

## LEADERSHIP PROFILE



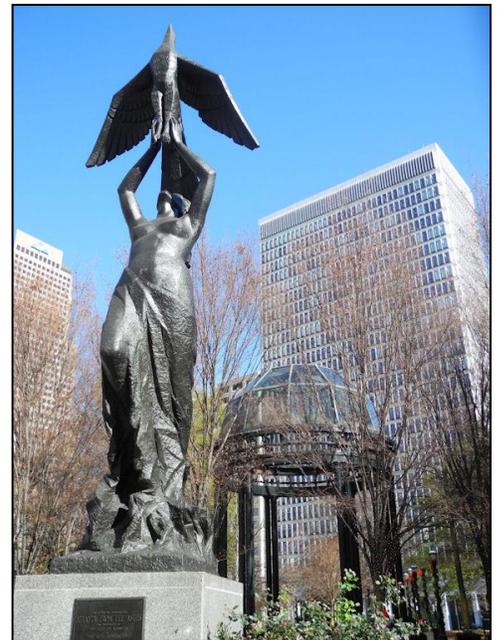
### Chief, Fire Rescue Department City of Atlanta Atlanta, GA

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#### THE CONTEXT

Established as the Atlanta Fire Department in 1882, what is now known as the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department (“AFRD”) has matured into a multifaceted, all-hazards emergency response organization widely recognized locally and nationally for operational excellence and commitment to community.

The City of Atlanta is at the core of one of the nation’s most dynamic metro areas. Encompassing a population of just under 5.8 million,<sup>1</sup> Metro Atlanta constitutes the country’s ninth largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA). The City itself is far smaller, of course, home to about one-tenth of the Metro area’s population, but the city’s policies, priorities and decisions—and AFRD’s—have an outsized influence on the entire region.



With the February 2018 retirement of Chief Joel Baker, a 30-year veteran of the department, Mayor [Keisha Lance Bottoms](#) has among her first priorities the

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<sup>1</sup> Per US Census Bureau estimates, 2017

appointment of a strong chief to leverage the department's proud heritage, maintain and even strengthen the department's commitment to excellence, and help ensure that Atlanta remains a leader in an evolving public safety environment.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

The Atlanta Fire Rescue Department (AFRD) provides emergency services within the City of Atlanta's 135 square-mile footprint, handling some 100,000 calls in 2017 for the City of Atlanta, for Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport (the world's busiest) and for neighboring jurisdictions when mutual aid is requested.<sup>2</sup> A recent annexation has added the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention and Emory University to AFRD's service area.

AFRD's mission is "To provide prompt quality services to our stakeholders that promote safety and security, enhance sustainability, and enrich the quality of life through professional development and dedication to service." As the city's leader of fire and rescue services, the Chief must embody the qualities of transparency, responsiveness and accountability that the new Mayor espouses for her administration.

Reporting to the Mayor through the City's Chief Operating Officer, the Chief of Atlanta Fire Rescue faces challenges different from those of his or her predecessors. For example:

- The City's finances, and therefore the department's, have improved markedly over the past two administrations, and yet there is never enough money to fund all the desired priorities, and thus attention to operating efficiencies remains top of mind.
- AFRD, known for its comprehensive training programs, is expected to be even more impactful as a planned training facility becomes a reality, but the department's reputation for effective training also makes Atlanta prime recruiting ground for fire departments elsewhere.
- Retention issues become even more pressing in light of the significant percentage of long-serving personnel who become eligible for retirement over the next four years. While there is no staffing crisis looming, the implications for leadership planning and development are significant.



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<sup>2</sup> The department protects over 3000 high-rise buildings, 23 miles of the rapid rail system, and 60 miles of interstate highway. The five stations at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport support a facility used by over one million passengers from 100+ countries each year.

AFRD is one of only 19 fire departments in the country to be accredited by the [Center for Public Safety Excellence](#) as well as maintain a Class I ISO rating.

The City’s official website can be accessed [here](#), and AFRD’s web site is [here](#). Other useful websites that describe some of the context in which the department operates include the [Atlanta Regional Commission](#) and the [Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce](#).

## THE RELATIONSHIPS

The Chief of Fire Rescue will lead a department of more than 1100 personnel (sworn and civilian). Among the major relationships important to the role:

<b>Reports to:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mayor of Atlanta (through the City’s Chief Operating Officer)</li> </ul>
<b>Executive staff (current bios <a href="#">here</a>):</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Deputy Chief</li> <li>• Deputy Chiefs over each of the five major divisions:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Airport Fire Division</li> <li>○ Emergency Medical Services Division</li> <li>○ Field Operations Division</li> <li>○ Support Services Division</li> <li>○ Technical Services Division</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Key relationships:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Atlanta City Council</a></li> <li>• Other City of Atlanta department heads</li> <li>• Neighborhood constituencies</li> <li>• General Manager, <a href="#">Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation</a></li> </ul>

## THE LOCATION

For many years, Atlanta has been the economic capital of the Southeast and one of the most dynamic metropolitan areas of the country. Regularly cited for its livability, the metro Atlanta area is home to nearly six million residents.

The Atlanta area is home to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the world’s busiest, as well as major educational institutions<sup>3</sup> and such nationally prominent public-benefit organizations as American Cancer Society,

<sup>3</sup> Agnes Scott College; Atlanta University Center, the country’s largest consortium of historically black colleges and universities; Emory University; Georgia State University, the fifth largest public university in the country; and Georgia Tech

the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CARE, The Carter Center and Habitat for Humanity International. Metro Atlanta is also home to more Fortune 500 companies than can be claimed by all but two other US cities.

A major center of tourism, Atlanta is also home to the world's largest aquarium and four major sports teams. Atlanta is hosting the Super Bowl in 2019 and the Final Four in 2020.

## THE RESPONSIBILITIES

The Chief of Atlanta's Department of Fire Rescue is the city leader with primary responsibility for fire safety and emergency services. Heading a department with over 1100 employees and a budget of more than \$100 million, the Chief is the city's principal voice for fire safety, advocate for professional standards and day-to-day leader of the finest cadre of fire and rescue personnel in the South.

Managing a balance between effective fire management, community relations and fiscal restraint will require nuanced leadership skills. Among the key priorities:



- 1. Budgetary stewardship.** Although economically healthy, Atlanta faces economic pressures similar to those of other cities nationwide. AFRD personnel supported the pension reform initiative key to the City's economic turnaround several years ago, but the current two-tier system (defined benefit or defined contribution, depending on date of hire) keeps pay issues at the forefront.

The Chief must find ways to leverage the department's available financial resources to maximize public safety impact while minimizing employee dissatisfaction.

- 2. Leadership stability.** For a variety of reasons, Atlanta has had five Chiefs, Acting Chiefs or Interim Chiefs in the past decade. Even though two of the chiefs served in the chief's role two times each, that number of changes at the top of an organization suggests Atlanta has been through more leadership changes than any informed observer would suggest is optimal.

Accordingly, Mayor Bottoms seeks to appoint a chief who can be expected to have sufficient running room to lead the department through

several budget and policy cycles. The best candidates will be able to demonstrate consistent support for effective leadership development in their current roles.

- 3. Operational excellence.** The Chief must embody a high standard of operational excellence. In addition to exhibiting a fundamental commitment to public safety, the Chief should show by his or her own actions and career progression a commitment to personal growth, professional competence and continuous improvement. The innate ability to relate to men and women in the firehouse will be as important as the ability to represent the department with city and civic leadership.
- 4. Community connectedness.** The fire department is one of the city's treasured institutions, and citizens take personally any decision or action perceived to have a negative effect on their neighborhoods' safety. It is important for the Chief to embody a connection to community, broadly construed, so that even the toughest decisions take place within a context of transparency, respect and accountability.

The need for connectedness also applies to the Chief's relationships with peers in the City's other departments as well as to constituents and stakeholders across the metro area.

## THE CANDIDATE

The City of Atlanta is an equal opportunity employer, and a diverse slate of compelling candidates is being developed for formal consideration. The ideal candidate will have a strong public safety background, with emphasis on successful leadership exhibited in Atlanta and other similarly positioned fire departments.

In addition to solid competence in fire safety and leadership, demonstrated in part by the Executive Fire Officer designation, the search committee will be especially interested in the following experiences and attributes:

- A broad leadership perspective developed in demanding public safety and emergency management environments.
- Progressive executive-level experience in fire service and demonstrated acumen heading a significant fire and rescue operation (at least 350



strong, consistent with the IAFF definition of metropolitan departments), preferably within a community that mirrors Atlanta's complexity and diversity;

- The financial acumen to anticipate, understand and apply the City's budgeting realities.
- The fortitude and experience to lead an organization of considerable scope and complexity; a thorough understanding of what it takes to manage and champion a major fire department; and deeply ingrained respect for those on the front lines.
- A reputation for consistency and fairness; an attitude of accountability, both internally and externally.
- Demonstrated commitment to continuing education and professional development, both personally and system-wide.
- A respect for community presence, a commitment to community engagement, and the willingness to leverage new tools in enhancing community connections.
- A record of building, managing and mentoring high-performing teams.
- A management style that is collegial and collaborative and yet decisive and self-confident. Leaders who succeed in Atlanta routinely demonstrate the ability to work with people from various backgrounds, culturally and socio-economically, in an urban environment.
- Superior communications skills. Atlanta deserves an inspiring Chief who is a persuasive advocate for public safety and a compelling leader for the men and women of the department.

**For potential consideration or to recommend a prospect,  
please email**

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**or call Sam Pettway or Laura DiBacco**

**at**

**404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392)**

