



2002 Program Guidance for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program

February 21, 2002



This document is an easy to understand summary of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's U.S. Fire Administration 2002 Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. It explains how to apply, what items can be requested, and how applications will be evaluated. Please read this program guidance carefully. The interim final rule and answers to "frequently asked questions" will soon be available, and should also be reviewed. Together, these three documents will provide you with all of the information you need to complete the on-line application. The on-line application will be available at www.usfa.fema.gov from March 1st until April 1st, 2002.

Prepared by the U.S. Fire Administration's Grants Program Office

2002 ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANT PROGRAM **PROGRAM GUIDANCE**

The purpose of the program is to award one-year grants directly to fire departments of a State to enhance their abilities with respect to fire and fire-related hazards. This program seeks to identify departments that lack the basic tools and resources necessary to protect the health and safety of the public and their firefighting personnel. Our primary goal is to provide assistance to meet these needs.

The authority of this program is derived from the Federal Fire Protection and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2201 et seq.), as amended by the Floyd D. Spence National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002, Pub.L. 107-73. In fiscal year 2002, Congress appropriated a total of \$360,000,000 to carry out the activities of this Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program.

Eligible applicants for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program are limited to fire departments of a State as defined herein. A “fire department of a State” is defined as an agency or organization that has a formally recognized arrangement with a State, local or tribal authority (city, county, parish, fire district, township, town or other governing body) to provide fire suppression for to a population within a fixed geographical area. A fire department can apply for assistance for its emergency medical services unit provided the unit falls organizationally under the auspices of the fire department.

Fire departments, which are Federal, or contracted by the Federal government and who are solely responsible under their formally recognized arrangement for suppression of fires on Federal installations, are not eligible for this grant program. Fire departments or fire stations that are not independent but are part of, or controlled by, or under the day-to-day operational direction of a larger fire department or agency are typically not eligible. Fire departments that are for-profit departments (i.e., do not have specific non-profit status or are not municipally based) are not eligible to apply for assistance under this program. Also not eligible for this program are ambulance services, rescue squads, auxiliaries, dive teams, urban search and rescue teams, fire service organizations or associations, and State/local agencies such as a forest service, fire marshal, hospitals, and training offices.

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program has been improved from the 2001 program, but in many respects it is very similar. All the activities available last year are eligible for funding again this year and Emergency Medical Services has been added as a new activity. The two major differences involve 1) our new on-line application and 2) a more flexible process that enables you to develop your grant project.

Automated Application

This year's application is automated and available on-line. The application will be accessible from the FEMA and USFA Internet websites. We have designed the automated application with many built-in "help screens" to assist you throughout the application process. The application can be saved and retrieved as many times as you need while you're filling it out right up to the deadline, 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 tell you if you've not filled in a critical field. Finally, by submitting your application on-line, you'll be automatically notified that we have received your application via e-mail.

Paper applications are discouraged, but accepted. We are discouraging paper applications because of the inherent delays associated with processing a paper application. Additionally, paper applications don't have the built-in help that is available to the on-line applicants. Also, there is no built-in assurance that your paper application is complete when you submit it. If you do not have access to the Internet, you may contact us directly (866-274-0960) to request a paper copy of the application via mail.

We will begin accepting completed applications on or about March 1, 2002. Completed applications must be submitted electronically or otherwise received by us on or before the close of business (5:00 p.m. EST) on April 1, 2002. Applications submitted by mail must be postmarked by March 25, 2002, or received by us on or before close of business on April 1, 2002. Applications not submitted electronically must be mailed to USFA Grant Program Technical Assistance Center, 16825 South Seton Avenue, Emmitsburg, Maryland, 21727-8998. We will not accept late or incomplete applications.

Project Development

The second major difference is the way you can formulate your grant proposal. This year we have removed many of the barriers placed between the last year's eligible categories. Depending on the program you apply for, we are allowing your grant proposal to include a number of related "activities" to address all of your needs within the programmatic or functional area. This approach provides you with the opportunity to apply for a more comprehensive grant project that address a broader range of your fire department's needs. But, because this year's format allows you to submit a more comprehensive application, you may submit only one application for one program. Also, your application should only comprise of activities that can be completed within the one-year grant period.

You can apply for any one of the four program areas this year. The programs, and associated activities, eligible in this year's grant program are as follows:

1. ***Fire Operations and Firefighter Safety Program.*** Eligible activities under this function are training, wellness and fitness, firefighting equipment, and personal protective equipment.
2. ***Fire Prevention Program.*** Eligible activities under this function include, but are not limited to, public education and awareness activities, fire codes enforcement activities, fire inspector certifications, purchase and installation of smoke alarms and fire suppression systems, and arson prevention and detection activities.
3. ***Emergency Medical Services Program.*** Eligible activities under this function for fire-based EMS units are equipment and training. Vehicles, such as ambulances, are not eligible in this programmatic area.
4. ***Firefighting Vehicles Acquisition Program.*** Eligible apparatus under this program include, but are not limited to, pumpers, brush trucks, tankers, rescue, ambulances, quints, aerials, foam units, and boats.

As stated above, you may apply for assistance in only one of these four programmatic areas this year. Within your selected programmatic area, you may develop a comprehensive program to address all of your needs by applying for as many of the eligible activities as you need. For example, if you determine that your needs are in the area of fire operations and firefighter safety, then you could apply for any one of the activities under that program, or any combination of activities, or all of the activities listed within that program. If you want a vehicle, you would apply under the vehicle acquisition program, but you can only ask for one vehicle per year.

Application Procedure

Eligible applicants can apply for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program on-line via FEMA's new "e-grants" application process. The system will allow one authorized representative of a department to log in and create a user name and password for the department. The individual who is selected to be a department's authorized representative is left to the discretion of each department. The information requested on-line is an electronic version of the SF-424 (for background/contact information), FEMA Form 20-20 (for budget information), and FEMA Forms 20-16A and 20-16C (for assurances and certifications) and the Standard Form LLL for lobbying if applicable. The application also includes questions about your department and your community, as well as questions regarding your proposed project.

Similar to 2001, you will be required to answer a series of questions designed to provide us with general information about your department and your community. Then, depending on the program and the activities that you plan to apply for, you will answer a series of activity-specific questions. You will answer the questions for each of the

activities that support your project. Lastly, you will be required to provide us with a written narrative describing your planned project. The narrative portion of your application should provide us with details on activities you propose to be funded including budget details for each of your activities. It should describe the financial need of your fire department, and elaborate on the benefits your community and/or fire department will gain from the expenditure of the grant funds. The narrative may not exceed five pages.

Evaluation Process

We will rank all complete and eligible applications based on the answers to the activity-specific questions. If you apply for more than one activity in your selected program, each activity will be scored separately, but then your scores will be prorated based on the individual activities' funding level compared to the total requested funding in your application. For example, if you are applying under the Fire Operations and Firefighter Safety Program and you are applying for \$9,000 in training and \$1,000 in firefighting equipment, the training portion of your proposal will represent 90 percent of your score and the firefighting equipment acquisition will represent 10 percent of your score. The number of activities included in your application will not provide you with any advantage or disadvantage with respect to the evaluation.

Applications that best address the grant program's priorities (as outlined below) 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 technical evaluation specialists will further evaluate the applications that make it into the competitive range, i.e., the highest ranked applications. There will be at least three panelists evaluating each application that makes it into the competitive range. These panelists will evaluate the application using your project narrative along with the answers to the general questions and the activity-specific questions.

When reviewing your narrative, the panelists will evaluate the clarity of your proposed project, the financial need of your department, and the benefits that would result if you were awarded the grant. These three elements carry equal weight when factored into the panelists' scores, i.e., one-third. The panelists will review the applications that make it into the competitive range and judge each application on its own merits. The panelists will consider all expenses budgeted, including administrative and/or indirect, as part of their cost-benefit review. The panelists will review each application in its entirety.

Keep in mind that we will use your answers to the activity-specific questions for the 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 indicates that their project reflects our established priorities (outlined below), will have a better chance of reaching the competitive range and the second level of review than those applicants whose projects do not reflect our priorities.

Programs and Program Priorities

Specific rating criteria and priorities for each of the grant categories are provided below under the descriptions of this year's eligible programs. The rating criteria, in conjunction with the program description, will provide you with an understanding of what information we are seeking with respect to your proposed projects.

(1) Fire Operations and Firefighter Safety Program.

There are four different activities available for funding under this program, they are: training activities, wellness and fitness activities, firefighting equipment acquisition, and personal protective equipment acquisition. You can apply for as many of these four activities as you think are necessary in one application. There are no bonuses or penalties for applying for only one activity or for multiple activities.

- a) **Training activities:** FEMA may make grants for the purpose of training firefighting personnel. Examples of training activities include, but are not limited to firefighting I and II, driver/operator, fire officer, hazardous materials response, incident command, supervision and safety, or training firefighting personnel to provide training in any of these areas.

We believe that more benefit is derived from the direct delivery of training than from the purchase of training materials and equipment. Therefore, applications focused on direct delivery of training, including train-the-trainer initiatives, will receive a higher competitive rating. We also believe that funding of basic firefighting training (i.e., training in basic firefighting duties, awareness, or operating fire apparatus) has greater cost benefit than funding of officer or safety officer training which in turn is rated higher than specialized training (such as mass casualty or fire investigator). We will also accord higher rating to applicants seeking to implement statutorily required training rather than non-mandatory or strictly voluntary training. Training designated for the establishment or maintenance of a rapid intervention teams will be afforded a slightly higher rating. Finally, we will rate more highly those proposed programs that benefit the highest percentage of applicable personnel within a fire department or those proposed programs that will be open to other departments in their region.

Eligible uses of training funds include but are not limited to purchase of training curricula, training equipment (including trailers), training props, training services, attendance at formal training forums, etc. Tow vehicles or other means of transport may be eligible as a transportation expense under this activity if adequately justified in your grant proposal, but we will limit transportation expenses to \$6,000 per year. Compensation to volunteer firefighters for wages lost as a result of attending training under

this program is an eligible expense if justified in your grant proposal. Overtime expenses paid to career firefighters to attend training, or overtime expenses paid to firefighters to cover for their colleagues while their colleagues are in training, is an eligible expense if justified in your grant proposal. Even though compensation is an eligible expense, proposals that contain such compensation expenses may be less favorable than similar proposals without compensation expenses due to the benefit/cost element in the evaluation process.

Activities that are not eligible in this area include construction of facilities such as classrooms, buildings, towers, etc. Modifications to an existing facility are allowable if the modifications involve only minor renovation as defined in the interim final rule and published in the Federal Register (i.e., limited to minor interior alterations costing less than \$10,000).

- b) **Wellness and fitness activities:** FEMA may make grants for the purpose of establishing or expanding wellness and fitness initiatives for firefighting personnel.

We believe that in order to have an effective wellness/fitness program, fire departments must offer **both** an entry physical examination and an immunization program. Accordingly, applicants for grants in this category must currently offer both benefits, or must propose to initiate both an entry physical examination and an immunization program with these grant funds in order to receive consideration in this activity. After entry-level physicals and immunizations, high priority is given to annual physicals and health screening programs, then to formal fitness and incident rehabilitation programs. Lower priority is given to stress management, illness rehabilitation, and employee assistance programs.

We believe the greatest benefit will be realized by supporting new wellness and fitness programs, and therefore, we will accord higher competitive ratings to those applicants lacking wellness/fitness programs over those applicants that already possess a wellness/fitness program. Finally, since participation is critical to achieving any benefits from a wellness or fitness program, we will give higher competitive rating to departments whose wellness and fitness programs mandate participation as well as programs that provide incentives for participation.

Eligible expenses in a wellness and fitness activity for firefighting personnel may include the procurement of medical services to ensure that the firefighting personnel are physically able to carry out their duties (purchase of medical equipment is not eligible under this category). Expenses to carry out wellness and fitness activities may include costs such as personnel (i.e., health-care consultants, trainers, and nutritionists), physicals, equipment (including shipping), supplies, and other related

contract services that are directly associated with the implementation of the proposed activity are eligible.

Transportation expenses and fitness club memberships for the firefighters or their families would not be eligible under the wellness and fitness activity. Other expenses that are not eligible in this area include construction of facilities to house a fitness program such as exercise or fitness rooms, showers, etc. Modifications to an existing facility are allowable if the modifications involve only renovations as defined in the interim final rule and published in the Federal Register (i.e., limited to minor interior alterations costing less than \$10,000).

- c) **Firefighting equipment acquisition:** FEMA may make grants for the purpose of acquiring additional firefighting equipment, including equipment needed directly for fire suppression or to enhance the safety or effectiveness of firefighting or rescue activities.

We believe that this grant program will achieve the greatest benefits if we provide funds to fire departments purchasing basic firefighting equipment (never owned prior to grant) to bring their departments up to the applicable minimum operational level (i.e., as required by statute, regulation, or professional firefighting guidance). Our second priority would be to replace used or obsolete firefighting equipment. Since our priority is to equip departments with basic firefighting equipment, departments that are seeking to expand into new mission areas will receive a lower competitive rating. Because of the obvious benefits, we will also give higher competitive rating to departments that are mainly purchasing firefighting equipment with design features intended to protect the safety of the firefighters. Equipment designated for the establishment or maintenance of a rapid intervention teams will also be afforded a slightly higher rating.

Eligible expenses include those expenses necessary to acquire additional firefighting equipment, including equipment for individual communications and monitoring equipment. Compressor systems, cascade systems, or similar SCBA refill systems are eligible expenditures in this area. Modifications to an existing facility to accommodate such equipment are allowable if the modifications involve only minor renovation as defined in the interim final rule and published in the Federal Register (i.e., limited to minor interior alterations costing less than \$10,000). Individual communications (portable radios) and/or mobile communications equipment (including mobile repeaters) are eligible. Personal accountability systems are eligible as well. The cost of shipping equipment purchased under this program is also an eligible expense.

Thermal imaging cameras are eligible, but the number of cameras that can be purchased with grant funds will be limited based on the population served by the department applying for assistance. Departments that serve communities of less than 20,000 can purchase one thermal imaging camera with grant funds if awarded a grant; departments serving communities between 20,000 and 50,000 can purchase two cameras with grant funds if awarded a grant; and departments serving communities of over 50,000 can purchase three cameras with grant funds if awarded a grant.

Integrated communications systems (or parts thereof), such as computer-aided dispatch, towers, fixed-site repeaters, etc., are not eligible under this activity. Vehicles, as defined in the interim final rule and published in the Federal Register, are not eligible under this activity. Personal protective equipment, including clothing for structural and wildland fire suppression such as “Turnout Gear” or “Bunker Gear” (including boots, pants, coats, gloves, hoods, goggles, vests, helmets, coveralls, and fire shelters), self-contained breathing apparatus, spare cylinders, and personal alert safety systems, is not eligible under this activity, but is eligible under the Personal Protective Equipment Acquisition activity.

- d) **Personal protective equipment acquisition:** FEMA may make grants for the purpose of acquiring personal protective equipment required for active firefighting personnel by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and other personal protective equipment for firefighting personnel.

One of the stated purposes of this grant program is to protect the health and safety of firefighters. In order to achieve this goal and maximize the benefit to the firefighting community, we believe that we must fund those applicants needing to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to a high percentage of their personnel. Accordingly, we will give a high competitive rating in this category to fire departments in which a large percentage of active firefighting staff do not have any personal protective equipment and to departments that wish to purchase enough PPE to equip 100 percent of their active firefighting staff. We will also give a higher competitive rating to departments that are purchasing the equipment for the first time as opposed to departments replacing obsolete or substandard equipment (e.g., equipment that does not meet current NFPA and OSHA standards), or purchasing equipment for a new mission. For those departments that are replacing obsolete or substandard equipment, the age of the equipment to be replaced will be factored into the score with a higher priority given to older equipment.

Due to safety benefits to firefighters, for applications that include PASS devices, we will give priority to applications with integrated PASS devices

over applications with non-integrated PASS devices. Finally, the number of calls that your department responds to in a year will be considered with the higher priority going to departments with higher call volume. Applications will be scored depending on call volume, however due to the inherent differences in call volume for different sized communities, the call volume of rural departments will be compared to other rural departments, suburban departments will be compared to other suburban departments, and urban departments will be compared to other urban departments.

Eligible personal protective equipment includes clothing for structural and wildland fire suppression such as “Turnout Gear” or “Bunker Gear” (including boots, pants, coats, gloves, hoods, goggles, vests, helmets, coveralls, and fire shelters), self-contained breathing apparatus, spare cylinders, and personal alert safety systems. Protective clothing for response to hazardous materials incidents and other specialized incidents are also eligible under this activity.

The purchase of three-quarter length rubber boots is an ineligible expenditure under this activity. Uniforms (formal/parade or station/duty) or uniform items (hats, badges, etc.) are also not eligible expenditures under this activity. Personal communications equipment such as radios and pagers are ineligible under this activity, but eligible under firefighting equipment acquisition activity.

(2) Fire Prevention Program.

FEMA may make grants for the purpose of establishing or enhancing a fire prevention program. Appropriate activities in this program include, but are not limited to the following: public education, public awareness, enforcing fire codes, inspector certification, purchase and installation of smoke alarms and fire suppression systems, and arson prevention and detection activities. Applicants can apply for as many related activities under this function as necessary.

We believe that the public as a whole will receive greatest benefit from fire prevention funds channeled to fire departments that currently do not have a prevention program. Also, we believe the public will benefit greatly from long-term fire prevention programs as opposed to limited efforts. Therefore, we will give a higher competitive rating to programs that will be self-sustaining after the grant period. Because of the benefits to be attained, we will give a higher competitive rating to programs that target one or more of USFA’s identified high-risk populations (i.e., children under fourteen years of age, seniors over sixty-five and firefighters), and programs whose impact is/will be periodically evaluated.

We believe that projects that benefit the entire community such as public education programs and programs that develop and enforce codes and standards,

and/or arson prevention and detection programs provide the greatest benefits. Therefore, such community-wide activities will be accorded the highest competitive rating. Programs where the focus is on the purchase and installation of residential and public detection and suppression systems achieve positive benefits but not the highest competitive rating. The purchase of public information materials and presentation aids and equipment achieve the least benefit, therefore, these types of activities will be accorded the lowest competitive rating.

Eligible expenses to carry out these activities would include costs such as a fire education safety trailer, personnel, transportation, equipment (including appropriate personal protective equipment), supplies, and contracted services which are directly associated with the implementation of the proposed activity. Tow vehicles or other means of transport may be eligible as a transportation expense if adequately justified in the proposal, but transportation expenses will be limited to \$6,000 per year.

Construction is not eligible under this program. A safety village that is not transportable would be considered construction, and therefore, not eligible.

(3) Emergency Medical Services Program

FEMA may make grants for the purpose of establishing or enhancing a fire department's emergency medical services program. Applicants can apply for either the training activity or the equipment acquisition activity or both activities under this function.

We believe that it is more cost-effective to enhance or expand an existing emergency medical service by providing training and/or equipment than it would be to create a new service. We believe that the most benefit would be realized by upgrading a service that currently meets a basic life support capacity to a higher level of life support. Therefore, we will afford a higher competitive rating to fire departments that are planning on acquiring an advanced life support service than those who wish to reach a basic life support level. Since training is a pre-requisite to the effective use of EMS equipment, departments whose request is more focused on the training activities will receive a higher competitive rating than departments whose request is more focused on equipment. A lower priority is to train firefighters to basic emergency medical service certification levels. Departments that don't currently offer emergency medical services will receive the lowest competitive rating because we don't believe there is sufficient benefit to be derived from such an investment in communities that don't currently support such a service.

Eligible expenses for the training activities under this program could include instructional costs (i.e., books, materials, equipment, supplies, and exam fees), certification/re-certification expenses, and continuing education programs. Eligible expenses for equipment acquisition in this program could include defibrillators, basic and advanced life support equipment, universal precaution supplies (i.e., medical PPE) mobile and portable communication equipment, computers, expendable supplies

(but not medications), and infectious disease control and decontamination systems. Transportation expenses may be eligible if adequately justified in the proposal.

Not eligible in this program are vehicles such as ambulances, medications and integrated communication systems (or parts thereof), such as computer-aided dispatch, towers, fixed repeaters, etc.

(4) Firefighting Vehicle Acquisition Program

FEMA may make grants for the purpose of acquiring new firefighting vehicles, used fire apparatus, or refurbished apparatus. The funds may also be used to refurbish a vehicle that the department currently owns. Applicants may apply for only one vehicle per year under this program.

We believe that more benefit will be realized by funding fire departments that own few or no firefighting apparatus than by providing funding to a department with numerous vehicles. Therefore, we will give a higher competitive rating in the apparatus category to fire departments that own few or no firefighting vehicles of the type they are seeking to purchase with the grant funds. We will also give higher competitive rating to departments that have an aging firefighting fleet, and departments that wish to replace an old, high-mileage vehicle or a vehicle that has sustained a high number of responses. Vehicles designated for the establishment or maintenance of a rapid intervention team will be afforded a slightly higher rating.

We believe the highest benefit would come from the purchase of basic firefighting vehicles; therefore, pumpers, engines, tankers, and brush trucks will be afforded the highest competitive rating. Due to their cost, we believe there is a lower benefit from expenditures for quints, rescue, hazardous materials response vehicles or vehicles with ladder or aerial apparatus, therefore, we will not accord positive competitive standing to applications proposing such purchases. Likewise, due to our priority to focus on basic firefighting capability, we will not afford a positive competitive standing to ambulances (transport vehicles), crash rescue, foam units, command and communications vehicles, and watercraft.

Eligible expenses under this program would include the cost of the vehicle and associated equipment necessary to conform to applicable national standards. New, used or refurbished vehicles are eligible. Custom vehicles are eligible, but they may not be as favorably evaluated as a lower costing commercial vehicle. An allowance for transportation to inspect a vehicle under consideration or during a vehicle's production would be eligible if justified and included in the grant proposal.

Other Eligible Costs

(1) Administrative costs are allowable under any of the program areas listed above, in accordance with OMB Circular A-87. (For more information about the Circulars, go to www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars.) Administrative costs are those costs directly associated with the implementation and management of the grant. Applicants must list their administrative costs under the “other” category in their budget and explain what the costs are for in their project narrative. The administrative costs should be based on actual expenses, not a percentage of the overall grant. We will reimburse actual expenses only. Examples of eligible administrative costs would be shipping, computers, office supplies, etc. The cost of a grant writer (if specifically listed on your application), and those costs associated with the NFIRS reporting requirements are eligible costs that can be charged to the grant as administrative costs.

(2) Applicants that have an approved indirect cost rate may charge indirect costs to the grant. Prior to any claims for indirect costs, the awardees must submit the documentation that supports the indirect cost rate to us for review and approval. The appropriate documentation for an approved indirect rate is a certified audit. We will allow the rate to be applied as long as it is consistent with its established terms. For example, some indirect cost rates may not apply to capital procurements; in these cases, indirect cost rates would not apply for a grant for equipment or vehicle acquisition.

(3) Some applicants with large awards may be required to undergo an audit in accordance with OMB Circular A-133. (For more information about the Circulars, go to www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars.) This circular requires any recipient of Federal funding that spends in excess of \$300,000 of those funds in a year to undergo an audit. The costs incurred for such an audit would be an eligible expenditure if included in the budget proposal. Grantees may wish to consider including anticipated costs of such an audit if they are applying for a significant level of funding.

(4) Modifications to an existing facility are allowable if the modifications involve only renovations as defined in the interim final rule and published in the Federal Register (i.e., limited to minor interior alterations costing less than \$10,000). Construction costs are not eligible under the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. Construction includes alterations to a building that changes the profile or footprint of the structure. Enhancements to existing structures such as the installation of apparatus-bay ventilation systems and retrofitting burn buildings to accommodate natural gas or propane burn simulators are also not eligible.

(5) Generally, grantees cannot use grant funds to pay for products and services contracted for, or purchased prior to the effective date of the grant. However, expenses incurred after the application deadline but prior to award may be eligible for reimbursement if the expenses were justified, unavoidable, consistent with the grant’s scope of work, and specifically approved by us. We will consider requests for reimbursement for pre-award costs on a case-by-case basis.

Award Procedure

Awards will be made on a competitive basis using rank order as the primary basis of our decision, regardless of program. There are two exceptions to this process. The law requires that we use no less than five percent of the available funding on fire prevention grants. Therefore, it may be necessary to go out of rank order to select a sufficient number of awards to comply with this requirement. We are also limited in the amount of funds that can be awarded for vehicles, i.e., we cannot award grants for vehicles in excess of 25 percent of the available funding. Once we reach that limit, it would then be necessary for us to deviate from rank order with respect to the remaining vehicle requests.

Throughout the process, career departments will be competing against other career departments for up to 45 percent of the available funding. Volunteer and combination departments will compete amongst each other for at least 55 percent of the available funding.

In order to fulfill our obligations under the law, we may also make funding decisions using the size and character of the community a department serves (urban, suburban, or rural), and the geographic location of the fire department. In these instances where we are making decisions based on geographic location, we will use States as the basic geographic unit. Geographic location of an applicant will be used primarily as a final discriminator, i.e., in cases where applicants have similar qualifications, we may use the geographic location of the applicants to maximize the diversity of the awardees.

As stated earlier, each application will be evaluated based on the answers to the activity-specific questions. The applications that best address the program's established priorities will be deemed to be in the "competitive range" and subject to a second level of review. This second level of review is conducted via a panel of technical reviewers that will assess the applications' merits with respect to the detail provided in the narrative on the activity, the applicant's financial need, and purported benefit to be derived from the cost. The panel evaluators will independently score each application before them and then discuss the merits/shortcomings of the applications in order to reconcile any major discrepancies. A consensus is not required.

Once every application in the competitive range has been paneled, the applications are ranked according to the average score awarded by the panel. The ranking will be summarized in a Technical Report prepared by the Grants Program Office. The Grants Program Office will then make award recommendations to the Grants Management Branch of the Financial and Acquisition Management Division. 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, i.e., the \$360,000,000 in appropriated funds less our authorized administrative costs. We have until September 30, 2002, to obligate

\$150,000,000 of the total and we must obligate the \$210,000,000 balance by September 30, 2003. However, we will endeavor to make all awards by this fiscal year's end (September 30, 2002), though it may be necessary to continue making awards into next fiscal year. Awards will be announced over several months as the decisions are made. Awards will not be made in any specified order, i.e., not by State or by program or any other characteristic.

Grantees' Responsibilities

Recipients (Grantees) must agree to:

(1) Share in the costs of the projects funded under this grant program. Fire departments in areas serving populations over 50,000 must agree to match the Federal grant funds with an amount of non-Federal funds equal to 30 percent of the total project cost. Fire departments serving areas with a population of 50,000 or less will have to match the Federal grant funds with an amount of non-Federal funds equal to 10 percent of the total project cost. All cost-share contributions must be cash. No "in-kind" contributions will be considered for the statutorily required cost-share, for example, allocation of training staff salaries to a training grant does not satisfy the cost-share requirements. No waivers of this requirement will be granted except for fire departments of Insular Areas as provided for in 48 U.S.C. 1469a.

(2) Maintain operating expenditures for the one-year grant period in the areas funded by this grant activity 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. This program is meant to supplement rather than replace a fire department's funding.

(3) Retain grant files and supporting documentation for three years after the conclusion and closeout of the grant.

(4) Ensure that all procurement actions are conducted in a manner that provides, to the maximum extent possible, open and free competition. In doing so, you must follow your established procurement processes when purchasing vehicles, equipment, and/or services with the grant funds. If you don't have established procedures, you should obtain at least two quotes/bids for the items you are procuring and document the process used in your grant files.

(5) Report to FEMA on the progress made on the grant after six months and at grant closeout. Also, report on the financial status of the grant at closeout.

(6) Make their grant files, books and records available if requested for an audit to ensure compliance with any requirement of the grant program.

(7) Provide information, through established reporting channels, to the U.S. Fire Administration's national fire incident reporting system (NFIRS) for the period covered by the assistance. If a grantee does not currently participate in the incident reporting

system and does not have the capacity to report at the time of the award, that grantee must agree to provide information to the system for a twelve-month period commencing as soon as they develop the capacity to report.

(8) Follow the audit requirements of OMB Circular A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non-profit Organizations, which calls for grantees who expend \$300,000 or more in Federal funds in a year (from all Federal sources), must have a single audit performed in accordance with the Circular. (For more information about the Circulars, go to www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars.)

Prepared by the U.S. Fire Administration's Grants Program Office