in Recruitment and Retention," <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/RecruitmentRetention.pdf>.

FPC Police Officer Recruitment Efforts

Recruiting at Community Events and Job Fairs

A main component of the FPC's recruitment efforts is on-the-ground recruiting at strategic locations throughout the city, such as community events, career and resource fairs, open houses, faith-based events, and colleges and technical schools. While this type of recruiting has long been employed by the FPC, in recent years we have sought to expand our presence and visibility in the community. The ultimate goal of these efforts is not only to recruit more police officers, but to improve community-police relations in Milwaukee.

In the fall of 2023, the FPC sought and received funding to add a second recruiter position to its ranks. As such, the FPC now employs two full-time recruiters (one of whom is a bilingual recruiter), along with a



community outreach coordinator, who work closely with the police department to attract qualified candidates to pursue careers in law enforcement. The FPC's recruiters participate in numerous job fairs and other recruiting events each year and actively communicate with thousands of potential candidates in person and by phone, text, and email—making sure their questions are answered and they are ready for each step in the application and testing process.

The addition of a second recruiter has greatly expanded the FPC's capacity to attend a variety of community events and job fairs, and build more partnerships with community organizations, academic institutions, and business organizations. Likewise, as we explore additional recruitment tactics, new advertising partnerships, and improved branding and social media outreach, having a second staff member with specialized knowledge and experience in these areas will be invaluable.

Another key aspect of our work includes recruiting at Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and MPS events. Our goal is to build a pipeline of young, diverse candidates, with a particular focus on recruiting them for our [police aide program](#). Police aides are civilian employees between the ages of 17 and 20 who serve in a paid, two-year apprenticeship-style program designed to prepare them for careers as Milwaukee police officers. Similar to expanding our general

recruitment footprint, the addition of a second recruiter allows the FPC to visit more MPS schools to recruit high school students who may be interested in careers in law enforcement.

The increase in community engagement efforts (as opposed to solely focusing on recruitment) is part of a broader strategy to create a stronger bridge between the community and the law enforcement members who serve it. Our hope is that these efforts will improve police-community relations and trust, and inspire community members to consider becoming a Milwaukee police officer.

MPD Selfie Contest. When it comes to such an endeavor, FPC recruiters need to do more than simply sell a job. They often have to change perspectives and shift mindsets, which requires speaking honestly about a police department that has experienced both recent challenges as well as positive growth and change. Part of recruiting is also about making sure you are doing everything you can to build rapport and highlight the positive aspects of what it means to be a police officer. As part of this effort, the FPC is partnering with local radio stations to help promote our *MPD Selfie Contest*. This is an initiative where we encourage community members to take pictures with Milwaukee police officers and post them on social media with the hashtag “*MoreThanAnOfficer.*” By doing so, individuals will be entered into a drawing where they will have a chance to win free State Fair Tickets! This serves as a great way to engage the community and our officers and show the positive relations that are being built.

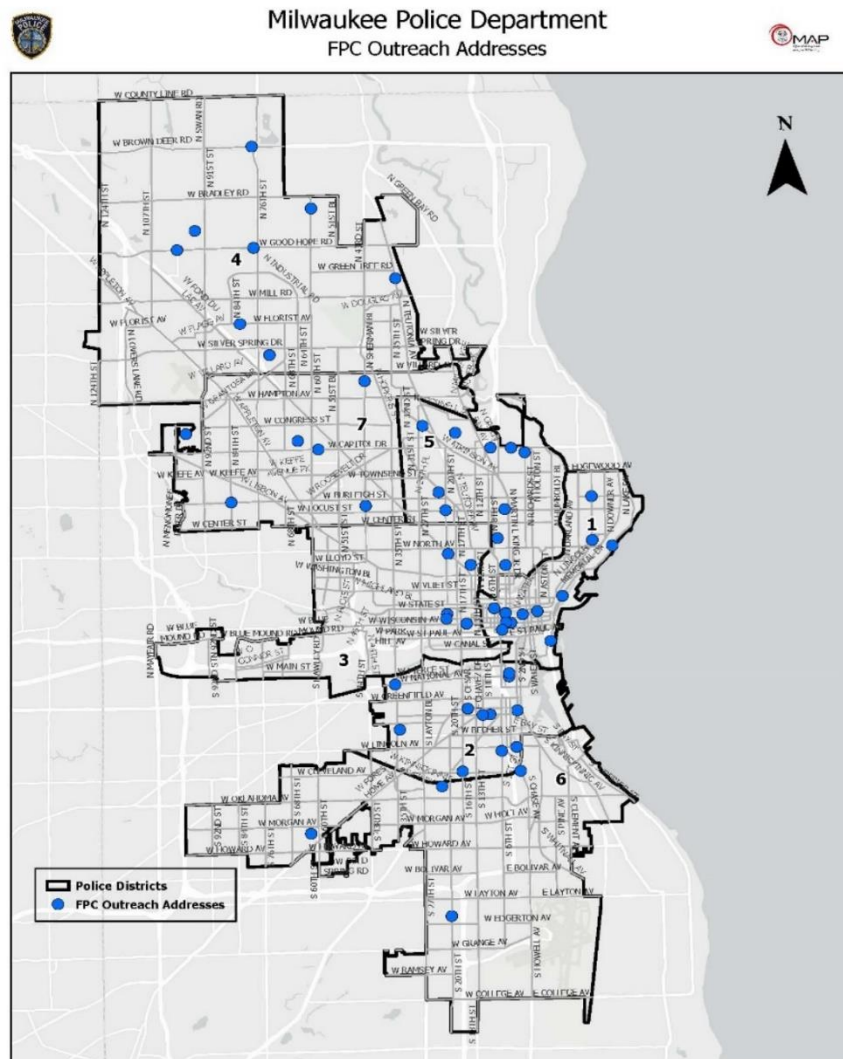
The Conversation. Another one of our recent initiatives was “The Conversation” radio show on Joy 1340 AM, which ran from November 2023 through December 2024. This started as an advertising partnership with this particular radio station. The station’s operations director later offered a free 30-minute weekly broadcast segment for the FPC recruitment team during the times our ads were running. The FPC team quickly realized this was a great opportunity to promote the police officer position and inform the community about the positive changes and initiatives taking place within MPD. The show ran every Monday from 2:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. and featured a variety of guests who were interviewed by FPC Recruiter Jordan Dickerson and MPD Officer Ralph McClain. Guests included individuals who are doing positive work within the community, other law enforcement leaders, and community members with inspiring stories to tell. A few of the guests included:

- MPD Chief of Police Jeffrey Norman
- MFD Fire Chief Aaron Lipski
- MPD Inspector Sheronda Grant
- Judge Derek Mosley
- Motivational speaker and entrepreneur Travis Spell
- Reentry strategist Adam Procell

As noted above, this work is part of a larger effort to increase the FPC’s presence and visibility throughout Milwaukee, which has continued since 2023 and throughout 2024.

Recent Outreach Numbers. Overall in 2024, FPC recruiters attended a total of 88 separate recruitment and community events, and hosted an additional 84 test prep sessions. The following is a list of a few of those events:

- UW-Milwaukee Spring Career Fair, Marquette Careers for Common Good Job Fair, UW Stevens Point All-Major Career Fair, La Causa Charter School Fair, MATC Diversity Career Fair, Boys & Girls Club Police Aide Presentation, MPS Junior Student Job Fair, UW Platteville Criminal Justice Career Fair, Running Rebels Community Organization's Life & College Fair, Community Brainstorming Conference, Hip Hop Career Fair, Milwaukee Public Library Trades and Tech Fair, Cinco De Mayo Festival, Hamilton High School, Juneteenth Day Celebration, UMOs Summer Career Fair, Black Arts Festival, numerous National Night Out festivals, Puerto Rican Festival, Milwaukee Diversity Job Fair, MATC Diversity Career Fair, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Fair, Reagan High School Career Fair, Rufus King High School College Fair, Vincent High School, Obama High School, and the Fatherhood Summit.



Advertising, Marketing, and Social Media Outreach

In addition to a notable presence at community events and career fairs, the FPC uses a wide array of advertisements to recruit for the police officer position, including ads targeted at historically underrepresented groups. Some of our traditional advertisements include:

- **Flyers** distributed at public libraries, community centers, and gyms like Planet Fitness and Crunch Fitness, which list the salary information in both annual and hourly terms. Our flyers are available in English, Spanish, and Hmong.



- **Radio Advertisements.** The FPC has placed radio ads on the following stations: 96.5 FM Hometown Rick, Jammin' 98.3 FM, The Truth 101.7 FM, WLUM 102.1 FM, 102.9 FM the Hog, Kiss 103.7 FM, Pure Oldies 106.9 FM, and Joy 1340 AM/98.7 FM. In addition, the FPC and MPD have partnered with La GranD radio station to play a radio segment to better engage Milwaukee Spanish-speaking community.

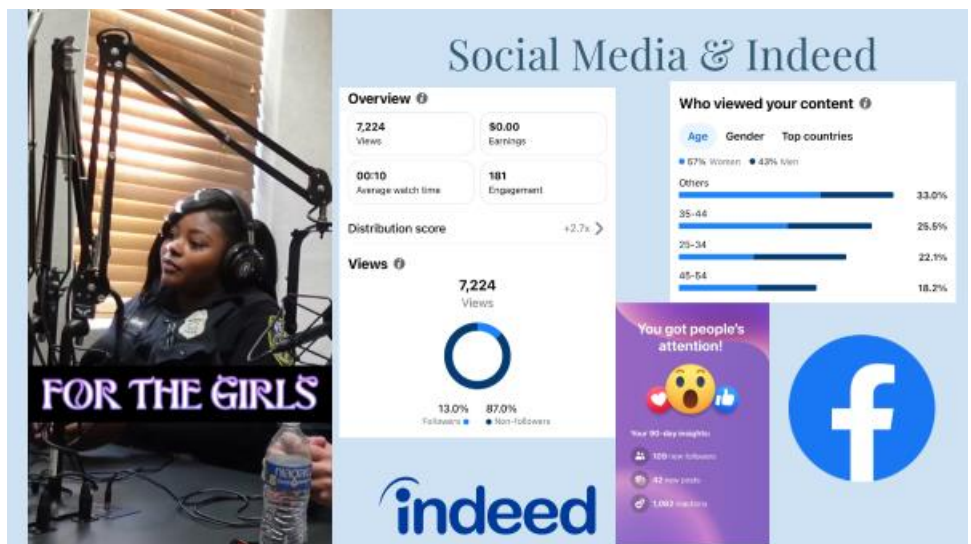


- **Bus Advertisement.** During 2023 and 2024, the FPC ran ad campaigns with the Milwaukee County Transit System where we placed ads on the side and back of city buses, with a primary focus on Northside and Southside routes.
- **Billboards.** In the past, the FPC has also partnered with Clear Channel on billboard ad campaigns, with ads placed at strategic locations near high-traffic areas throughout the city.



- **Social Media & Job Sites.** The FPC has worked with Sinclair Broadcasting Group on our police officer recruitment campaigns. The partnership included a mixture of targeted Facebook and Instagram ads in Milwaukee and its surrounding areas. In addition to the social media campaign conducted by Sinclair, FPC staff post updates on our recruitment efforts and community events on the FPC's Facebook page.

We also publish the police officer posting on various job sites like Indeed and the Wisconsin Law Enforcement Network (WILENET).



Updated Advertisement Campaign for 2025

Beginning in 2023, the FPC greatly expanded its advertisement partnerships, more than tripling its overall expenditures from the previous year. This year, the FPC's budget for recruitment and advertising totals approximately \$130k, the vast majority of which will go to police officer recruitment.

Since expanding our advertising expenditures, the FPC has focused on identifying the success of various advertisement investments by tracking police officer application spikes, reviewing what applicants self-report about the ways they learned of the job posting, and conducting focus groups of new recruits. This year we will focus on avenues that yielded the highest return rates, as well as a few new opportunities.

Enhanced Bus Ad Campaign.

As noted above, in previous years we have run campaigns with the Milwaukee County Transit System where we placed our ads on the side and back of city buses. During these periods, we have experienced a spike in police officer applications.



Due to the success we experienced with past bus advertisements, we have decided to continue using bus ads as a recruitment tool this year. However, instead of only deploying bus ads in Milwaukee, we will be expanding our efforts to include bus advertisements in Racine and Waukesha. Having bus ads run in these locations will expand our reach and allow the ads to be seen in other areas like Caledonia, Mount Pleasant, Sturtevant, Brookfield, Hartland, and Oconomowoc. At various points throughout 2025, we will have 20 buses going around Milwaukee, 3 buses in Waukesha, and 2 buses in Racine.

Job Sites. Postings on job sites such as Indeed have consistently yielded positive results. Nearly 26% of qualified applicants in 2024 indicated that they had heard about the role through Indeed. This year, we will not only be posting on Indeed for a set period of time, we will invest in the post for the entire year. It is not always about trying something new; Indeed has worked every year and we will continue to go with what works.

Podcasts. In the past, the FPC has run ads on podcast platforms with our partner IHeartMedia, which has received positive feedback. Podcasts allow us to better target our audience. We can

target current job seekers, gym enthusiasts, military veterans, those interested in true crime, and more. In 2025, podcast ads will continue to part of our recruitment strategy.

Social Media. Our social media campaigns will also continue year-round throughout 2025. These ads will highlight individual officers and their unique stories, as well as MPD's specialty units and opportunities for career growth, along with MPD's commitment to community engagement. Social media will be an important part of our efforts to change the current landscape and narrative surrounding the law enforcement profession. Videos surface daily throughout the country of officers who do the wrong thing, and so often we are saturated with negative images of police officers that go viral. Unfortunately, this has led many to believe that all police officers are not good people. We will use our own social media presence to combat this stereotype and create different social media videos that are geared toward humanizing our officers, showing them in a positive light, and promoting unity and peace in our community. Social media allows us to create our own narrative and promote the positive side of the Milwaukee Police Department.

Other Unique Advertising Initiatives. Running advertisements in **shopping malls** and **movie theaters** is something that has been around for years. The FPC, however, tried mall ads for the first-time last year. This new recruitment avenue led us to another recruitment opportunity with a news/radio station that saw our ads in Mayfair Mall and asked us to join their news segment to talk about police officer recruitment. This year we will again place ads in Mayfair around holiday season, during which there is increased foot traffic. The same thing will be done at movie theaters. We know that a number of big blockbusters are released in the summer, so we will capitalize on that by placing ads at movie theaters during those months.





The FPC also recently collaborated with **Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC)** to place print advertisements throughout its downtown campus.



In addition, in 2024 the FPC partnered with GSTV, the station in charge of advertisements on **gas station pump screens** throughout Milwaukee. Officer testimonials were used for this advertisement campaign as well, which included 64 gas stations throughout the city. This helped increase our visibility throughout the community, including during last year's Republican National Convention (RNC).

Beginning in 2024, FPC recruiters began using **recruitment cards** as a convenient handout to potential recruits. These cards were later provided to select MPD members to use in their recruitment efforts as well.



New Streaming Ad Campaign. Streaming services and platforms are continually growing in popularity, and this is only expected to increase. Understanding this, the FPC recently partnered with CBS 58 and FOX 6 News to stream our ads and officer testimonials across multiple networks and platforms. Our partnership with CBS will run from March through May 2025 and include TV advertisements on Telemundo, WMLW, and CBS 58, in addition to over 100 networks. Our Fox 6 campaign will run from March through June 2025 and consist of ads on over 100 streaming platforms including Disney+, Hulu, Telemundo, and Univision.

Updated Recruitment Theme

An important part of recruiting for law enforcement officers is being able to pivot, adapt, and change in response to new information. To build and improve upon the recruitment efforts described above, members of the FPC's recruiting team conducted focus groups with police recruits graduating the academy to gain insight on how they heard about the police officer position, what made them want to become officers, and why they specifically chose the Milwaukee Police Department. The first focus group was conducted in the fall of 2023, while the second focus group was conducted in early 2024. The two focus groups included over 70 recruits who provided the FPC with valuable information to help tailor and create a new recruitment campaign theme.

The recruits indicated there were multiple avenues through which they learned that MPD was hiring. These included Indeed, social media, bus ads, career fairs, and radio. However, the overwhelming majority said they learned about the position by word-of-mouth. Although there was a good deal of variation in the recruits' prior experiences with police, a common theme was their desire to have a sense of purpose in their careers. They all wanted to do something that was greater than themselves and that offered a sense of fulfillment not often found in many other jobs. They were not looking for "just a job," they wanted a rewarding career, with good pay and benefits, and one that offered them an opportunity for growth. The reasons they expressed for choosing Milwaukee included serving the city and the community where they

grew up, as well as MPD's size, diversity, and opportunities to advance and work in different specialty units.

As mentioned earlier, the FPC is not naïve regarding the current perceptions of police by many people in our community. See [FPC's 2024 Police Satisfaction Survey](#). Many people view police officers with suspicion or in a negative light. It is difficult for them to see and recognize police officers as normal people, who are just like anyone else. The way the community views the department and its officers, together with the information gathered from the focus groups and other research, played a pivotal role in developing and implementing the FPC's new recruitment campaign theme, *"More Than an Officer."*

"More Than an Officer" is a campaign designed to humanize officers and allow them to share their journeys and personal stories on what made them become police officers in the city of Milwaukee. We believe that showing the human side of officers will help break down some of the misconceptions surrounding police, while also encouraging people who might never have considered this career to apply. With *"More Than an Officer,"* the FPC recruiters work with current MPD officers to share their testimonials and journeys to becoming sworn law enforcement officers. The campaign is centered around video recordings of true stories and focuses on highlighting the person in the uniform, rather than the uniform itself. Our goal is to show that MPD officers are more than officers—they are mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, neighbors, friends, and ordinary people with lives just like the rest of us. The only difference between us and them is that they have decided to take an oath to protect and serve our community and make it a better place.

This campaign is not meant to be a quick fix, or solve all the problems related to the decline in police satisfaction within our city. It is meant to humanize officers, give them an opportunity to share their stories, and highlight them in a positive way. The goal is to emphasize commonalities instead of differences, and help bridge the gap between officers and the community. Two of our officers' testimonials can viewed by clicking on the links below:

- Officer Dominique Thompson: <https://youtu.be/E-o-ofjP4q8>
- Officer Alicia Walker: <https://youtu.be/gn7T4rl4ARU>

New Initiatives in the Works. The FPC is currently in the process of hiring a consultant to assist us with recruiting, marketing and branding, website design, and social media outreach. In early 2025, the FPC issued a request for information (RFI) for firms that can provide guidance, assistance, and recommendations related to recruitment and marketing after undertaking a critical review of our current strategies, tactics, websites, and social media posts. Twenty firms submitted proposals in response. After a careful review of those firms, the FPC has tentatively selected **Safeguard Recruiting** to take on this important role.

Safeguard is operated by former law enforcement professionals with over 80 years of combined experience. Its team has conducted over 400 successful campaigns using a recruiting-first

approach that has enabled its clients to overcome past frustrations with a marketing centric approach. Unlike other companies that promise impressions and views, Safeguard guarantees actual candidates and applicants. Safeguard is uniquely qualified to help the city of Milwaukee increase the volume of police applicants for MPD and ensure full staffing for the department. The FPC intends to leverage Safeguard's experience and expertise to do exactly that.

Finally, in 2025 the FPC plans to hire an additional staff member through the Department of Employee Relations' (DER's) **management trainee program** to assist with managing its social media efforts and website, creating additional social media content, performing continuous evaluations, and exploring opportunities for improvement. This will further expand the FPC's digital reach in the coming year. DER's management trainee program offers recent college graduates an opportunity to pursue a career in public service through a one- or two-year appointment.

Maximizing Applicant Opportunities and Targeting All Potential Applicant Populations

The FPC is always looking for ways to target new applicant populations for the Milwaukee Police Department. A few of our recent efforts on this front include:

Continuous Recruitment. Like many police departments throughout the country, the city of Milwaukee has experienced a notable decline in the number of applicants looking to become police officers. In response, the FPC has opted to engage in a continuous recruitment model for recruiting police officers.

The FPC began conducting continuous recruitment for police officers in May 2023. The continuous recruitment model is designed to make the process more applicant-focused and applicant-friendly. This model allows candidates to apply year-round, rather than only during a limited application period of a few weeks, as we had historically done. This is designed to attract additional applicants and qualified candidates by providing them with more opportunities to apply year-round and reducing waiting periods.

In this model, passing exam results are valid through the end of the year, and applicants who do not pass a particular exam component are automatically re-invited to participate in the next testing cycle. Applicants can therefore try again without having to re-apply or retake prior exam components they have already passed.

Police Transfer/Lateral Recruitment. In September 2024, the city executed a memorandum of understanding with the Milwaukee Police Association (MPA) allowing the FPC for the first time to recruit and hire experienced police officers from other agencies at a salary step commensurate with their prior experience. Shortly thereafter, the FPC launched its first transfer/lateral police officer recruitment in November of 2024. This effort is intended to open up a new pool of applicants for MPD and attract new members with valuable experience. The candidates who have applied for this opportunity are currently participating in the testing

process and are expected to join MPD in the summer of 2025. If this effort proves successful, a second lateral recruitment may follow later in 2025.

MPD's 30x30 Initiative. Women make up less than 14% of sworn officers across the country. Currently, MPD's officer corps is comprised of only 15.5% women. MPD has therefore proudly joined the 30x30 Initiative, a coalition of police leaders, researchers, and professional organizations who have joined together to support and advance the representation, experiences, and well-being of women in policing agencies across the United States. Through efforts like targeted recruiting, promoting a supportive culture and work environment, adopting family-friendly policies, and eliminating barriers to promotions, MPD and the FPC are committed to increasing the representation of women in Milwaukee's police force.



CampHero. This ongoing initiative is a collaboration between Girl Scouts, MATC, FPC, and MPD, and the Milwaukee Fire Department (MFD). *CampHero* is a hands-on experience that introduces young girls to protective service careers. They explore interests and skills while participating in activities in the areas of law enforcement, fire suppression, and emergency medicine. Girl Scouts work alongside the professionals at MATC's Fire Academy (Oak Creek, WI) during the day and spend nights sleeping indoors at Trefoil Oaks Program Center in Kenosha.



Hiring Incentives

Recently, the FPC has sought to further incentivize and attract police officer applicants, where possible, through the use of hiring incentives. While hiring incentives are not a silver bullet for all recruitment challenges, they can have a positive impact when employed in a thoughtful and strategic manner and serve as one component of a broader plan. Some noteworthy examples of hiring incentives the FPC has utilized in the last year include:

Lateral Signing Bonus. As part of the FPC's first lateral recruitment in November 2024, the FPC sought and received approval to offer a \$10,000 signing bonus to incentivize experienced officers from other agencies to join the Milwaukee Police Department. This bonus is a limited time offer available only to those who applied during the initial lateral recruitment. Whether it will be employed again is currently under consideration.

Employee Referral Program. In November 2024, the city also announced a new Employee Referral Program, which provides incentives to current city employees who refer applicants for entry-level and transfer/lateral police officer positions. Through this program, city employees will receive a \$500 bonus for each candidate they refer who is successfully hired by the department and completes half of their probationary period.

Ongoing Recruitment Workgroup. The FPC, MPD, the City Innovation Director, and Alderwoman Sharlen Moore are collaborating through an on-going workgroup to consider and vet other potential incentives, such as housing, residency, daycare, retention, or bilingual incentives, as well as other ways to improve our recruitment efforts. One initiative the workgroup has already spearheaded was a resolution approved by the Common Council in early 2025 authorizing the city to advocate for the creation of a state-funded police officer recruitment incentive program, which would provide a \$5,000 signing bonus to newly hired police officers in Wisconsin.

FPC Testing & Hiring Efforts

Improving and Modernizing the Testing Process

The FPC's efforts are not limited to recruitment but include the testing process as well.

Updated Background Standards. For example, in 2022 the FPC Board adopted several significant updates to its background standards and procedures for new police officers. Prior to the adoption of these new standards, if an applicant had their driving privileges suspended or revoked for moving violations two or more times within the past five years, it would result in an automatic disqualification. Similarly, in the past, the use or possession of marijuana within the past two years was grounds for automatic disqualification. The FPC Board eliminated both of these mandatory disqualifications from its background standards and procedures. While these factors can still be considered in assessing the totality of a candidate's background, they are no longer automatically disqualifying. These changes were adopted by the FPC Board with

the hope of increasing the number of otherwise qualified candidates, and this appears to have achieved its intended purpose.

New Testing Vendor. In the summer of 2024, the FPC entered into a contract with a new testing vendor—National Testing Network (NTN). NTN is now the FPC’s exclusive testing vendor for police entry-level and promotional testing. NTN was selected through a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process and began testing police officer candidates in September 2024.

Our goal in selecting NTN was, among other things, to remove barriers by creating a more candidate-friendly testing process, reduce the overall time the process takes, modernize our recruitment and testing methods, and expand and improve our recruitment efforts and reach. NTN offers the FPC new recruitment features and has a greater national reach than its prior testing vendor.

Online testing. A key benefit that NTN offers (which our prior vendor did not) is that they are able to facilitate and administer several components of the testing process (the written test, writing sample, and oral interview) in a virtual/online format. This means candidates no longer have to worry about finding a mode of transportation, taking time off work, arranging for child care, or adjusting their schedules to appear in person at the academy for these exams at specific times and dates. Instead, they are provided with a virtual link where they can complete the written test, writing sample, and oral exam during a variety of preselected dates and times. In cases where individuals might struggle with obtaining a reliable computer that meets the functional standards needed to take the exam virtually, or if they lack reliable internet connection, alternative facilities are still available for individuals to sign up and complete the exam in person, such as MATC and other facilities outside Milwaukee County. This is part of the FPC's effort to combat the largest testing "drop off point" in the testing process, particularly for Black applicants, which is the failure to show up for the initial written test.

These alterations to the initial steps in the testing process will not only reduce some of the barriers we know applicants previously experienced, they will yield results much faster, reducing the overall time the testing process takes.

Increased Number of Fit Camps and Preparation Sessions. The addition of a second recruiter allows the FPC to conduct even more fit camps and test prep sessions. In partnership with the MPD, the FPC’s recruiters organize dozens of prep sessions and fit camps each year, allowing applicants to familiarize themselves with each stage of the testing process (written test, oral interview, physical readiness test) and prepare themselves to perform their best.

Keeping Candidates Informed and Engaged. The FPC strives to keep candidates informed and maintain contact through regular email and text message reminders to increase show rates for applications, events, and exams. Our recruiters use a texting software named SlickText to assist in recruitment and retention efforts. This texting system allows people to opt in and receive

updates and alerts regarding any FPC job posting, and also helps our recruiters communicate with candidates and answer questions they may have regarding the testing process. The FPC is always sure to include a QR code in our printed and digital marketing materials so that potential applicants can easily opt-in to our SlickText system and receive text updates. SlickText is an excellent tool to recruit, retain, and engage candidates, and it has continued to show positive results.

NTN Background Investigations. Starting in 2025, the FPC will begin using NTN to also conduct background investigations of police officer candidates. NTN background services provide the same thorough investigations and vetting of candidates as previously done, but at a much faster pace. NTN guarantees comprehensive, completed background reports within a 6-to-8-week turnaround time. This will further speed up the overall time of the testing process.

[Maintaining High Testing Standards](#)

The FPC is committed to ensuring that the members of the Milwaukee Police Department meet the highest standards. Candidates are and will continue to be put through a rigorous testing and vetting process designed to make sure those who are hired to be police officers are intelligent, honest, and dedicated public servants well qualified for the critical role of keeping the public safe.

Written Test, Oral Interview, Writing Sample Exercise

The first step in the testing process is the written test. The FPC uses tests that are validated by an outside third party to measure aptitude for and compatibility with the position. The testing process is overseen by the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners, which is dedicated to building and maintaining a qualified and representative police force, and the testing is administered by an experienced and professional civilian staff.

Oral Board Interview & Writing Sample

Candidates who pass the written test are invited to participate in the oral board interview and writing sample. This component of the examination process is arranged and scheduled by FPC staff, but the panel members consist of former, current, and retired MPD personnel who have been properly trained by a third-party vendor to evaluate the interviews. Oral board interviews are a crucial step in assessing candidates' suitability for public safety roles, evaluating their communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and overall demeanor. Similarly, the writing sample exercise ensures candidates have ability to adequately communicate in writing, such as through report writing.

Physical Ability Test

Candidates who pass the previous sections are invited to complete the physical readiness test (PRT). [The Wisconsin Law Enforcement Standards Board \(LESB\)](#) is the certifying authority in Wisconsin for police officers, and they set the standards for the PRT. See the following table for an overview of the standards:

Physical Readiness Test	Entrance to the Police Academy	Graduation from the Police Academy
1.5-mile run	20:20 minutes	16:57 minutes
300m run	82 seconds	68 seconds
Push-ups	18	23
Sit-ups	24	30
Vertical Jump	11.5 inches	14 inches
Agility Run	23.4 seconds	19.5 seconds

LESB has also produced a [video overview of the test](#).

Background Investigation

When we are ready to begin processing background investigations, applicants are asked to submit information for review. After a full investigation using the information provided, candidates are interviewed by an investigator. A key qualification for a police officer is honesty and integrity, so providing false, misleading, or incomplete information can lead to disqualification from the hiring process.

Eligible List

Candidates who successfully pass the examination process are placed on an eligible list for police officer, with ranking based upon the test scores plus any applicable preference points (see below).

Pre-employment Medical Examination, Psychological Evaluation, and Drug Test

Individuals offered employment must pass a pre-employment medical examination, psychological evaluation, and drug test as a condition of employment.

Appointments

Final appointment as a police officer is contingent upon passing all pre-employment components, the number of vacancies authorized to be filled, and approval by the FPC Board.

Preference Points

Preference points may be added to the final passing score in accordance with state statutes and [FPC Rules](#).

Residency Requirement

Within six months of being hired, police officers must comply with the city of Milwaukee's residency requirement for designated emergency personnel and must reside within 15 miles of the jurisdictional boundaries of the city.

Improving Diversity

The FPC conducts recruitment for the police officer position through a lens of equity and inclusion. Over the last few years, the FPC has been very intentional about developing a diverse and inclusive police department. In light of the national conversations surrounding the need for police reforms and the low representation of women and minorities in the law enforcement profession, the FPC employs recruitment campaigns intentionally designed to increase diversity in MPD and attract honest, compassionate, and dedicated officers to the police force.

As noted above, the FPC utilizes several different tactics to recruit diverse talent.

- We emphasize events tied to MPS events and activities to build a pipeline of diverse candidates.
- We recruit at open houses, community events, faith-based organizations, and cultural hubs like the Juneteenth Day Celebration, Mexican Fiesta, and Puerto Rican Fest, among many other strategic locations and events.
- We employ targeted advertising directed at historically underrepresented groups.
- Since 2023, the FPC has also expanded its advertisement partnerships to maximize our recruitment reach and impact.

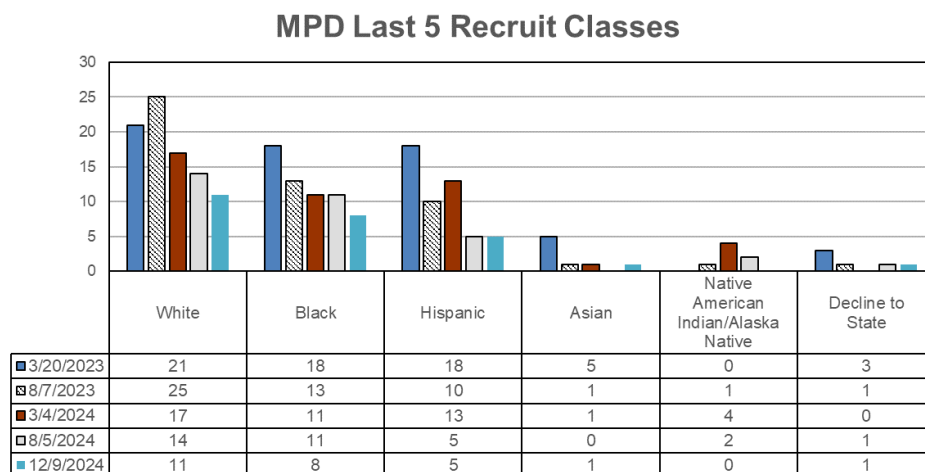
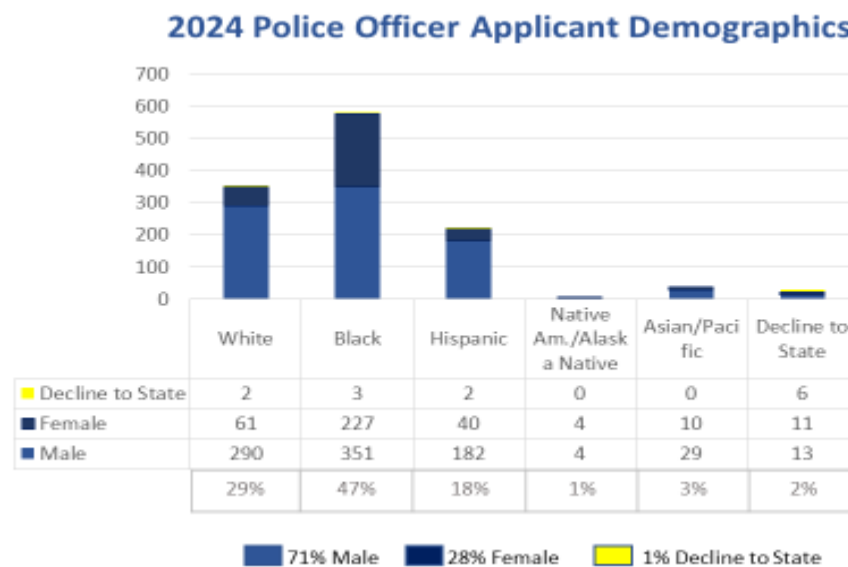
Keeping potential candidates educated and engaged in the hiring process is also critical. The recruitment and hiring process can be extensive, so retaining the recruited talent before appointment is important. To do this, the FPC:

- Hosts extensive workshops and prep sessions as an equity and retention strategy to prepare candidates for exams and the physical readiness test.
- Maintains regular contact with candidates through email and text message reminders to increase show rates for applications, events, and exams.

- Utilizes exams that have been reviewed to ensure no potential bias in phrasing or vocabulary is used, which also include topics related to cultural proficiency.

Our most recent recruitments have produced highly diverse eligible lists and recruit classes that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of our city. As the Crime and Justice Institute (CJI) noted in the Fifth Annual Report on the *Collins* Settlement Agreement, “With its full complement of staff and a renewed sense of stability, the FPC was able to focus on new and improved strategies for recruitment and promotions of police personnel. The increase in outreach to the community, with a specific focus on members of the Black, Hispanic, and Asian communities, as well as women from all backgrounds is particularly important for achieving compliance with Settlement Agreement section IV. The demographics of the recruit classes show the results of these efforts.”

In terms of our recruitment and outreach “success,” the following statistics are illustrative:



Key Performances Indicators, Current Successes, and Future Goals

The FPC's key performance indicators (KPIs) include:

- The number of applicants recruited every 4 months and every year.
- The number of recruits hired per class.
- The overall hire rate, that is, the percentage of applicants who are actually hired into the academy.

Again, police officer recruitment and hiring continues to be a nationwide challenge. Despite the challenging environment, the FPC's current recruitment efforts are already producing results that are as good as or better than several other similar jurisdictions.

For example, in 2024 the FPC recruited a total of 1,291 new police officer applicants who met the minimum qualifications. This amounted to approximately 27 new applicants on average per week.



In addition, the FPC appointed and hired 116 new police officer recruits in 2023, and 110 new recruits in 2024. The overall hire rate from our 2023 recruitment was approximately 9%, although this rate fell to around 7% for the first batch of applicants recruited in 2024.

The total number of law enforcement officers at MPD as of February 2025 is 1,572. This represents a decrease of over 300 officers from 2018, when MPD's sworn strength was around 1,900. As can be seen from the below chart, this decrease was largely due to the limited number and sizes of recruit classes that were funded between 2019 and 2021.

Year	Recruit Class	Budgeted No.	Actual No. Appointed	Actual No. Graduated	%
2019	Class 1 - 2019	50	48	37	90%
2020	Class 1 - 2020	65	65	62	95%
2021	Class 1 - 2021	30	30	26	87%
2022	Class 1 - 2022	65	59	50	85%
	Class 2 - 2022	65	62	51	82%
2023	Class 1 - 2023	65	65	51	78%
	Class 2 - 2023	50	51	41	80%
2024	Class 1 - 2024	65	46	37	80%
	Class 2 - 2024	65	35	25	71%
	Class 3 - 2024	65	29	25*	-

* Currently remaining in the Academy

For purposes of Act 12, MPD's average adjusted sworn strength (excluding recruits and grant funded officers) increased from 1,454.7 FTEs in 2023 to 1,466.1 FTEs in 2024, a net increase of 11.3 FTEs.

By comparison, other comparable jurisdictions have fared no better, and in some cases, far worse. For example, a recent [memorandum](#) from the city's Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB) identified three police departments as "having success with recruitment": Cleveland, Minneapolis, and Seattle. Notably, all three of these jurisdictions have recruitment tools and funding that Milwaukee does not.

Cleveland has had relative comparable success. As noted in the LRB memo, in 2023 the Cleveland Police Department received 1,299 new police officer applications, the highest it had received since the public-safety recruiting crisis materialized in 2021. However, Cleveland offers new police officers a \$5,000 structured signing bonus, has an 8-member recruitment team (compared to the FPC's 2), and has already been allocated funding allowing it to hire an advertising company that has assisted the department with marketing and recruitment strategy.

By contrast, the Minneapolis Police Department received 1,125 new police officer applications as of October 21, 2024, as noted in the LRB memo. Yet, it only hired 76 new recruits in 2024. This occurred despite the fact that the Minneapolis Police Department has a 5-member civilian recruitment team, launched a \$1 million recruitment campaign in 2024, and offers a starting salary of \$90,000 per year (compared to \$63,535 in Milwaukee).

In Seattle, the police department received over 2,000 applications in 2023, according to the LRB memo; however, that department hired only 72 new officers in 2024. Again, this occurred despite the fact that the Seattle Police Department offers a \$7,500 signing bonus to new recruits, a \$50,000 signing bonus for laterals, has a starting salary of \$103,000 per year, and launched a new branding/marketing campaign with an advertising agency in 2023.

Despite the relative success Milwaukee has experienced in recent years, the FPC believes we can and will do even better in the future. We are hopeful that our new initiatives (as such contracting with Safeguard Recruiting, as well as our new streaming ad buys), together with our existing efforts, will allow us to increase the number of police officer applicants the city receives. Our goal for 2025 is to see an increase in applications to a total of 1,500 or more during the year. In subsequent years, we are hopeful we can generate even more interest in the police officer position, as our new initiatives begin to bear even more fruit.

With respect to officer hiring, our ultimate goal is to hire 3 classes per year, each with 65 recruits. While this is a challenging goal we have set, it will be attainable in the near future if we can increase our hiring rate to around 10%. Our recent initiatives like online testing, recruiting police laterals, and efforts to reduce the time the testing process takes, are specifically designed to accomplish this goal.

Recruiting and Hiring Plan – Firefighter

Recruiting and hiring for the firefighter position has not presented the same challenges as police recruiting in recent years. The FPC recruitment and hiring efforts for the Milwaukee Fire Department (MFD) have nevertheless utilized many of the same strategies and tactics as we do for MPD.

For instance, the FPC uses a combination of on-the-ground recruiting at community events and job fairs, targeted advertising, and initiatives to reduce barriers in the testing and hiring process.

Recruiting Initiatives

Flyers are distributed at all public libraries in addition to a variety of community centers and gyms.

SlickText. As with police candidates, the FPC sends SlickText reminders to people who have signed up to be notified once the firefighter recruitment opens in summer 2025. There are currently over 1,000 subscribers on the list.

Media. The FPC will reach out to Telemundo and other news stations to cover the opening of our annual firefighter recruitment.

Social Media. The FPC is collaborating with the MFD to create an MFD Newsletter. We anticipate this newsletter will launch in May 2025. This will be used as a tool to generate interest and help keep candidates engaged in the process.

Pop-up Tables. Recruitment pop-up tables throughout Milwaukee will be used, such as in grocery stores like El Rey, gyms, and Menards.

Paid Advertisement. Facebook advertisements targeting women will run while applications are being accepted. These ads will run alongside a radio advertisement campaign we also intend to launch. However, given that the firefighter position does not face the same challenges police officer does when it comes to recruiting, the bulk of the FPC's recruitment plan for the firefighter position will rely heavily on community outreach and less on paid advertisement.

Testing and Hiring Initiatives

As with the police department, the FPC is also committed to reducing barriers in the firefighter hiring process, while at the same maintaining high testing standards and promoting diversity.

Elimination of Citizenship Requirement. In 2022, the FPC amended its Board Rules to remove the citizenship requirement for the firefighter and fire cadet positions. The rule change allows individuals who are lawful permanent residents or otherwise legally eligible to work in the

United States to apply for and become firefighters or fire cadets. This rule change was designed to expand the potential pool of applicants for these positions, improve fairness in the selection process, and help to increase diversity within the MFD.

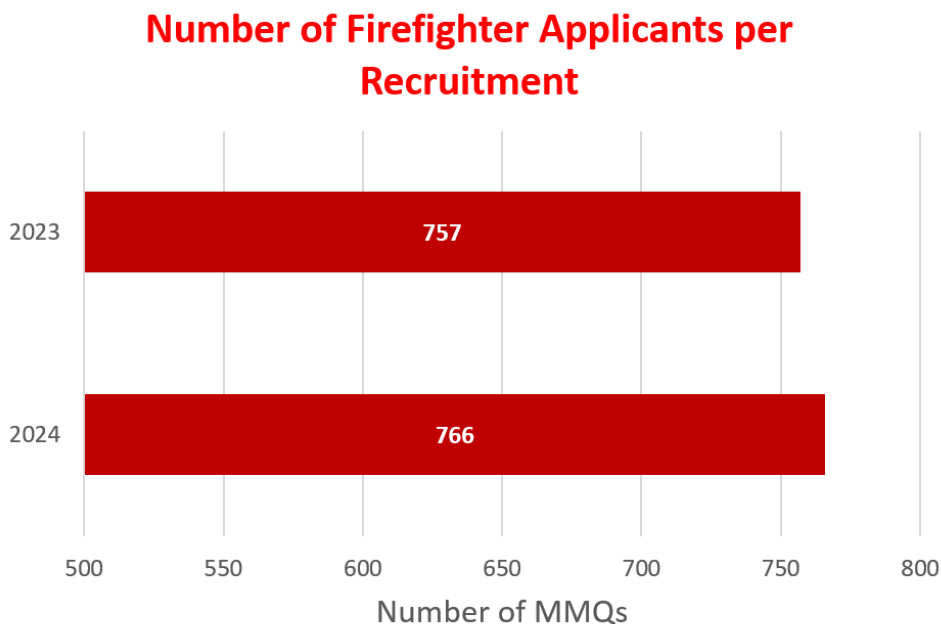
Regular, Yearly Recruitments. In 2023, the FPC moved to a consistent recruitment cycle for the firefighter position, where applications are accepted every year during the summer months. Like continuous recruitment for police officers, this regular recruitment cycle is designed to be more applicant focused by giving potential candidates more opportunities to apply. It also provides our recruiting staff with more opportunities to engage candidates, solicit feedback, and adapt their approaches to improve the process.

Online testing. Although the FPC moved to online testing for the police department in late 2024, we have utilized this option for the fire department since 2023 (through the same vendor, NTN).

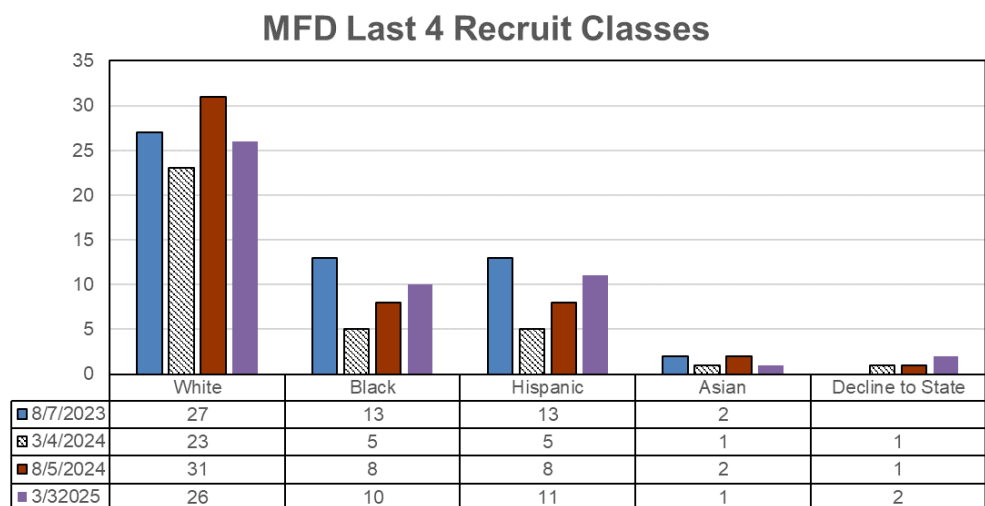
Current Successes

The FPC's recruiting and hiring efforts for the Milwaukee Fire Department have met with considerable success. MFD is now on a path of sustainable growth.

Since the passage of Act 12 in July 2023, MFD has increased its daily staffing level from 192 to 207. MFD's total sworn strength has increased to a total of 773 members, with only 5 current vacancies. In addition, the FPC's last two firefighter recruitments yielded over 700 qualified applicants both times.



While some progress has been made in diversifying the fire department, as can be seen through the graph below, the FPC and MFD still have more work to do on this front. Both agencies are fully committed to this endeavor and ready to meet this ongoing challenge.



Conclusion

In summary, the FPC—in partnership with the Milwaukee Police and Fire Departments—has navigated significant challenges in recent years related to recruiting and staffing Milwaukee’s public safety departments. These challenges underscore the importance of our collective responsibility for ensuring that the Milwaukee Fire and Police Departments are fully staffed with the very best police officers and firefighters. While we are proud of our work on this front to date, we know there is more work and challenges that lie ahead. We look forward to building on our momentum and progress to realize even greater success in the coming years.

3/17/2025