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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**COMBATTING THE RESISTANCE TO CHANGE**

*Using research for a safer and more inclusive fire service.*

**MINNESOTA, September 22, 2022** – On September 3rd, Women in Fire was awarded \$769,717.28 in Fire Prevention and Safety grant funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S)

The fire service (FS) is at a precipice of change. With increasing community needs, decreasing budgets, and evolving needs to “do more with less”, it is not surprising that firefighters (FFs), leaders, and organizations nationwide are exhausted. Understaffed organizations are a threat to the health and safety of responding FFs and the communities they serve. National discussions are focused on where to find the most qualified personnel to fill gaps and provide an opportunity for respite to those serving relentlessly on the front lines. This need partnered with increasing pressure for public entities to mirror the communities they serve is compelling the FS to look at their values and culture related to diversity equity and inclusion (DEI).

With our current FEMA-funded project, we have made great strides in compiling evidence-based information for clinicians, FFs, and fire department (FD) leadership focused on reproductive health and creating inclusive, diverse environments. We will build on our current success working with our stakeholder panels of qualified FFs, organizational leaders, occupational medicine physicians, and scientists to develop and disseminate women’s health information including DEI, cancer, modifiable risk factors, and reproductive health. The lack of literature available on women FFs likely impacts recruitment and retention. With an extreme national shortage of workers due to COVID-19 and increased burnout, the FS must start recruiting from a diverse pool of candidates. This project is directly responsive to these needs. We propose the following goals:

During the grant period of September 2, 2022 and September 1, 2024, in partnership with NDRI-USA and the NVFC, we will work to create a more inclusive environment through comprehensive evidence-based courses designed to change FF behavior and promote more inclusive, diverse FDs. The main focus points of this grant will be:

**Reproductive Health** – One noted gap is the lack of policies in place to address reproductive health, maternity leave, light duty, breastfeeding and return to work which will be a key focus of this project.

**The National Report Card** - It is imperative to understand why the number of women in the FS remains so low, what current FD efforts focused on DEI have been successful, FS perceptions of DEI, and how this may impact recruitment and retention.

**Fire Camps** - Though more and more camps are being created, there have been no formal examination of the camps, including how many exist, how many women are trained, or a network created to connect these efforts.

**Women in Fire Mission Statement:**

Leading the fire service community by providing training, education, advocacy, resources, mentoring, and networking in order to enhance the fire service.

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