

# **Program Guidance for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grants**

**May 2005**

This document provides a summary of the priorities for funding of the 2005 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grants of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Please read this program guidance carefully because it explains how to apply, what items can be requested, and how applications will be evaluated. The Interim Final Rule (once published), the applicants' online tutorial, and the Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) should also be reviewed when made available on the Website of the Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP) of DHS. Together, these four documents will provide applicants with the information they need to complete the online application. The online application will be available at [www.firegrantsupport.com](http://www.firegrantsupport.com) on or about May 31, 2005.



*Prepared by the Office for Domestic Preparedness and the U.S. Fire Administration*

## **Table of Contents**

Purpose of the SAFER Grants	3
Definitions	4
Application Process	5
Automated Application	6
Online Tutorial	6
Application	6
Application Overview	7
DUNS Number	8
Evaluation Process	8
Narrative Statement for Hiring of Firefighters Activity	9
Narrative Statement for Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activities	10
SAFER Grants Activity Priorities	10
Hiring of Firefighters Activity Priorities	11
Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity Priorities	13
Funding Limitations	16
Reasonableness of Request	16
Award Procedures	16
Grantee Responsibilities	17
Excess Funds	18

## PROGRAM GUIDANCE FOR THE SAFER GRANTS

The purpose of the SAFER grants is to award grants directly to volunteer, combination, and career fire departments to help the departments increase their cadre of firefighters. Ultimately, the goal is for SAFER grantees to enhance their ability to attain 24-hour staffing and thus assuring their communities have adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards. The SAFER grants have two activities that will help grantees attain this goal: 1) hiring of firefighters and 2) recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

The Hiring of Firefighters Activity involves a five-year grant to assist fire departments pay a portion of the salaries of newly hired firefighters. These newly hired positions must be in addition to authorized and funded active firefighter positions. Grantees must do everything in their power to maintain the number of authorized and funded positions as declared at the time of application **PLUS** the awarded new firefighter positions throughout the period of performance (five years). Grantees that fail to maintain this level of staffing risk losing all or a portion of their grant. Volunteer, combination, and non-profit career fire departments are all eligible to apply for assistance in hiring new firefighters. These grants require the awardee to match an increasing proportion of the salary over a four-year period; in the fifth year of the grant, the awardee must absorb the entire cost of any positions awarded as a result of the grant.

The long-term nature of the eligible activities under these grants makes it essential that an applicant's local governing body be involved in the application process. As such, each applicant will certify that their governing body has been informed of the applicant's intention to submit a SAFER grant application and that the local governing body acknowledges the commitment under the grant and that appropriate financial support will be secured for the applicant's cost-sharing obligations.

Once a SAFER funded position is filled, the funded position must remain filled until the end of the period of performance. During the five-year performance period, SAFER grantees must also maintain their staffing at a level equal or greater than their staffing level at the time of application. In the event that the staffing level falls below the staffing level at application, or if a funded position becomes vacant or otherwise inactive, we will consider the grantee to be in default of their grant agreement if the position is NOT filled for an extended period of time (six months or more). Grantees that do not fulfill their grant award obligations will be required to return the defaulted portion of the Federal funds disbursed for the funded position under the grant award. For example, if one of four positions funded by SAFER is vacated for an extended period time, we would require the grantee to remit all Federal funds disbursed for that one position.

The national standards that SAFER grants will help fire departments to meet are the standards prescribed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA):

- **NFPA 1710** Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public

by Career Fire Department (Section 5.2.4.2 – Initial Full Alarm Assignment Capability). This standard primarily applies to all-career fire departments and combination departments at the combination department’s election.

- **NFPA 1720** Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to Public by Volunteer Fire Departments (Section 4.3 – Staffing and Deployment). This standard primarily applies to all-volunteer fire departments, but may also apply to combination departments if the combination department does not elect to comply with the NFPA 1710 standard.

Note: The SAFER program is focused only on the staffing sections of these two standards. The National Fire Protection Association has established a special link [www.nfpa.org/SAFERActGrant](http://www.nfpa.org/SAFERActGrant) that provides text of the 2 sections of NFPA 1710 & NFPA 1720 that applies to the above.

The Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity provides assistance to awardees for periods of up to four years. The purpose of these grants is to assist with the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Volunteer departments, combination departments and local or statewide organizations that represent the interests of volunteer firefighters are eligible to apply for assistance under this activity.

Congress appropriated a total of \$65 million to the Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP) in DHS to carry out the activities of the SAFER grants. The authority for SAFER is derived from the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2201 et seq.) as amended by the re-designation of the second section 33 and section 34 as sections 35 and 36, respectively, and inserting a new section 34, entitled Expansion of Pre-September 11, 2001, Fire Grant Program of the U.S. Fire Administration. The appropriated funds are available until September 30, 2006.

## **Definitions**

For the purposes of the SAFER grants, the following definitions shall apply:

*Automatic-aid:* A dispatch process whereby fire departments are dispatched simultaneously on the initial alarm or where fire departments participate in “closest-unit” response dispatching.

*Career Fire Department:* An agency or organization in which all members receive financial compensation for their services.

*Combination Fire Department:* An agency or organization in which at least one active firefighter receives financial compensation for their services (including paid-on-call) and/or at least one active firefighter does not receive financial compensation for their services, other than life and health insurance and workers’ compensation insurance or a stipend payment such as paid-on-call.

*Fire Department:* An agency or organization that has a formally recognized arrangement with a State, territory, local, or tribal authority (city, county, parish, fire district, township, town, or other governing body) to provide fire suppression on a first-due basis to a fixed geographical area. Fire departments may be comprised of members who are all volunteer, all career, or combination of volunteer and career.

*Firefighter:* An individual having the legal authority and responsibility to engage in fire suppression; being employed by a fire department of a municipality, county, or fire district; being engaged in the prevention, control, and extinguishing of fires; and/or responding to emergency situations in which life, property, or the environment is at risk. This individual must be trained in fire suppression, but may also be trained in emergency medical care, hazardous materials awareness, rescue techniques, and any other related duties provided by the fire department.

*Initial Full Alarm Assignment:* Those personnel, equipment, and resources ordinarily dispatched upon notification of a structural fire.

*Mutual-aid:* A dispatch process whereby assisting fire departments are dispatched only when the first-arriving unit on a scene calls for assistance.

*Operational budget:* The budget that supports fire-related programs and/or emergency response activities (salaries, maintenance, equipment, apparatus, etc.).

*State:* For the purpose of these grants, “State” is defined as the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

*Staffing and Deployment:* The minimum staffing requirements to ensure that a sufficient number of members are available to operate safely and effectively.

*Volunteer Fire Department:* An agency or organization in which no member receives financial compensation (salary, wages, or stipend per call) for their services other than life and health insurance and workers’ compensation insurance. We consider a department to be mostly volunteer if 51 percent or more of its membership is made up of personnel who do not receive financial compensation for their services.

## **Application Process**

Eligible applicants can apply for a SAFER grant online via ODP’s “e-grants” application process. The online application can be accessed at the following websites: the USFA’s web site at [www.usfa.fema.gov](http://www.usfa.fema.gov), or ODP’s AFG website at [www.firegrantsupport.com](http://www.firegrantsupport.com).

Potential applicants must be aware that eligibility is contingent upon a stable budget. Grants will not be awarded to a municipality or other recipient whose annual

operational budget has been reduced below 80 percent of the average annual funding in the three years prior to the date of application. Such a condition will be an automatic disqualification.

Each department or organization can submit only one application per application period. The system will allow one authorized representative of a department to log in and create a username and password for the department. If an applicant has submitted previous applications to the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program or the Fire Prevention and Safety Grants, **PLEASE USE THE SAME USERNAME AND PASSWORD THAT YOU USED FOR YOUR PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS.** The selection of the authorized representative is at the discretion of each applicant.

### **Automated Application**

The SAFER grant application is automated and has many built-in “Help” screens and drop-down menus to assist you in completing the application throughout the application process. The application can be saved and retrieved as many times as you need while you’re filling it out, up to the deadline or submittal. ***But, once you’ve submitted your application, you cannot change it.*** Another positive feature of the automated system is that it will not allow you to submit an incomplete application, i.e., the system will alert you if you have not provided required information. Also, by submitting your application online, you will be automatically notified via e-mail that your application has been received.

### **Online Tutorial**

An online tutorial will be available via ODP’s AFG website to help applicants become familiar with the SAFER grants and the online grant application. This tutorial explains the SAFER grant priorities and the Program Guidance for SAFER. It also describes all application screens and provides information for applicants that will assist them in developing a comprehensive and well organized application.

Additionally, the tutorial will be accessible while the applicant completes the online application. By clicking the “Tutorial” button on the application screen, the user will be able to view the tutorial’s information about the specific application screen on which the user is currently working.

### **Application**

Applications for SAFER grants will be accepted on or about May 31, 2005, to June 28, 2005. Monitor the ODP and USFA websites for up-to-date information on the dates of the application period. Completed applications must be submitted electronically or otherwise received by the grants program office on or before the close of business (5 p.m. EDT) on the last day of the application period, June 28, 2005. No late, incomplete, or faxed applications will be accepted. No electronically submitted applications other than those submitted online via the automated grant application system will be accepted.

If you do not have access to the Internet, contact us directly (1-866-274-0960) to request a paper copy of the application via mail. ***We will not send the paper applications to you via overnight delivery, nor by fax or e-mail.*** The only legitimate paper application is the application that the grants program office sends you—do not use any paper application that you did not receive directly from the grants program office. Do not print the screens from the online application and submit them as your application. Any paper application that is not in the correct format will be deemed ineligible.

Paper applications are accepted but we discourage their use because of the inherent delays and mistakes associated with processing a paper application. Also, if awarded, applicants who submit paper applications must continue to manage their grants via paper, including payment requests, requests for modifications, reporting, etc. Whereas applications submitted via the electronic egrants system can do all of these functions online. Paper applications also don't have the built-in "Help" screens that are available to the online applicants. Finally, there are no assurances that your paper application is complete when submitted.

Paper applications submitted in by mail must be postmarked no later than four calendar days before the end of the application period. Assuming a June 28, 2005, end-date, applications that are postmarked after June 24, 2005, will not be accepted unless they are received before the end of the application period. Applications that are not submitted electronically must be mailed to the following address:

SAFER Grant Office Technical Assistance Center  
c/o U.S. Fire Administration  
16825 South Seton Avenue  
Emmitsburg, Maryland 21727-8998

The grants program office will not be responsible for applications mailed to any address other than the one listed above.

## **Application Overview**

The application includes general questions about your department (or organization) and your community, as well as questions regarding your proposed activity. After you have completed the general questions, you will be asked a series of questions relative to the activity you have selected. You will answer the questions that support your activity.

You also will be required to provide a written narrative statement describing your planned activity. The narrative portion of your application should provide the grants program office with specifics about your project or projects. There are specific elements that are required to be addressed in the narrative. These requirements are detailed in the appropriate activity sections below.

We recommend that you type your narrative offline in any word processing software, such as Word, Word Perfect, Notepad, etc. Once your narrative is complete, you can copy it or “cut-and-paste” it from your word-processing document into the Narrative Statement block in the application. Space for the narrative is limited, so your narrative should not exceed six pages. Do NOT type your narrative entirely in capital letters.

You may decide to hire or otherwise use a grant writer to assist you in the application process. This is allowable. However, you, as the applicant, are responsible for the information contained in your application. By submitting the application, you are certifying that all of the information contained therein is true and an accurate reflection of your department. Therefore, it is imperative that, before submission, you review all work produced by grant writers or other third parties on your behalf.

### **DUNS Number**

Effective October 1, 2003, all Federal grantees must obtain a DUNS number, (a unique nine-character identification number provided by the commercial company Dun & Bradstreet). The Federal government will use the DUNS number to better identify related organizations that are receiving funding under grants and cooperative agreements and to provide consistent name and address data for electronic grant applications. Additional information about DUNS numbers can be found on the Dun & Bradstreet website (<https://eupdate.dnb.com/requestoptions/government/ccrreg>).

There is no charge to obtain a DUNS number, and it is the applicant's responsibility to obtain one. Applicants are encouraged to apply for a DUNS number well in advance of the application period because it may take up to two weeks or more to obtain the number online. It is recommended that applicants request a DUNS number as soon as possible by calling 1-866-705-5711. When completing the online application, there is a special data field for entering the DUNS number. If applying on paper, use the box entitled “Federal Identifier” on the SF 424, Application for Federal Assistance, to enter the DUNS number. Be advised that this number is required for all Federal grant recipients, and there may not be any extensions granted for applicants who were unable to obtain their number prior to the end of the application period.

### **Evaluation Process**

All complete and eligible applications will be ranked based on the substance of the application relative to the established SAFER grant funding priorities. This relationship is determined from your answers to the activity-specific questions.

Volunteer and combination fire departments are eligible to apply for both the Hiring Firefighters Activity and the Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity on the same application. If a volunteer or combination fire department applies for assistance in both the hiring and recruitment activities, each activity will be scored

separately, then the scores will be weighted on a pro-rata basis based on the funding levels of each activity.

Applications that best address the SAFER grant funding priorities will score higher than those applications that are not directed toward the priorities. The applications that score the highest will be determined to be in the “competitive range.” A panel of at least three technical evaluation specialists will further evaluate the applications that are in the competitive range, i.e., the highest-ranked applications. These panelists will evaluate the application using your narrative along with the answers to the general questions and the activity-specific questions. Each application will be judged on its own merits—not against other applications.

When reviewing applications in the competitive range, the panelists will use the Narrative Statement and all the information contained in the application to determine the worthiness of the request for an award. The panelists will evaluate specific elements in the narratives depending on which activity the applicant is seeking assistance. The specific elements for the activities are as follows:

### **Narrative Statement for Hiring of Firefighters Activity**

The narrative statements for applications requesting assistance in hiring of firefighters must include the following elements, each of which will be evaluated by the panelists:

- A statement that describes why the applicant needs the grant funds, i.e., how the newly hired firefighters will be used within the department and a description of the specific benefit these firefighters will be to the fire department and community.
- A statement regarding how the community and current firefighters are at risk without the needed firefighters, and to what extent that risk will be reduced if the applicant is awarded.
- An explanation of the applicant’s inability to address the need without Federal assistance.
- A statement relating to how the applicant will ensure, to the extent possible, that they will seek, recruit, and hire members of racial and ethnic minority groups and women to increase their ranks within your department.
- A statement regarding how the applicant plans to meet the match requirements for the five years required under the grant award. This statement should include any long-term plans to retain the new firefighter positions.
- A statement regarding how the applicant plans to meet the requirement to ensure that firefighter positions filled under the SAFER grants are not discriminated against for, or prohibited from, engaging in volunteer activities in another jurisdiction during off-duty hours.

**Note:** These elements carry equal weight when factored into the panelists’ scores.

## **Narrative Statement for Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity**

The narrative statements for applications requesting assistance in the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters must include the following elements, each of which will be evaluated by the panelists:

- A statement that describes why the applicant needs the grant funds, i.e., how the recruitment of new firefighters and retention of current firefighters will be used within the department and a description of the specific benefit these firefighters will be to the fire department and community. This statement should include specifics about the recruitment and/or retention plan and what specific benefit the efforts would provide the community.
- A statement regarding how the community and current firefighters are at risk without the needed firefighters, and to what extent that risk will be reduced if the applicant is awarded.
- An explanation of the applicant's inability to address the need without Federal assistance.
- A statement relating to how the applicant will ensure, to the extent possible, that they will seek, recruit, and hire members of racial and ethnic minority groups and women to increase their ranks within your department.

**Note:** These elements carry equal weight when factored into the panelists' scores.

### **SAFER Grants: Activity Priorities**

As stated above, there are two activities in which applicants may request funding under the SAFER grants: 1) hiring of new firefighters and 2) recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Volunteer and combination fire departments are eligible to apply for both the Hiring of Firefighters Activity and the Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity on the same application. Career fire departments may apply for funding only in the Hiring of Firefighters Activity. Organizations that support volunteerism or otherwise have an interest in volunteer firefighters may apply only for Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity.

Keep in mind that we will use your answers to the activity-specific questions for our initial assessment. Your answers to these questions are the primary basis upon which we will determine whether your application warrants further evaluation. Applicants whose answers indicate that their activity is consistent with our established priorities (as outlined below) will have a better chance of reaching the competitive range and the second level of review than those applicants whose activities do not reflect the established priorities. Applicants who falsify their application or misrepresent their department or organization in any material manner will have their application deemed ineligible by the grants program office and referred for further action as appropriate.

The priorities of the SAFER grants activities are as follows:

## **Hiring of Firefighters Activity Priorities**

The goal of the hiring of firefighters activity is to award grants directly to volunteer, combination, and career fire departments to help the departments increase their cadre of frontline firefighters. Ultimately, the SAFER grants' goal is for grantees to enhance their ability to attain 24-hour staffing and thus assuring their communities have adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards.

Volunteer, combination and career fire departments are **eligible** to apply for the Hiring of Firefighters Activity. Municipalities and fire districts may submit applications on behalf of fire departments when the fire departments lack the legal status to do so, e.g., when the fire department falls within the auspices of the municipality or district. The Alaskan Village Initiative, a nonprofit organization incorporated in the State of Alaska, shall also be considered eligible for purposes of receiving assistance under these grants on behalf of Alaska Native villages. Each eligible applicant is limited to one application per application period.

Federal fire departments are **not eligible** for assistance under the SAFER Hiring of Firefighters Activity. Fire departments under contract to the Federal government and whose sole responsibility is the suppression of fires on Federal installations or lands are not eligible. Local and statewide organizations that represent the interests of volunteer firefighters are not eligible. Also not eligible are for-profit fire departments and organizations, (i.e., do not have specific nonprofit status or are not municipally based); fire stations that are not independent, or are part of, controlled by, or under the day-to-day operational direction of a larger fire department or agency; ambulance services, rescue squads, auxiliaries, dive teams, urban search and rescue teams; and, State and local agencies, such as a forest service, fire marshals, hospitals, and training offices. Non-Federal airport and/or port authority fire departments whose sole responsibility is suppression of fires on the airport grounds or port facilities are not eligible unless the airport/port fire department has a formally recognized arrangement with the local jurisdiction to provide fire suppression on a first-due basis outside the confines of the airport or port facilities.

Be advised that recipients of grants in the Hiring of Firefighters Activity must commit to a five-year period of performance during which the Federal contribution toward the costs of the salaries will diminish over the course of the performance period. The Federal share of salaries and associated benefits is limited to a total of \$100,000 per position over the course of the performance period. There is no funding limit for any application or any limit to the number of positions eligible for funding per application. However, applicants requesting large numbers of firefighters must make a strong case for their request. To maintain continued involvement, we will also limit the Federal share in each of the years of the grant. Based on a total funding cap of \$100,000 over five years, the maximum annual Federal share of funds that grantees can receive under SAFER for salary and benefits for newly hired firefighters will not exceed the lesser of the following:

Year One: 90 percent of the actual costs or \$36,000  
Year Two: 80 percent of the actual costs or \$32,000  
Year Three: 50 percent of the actual costs or \$20,000  
Year Four: 30 percent of the actual costs or \$12,000  
Year Five: No Federal share -- all costs borne by grantee

The industry minimum standards to be addressed include NFPA 1710 (Section 5.2.4.2 – Initial Full Alarm Assignment Capability), which primarily applies to all-career fire departments and at the combination department’s election, and NFPA 1720 (Section 4.3 – Staffing and Deployment), which primarily applies to all-volunteer fire departments and combination departments that do not elect to comply with NFPA 1710.

The highest priority under the hiring of firefighters activity would be to provide funding to departments who are not in compliance with the previously identified sections of NFPA 1710 or 1720 and who will come into compliance with the standards in the most economical manner. Applicants that will achieve the greatest percentage increase in compliance with the identified sections of NFPA 1710 or 1720 will receive greater consideration than applicants who are closer to compliance.

Applicants whose newly hired firefighters will be certified at the Firefighter I level (NFPA 1001) within the first six months of employment AND who will have the new recruits trained to Firefighter II level (or equivalent) within the first two years of the grant period, will be afforded higher consideration than applicants who will not be able to achieve such results. Applicants who will have trained their new recruits to have EMS certification to the minimum level established by the local fire department will also receive higher consideration.

Departments’ call volume will be factored into the initial evaluation. Departments that respond to a high number of incidents will receive higher consideration than departments from similar communities (urban, suburban, and rural) that respond to few incidents. It is our belief that the health and well being of firefighters is of paramount importance, as such, applicants who indicate that their newly hired firefighters will undergo an entry-level physical and receive immunizations will receive higher consideration than applications where these benefits will not be provided.

Applicants who will come into compliance with the minimum four-person staffing standard for the first arriving engine or vehicle capable of initiating suppression activities with the fewest requested additional personnel will receive higher consideration than applicants seeking a larger number of additional personnel in order to comply. It is believed that a benefit will be derived by awarding grants for the hiring of firefighters to fire departments that have automatic mutual aid agreements. Additionally, higher consideration will be given to those applicants whose request is based on a staffing needs assessment.

The only eligible costs under the hiring of firefighters activity are the salary and associated benefits for the new firefighter positions. Overtime costs, including costs in

which fire departments routinely pay overtime as a part of the base salary to comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requirements, are not eligible. Administrative and indirect costs associated with hiring of the firefighters are not eligible. Costs of training and equipping firefighters are not eligible. However, we will pay the salaries and benefits of firefighters hired under the SAFER grants while they are engaged in training. Costs for uniforms and physicals are not eligible. Also, in concert with the authorizing legislation, funds to support the new additional hired positions shall not be used to supplant normal operating budgets or funds received by Federal, State, or local sources for these purposes.

Only full-time positions will be funded. We recognize that many departments have shifts that exceed a 40-hour workweek; however, we consider full-time positions to be those that are funded for at least 2,080 hours per year (i.e., 40 hours per week, 52 weeks per year.) The program office will also consider funding the sharing of a full-time position with sufficient justification. A job-share position is a full-time position that is occupied by more than one person. Example: A department may hire two part-time staff persons at 28 hours each to fulfill the scheduled work hours of one 56-hour shift position. Part-time positions will not be funded unless they are combined to equal a full-time position.

A recruitment period of ninety (90) days will be provided to all grantees under the Hiring of Firefighters Activity. The five-year period of performance will start 90 days after the grantee was notified of their award. The period of performance will commence after this recruitment period whether or not the grantee has filled the new firefighter positions. If an awardee fills their awarded firefighter positions during the 90-day recruiting period, they will be afforded credit toward the 12-month period of the grant performance period in which the grantee is to absorb the entire salary. Costs that may be claimed are the actual payroll expenses incurred net of any employment gaps. No extensions of the grant performance period will be considered. Awardees will draw the Federal share of the awarded amount on a reimbursement basis no more frequently than quarterly.

**Note:** Failure to fully fund awarded positions in the fifth year will be considered as defaulting on the grant agreement, and may require the return of all or a portion of the Federal funds disbursed under the grant.

### **Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity Priorities**

The goal of this activity is to create a net increase in the number of trained, certified, and competent firefighters capable of responding to emergencies likely to occur within the fire department geographic response area and safely. The primary focus is the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters who are involved with or trained in the operations of firefighting and emergency response. There is no local matching requirement for this activity; however, applicants should demonstrate that the Federal funds expended under this activity will realize significant benefits to their organization and community.

Volunteer, paid-on-call, and combination fire departments as well as local and statewide organizations, such as the State Volunteer Fire Association, that represent the interests of volunteer firefighters *are eligible* to receive assistance under the Recruitment and Retention Activity.

In addition to organizations that represent the interests of volunteer firefighters, an individual fire department may serve as a “host applicant” and apply for a regional project on behalf of itself and any number of neighboring fire departments. The applicant must include in the narrative section of the application a list of each third-party organization that will benefit from the regional project if the project is approved. The third-party organizations that will be the beneficiaries of a regional recruitment and retention project may also apply for funding under the SAFER as long as the third-party organizations do not ask for the same project as the host applicant. The host applicant may **NOT** apply for other needs beyond the regional project.

Career fire departments are **not eligible** to receive assistance under the Recruitment and Retention Activity. Federal fire departments are not eligible for assistance under this activity. Fire departments under contract to the Federal government and whose sole responsibility is the suppression of fires on Federal installations or lands are not eligible. Also not eligible are for-profit fire departments and organizations, (i.e., do not have specific nonprofit status or are not municipally based); fire stations that are not independent, or are part of, controlled by, or under the day-to-day operational direction of a larger fire department or agency; ambulance services, rescue squads, auxiliaries, dive teams, urban search and rescue teams; and, State and local agencies, such as a forest service, fire marshals, hospitals, and training offices. Non-Federal airport and/or port authority fire departments whose sole responsibility is suppression of fires on the airport grounds or port facilities are not eligible unless the airport/port fire department has a formally recognized arrangement with the local jurisdiction to provide fire suppression on a first-due basis outside the confines of the airport or port facilities.

Applicants who propose to initiate a recruitment and/or retention plan as a part of their application will receive equal consideration for the recruitment activities and the retention activities. Proposals in this activity may include providing incentives for volunteer firefighter members to continue their service in a fire department. Examples of the type of initiatives that may receive assistance include, but are not limited to the following:

- Accidental death and dismemberment insurance
- College education cost reimbursement
- Reimbursement for attending required training
- Marketing costs to recruit new volunteer members
- Staffing needs assessment
- Explorer, cadet and/or mentoring programs
- Entry-level and/or periodic physicals and minimum training requirements
- Tuition assistance for higher education and professional certifications

- Length of service awards and other retirement benefits

Be advised that with proper justification, applications for assistance in the Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters could include activities that would require as many as four years to complete. There is no local match requirement for this activity and there are no maximum Federal share limits.

Eligibility for this activity is limited to volunteer, paid-on-call, and combination fire departments (see “SAFER Grants Definitions”). Statewide or local volunteer organizations that represent the interest of volunteer firefighters and individual fire departments (volunteer or combination) may apply for assistance for regional projects. Individual fire departments may act as a “host applicant” and apply for regional projects on behalf of itself and any number of neighboring fire departments. The applicant must include in the narrative section of the application a list of each third-party organization that will benefit from the regional project if the project is approved. The third-party organizations that will be the beneficiaries of the recruitment and retention project may also apply for funding under the SAFER as long as the third-party organizations do not apply for a project that could conflict with, or duplicate, the host applicant’s project. The host applicant may **NOT** apply for other needs beyond the regional project.

We believe that departments with the highest percentage of volunteers will benefit the most from the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters; therefore, applicants whose membership is substantially volunteer, will receive higher consideration than departments with a low percentage of volunteers. Also, our highest priority is to assist departments that have been experiencing a high rate of turnover. As such, we will strive to fund departments with the lowest retention rate. (Note: Retention rate is calculated by dividing the number of volunteer firefighting personnel by the total years of service.)

We believe it critical to have a recruitment and/or retention plan; accordingly, applicants for recruitment and/or retention programs that are based on a formal plan will receive higher consideration than requests that are not. We believe that a designated project coordinator and a marketing plan are necessary for the successful implementation of any recruitment and/or retention program, therefore, requests that included a coordinator’s position and a marketing plan will receive higher consideration than requests that do not. We will also give a higher competitive ranking to applications where the recruitment and/or retention plans include accident and/or injury insurance and loss wages for members.

It is our belief that the health and well being of firefighters is of paramount importance, as such, applicants who indicate that their newly recruited firefighters will undergo an entry-level physical and receive immunizations will receive higher consideration than applications where these benefits will not be provided. Finally, requests for recruitment and/or retention activities that have a regional impact will receive a higher competitive advantage than applications that will benefit only the applicant.

## **Funding Limitations**

Awards will be made on a competitive basis using rank order as the primary basis of our decision, regardless of the type of SAFER grants being awarded. But, there are some exceptions to this process. The law requires that we set aside ten percent of the available funding for hiring firefighters for volunteer and mostly volunteer fire departments. For the purpose of fulfilling this regulatory requirement, we will consider a department to be mostly volunteer if more than 50 percent of their membership is made up of personnel who do not receive financial compensation for their services other than life and health insurance and worker's compensation or a stipend payment such as paid-on-call. In order to satisfy this regulatory requirement, it may be necessary to go out of rank order to select a sufficient number of awards to make awards equal to the ten percent set-aside.

We are also required to direct at least ten percent of the total amount of available funds for the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. If less than 10 percent of the available funds are awarded to volunteer and mostly volunteer fire departments, the remaining funds must be transferred to component of SAFER that provides grants for the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

Regardless of the merit of an application, applicants are reminded that grants may not be awarded to a municipality or other recipient whose annual budget has been reduced below 80 percent of the average annual funding in the three years prior to the date of application.

## **Reasonableness of Requests**

Peer review panelists will review all of the applications deemed to be in the competitive range and judge each application on its own merits. The panelists will consider all expenses budgeted as part of the cost-benefit determination and may recommend appropriate adjustments. Regardless of the eligibility of any costs requested, the grants program office reserves the right to reduce any requests for assistance, in whole or in part, that it deems to be excessive or otherwise contrary to the best interests of the program.

## **Award Procedure**

Once the peer review panel has reviewed every application in the "competitive range", the applications are ranked according to the score awarded by the panel. The ranking will be summarized in a Technical Report prepared by the grants program office. The grants program office staff will then make award recommendations to the Grants Management Branch of the Financial and Acquisition Management Division at FEMA. The Grants Management Branch will then contact the applicant to discuss and/or negotiate the content of the application before making the final award decision.

We will select a sufficient number of awardees from this one application period to obligate all of the funding available this year. Awards will be announced as the negotiations progress. Awards will not be made in any specified order, i.e., not by State, grant activity or type, or any other characteristic.

## **Grantee Responsibilities**

Grant recipients (grantees) must agree to the following:

1. Perform the tasks (scope of work) outlined in the grantee's application and approved by the grants program office in accordance with the articles of agreement within the period of performance.
2. Share in the costs if awarded under the hiring of firefighters. The grantee's portion of the salary and benefits cost for hiring firefighters under this grant must be equal to at least the following:
  - i. 10 percent of the actual costs in year one
  - ii. 20 percent of the actual costs in year two
  - iii. 50 percent of the actual costs in year three
  - iv. 70 percent of the actual costs in year four
  - v. 100 percent of the actual costs in year five

All cost-share contributions must be cash. No "in-kind" contributions will be considered for the statutorily required cost-share. No waivers of this requirement will be granted except for fire departments of Insular Areas as provided for in 48 U.S.C. 1469a. Grantees that do not fulfill their obligations under these grants will be required to return the defaulted portion of the Federal funds disbursed under the grant award.

3. If awarded under the Hiring of Firefighters Activity, grantees must retain a level of staffing that is equal to the level of staffing at the time of application plus the SAFER funded positions. Grantees that fail to maintain this level of staffing risk losing all or a portion of the Federal funds awarded under this grant.
4. Maintain operating expenditures for the period of the grant in the areas funded by this grant at a level equal to or greater than the average of their operating expenditures in the two years preceding the year in which this assistance is received. These grants are meant to supplement rather than replace an organization's funding.
5. Retain grant files and supporting documentation for three years after the conclusion and closeout of the grant. The grants program office may require access to any pertinent books, documents, papers, or records that belong to a grant recipient. The Office of Inspector General or the Comptroller General of the United States may also require access to a grantees books and records.

6. Provide a periodic performance reports in conjunction with the quarterly payment requests to the grants program office. In the fifth and final grant year for grants involving the hiring of firefighters, grantees will have to submit a performance report at the mid-point of the fifth year and then at grant closeout. All grantees will be required to produce a final report on how the grant funding was used and the benefits realized from the award. An accounting of the grant funds must also be included in the performance reports.
7. Follow the audit requirements of OMB Circular A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Nonprofit Organizations, which calls for grantees who expend \$500,000 or more in Federal funds in a year (from all Federal sources), to have a single audit performed in accordance with the Circular. (For more information about the Circulars, go to [www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars).)
8. Notwithstanding any provision of other laws, firefighters hired under these grants shall not be discriminated against, for, or be prohibited from, engaging in volunteer activities in another jurisdiction during off-duty hours.
9. Homeland Security Presidential Directive-5 requires that, beginning October 1, 2005, all recipients of Federal preparedness funds (including recipients of Federal grants and contracts) adopt the National Incident Management System (NIMS) as a condition for the receipt of the Federal funds. Recipients of FY2005 SAFER grants will be considered to be in compliance with the NIMS requirement if the grantee has an operational knowledge of the Incident Command System (ICS) and an understanding of NIMS' principles and policies. Responders who have already been trained in ICS do not need retraining if their previous training is consistent with DHS standards. In order for us to document compliance, grantees will be required to certify their recognition of NIMS/ICS as part of their grant closeout process.
10. Grantees, to the extent possible, will seek, recruit, and appoint members of racial and ethnic minority groups and women to increase their ranks within the applicant's department.
11. Failure to fulfill the recipient's responsibilities may result in requiring the recipient to return a portion, or all, of the grant funding as per section 24 (15USC 2229a).

### **Excess Funds**

Occasionally, due to successful competitive bid processes, breaks on service etc., some grantees have funds remaining after the completion of their obligations outlined above. Grantees awarded under the hiring of firefighters activity that complete the approved scope of work and still have grant funds available, shall return all excess funds to the grants program office. Grantees awarded under the recruitment and retention of

volunteer firefighters that have completed the approved scope of work and still have grant funds available may use the excess funds to continue with recruitment or retention activities consistent with the original scope of work as long as it is within the originally approved period of performance. There will be no extensions to any SAFER grants.