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2016

AFG Resource Guide

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AFG season is upon us

Is AFG important to your department? I am guessing if you are reading this guide, then the answer is yes, or at least you think it should be. I know from having run FireGrantsHelp.com since 2009 how important the AFG grant is to all sizes and shapes of departments.

We have built this guide to give first responders the most accurate and up-to-date information on the AFG grant. This guide will educate both the novice and experienced fire grant writer on how to tackle this grant program successfully.

Outside of explaining the grant components and how to submit a competitive application, there are a couple of meaningful themes throughout this guide that I want to call to your attention. Both require action on your part.

First, with no action your department may not receive an AFG grant. Second, the AFG grant program may go away entirely. The first theme means embracing SAM.gov, and the second theme is the importance of keeping the AFG grant going beyond 2017.

Since the 2014 AFG application period, FEMA has warned us that AFG grants require applicants to be registered in SAM.gov. This means that annually, each AFG applicant needs to make sure that SAM.gov has their current information during the application period and the award cycle.

Since the first round of awards started this April, FireGrantsHelp and our grant writers have fielded calls from panicked departments who were awarded an AFG grant but the grant was withheld because their SAM.gov registration was not current. In most cases, FEMA was able to give these departments time to get their registration in order before releasing their grant award.

In the upcoming 2016 application period and following award cycle, there will be far less leniency for departments to update their accounts upon award — the awards will simply not be given. Learn how to get prepared and stay organized now and through the application and award cycle on page 6.

And in case you didn't know, the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program is set to expire in 2017 if not reauthorized by Congress. Refer to page 4, where we launch into more detail about what this means for the program and how you can help remind Congress how important this program is to the fire service.

I have three wishes for you during this application period: an easy SAM.gov registration and annual renewal, that your application passes technical review and that you are ultimately awarded a grant from this program.

— Sarah Wilson, director and founder of FireGrantsHelp
sarah.wilson@firegrantshelp.com

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FIRE GRANTS: How we got here

The **Assistance to Firefighters Grant program** will start its 16th year with the opening of the 2016 AFG grant application period. Through its first 15 years, the program has distributed \$6.9 billion in grant funding to fire departments and EMS agencies to help address vehicle, equipment, training and other needs.

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant program, also known as AFG or the FIRE Act grant program, was established by Title XVII of the FY2001 Floyd D. Spence National Defense Authorization Act. Currently administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the Department of Homeland Security, the program provides federal grants directly to local fire departments and unaffiliated EMS organizations.

Since its establishment, the AFG program has been reauthorized twice. The first reauthorization was Title XXXVI of the FY2005 Ronald W. Reagan National Defense Authorization Act (**P.L. 108-375**), which authorized the program through FY2009. The second and current reauthorization is Title XVIII, Subtitle A of the FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act (**P.L. 112-239**), which authorizes the program through FY2017.

Through its first 15 years the AFG program has experienced a drastic swing in budget allocations. The program began in 2001 with a very modest \$100 million budget. By 2004 the program had dramatically expanded to a \$746 million budget. From that point, the annual allocations began to dwindle to a low of \$321 million in 2013. For the past three years the program has stayed in the \$345 million range.

Budget allocations aside, the AFG program is scheduled to sunset in 2017. Just as in 2009 and 2013, the grant program will need to be reauthorized by Congress if it is going to continue. Although it has only been seven years since the first reauthorization of AFG, the climate in Congress has changed dramatically. A number of senators and representatives who pushed for the program's existence were still members of Congress when the previous reauthorizations took place. By 2017 a large number of these supporters will probably not be in office; some have retired and others were voted out of office.

For those who are relatively new to the fire service, it took us over 25 years to get a federal grant program

established. The landmark document “**America Burning**” first recommended a federal grant program in 1973, but it wasn’t authorized by Congress until 2000. If Congress does not reauthorize these programs, the hard work of elected officials and fire and EMS personnel to establish this program will be wiped out. We need to start immediately to address the importance of this program with our federal legislators.

There are several ways you can help. If you received an AFG award in recent years, let your elected officials know how important receiving this award was to your department and community. If you belong to a county or regional fire services group, consider meeting with your representative or senator. Explain to them how vital the continuation of this program is to the health and safety of the communities they represent.

Know the grant priorities

The foundation for a successful grant application begins by reading the program guidelines. In layman’s terms, these are the instructions for the grant process. FEMA now calls this document the Funding Opportunity Announcement, or FOA. This document provides all of the information concerning grant eligibility, program priorities, filing deadlines and application assistance. A portion of this document that the fire service community seems to gloss over each year is the priority section.

Until a few years ago, you had to search through the funding announcement document to find the priorities and then read pages of text to determine what the priorities were for a specific AFG category. What made it worse is the way the priorities were interspersed with other grant information. This made it difficult for the reader to determine what priorities went with what grant activities.

In recent years FEMA has simplified the process dramatically. Now the priorities are displayed in a matrix format at the end of each funding activity in the FOA. They are classified as high, medium and low priority and broken out by urban, suburban and rural designations.

It seems that although FEMA has simplified this process, departments are still applying for items that are not on the high priority list. When the rejection notice arrives they are puzzled as to why they didn’t get funded. When reviewing the priority matrix, one key to keep in mind is that the AFG program now is funded at about 40 percent of its allocation from 10 years ago.

Because of this, items that are listed as low priority will absolutely not receive funding. Items that are listed

as medium priority will seldom be funded. The message is pretty clear: Don’t apply for funding for low- and medium-priority items. Also, don’t request funding for an item that doesn’t appear on the matrix at all. FEMA apparently doesn’t consider those items a priority under any circumstances.

In this year’s guide, we focus on priorities for each funding activity and how to judge if your request is going to meet that benchmark.





SAM, DUNS and procurement

I know everyone is absolutely tired of hearing about the System for Award Management and **DUNS**, but ongoing problems continue with applications because departments are not registered, don't have a current registration or the information does not match from one to the other. Here are three things you must do:

1. Before you start your 2016 grant application, make sure you have a **DUNS number**.
2. Make sure you are **registered in SAM**.
3. Make sure that the information contained in your SAM registration matches the information in your DUNS registration and that both of these agree with the information in your FEMA account profile.

This may not sound very important, but all of this data must match or FEMA will not process your award. If you are being considered for funding and you are not registered, your information doesn't match or you don't have a DUNS number, you will receive a nasty email from FEMA stating that you have seven days to get this information corrected or you will lose your grant award.

Remember, it may take two weeks or more after SAM

registration submittal before it is active — then add an additional 24 hours for Grants.gov to recognize the information.

Some of the common problems include applicants that have used a physical address on one form and a post office box on the other. Some departments have changed their name slightly from one form to the other. This can be as small a change as Washington Community Volunteer Fire Department to Washington Community Fire Department.

Other problems have included different contact people listed and different email addresses or phone numbers listed.

Next let's look at the changes that occurred at the end of 2014 to the procurement standards and how they affect your AFG application and award. In particular there are four areas of concern for departments receiving awards under AFG.

First, all departments are now required to have a written procurement policy. At first, you will simply be required to acknowledge that you have a written policy by signing a form if you are awarded a grant.

If you are audited, you will be required to produce the form. In the future, there may be a question added to the AFG application asking if you have a written

procurement policy, and you may be required to produce a copy of the policy when you are awarded your grant or at the time of closeout.

The second major change has to do with the way your department contacts vendors for information for AFG requests. If you use a vendor or manufacturer to draw up specifications or similar documents for an item, your department cannot buy the item from that vendor if you are awarded a grant.

Third, it is the responsibility of the grantee (your department) to ensure that the vendors, manufacturers and even the grant writers that you contract with are not barred from doing business with the federal government.

Finally, your department is now required to have a policy that delineates how you protect federally funded equipment if you are awarded a grant. This can be a simple policy that states how the equipment will be inventoried, how it will be accounted for, the fact that it will be included on your department's insurance policy, maintenance schedules and how the equipment will be disposed of when the time comes.

I know all of this can seem a little overwhelming, but don't panic – it isn't as complicated as it sounds. If your department does not have a written procurement policy, you have several options. Here are some suggestions:

- Write your own policy. However, keep in mind that your policy cannot be any less stringent than the federal policy.
- Adopt your local, county or state government's policy. Again, these policies must be in line with the federal policy.
- Adopt the federal procurement policy outlined in **Code of Federal Regulations, Title 2** (2 CFR) as the procurement policy for your department.

If you are trying to get price estimates for your AFG application, there are several ways to handle this without violating the new regulations. You can call a vendor or manufacturer and say, "Please give me a price for a specific number of new SCBA that meet NFPA 2013 with a specific size bottle and a spare. Do you expect any price increases in the next six months?"

This is completely legal, and if you are awarded grant funds you can buy from that vendor. What you cannot do is get specs from that vendor for new SCBA and then use those specs to get bids from other vendors.

Here are two portions of the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 2 (2 CFR), that may be of assistance:

§200.318 General procurement standards

(a) The non-federal entity must use its own documented procurement procedures, which reflect applicable state and local laws and regulations, provided that the procurements conform to applicable federal law and the standards identified in this section.

§200.319 Competition

(a) All procurement transactions must be conducted in a manner providing full and open competition consistent with the standards of this section. In order to ensure objective contractor performance and eliminate unfair competitive advantage, contractors that develop or draft specifications, requirements, statements of work, and invitations for bids or requests for proposals must be excluded from competing for such procurements. Some of the situations considered to be restrictive of competition include but are not limited to:

1. Placing unreasonable requirements on firms in order for them to qualify to do business.
2. Requiring unnecessary experience and excessive bonding.
3. Noncompetitive pricing practices between firms or between affiliated companies.
4. Noncompetitive contracts to consultants that are on retainer contracts.
5. Organizational conflicts of interest.
6. Specifying only a "brand name" product instead of allowing "an equal" product to be offered and describing the performance or other relevant requirements of the procurement.
7. Any arbitrary action in the procurement process.

(b) The non-federal entity must conduct procurements in a manner that prohibits the use of statutorily or administratively imposed state or local geographical preferences in the evaluation of bids or proposals, except in those cases where applicable federal statutes expressly mandate or encourage geographic preference. Nothing in this section preempts state licensing laws. When contracting for architectural and

engineering (A/E) services, geographic location may be a selection criterion provided its application leaves an appropriate number of qualified firms, given the nature and size of the project, to compete for the contract.

(c) The non-federal entity must have written procedures for procurement transactions. These procedures must ensure that all solicitations:

1. Incorporate a clear and accurate description of the technical requirements for the material, product, or service to be procured. Such description must not, in competitive procurements, contain features, which unduly restrict competition. The description may include a statement of the qualitative nature of the material, product or service to be procured and, when necessary, must set forth those minimum essential characteristics and standards to which it must conform if it is to satisfy its intended use. Detailed product specifications should be avoided if at all possible. When it is impractical or uneconomical to make a clear and accurate description of the technical requirements, a “brand name or equivalent” description may be used as a means to define the performance or other salient requirements of procurement. The specific features of the named brand which must be met by offers must be clearly stated.
2. Identify all requirements, which the offerors must fulfill and all other factors to be used in evaluating bids or proposals.

(d) The non-federal entity must ensure that all prequalified lists of persons, firms, or products, which are used in acquiring goods and services are current and include enough qualified sources to ensure maximum open and free competition. Also, the non-federal entity must not preclude potential bidders from qualifying during the solicitation period.

If you are interested in learning more about 2 CFR, links to informational webcasts are available at www.cfo.gov/cofar.

Assistance to Firefighters Grant ‘get ready’ checklist

- ✓ Access your department’s NFIRS data for the past three years if possible.
- ✓ Analyze this data to determine if there are trends emerging.
- ✓ Identify staffing challenges in your department and surrounding departments to whom you provide mutual aid.
- ✓ Compile a demographic profile of your service area, including income and population statistics.
- ✓ Determine what your department needs are and if these needs are eligible for AFG funding. Secure a good cost estimate and make sure your department has sufficient funds to cover the AFG match.
- ✓ Review your department’s budget, identify all sources of income and detail expenses.
- ✓ Know your SAM.gov registration information and DUNS number. If you have trouble with either of these, seek help before the application period opens. Make sure that the information contained in SAM and DUNS match each other and the same as the information contained in your FEMA profile.
- ✓ Save all of this information in one place so you can access it and update it easily. Back up this information on a thumb drive in case you work on the grant application on different computers or the original computer malfunctions.

Ask for help!

There are plenty of resources to help answer questions. Here are three of the better ones:

- Contact the AFG Program Help Desk with questions or comments by calling 1-866-274-0960 or emailing firegrants@dhs.gov.
- Register for free at FireGrantsHelp.com and learn about the various resources offered.
- Submit a grant assistance request to the National Volunteer Fire Council and get linked to one of the NVFC’s peer reviewers.

2016 AFG PROJECT GUIDES

Each AFG application will require you to identify specific projects your fire department wants help funding. Those projects can be combined into seven categories: PPE projects, modifications to facilities projects, wellness and fitness projects, equipment projects, training projects, new vehicle projects and regional project requests. We'll walk you through each of those categories paying attention to common pitfalls, FEMA requirements and some special nuances. We also explain the increasingly popular micro grants and how and when they make sense for those project categories. Finally, with EMS accounting for the majority of calls for help, we look at what EMS equipment is most likely to be funded by FEMA.

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PPE projects

Personal protective equipment, which consists of both turnout gear and SCBA, continues to be one of the most requested items by AFG applicants. The highest priorities for PPE under AFG are:

- Departments requesting new turnout gear for the first time.
- Departments replacing obsolete or damaged turnout gear.
- Departments outfitting firefighters that do not have turnout gear.

Departments that are requesting turnout gear for a new mission, a new risk or to increase the department's supply of turnout gear are all medium and low priorities on AFG's lists and stand little chance of being funded.

Under this category, AFG considers turnout gear, wildland gear and PASS devices to have the highest priority. Specialized turnout gear such as BPE, proximity suits, extrication clothing and encapsulated suits only have a medium priority.

AFG considers a complete set of structural or proximity PPE turnout gear to comprise these **NFPA 1971-** or **1976-**compliant components.

- One pair of pants
- One coat
- One helmet
- Two hoods
- One pair of boots
- Two pairs of gloves
- One pair of suspenders
- One pair of goggles

In some areas where additional PPE, like a personal safety/rescue bailout system that is statutorily required, AFG will consider all statutorily required items to be part of a complete PPE set.

AFG considers a complete set of EMS PPE turnout gear to be composed of these **NFPA 1999**-compliant components.

- One pair of pants
- One coat
- One helmet
- One pair of boots
- One pair of gloves
- One pair of suspenders
- One pair of goggles

AFG considers a complete set of wildland PPE turnout gear to be composed of these **NFPA 1977**-compliant components.

- One pair of pants
- One coat
- One jumpsuit
- One helmet
- One pair of boots
- One pair of gloves
- One pair of suspenders
- One pair of goggles
- One fire shelter
- Web gear
- Backpack
- Canteen/hydration system

As far as SCBA goes, FEMA has established three priorities for AFG.

1. Replacing SCBA compliant with NFPA 1981, 2002 or earlier editions.
2. Replacing obsolete or damaged SCBA.
3. Funding every operational member with their own face piece.

Requesting AFG funding for new SCBA to address a new risk or to increase a department's supply are a medium and low priority under 2016 AFG and will not be considered for funding.

Remember, AFG considers a complete SCBA unit to be composed of the harness and backpack, one face piece and two cylinders. Acquiring for the first time or replacing an individual SCBA face piece for each

MAYDAY, MAYDAY

- For turnout gear requests, make sure your gear inventory under the Request Details section does not list more gear than you have firefighters listed under the Applicant Information section.
- If you are not requesting training funds along with your PPE request, a question at the end of the Request Details section asks if you will seek training elsewhere. You must answer "yes" or you will receive a negative score during technical review.
- Do not apply to replace gear that is less than 10 years old or SCBA that is less than two NFPA cycles old.
- Do not apply for turnout gear for future members. A turnout gear request cannot be made for firefighters who may join the department in the future.
- For AFG, an SCBA consists of the cylinder that comes with the pack and a spare cylinder. Do not apply for additional spare cylinders. AFG assumes that 10 SCBA units will have 20 cylinders.
- SCBA from a manufacturer that is no longer in business is considered obsolete.
- The SCBA's age is determined from the manufacturer's tag attached to the SCBA, not from the date on the cylinder.
- Allow sufficient time to work on your application and have someone else read the application before submission.

operational firefighter of a department is a high priority. To the extent a request for additional face pieces exceeds any face pieces requested as part of an SCBA unit, that request should be entered as a separate request line item in the Request Details section of the application, and it will not be considered a request to increase supplies.

Here are some important details to keep in mind when applying for PPE, both SCBA and turnout gear.

AFG funds used to acquire PPE may only be used to acquire compliant PPE for firefighting and nonaffiliated EMS personnel. Only the acquisition of PPE compliant with the most current edition of NFPA 1971, 1976, 1977, 1981 and 1999 are eligible activities.

Acquiring used, refurbished or updated PPE is ineligible for reimbursement. When requesting to replace obsolete or damaged PPE, applicants will be asked to provide the age of the items being replaced. All PPE items in the current inventory should be accurately described and accounted for in the application narrative. In order for PPE to be considered obsolete, the items being replaced must be a minimum of two NFPA cycles and 10 years or older from the date they were manufactured.

When completing your turnout gear inventory in the Request Details section of the application, make sure the total inventory matches the number of firefighters listed in the application's Characteristics I section. And remember, the date of the SCBA is the date of the standard under which it was manufactured. These dates will either be 2013, 2007, 2002, 1997 and 1992 or earlier. It is not the date the SCBA cylinder was made. Every SCBA set should have a manufacturer's tag on it stating the NFPA standard that it meets.



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How AFG can help you pay for Globe turnout gear and boots



Globe is the oldest and largest turnout gear manufacturer in the world. Founded in 1887, Globe designs and builds athletic gear for firefighters because fighting fires is demanding, physical work requiring maximum athletic performance.

When your department needs to purchase new turnout gear or replace existing turnout gear, Globe is likely to be the first name that comes to mind. After all, turnout gear and boots are critical components any firefighter takes with them onto the fireground.

But often funding the next generation of turnout gear can be difficult. Even when the need is clear, funds are tight. Many firefighters are dealing with gear that's older or worn because the budget just won't allow the purchase of new gear.

That's where grants can help. If your department is looking for ways to fund the purchase of Globe turnout gear, applying for grants can help your department go beyond the limits of your operating budget.

AFG, also known as the FIRE Act or Assistance to Firefighters Grant program, is probably the best-known grant program for the fire service and has provided many fire and rescue agencies with critically needed equipment.

One downside to AFG is that it gets the most applications of any fire grant source, and the available funding can't address every application. Because there are so many applicants, you'll want to put your best possible foot forward to stand out from the other applicants. Above all, these five must-dos will help your chances of securing AFG money.

1. For turnout gear and boot requests, make sure your gear inventory under the Request Details section does not list more gear than what's needed for the firefighters you have listed under the Applicant Information section.
2. Do not apply to replace gear that is less than 10 years old. The many departments dealing with decade-old gear will more than likely get priority.
3. Do not apply for turnout gear for possible future members. A turnout gear request cannot be made for firefighters who may join the department in the future.
4. If you are not requesting training funds along with your PPE request, a question at the end of the Request Details section asks if you will seek training elsewhere. You must answer "yes" or you will receive a negative score during technical review.
5. If you think that your turnout gear request doesn't meet the eligibility or priority requirements of AFG you may want to consider researching other grant possibilities.

AFG can be a great source for funding to purchase turnout gear and boots. You'll need to be smart if you want to stand the best chance of beating out other applicants. But with some preparation and planning, your department can secure the funds you need to purchase new PPE.

Globe has partnered with FireGrantsHelp to provide free grant assistance to fire departments for turnout gear and boots. To sign up for help, [click here](#).



Modifications to facilities projects

AFG grants may be used to provide limited modifications to fire stations built prior to Jan. 1, 2003. Structures built prior to Jan. 1, 2003, that have been expanded or added on to may be eligible for an award to retrofit areas.

The highest priority is given to applications that request source-capture exhaust systems, sprinkler systems or smoke/fire detectors. Source-capture systems grab exhaust gases from a vehicle directly via a conduit that attaches to or over the end of the vehicle's exhaust system at the tailpipe. The captured exhaust gases are expelled through the attached conduit via mechanical/pneumatic means to the exterior of the building.

Those applications that request generators or air-quality systems are ranked as a medium priority.

Here's a look at how fire station priorities are determined for grant funding.

MAYDAY, MAYDAY

- New fire station construction is not eligible.
- The station must have been built before 2003. If it has an addition, only the pre-2003 section is eligible.
- Total funding for each station cannot exceed \$100,000.
- Source capture exhaust extraction systems have the highest priority under the vehicle exhaust mitigation category.
- Station maintenance and bay floor resurfacing is not eligible.
- You must complete an [Environmental and Historic Preservation Screening form](#) if selected for an award.

1. Stations with full-time coverage 24/7 are ranked highest.
2. Part-time or selected coverage at stations are a medium priority.
3. Stations that are not manned on a regular basis have the lowest ranking.
4. Facilities with sleeping quarters are at the top of the list.
5. Facilities without sleeping quarters have a medium ranking.
6. Training facilities, dispatch centers and marine fire facilities have the lowest ranking.

Remember, no modification may change the structure's footprint or profile, and the funding for any projects or activities cannot cumulatively exceed \$100,000 (total project cost) for any individual station.

Applicants are required to complete an environmental and historical review if funded for any of the building modification activities. You will not be able to draw down funds if you have not completed this form and received permission from FEMA that your review has been approved. If you do move forward with your project without Environmental and Historical Preservation approval, any funds that you expend on the project will be denied by AFG.



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Wellness and fitness projects

Over the years, securing funding from this AFG category has posed a problem for many departments, especially volunteer departments. Wellness and fitness activities are intended to strengthen emergency responders so their mental, physical and emotional capabilities are resilient enough to withstand the demands of all-hazards operations. Rather than have the priorities listed as high, medium and low for this category of funding, they are simply listed as Priority 1 and Priority 2.

In order to be eligible for funding, applicants must offer or plan to offer all four of the following Priority 1 activities.

1. Initial medical exams
2. Job-related immunizations
3. Annual medical and fitness evaluations
4. Behavioral health programs

A department may apply for Priority 2 activities only if it currently offers or is requesting a combination of the four activities required under Priority 1. Departments that have some of the Priority 1 programs in place must apply for funds to implement the missing Priority 1 programs before applying for funds for any Priority 2 activities. In addition, funded medical exams must meet current **NFPA 1582** requirements. There are five Priority 2 activities.

1. Candidate physical ability evaluation
2. Formal fitness and injury prevention program and equipment

3. Injury and illness rehabilitation
4. IAFF or IAFC peer fitness trainer programs, including transportation, travel, overtime/backfill and reasonable expenses associated with member participation in train-the-trainer for IAFC/IAFF and implementation of a peer fitness trainer program
5. Formal fitness and injury-prevention program and equipment

Remember, simultaneous requests for Priority 1 and Priority 2 activities will receive a lower funding consideration than requests that complete all of the four Priority 1 activities.

MAYDAY, MAYDAY

- Fitness club memberships for participants or their families are not eligible.
- Non-cash incentives (T-shirts or hats of nominal value, vouchers to local businesses or time off) are not permitted, neither is the payment of a cash incentive.
- The purchase of buildings is not eligible.
- Purchase of medical equipment that is not used as part of the wellness and fitness program is prohibited.
- Contractual services with anyone other than a medical professional for programs such as smoking cessation are not permitted.
- Physicals must meet NFPA 1582.



Equipment: Communications Projects

AFG grants fund equipment for effective response, firefighting, rescue and emergency medical operations to enhance the public safety. Applications under the equipment category make up the third highest number of applications submitted annually — after vehicles and PPE — for AFG funding.

FEMA has done an excellent job of breaking down the vast amount of equipment used by today's fire service and categorizing it as high, medium or low priority. I highly suggest that you refer to the Notice of Funding Opportunity before you make your final decision on applying for a certain piece of equipment. In general, all basic firefighting equipment such as nozzles, hoses, portable generators, simulators, thermal imaging cameras, air compressors and other similar items have a high priority. Also in the high-priority ranking are communications equipment and rescue and extrication equipment.

In the medium-priority area you will find hazmat equipment. In the low-priority listing you will find CBRN equipment, traffic pre-emption systems, boats and tow vehicles.

Equipment that has a direct effect on the health and safety of firefighters gets additional consideration. This is also true for equipment that benefits other departments and equipment that brings a department into compliance with national standards or statutory requirements.

When reviewing applications, FEMA gives the highest priority to first-time purchase (never owned by applicant) to support existing mission and/or replace obsolete or damaged equipment. If you are replacing obsolete or damaged equipment, it should be at least 15 years old or no longer manufactured.

FEMA gives medium priority to equipment that increases capabilities within the department's existing mission or to meet a new risk. The lowest priority is given to requested items for a new mission, for additional supplies or for reserve equipment.

In recent years, communications equipment has been one of the most frequently requested equipment categories. AFG continues to fund applications for communications equipment — but at a very basic level. Included at that level are mobile radios, portable

radios, pagers, base radios and in-apparatus repeaters. Requests for other communications equipment will not be considered.

The most important fact to keep in mind when planning radio projects is that all radio equipment must be **APCO Project 25** (P25) compliant. All AFG applicants should conduct market research prior to submitting their applications. When contacting prospective vendors, ask if the desired communications equipment is P25-compliant and operates in accordance with SAFECOM regulations and technical standards. If you have questions or are not sure, manufacturers are required to produce, upon request, supporting documentation that shows the specified equipment is P25-compliant.

As an initial step in researching P25-compliant communications equipment for either your AFG application or award, visit the DHS Lessons Learned Information Sharing website and click on RKB Certifications & Declarations. Type the vendor/manufacturer name of the equipment being researched into the “title” box and hit “apply.” Products listed will have supporting P25 documentation. Click on the product for specification details and documentation.

The move to P25-compliant communications equipment is another attempt to standardize our response capabilities. P25 radios will allow users from different agencies or areas to communicate directly with each other.

MAYDAY, MAYDAY

- Existing equipment is considered obsolete once it's 15 years old or is no longer manufactured.
- Accountability systems are now located under equipment (moved from PPE).
- All simulators and all mobile or fixed fire/evolution props have moved from training to equipment.
- Under the Request Details section, if you are not requesting funding for training on the equipment you are requesting, you must check the box that asks if you will receive training from another source to have a competitive application.
- Do not request equipment for services that you do not provide.
- A request for portable radios allows for a portable radio for every seated position on the apparatus; this number should match the seating chart under Department Characteristics.
- Sirens or other outdoor warning devices are not eligible for funding.
- Mobile radios for personally owned vehicles are not eligible except chief fire officers' personal vehicles, if justified.
- Telephones are not eligible for funding.
- Drones and other aerial surveillance devices cannot be funded under this application.

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New vehicle projects

Annually, about 50 percent of the applications the AFG program receives are for new vehicles. Only about 4 percent of those are funded. One of the problem areas for departments is that they continue to apply for vehicles that are a low or medium priority in their demographic classification. Under the Vehicle Acquisition application, FEMA has broken fire departments into urban, suburban and rural classifications. This matrix is featured in the NOFO and should be consulted before you apply for funding. Under all three demographic classifications, pumpers (engines), ambulances, aerials and community paramedic vehicles are high priorities.

From this point on it gets a little tricky. If you are in an urban or suburban area, a rescue is considered a high-priority vehicle. However, if you are in a rural area, a rescue is considered a medium priority. Under current budget constraints AFG has not been funding medium-priority vehicle requests.

In similar fashion, if yours is a rural department, a brush truck or quick-attack unit is a high priority. However, for a suburban department this is considered

a medium priority and stands little chance of being funded.

Under all three demographic classifications, rehab units, command vehicles, hazmat vehicles and light and air units are all considered low or medium priority.

FEMA will give additional considerations when these factors are present.

- Departments have automatic aid agreements, mutual aid agreements or both.
- A high call volume of the department's primary first-due response area.
- Requests to replace apparatus that have open cab/jump seat configurations.
- High age and mileage of the vehicle being replaced; older equipment receive higher consideration.
- Age of the newest vehicle in the department's fleet is similar to the vehicle to be replaced.
- Average age of the fleet; older equipment within the same class will have a higher ranking.

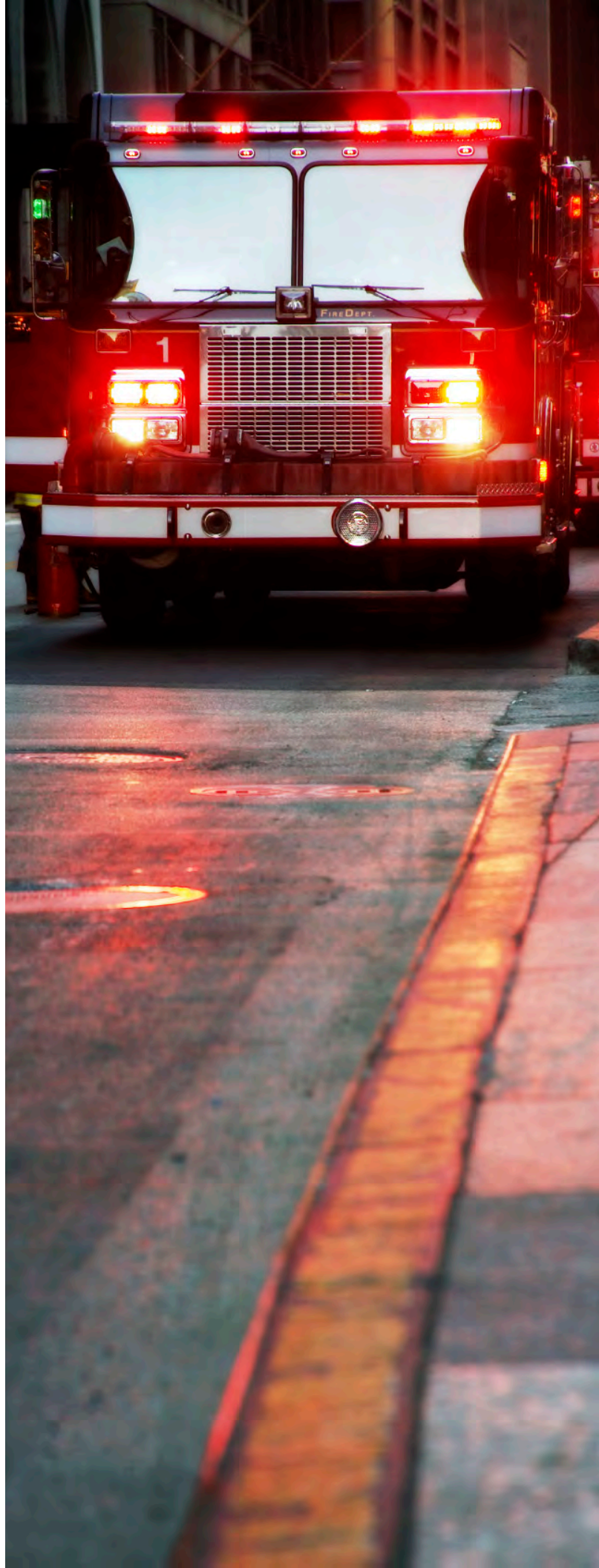
Remember that AFG will no longer fund refurbished or used vehicles. And it is important to apply for the vehicle you need. Don't submit an exorbitant estimate just because it is a grant and a salesperson told you to. AFG will consider this an unreasonable request and give it a low score.

If you do not have a significant number of buildings four stories or taller, you will not get funded for new quint. If you are funded for a new vehicle, you must permanently remove the vehicle you wanted to replace from service. Also, you cannot encumber the title of a FEMA-funded vehicle by using it as collateral for a loan.

The AFG application will ask if you are requesting funds for training with this vehicle. If you answer "no," the next question will ask if you will be receiving training through another source. You must answer "yes" to be considered for funding.

MAYDAY, MAYDAY

- AFG will no longer fund refurbished or used vehicles.
- Apply for the vehicle you need. Don't submit an exorbitant estimate just because it is a grant and a salesperson told you to. AFG will consider this an unreasonable request and give it a low score.
- If you do not have a significant number of buildings four stories or taller, you will not get funded for new quint.
- If you are funded for a new vehicle, you must permanently remove the vehicle you wanted to replace from service.
- You cannot encumber the title of a FEMA-funded vehicle by using it as collateral for a loan.
- You will be asked if you are requesting funds for training with this vehicle. If you answer "no," the next question will ask if you will be receiving training through another source. You must answer "yes" to be considered for funding.
- Allow sufficient time to work on your application and have someone else read the application before submission.





Training projects

Under the Training Activity of AFG, FEMA has established **NFPA 1001** Firefighter I and II, EMT and hazmat ops training activities as the priority. To go along with these priorities, FEMA has developed a training priority matrix as part of the NOFO.

In this matrix FEMA lists the priorities for urban, suburban and rural departments by individual training activity. Each activity has been assigned a high, medium or low priority depending on each population category. Consult this matrix before you begin your training application to determine which priority your proposed training project meets. Because of limited funding, requests for a low- or even medium-priority training activity have little chance of being funded.

In addition to this matrix, FEMA has determined that hands-on, instructor-led training that meets a national, state and/or DHS-adopted standard and results in a national or state certification provides the greatest training benefit. Instructor-led training that requires student testing to demonstrate academic competence and/or practical proficiency for certification will receive a high competitive rating. Proposed training activities that benefit the highest percentage of applicable personnel within a fire department, or training that will be open to other departments in the region, also receive a high competitive rating.

Overtime expenses paid to career firefighters to attend training or to backfill positions for colleagues

who are in training is an eligible request. Compensation to volunteers (fire and nonaffiliated EMS) for wages lost to attend training is also an eligible activity. However, there is no overtime or backfill expenses for volunteers.

Construction of facilities such as buildings, towers or sheds is not an eligible expense under this category.

MAYDAY, MAYDAY

- Minor interior alterations to your station, not to exceed \$10,000 to support the awarded training activities, like the removal or construction of a non-weight bearing wall, is an eligible activity.
- Overtime expenses paid to career firefighters to attend training or to backfill positions for colleagues who are in training is an eligible request.
- Compensation to volunteers (fire and nonaffiliated EMS) for wages lost to attend training is an eligible activity. However, there are no overtime or backfill expenses for volunteers.
- Construction of facilities such as buildings, towers or sheds is not an eligible expense.
- The purchase of firefighting equipment or PPE used exclusively for training is not eligible.



Regional projects

Regional applications give departments a chance to achieve programs where they would not have been competitive as an individual department and to save money on such projects. Eligible regional program activities are vehicle acquisition and training, equipment and PPE activities. Regional program activities should achieve cost effectiveness, support regional efficiency and resilience, and benefit more than one local department.

Under all regional activities, one department must act as the host for the application. As such, the host department must agree, if awarded, to be responsible for all aspects of the grant. This includes, but is not limited to, accountability for all assets received through the grant and all reporting requirements in the regional application.

All participants in a regional application must sign a memorandum of understanding prior to submitting the application. The memorandum should specify the responsibilities of the participating partners, the participants' level of involvement in the project and the proposed distribution of all grant-funded assets.

Successful regional applicants shall provide a copy of the signed memorandum at the time of award. Any entity named in the application as benefiting from the award must have signed the memorandum.

All departments participating in a regional application must be compliant with all AFG requirements, including being current with past grants, closeouts and other reporting requirements. In addition, when completing the Request Details and Narrative sections, the host applicant must list any non-AFG eligible third-party organizations that will benefit if the grant is approved. When calculating the required match for a regional grant, the host will use the total population served by all departments involved in the regional application.

In recent years AFG has expanded the eligible list of regional projects to include apparatus purchases. Those considering a regional vehicle request must examine AFG's published priority list to determine if the vehicle in mind is a high priority.

There are six high-priority vehicles under a regional application.

1. Aerial
2. Mobile command vehicle
3. Air/light utility
4. Bariatric ambulance
5. Rehab unit
6. Non-transport, nonaffiliated EMS (community paramedic)

MAYDAY, MAYDAY

- If you are a part of a regional application, you cannot apply to AFG for the same project on your own.
- The host department never functions as a pass-through organization, and the participating partners are never sub-grantees; the host distributes grant-funded assets and never grant funds to participating organizations.
- The host department is responsible for all financial and programmatic reporting.
- Ownership of the grant-funded assets stays with the department that accepts them.



Micro grants

The past three AFG application cycles have seen the initiation and rapid growth of the micro grant concept. If a department has needs that total less than \$25,000 or a project that requires a federal share of less than \$25,000, micro grants deserve serious consideration.

In 2014, AFG received 1,298 micro grant requests. More than 80 percent of the micro grant requests, 1,011 applications, went to peer review. That is a much higher percentage going to peer review than any other category under AFG. This should translate into a higher percentage of funded applications for those who choose this selection.

Do not get confused when completing the AFG

application; micro grants are not a separate application or program. They are a voluntary choice, made by the fire departments and nonaffiliated EMS organizations for activities (equipment, PPE, training and wellness and fitness) within the Operations and Safety application, to limit the federal share to \$25,000 for all Operations and Safety activities. Selecting a micro grant option for an eligible Operations and Safety activity does not impact an applicant's request or federal participation under the Vehicle Acquisition or Regional programs.

FEMA has consistently stated that applicants who select micro grants as a funding opportunity choice may receive additional consideration for awards.

MAYDAY, MAYDAY

- No overmatching will be permitted for projects proposed under micro grants.
- If you pursue a micro grant, you cannot file an additional request under the Firefighter Operations and Safety activity.
- Micro grants cannot be used under the Vehicle Application activity.
- Micro grants still carry all of the financial and programmatic reporting requirements of other AFG grants.



Photo by Joe Thomas/Greenbox Photography

EMS get ready guide

Since emergency medical services are provided through a number of different venues, it is important to verify that your agency is eligible before you apply for AFG funding. With new technology on the market to make firefighters safer and more efficient, AFG has adjusted its priorities to include items like power-assisted cots, P25 radios and chest-compression devices.

AFG considers an EMS agency or organization eligible if it is a public or private nonprofit emergency medical services entity providing medical transport is not affiliated with a hospital and does not serve a geographic area in which emergency medical services are adequately provided by a fire department.

Nonaffiliated EMS organizations are those operating in any of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico or any federally recognized Native American tribe or authorized tribal organization, or an Alaskan native village, Alaska Regional Native Corp. or the Alaska Village Initiatives.

AFG considers the following as hospitals:

- Clinics
- Medical centers
- Medical college or university
- Infirmary
- Surgery centers
- Any other institution, association or foundation providing medical, surgical or psychiatric care and/or treatment for the sick or injured

Requests for ballistic protective equipment are now eligible as a new mission under PPE. A set of BPE comprises one vest, one helmet, one triage bag and one pair of goggles.

Fire and EMS organizations are encouraged to establish joint interagency plans, policies and procedures that address active shooter and mass casualty incident response operations. The development of such doctrine should be coordinated among the fire/EMS response organizations; law

enforcement, public safety and private sector responder agencies; and regionally with hospitals and receiving medical facilities.

In addition, fire and EMS personnel should be properly trained and qualified in the use of the ballistic protection equipment and active shooter mass casualty tactics and procedures. Interagency training and exercises are highly encouraged.

AFG considers a complete set of EMS PPE turnout gear to comprise these NFPA 1999 compliant components: one pair of pants, one coat, one helmet, one pair of boots, one pair of gloves, one pair of suspenders and one pair of goggles.

Since training is a prerequisite for the effective use of EMS equipment, FEMA has determined that it is more cost-effective to enhance or expand an existing nonaffiliated EMS organization by providing training or equipment than it is to create a new service. Therefore, communities attempting to start nonaffiliated EMS services will receive the lowest competitive rating.

AFG provides training grants to meet the educational and performance requirements of nonaffiliated EMS personnel. Training should align with the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which designs and specifies a national standard curriculum for EMT training, and the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians, a private, central certifying entity whose primary purpose is to maintain a national standard. NREMT also provides certification information for paramedics who relocate to another state.

Of higher priority due to time and cost of upgrading an organization's response level are:

- Organizations seeking to elevate the response level from EMT Advanced (EMT-I) to Paramedic (EMT-P)
- Organizations seeking to elevate the response level from EMT (EMT-B) to EMT Advanced (EMT-I)

EMS and rescue agencies may apply for equipment funding under AFG. The following are considered high priority under this activity:

- Airway equipment (non-disposable)
- Vehicle extrication equipment
- Power lift cots and stretchers
- Monitors and defibrillator-15 leads
- Responder rehab equipment
- Automated external defibrillators BLS level
- Pulse oximeters
- Stretchers, backboards, splints, etc.
- Blood pressure cuffs
- Stethoscopes
- Chest compression devices
- P25-compliant radios

Most equipment replacement rules follow those of fire departments. The one exception is any type of technology equipment. AFG considers this equipment obsolete if it is eight or more years old.

MAYDAY, MAYDAY

- While fire departments and nonaffiliated EMS organizations may share some common program priorities, there are some restricted activities for nonaffiliated EMS organizations. Nonaffiliated EMS organizations are not eligible to request any activity that is specific or unique to structural or proximity firefighting.

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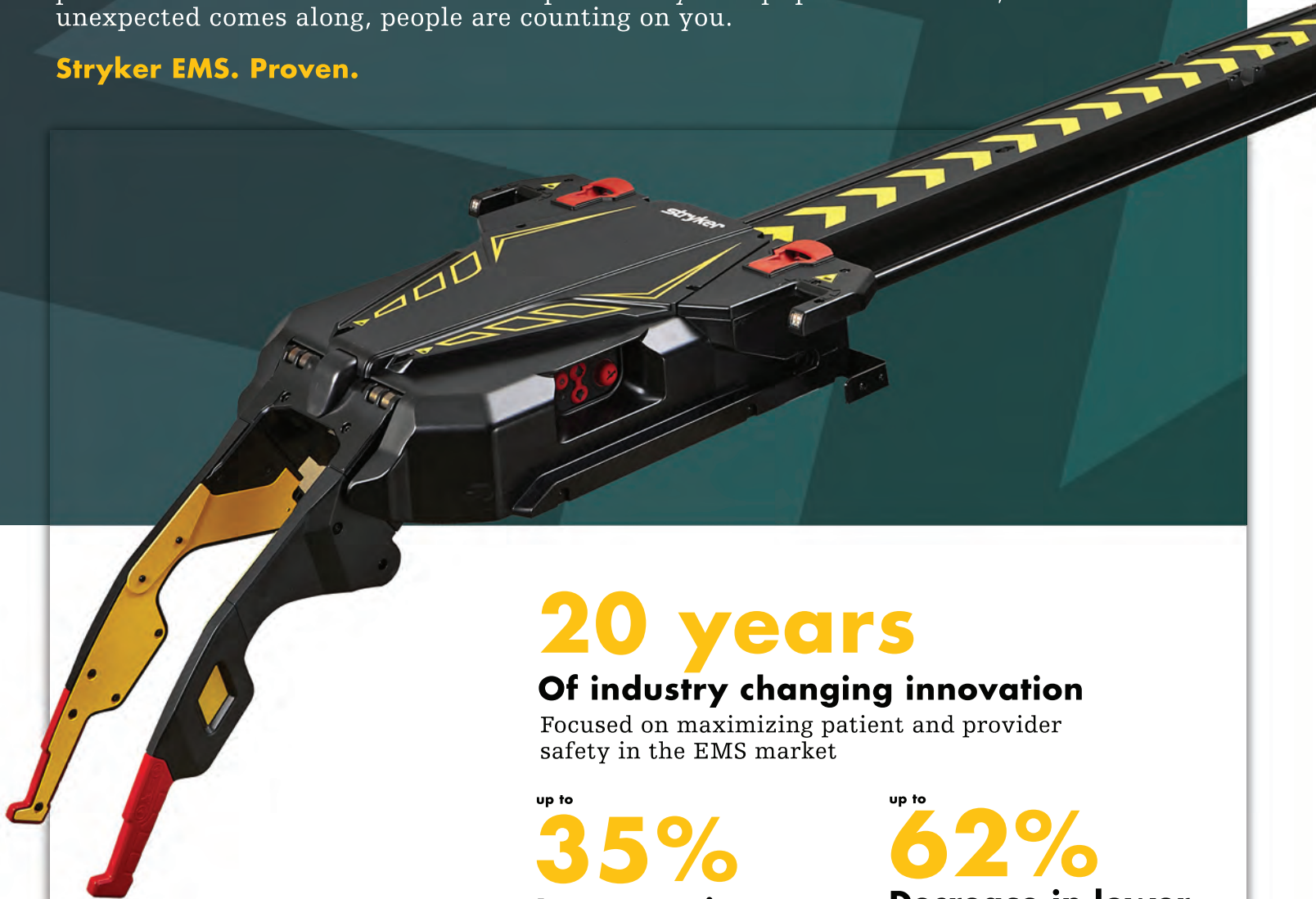
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Is possible for workers using a powered fastener¹

1. Data contained in and/or calculated from: T.K. Fredericks, S.E. Butt, K.S. Hamrs, J.D. Burns, (2013) "Evaluation of Medical Cot Design Considering Biomedical Impact on Emergency Response Personnel." International Society for Occupation Ergonomics & Safety.

NARRATIVE GUIDES & EXAMPLES

Every AFG application will require you to complete four narratives under the Department Characteristics sections. These include critical infrastructure, training, description of community and organization, and financial need. There may be other specific narratives needed depending on your answers to certain questions inside the Department Characteristics section. To get started, we'll examine the four standard narratives needed under this section of your AFG application.



Critical infrastructure narrative

The first narrative you will encounter in your AFG application is one that follows the question:

“Does your department protect critical infrastructure? If you answer yes, please list the critical infrastructure.”

This question has replaced the old question that asked if you protected critical infrastructure of the state. Applicants had been interpreting this question too literally and answering “no” because they didn’t have a state-owned building in their coverage area.

Think of sites in your coverage area that would strain your response capabilities if they were the site of an alarm. Another easy way to compile your critical infrastructure is to list the location, facility or event where you have done pre-incident planning. List those

places that you always sit around the station and say, “Boy, if anything ever happens at _____ we would be there all day.” List those places that the fire chief always thinks, “If we ever have an alarm at that place, I hope I’m on vacation.”

You get the idea. And yes, I listed the term “event” because critical infrastructure doesn’t have to be a building or location. Many departments provide services to festivals, sporting events, concerts and other similar activities that attract tens of thousands of visitors to the area. If anything happened at one of these sites, it would certainly strain the response capabilities of the department.



Training narrative

The next narrative follows a set of questions that ask what percentage of your firefighters are certified to **NFPA 1001** Firefighter I and II. If your answer is less than 100 percent to Firefighter II, you must provide details about your training and plans to achieve that goal.

Many applicants have paid little attention to this narrative and gave one-line answers like, “We will never meet this standard” or “We will be at that goal in five years.” They have done this because there is no scoring value attached to this section. Yes, that is correct – FEMA has not assigned a score to this narrative, but in essence they have.

Imagine if you are sitting on a peer-review panel and a department is asking for \$350,000 for a new engine and they have few firefighters certified to Firefighter I or II and give a vague one-line answer to the training question. Would you score their overall application highly? I doubt it. Your answer also doesn’t have to be a Pulitzer-winning response. Simply describe how many firefighters you have and how many earned Firefighter I and II. Then, state what your plans are to increase your compliance with NFPA 1001. It can be a response like:

“We have six firefighters attending the academy, and they will test out this April. This will bring us to 80 percent compliance. Our other 20 percent are having difficulty scheduling prep classes to take the test because of their employment. We are attempting to schedule these classes in our station during the third quarter of this year. However, even if they are able to complete the prep class, the certification tests are only held twice a year in our area. Those dates are in the spring and summer. The next closest testing site is 125 miles away, so our firefighters will not be able to test until next year.”

In a few sentences you were able to detail your plans for firefighter certification and explain the difficulties you are encountering in scheduling a testing date.



Community and organization narrative

Photo by Joe Thomas/Greenbox Photography

You are on vacation 500 miles away from home and the person in front of you in the hotel check-in line is wearing a T-shirt that says, “Station 1 First Due at the Courthouse.” You tap him on the shoulder and tell him you are a volunteer. Then the two of you have a conversation about your coverage area, how many calls you have, the apparatus you have, the problems you have in your coverage area and similar stories. Most of us do this every time we see another firefighter and we have the time to chat.

Fast-forward to the opening of the AFG grant period. You are sitting at your computer and you are asked to describe your organization and the community you serve. Your mind goes blank and you struggle to get a few sentences down. You wonder exactly what do they want here and why they are they asking you this.

To make things easier, imagine that the three people on the review panel are sitting in front of you and they just said, “Hey, are you a firefighter at Station 1? What kind of apparatus do you have? How many calls do you run? How many structure fires do you have? Wow, that’s a large number. How big is your coverage area? Does your station have any special training?” The conversation could go on and on.

Why is it easy for us to talk about our department to the guy in the check-in line but we freeze up when we have to put similar information into our grant application? You see, the three people on the grant review panel know absolutely nothing about your

department, just like the guy at the check-in line. You need to do the same thing when you write your community and organization narrative to AFG.

Here are 10 narrative items to answer:

- Where is the department located?
- Describe the geography and topography of the coverage area.
- How large is the coverage area?
- How many stations does the department have?
- What apparatus does it have?
- What is the department’s annual call volume?
- What type of services does it provide?
- Are there any special types of infrastructure that you protect?
- What has been happening to your coverage area? This can include growing population, new developments and construction, declining population, vacant buildings and a large number of foreclosures.
- Are the number of alarms increasing, especially structure fires?

This list could go on, but it should give you some idea of the type of information needed to give the reviewer an accurate picture of your coverage area.



Financial need narrative

An AFG application that makes it through technical review is then evaluated by a team of three peer reviewers. The maximum score an application can receive in peer review is 100 points. The financial need narrative, located in the application's Department Characteristics section, is the first narrative that is counted in the peer-review scoring. FEMA will tell you that typically the financial need section tends to be the weakest and lowest scoring of all the narratives. There are three common mistakes that departments make in this section.

1. Not providing enough financial information about the department
2. Not providing true information about the department's financial picture
3. Not writing about the coverage area's economic situation and how it has impacted the department's budget

Begin your narrative by detailing your current sources of funding, your department's budget and your department's expenses. It is important to break these out in both whole numbers and percentages of your budget. If any of these amounts has been

fluctuating, describe why and how this has affected your operations. This is basically the root cause of your need for financial assistance. To put it simply, this is why the department doesn't have the money to fund the project.

A quick reference to your service area demographic profile may be extremely beneficial at this time. The census data profile that you should have for each community in your first-due coverage area is critical in painting a picture of the local economic and social landscape for the funding agency. At a minimum, examine such data as the per capita income for the community, the poverty rates and the median household income.

If you feel that any of this information is helpful to your cause, extract it both in whole numbers and percentages. Include with this local data the national data and how your area compares. Next, explain what steps you are taking to address your department's financial situation and what the short- and long-term outlook is for improvement. Then tie all of this information into your justification for federal assistance.

If your department has made any large expenditures in the past year that have negatively affected your budget, explain them in detail. If I were a reviewer

and a department told me that it spent \$65,000 last year fixing the sidewalk at the station and this year was requesting \$62,000 for 10 new SCBA, I would wonder about their priorities. Why didn't they spend the \$62,000 to buy new SCBA and put the sidewalk project on the back burner? The reason may be very valid. Perhaps both the city code officer and their insurance company wrote them up and mandated repairs be made because the sidewalk was in such poor condition that it was a safety hazard. The reviewers will never know this if it is not included in the narrative, and they will draw their own conclusions — like questioning the department's spending priorities.

The next part of your narrative should describe what you want to purchase and how much it costs. If your project consists of several items, list each item and its price. Be sure to give the total project cost and any matching funds that you may be providing. Then provide information on how your department will be securing its match.

Be clear with the description of your financial situation. Remember, your application will probably be in front of a reviewer for only a few minutes. Be open about your department's financial outlook and the reasons for it. Explain with examples why this situation has occurred and how you are trying to address it.

MAYDAY, MAYDAY

Don't let these four common mistakes derail your grant efforts:

- Do not try to lower your budget numbers just to look poor. It is hard to imagine a department responding to 200 alarms a year from two stations with six pieces of apparatus on a \$25,000 annual budget.
- If you are planning to provide more than the required match, give as much detail as possible for the source of these funds.
- Be practical in your request for funds. Don't just add extra equipment to the request because a salesperson is telling you to. The reviewers are knowledgeable and will spot this immediately.
- Don't copy someone else's narratives and simply change the department name, especially the financial need section. You need to describe your need for financial assistance, and another department's information won't make sense in your application.





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