

Marketing Plan for Fire Department Recruitment - 2023

THE BRAVE. THE STRONG.



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Table of Contents

The Communications & Marketing Plan for Recruitment

Introduction 3-4

Plan Overview 5-7

Communications & Marketing Tactics 7-8

Implementation 8

Budget 9

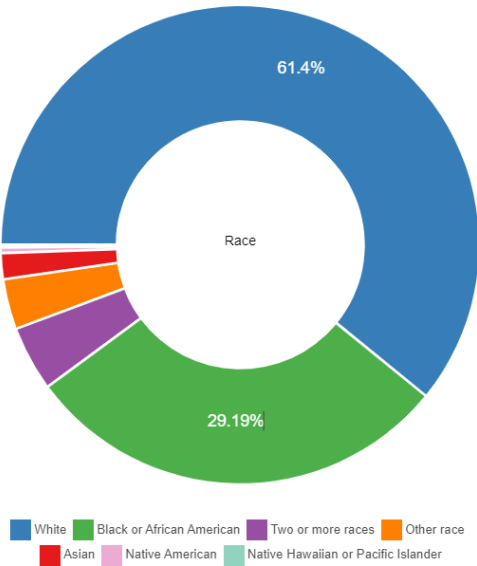
Measurement 9

Recommended Designs to Support Brand Message 9-10

Introduction

Established in 1877, the City of Gastonia is the 13th largest city in North Carolina with a 2023 population of 82,721. The city is currently growing at a rate of 0.96% annually and its population has increased by 2.9% since its last recorded population of 80,392 in 2020. The average household income in Gastonia is \$68,119. The median age is 37.8 years – 36.5 years of age for males and 39.3 years of age for females.

Population by Race



Race	Population	Percentage (of total)
White	47,057	61.4%
Black or African American	22,373	29.19%
Two or more races	3,283	4.28%
Other race	2,503	3.27%
Asian	1,242	1.62%
Native American	165	0.22%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	12	0.02%

Source: Word Population Review

Gastonia is a two-time *All-America City* designated by the National Civic League. A short distance from Charlotte, our City continues to become a vibrant community – offering a diverse quality of life to our residents with the promise of a sustainable and viable economic future.

The Gastonia Fire Department

The Gastonia Fire Department was first established in 1901 by a group of volunteer citizens under the command of George G. Glenn as Chief. During those times, equipment was scarce and almost nonexistent. The only fire hose available was wound on a small hand reel, which was pushed or carried to fires. In 1905, a team of “fine fire horses” were purchased, and L. L. Jenkins donated a fire wagon and some harnesses. This became the first official fire apparatus for the Gastonia Fire Department.

Since then, the Department has grown by leaps and bounds with the 18 Fire Chiefs who have led the department throughout the years. From the first official fire station on South Street in 1901, to the newest building, the department headquarters and Station 1 built in 2002, the Gastonia Fire Department continues to grow to serve the public. The Special Operations Division consists of two branches: hazardous materials mitigation, and technical rescue. The 39 members of this division are cross trained in rescue and hazardous materials with additional specialty training. The fire

Department's Life Safety Division is responsible for fire code enforcement, fire investigations, and life safety education for citizens.

Today, the Department has a total of eight fire stations and more than 144 firefighters who have the privilege of operating state-of-the-art equipment to ensure the safety of the citizens of Gastonia.

Our Mission

Save lives and property, and to proudly serve the citizens and visitors of the City of Gastonia.

Firefighter Recruitment

The Department established a Recruitment Committee to identify and use all local and regional resources available to attract more applicants to the Fire Department. Realizing that communities are changing, the Department is committed to identifying resources, time, and talent to recruiting qualified individuals who can meet today's challenges while upholding its mission, vision, and values.

Recruitment Goals

The Gastonia Fire Department has established these recruitment goals it would like to achieve during the next three to six months:

- The Department seeks to hire four positions and establishes a hiring list for new positions yearly.
- Attend more community events, job fairs, other events that will increase exposure to a pool of qualified candidates.
- Identify more ways to promote that the GFD has open positions.

Current Recruitment Efforts

The Department currently uses social media posts, websites, word of mouth, attends job fairs and fire academies to recruit qualified candidates. The Fire Department has never experienced recruitment challenges before now, as the number of applicants has plummeted over the past five years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, applicants' ability to pass testing, etc.

THE PLAN OVERVIEW

The Communications & Marketing Plan for Recruitment (3-6 months)

The Gastonia Fire Department recognizes the value of incorporating strategic communications and marketing tactics that will extend its reach to a wider audience more than its current recruitment efforts. GFD leadership is committed to working with the Communications & Marketing Department to implement a robust plan that will support its recruitment goals. The Department lacks a brand message that will appeal to potential candidates and move them to apply. This plan builds on the Department's current recruitment efforts and identifies a strategic mix of marketing communications tactics that will achieve its recruitment goals.

The plan will be implemented August through October 2023 and extended to January 2024 if necessary.

Communications and Marketing Goals

We have identified three goals for this plan:

- (1) Create print and visual messaging that supports the GFD's recruitment goals.
- (2) Create memorable messaging that resonates with the target audience and inspires GFD officers and staff to champion the brand image.
- (3) Identify and implement low-cost and no-cost marketing communications tactics that will effectively reach the target audience.

Assets, Challenges, Opportunities

The list below identifies the Department's assets, challenges, and opportunities related to recruiting qualified candidates.

Assets to Recruit Qualified Candidates

- ✓ Competitive benefits package, pay, recognition.
- ✓ Desirable location, affordable housing, and lifestyle.
- ✓ Opportunities for advancement.
- ✓ On-site health clinic.
- ✓ Comprehensive training and certifications.
- ✓ State-of-the-art equipment.
- ✓ Solid department leadership.
- ✓ Excellent reputation in the regional fire service community.

Challenges for Recruitment Efforts

- ✓ Competition with private sector for top talent and salary.
- ✓ Fewer graduates seeking "blue collar" type jobs.
- ✓ Attracting diverse candidates.

Opportunities for Recruitment Efforts

- ✓ Special Separation Pay
- ✓ Opportunities for Advancement
- ✓ Additional fire stations within the near future.

Target Audience

This plan will incorporate the following demographics of the target audience:

- Age 20 and older and physically fit.
- Residing anywhere locally and throughout the U.S.
- Minimum education: high school diploma or GED and/or higher education degree.
- Diverse groups (gender and ethnic groups).

Brand Message

Branding includes the activities associated with presenting a positive image – in this case, about GFD’s hiring opportunities. A good brand message should create an emotional attachment with the target audience that delivers on its promise.

What is GFD’s Brand Message?

The Gastonia Fire Department has not adopted a brand message and seeks to establish one that resonates with the public, reflects its mission, and generates a call to action.

Suggested Brand Messaging

The Department believes that firefighting is a rewarding and exciting job that provides structure and comradery. The public would most likely agree that firefighters are vital first responders.

Some suggested taglines to consider are:

“THE BRAVE. THE STRONG.”

“See Yourself Here”

“Ignite Your Career”

“Make a Difference”

“I Make a Difference”

Note: The Department’s brand message will also be translated into Spanish to resonate with Spanish-speaking audiences, and we will use appropriate media outlets and social media platforms to carry our message.

COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING TACTICS

We will execute the following tactics to support the brand message based on budget and availability. These tactics will be evaluated at the end of three months to evaluate effectiveness.

- ✓ Social Media
- ✓ Advertising/Promotion
- ✓ Media Relations
- ✓ Special Events
- ✓ Video

Advertising

This plan focuses on two tactics: print and outdoor advertising.

- Print advertising.
 - Spanish language newspaper (1)
 - Fire Service magazine (TBC)
- Outdoor advertising in a high-traffic area.
 - Billboard (1)

Video Production

Repurpose the Department’s current recruitment video so that it resonates with the target audience and features the brand message. Themes will highlight recruitment and community involvement. The video will be sent for broadcast consideration on the following platforms and can be used during presentations.

- Gaston County Government Access Channel
- Social Media
- Department and City Websites
- YouTube Channel

Media Relations

We will pitch positive media stories about the GFD and its recruitment efforts to local media outlets.

<u>Print</u>	<u>Broadcast (short list)</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gaston Gazette• Spanish language newspaper	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WCNC-TV• WFAE Radio• WSOC-TV• WBTV• WCCB-TV• Queen City News• Gaston County Podcast

Social Media

The Department uses its Facebook, Nextdoor, and Instagram social media platforms to inform the public about hiring opportunities. This plan will use these platforms as a tactic to reach qualified candidates and include the City’s social media platforms to enhance the messaging.

Special Events

The Department has identified several recruitment events to promote hiring:

- Fire Truck Fridays
- College Fairs
- Job Fairs
- Fire Department Open House

IMPLEMENTATION

Below is the preliminary timeline to implement the tactics of the plan:

Task	Estimated Timeline
<u>Print Advertising</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Gaston Gazette- Spanish-language newspaper (1 ad)	August, October 2023
<u>Outdoor Advertising</u> Billboard (1)	August – December 2023
<u>Social Media</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Weekly posts on social platforms throughout the campaign weeks.-	Marketing & Communications Department will work with GFD Recruiter to determine specific dates for posts.
<u>Media Relations</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Media pitches throughout the campaign, depending on availability of topics.	August – December 2023
<u>Special Events</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Job fairs- College fairs- Fire Truck Fridays	To be determined by GFD
<u>Recruitment Video</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Begin assessing current video to determine if it can be repurposed for use on social media platforms and YouTube channel.	To be determined by Communications & Marketing Department
<u>Website</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Marketing & Communications Department will work with GFD Recruiter to determine best placement on the City's main page and/or department pages.	August – December 2023

BUDGET (estimate)

We estimate that approximately \$4,575 is needed to implement this marketing and communications plan within the timeline indicated above.

- Video production (TBC)	2,000.00
- Spanish language ads (1)	275.00
- Billboard cover artwork	<u>175.00</u>
	\$2,450.00

MEASUREMENT

We will rely on various metrics to evaluate the success of our plan:

- Social media engagement
 - Facebook: likes, shares | Instagram: views, engagement
- Print advertising – distribution
- Outdoor advertising – reach
- Media relations – media mentions
- Special Events – anecdotal data events – attendance

After the six-month timeline, the Communications & Marketing Department will meet with the GPD Recruitment Committee to determine if goals were met and if an extension of this plan is necessary.

Suggested Design Concepts to Support Brand Message

- Designs include brand message and call to action.
- Images will reflect the target audience and include Spanish translation.
- Layout/design can be adjusted for the platform/channel in which the design will be used.



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