

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

May 2006

This document provides a summary of the priorities for funding of the 2006 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grants of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Read this program guidance carefully as it explains how to apply, what information will be requested, and how applications will be evaluated. The applicants' online tutorial, and the answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) should also be reviewed on the grant program's website (www.firegrantsupport.com). Together, these documents will provide applicants with the information they need to complete the online application. The online application will be available on or about May 30, 2006.



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PROGRAM GUIDANCE FOR FY2006 SAFER GRANTS

Purpose and Overview of the SAFER Grants

The purpose of the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants is to help fire departments increase their cadre of firefighters. The program's goal is to enhance the local fire departments' ability to attain and maintain 24-hour staffing, thus assuring their communities have adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards. The SAFER grants have two activities that will help grantees in this endeavor: (1) hiring of firefighters and (2) recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

Congress appropriated a total of \$110 million to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to carry out the activities of the SAFER grants. The authority for SAFER is derived from the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2201 et seq.) as amended. Appropriated funds are available for award until September 30, 2007. Once awarded, the funds are available for expenditure by the grantee for the full period of grant performance.

Hiring of Firefighters

The Hiring of Firefighters Activity is a five-year grant that provides fire departments with funding to pay a portion of the salaries of newly hired firefighters. These newly hired positions must be in addition to authorized and funded active firefighter positions. Grantees must maintain the number of authorized and funded positions as declared at the time of application and maintain the awarded new firefighter positions throughout the five-year period of performance. Grantees that fail to maintain this level of staffing risk losing their grant. Volunteer, combination, and non-profit career fire departments are all eligible to apply for assistance in Hiring of Firefighters Activity. These grants require the grantee to match an increasing portion of the salary over a four-year period; in the fifth year of the grant, the grantee must fund the entire cost of any positions funded as a result of a grant award.

The long-term nature of the eligible activities under these grants makes it essential that an applicant's local governing body be involved in the application process. As such, each applicant certifies in their application that their governing body has been informed of the applicant's intention to submit a SAFER grant request, that the local governing body acknowledges the commitment required for the grant if awarded, and that appropriate financial support will be secured for the applicant's cost-sharing obligations. The commitment from the local governing body is critical to the success of any grant awarded under this program. As such, DHS may require that applicants provide documentation from the local governing body that affirms this support.

Once a SAFER funded position is filled, the funded position must remain filled until the end of the period of performance. During the five-year period of performance, SAFER grantees must also maintain their staffing at a level equal to, or greater than, their staffing level at the time of application. In the event that the staffing level falls below the

staffing level at application, or if a funded position becomes vacant or otherwise inactive, we will consider the grantee to be in default of their grant agreement if the position is NOT filled or staffing levels decline for an extended period of time (e.g., six months or more). Grantees that do not fulfill their grant award obligations will be required to return the defaulted portion of the Federal funds disbursed for the funded position under the grant award. For example, if one of four positions funded by SAFER is vacated for an extended period time, we would require the grantee to remit all Federal funds disbursed for that one position. If staffing levels decline before the level required above and this deficiency is not corrected within six months, DHS may require the grantee to return all grant funds.

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

- **NFPA 1710** Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Department (Section 5.2.4.2 – Initial Full Alarm Assignment Capability). This standard primarily applies to all-career fire departments and combination departments at the combination department’s election.
- **NFPA 1720** Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to Public by Volunteer Fire Departments (Section 4.3 – Staffing and Deployment). This standard primarily applies to all-volunteer fire departments, but may also apply to combination departments if the combination department does not elect to comply with the NFPA 1710 standard.

Note: The SAFER grants are focused only on the “Deployment” or “Staffing and Deployment” sections of these two standards (respectively). Information about these standards is available on the on the NFPA Website at www.nfpa.org. The National Fire Protection Association has established a special link that provides information about these two standards. For more information on the standards, contact NFPA at 1-800-344-3555, or e-mail questions to stds_admin@nfpa.org.

Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters

The Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity provides assistance to grantees for periods of up to four years. The purpose of these grants is to assist with the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Volunteer departments, combination departments and local or statewide organizations that represent the interests of volunteer firefighters are eligible to apply for assistance under this activity. There are no non-Federal match requirements for this activity.

Definitions

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

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

Career Fire Department: An agency or organization in which all members receive financial compensation for their services (organizations that provide reimbursement on a paid-on-call basis are considered to be a “combination fire department” for the purposes of this program).

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

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

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

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

Mutual-aid: An agreement whereby assisting fire departments are dispatched only when the first-arriving unit on a scene calls for assistance.

Non-supplanting: The SAFER grant will not provide assistance to fund positions that are currently funded by the applicant. In other words, the grantees cannot use the Federal grant dollars to substitute for their own budget. Awardees must maintain the number of firefighters they stipulated at the time of application, plus the funded SAFER positions, through out the period of performance.

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

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

Statewide or local firefighter interest organizations: Statewide and local firefighter interest groups are organizations that are in existence to support or represent the interests of firefighters in front of legislative bodies at the local, State and Federal level. Such organizations include state or local firefighter and/or fire chiefs associations, fire department auxiliaries, volunteer firefighter relief organizations and associations. DHS shall make the final determination as to whether an applicant is an appropriate firefighter interest group.

Staffing and Deployment: The minimum staffing requirements to ensure that a sufficient number of members are available to operate safely and effectively as defined in NFPA 1710 and 1720.

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

Application Process

Eligible applicants can apply for a SAFER grant online via the DHS “e-grants” application process. The online application can be accessed through the following websites: the USFA Website at www.usfa.fema.gov, or the Website of the Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) program at www.firegrantsupport.com, or accessed directly at <https://portal.fema.gov>.

Potential applicants must be aware that eligibility is contingent upon a stable budget. Grants will not be awarded to a municipality or other recipient whose annual operational budget has been reduced below 80 percent of the average annual funding in the three years prior to the date of application.

Each department or organization can submit only one application per application period. Applicants may apply for either the Hiring of Firefighters or for the Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters or both on the same application. However, we will evaluate applications that include requests for both activities in their entirety and fund them accordingly, i.e., we will not make a partial award for one of the two activities. It is not necessary to for the applicant to write two separate narratives, however, applicants that are requesting assistance in both activities should be sure to address both activities under each of the applicable narrative elements (see pages 12 and 13 for details regarding the requisite narrative elements).

The system will allow one authorized representative of a department to log in and create a username and password for the department. Previous grant applicants for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program or the Fire Prevention and Safety Grants **MUST USE THE SAME USERNAME AND PASSWORD THAT WAS USED FOR THEIR PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS.** The selection of the authorized representative is at the discretion of each applicant.

Automated Application

The automated SAFER grant application is designed with many built-in “Help” screens and drop-down menus to assist you throughout the application process. The application can be saved and retrieved as many times as necessary until the deadline or submittal. **However, once you’ve submitted your application, you cannot change it.** The automated system will not allow you to submit an incomplete application, i.e., the system will alert you if you have not provided required information. You will be automatically notified via e-mail that we have received your application.

Online Tutorial

An applicant tutorial will be available on the AFG program’s website at www.firegrantsupport.com. This tutorial explains the SAFER grant program and priorities for funding, describes the application screens, and provides information for applicants that will assist them in developing a comprehensive, competitive and well organized application.

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

Application

Applications for SAFER grants will be accepted on or about May 30, 2006, to June 30, 2006. Monitor the AFG program and USFA Websites for up-to-date information on the dates of the application period. Completed applications must be submitted electronically or otherwise received by the AFG program office on or before the close of business (5 p.m. EDT) on the last day of the application period. No late, incomplete, or faxed applications will be accepted. No electronically submitted applications other than those submitted online via the automated grant application system will be accepted.

If you do not have access to the Internet, contact us directly (1-866-274-0960) to request a paper copy of the application via mail. **We will not send the paper applications to you via overnight delivery, fax or e-mail.** The only legitimate paper application is the application that the AFG program office sends you—do not use any paper application that you did not receive directly from the AFG program office. Do not print the screens

from the online application and submit them as your application. Any paper application that is not in the correct format will be deemed ineligible.

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

Paper applications submitted by mail must be postmarked no later than four calendar days before the end of the application period. Assuming a June 30, 2006, end-date, applications that are postmarked after June 27, 2006, will not be accepted unless they are received before the end of the application period. Applications that are not submitted electronically must be mailed to the following address:

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

DHS will not accept applications mailed to any address other than the one listed above.

Application Overview

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

Next, you will be required to provide a written narrative statement describing your planned activity. The narrative portion of your application should provide the AFG program office with specifics about your project or projects. Specific elements that are required to be addressed in the narrative are detailed in the appropriate activity sections below.

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

You may decide to hire or engage a grant writer to assist you in the application process. However, as the applicant, you are responsible for the information contained in your application. By submitting the application, you are certifying that all of the information contained therein is true and an accurate reflection of your department. Therefore, prior to submission, it is imperative that you review all work produced by grant writers or other third parties on your behalf. Applicants who falsify their applications or misrepresent their organizations in any manner will have their applications deemed ineligible by the AFG program office and referred to the DHS Office of the Inspector General for further action, as appropriate.

DUNS Number

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

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

Criteria Development Process

Each year, the AFG program office conducts a criteria development meeting to develop the funding priorities for the coming year. A panel of fire service professionals representing the nine major fire service organizations is convened. The organizations that are represented include the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM), the International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI), the North American Fire Training Directors (NAFTD), and the Congressional Fire Service Institute (CFSI).

The criteria development panel is charged with making recommendations to the AFG program office regarding the creation and/or modification of previously established funding priorities as well as developing criteria for awarding grants and proposing any

necessary changes to the administration of the SAFER grants. The content of this Program Guidance reflects our implementation of the criteria development panel's recommendations with respect to the priorities, direction, and criteria for awarding grants as they relate to the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response grants.

Evaluation Process

All complete and eligible applications will be ranked based on the substance of the application relative to the established SAFER grant funding priorities. The answers to activity-specific questions provide us with the information that we use to determine your application's ranking, relative to stated priorities.

Volunteer and combination fire departments are eligible to apply for both the Hiring of Firefighters Activity and the Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity on the same application. Please note, however, that each department or organization can submit only one application per application period. Applicants who choose to apply for both the Hiring of Firefighters and the Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters activities will do so within one application. Such applications will be scored in total against the established funding priorities and, if they continue on to the peer review stage of application competition, will be again evaluated in their entirety and funded accordingly, i.e., we will not make a partial award for one of the two activities. It is not necessary to for the applicant to write two separate narratives, however, applicants that are requesting assistance in both activities should be sure to address both activities under each of the applicable narrative elements. For example, when composing the narrative segment regarding how the community and current firefighters are at risk, make sure you address this element from both the hiring perspective and the recruitment/retention perspective.

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

When reviewing applications in the competitive range, the panelists will use the Narrative Statement and all the information contained in the application to determine the worthiness of the request for an award. The panelists will evaluate specific elements in the narratives. The criteria are different for the two activities. The specific elements for the activities are as follows:

Narrative Statement for Hiring of Firefighters Activity

The narrative statements for applications requesting assistance in hiring of firefighters must include the following six elements. Each element will be evaluated independently by the panelists:

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

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

Narrative Statement for Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity

The narrative statements for applications requesting assistance in the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters must include the following four elements. Each element will be evaluated independently by the panelists:

- A statement that describes why the applicant needs the grant funds, i.e., how the recruitment of new volunteer firefighters and retention of current volunteer firefighters will be used within the department or organization and a description of the specific benefit these firefighters will provide for the fire department(s) or community. This statement should include specifics about the recruitment and/or retention plan and what specific benefit the efforts would provide the surrounding community or communities.
- A statement regarding how the community and current firefighters (or geographic area of concern for an eligible organization) are at risk without the needed

firefighters, and to what extent that risk will be reduced if the applicant is awarded.

- An explanation of the applicant's inability to address the need without Federal assistance.
- A statement relating to how the applicant will ensure, to the extent possible, that they will seek, recruit, and retain members of racial and ethnic minority groups and women to increase the ranks within their fire department.

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

SAFER Grants Activity Priorities

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

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

The priorities of the SAFER grants activities are as follows:

Hiring of Firefighters Activity

Goal

The goal of the Hiring of Firefighters Activity is to award grants directly to volunteer, combination, and career fire departments to help the departments increase the number of frontline firefighters. Ultimately, the goal of SAFER grants is to enhance the ability of grantees to attain and maintain 24-hour staffing and to assure that their communities have adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards.

Eligibility

Volunteer, combination and career fire departments are **eligible** to apply for the Hiring of Firefighters Activity. Municipalities and fire districts may submit applications on behalf of fire departments when the fire departments lack the legal status to do so, e.g., when the fire department falls within the auspices of the municipality or district. Each eligible applicant is limited to one application per application period.

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

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

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

Be advised that recipients of grants in the Hiring of Firefighters Activity must commit to a five-year period of performance during which the Federal contribution toward the costs of the salaries will diminish over the course of the performance period. For the 2006 program year, the Federal share of salaries and associated benefits is limited to a total of \$103,500 per position over the course of the performance period (this figure is adjusted for inflation for 2005 at a rate of 3.5%). There is no funding limit for any application or any limit to the number of positions eligible for funding per application. However, applicants requesting large numbers of firefighters must make a strong case for their request. To maintain continued involvement, we will also limit the Federal share in each of the years of the grant. Based on a total funding cap of \$103,500 over five years, the allocated amount of Federal funds that grantees should budget for under SAFER for salary and benefits for newly hired firefighters will not exceed the lesser of the following:

- Year One: 90 percent of the actual costs or \$37,260
- Year Two: 80 percent of the actual costs or \$33,120
- Year Three: 50 percent of the actual costs or \$20,700
- Year Four: 30 percent of the actual costs or \$12,420
- Year Five: No Federal share -- all costs funded by grantee

Funding Priorities

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

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

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

Department call volume will be factored into the initial evaluation. Departments that respond to a high number of incidents will receive higher consideration than departments from similar communities (urban, suburban, and rural) that respond to few

incidents. It is the recommendation of the criteria development panel that the health and well-being of firefighters is of paramount importance, as such, applicants who indicate that their newly recruited firefighters will undergo an entry-level physical and receive immunizations will receive higher consideration than applications where these benefits will not be provided.

The criteria development panel has recommended and we have agreed that, for the purposes of the SAFER grants, a safe and efficient initial attack requires a minimum of four firefighters. Therefore, applicants who will come into compliance with the minimum four firefighter standard for the first arriving engine (or vehicle capable of initiating suppression activities) with the fewest number additional personnel will receive higher consideration than applicants seeking a higher number of additional personnel. It is believed that a benefit will be derived by awarding grants for the hiring of firefighters to fire departments that have automatic mutual aid agreements. Additionally, higher consideration will be given to those applicants whose request is based on a staffing needs assessment.

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

Note: No changes in scope will be considered. Once submitted, you may **NOT** reduce the number of positions requested in your application nor change or modify the grant's period of performance. Failure to fully fund awarded positions will be considered as defaulting on the grant agreement, and may require the return of all or a portion of the Federal funds disbursed under the grant.

Recruitment and Retention of Firefighters Activity

Goal

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

Federal funds expended under this activity will achieve significant benefits for their organization and community.

Eligibility

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

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

A recruitment period of ninety (90) days will be provided for all grantees under the Recruitment and Retention of Firefighters Activity. The specifics regarding the period of performance will be detailed in the award documents. Payment requests will be submitted quarterly on a reimbursable basis, i.e., grantees may request reimbursement of first-quarter expenses incurred during the second quarter of the performance period.

Funding Priorities

The highest priority is to assist departments that have been experiencing a high rate of turnover and departments whose staffing levels are significantly below the ideal staffing level required to comply with NFPA 1710 or 1720. As such, we will strive to

fund departments with the lowest retention rate and departments with the highest vacancy rates.

We concur with the recommendation of the criteria development panel that departments with the highest percentage of volunteers and departments or organizations with large numbers of volunteers will benefit the most from the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Therefore, applicants whose membership is substantially volunteer, or departments with a significant number of volunteer firefighters, will receive higher consideration than departments with a low percentage of volunteers or smaller number of volunteer members.

Further, it is critical to have a recruitment and/or retention plan. Accordingly, applications requesting funding for recruitment and/or retention programs that are based on a formal plan will receive higher consideration than applications that are not. Applicants that claim to have a recruitment and retention plan should be prepared to summarize the plan in their narrative. A designated project coordinator and a marketing plan are necessary for the successful implementation of any recruitment and/or retention program. Therefore, requests that include a coordinator's position and a marketing plan will receive higher consideration than requests that do not. In accordance with the recommendations of the criteria development panel, we will also give a higher competitive ranking to applications where the recruitment and/or retention plans include accident and/or injury insurance and lost wages for members.

Department call volume will be factored into the initial evaluation. Departments that respond to a high number of incidents will receive higher consideration than departments from similar communities (urban, suburban, and rural) that respond to few incidents.

It is the recommendation of the criteria development panel that the health and well-being of firefighters is of paramount importance. As such, applicants who indicate that their newly recruited firefighters will undergo an entry-level physical and receive immunizations will receive higher consideration than applications where these benefits will not be provided. Applicants who indicate that newly recruited firefighters will meet the minimum fire and EMS certification requirements prescribed by the locality or State within twelve months of appointment to the department will receive additional consideration.

Finally, requests for recruitment and/or retention activities that have a regional impact will receive a higher competitive advantage than applications that will benefit only the applicant.

Applicants who propose to initiate both a recruitment and retention plan as a part of their application will receive equal consideration for the recruitment activities and the retention activities. Proposals in this activity may include providing incentives for volunteer firefighter members to continue their service in a fire department. Examples of

the type of initiatives that may receive assistance include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Accidental death and dismemberment insurance
- Compensation for lost wages when attending required training
- Marketing costs to recruit new volunteer members
- Staffing needs assessment
- Entry-level and/or periodic physicals and immunizations
- Tuition assistance for higher education and professional certifications
- Length of service awards and other retirement benefits

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

Funding Limitations

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

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

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

Reasonableness of Requests

Peer review panelists will review all of the applications deemed to be in the competitive range and judge each application on its own merits. The panelists will consider all expenses budgeted as part of the cost-benefit determination and may recommend appropriate adjustments. Regardless of the eligibility of any costs requested,

the AFG program office reserves the right to reduce any requests for assistance, in whole or in part, that it deems to be excessive or otherwise contrary to the best interests of the program.

Award Procedure

Once the peer review panel has reviewed every application in the “competitive range,” the applications are ranked according to the scores awarded by the panel. The ranking will be summarized in a Technical Report prepared by the AFG program office. At that point, the AFG program office staff will make award recommendations to the Grants Management Specialists in DHS. The Grants Management Specialists will then contact the applicant to discuss and/or negotiate the content of the application before making the final award decision.

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

Grantee Responsibilities

Grant recipients (grantees) must agree to the following:

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

All cost-share contributions must be cash. No “in-kind” contributions will be considered for the statutorily required cost-share. No waivers of this requirement will be granted except for fire departments of Insular Areas as provided for in 48 U.S.C. 1469a. Regardless of the potential for fire departments in Insular Areas to obtain a waiver of the cost-share requirements, the \$103,500 Federal limit will remain in effect. Grantees that do not fulfill their obligations under these grants will be considered in default and required to return the Federal funds disbursed under the grant award.

3. The SAFER grants are intended to supplement grantees' staffing NOT supplant grantees' staffing. If awarded under the Hiring of Firefighters Activity, grantees must retain a level of staffing that is equal to the level of staffing at the time of application, in addition to the staffing of the SAFER funded positions. Grantees that fail to maintain this level of staffing risk losing the Federal funds awarded under this grant.
4. Maintain operating expenditures for the period of the grant in the areas funded by this grant at a level equal to or greater than the average of their operating expenditures in the two years preceding the year in which this assistance is received. These grants are meant to supplement rather than replace an organization's funding.
5. Retain grant files and supporting documentation for three years after the conclusion and closeout of the grant. The AFG program office may require access to any pertinent books, documents, papers, or records that belong to a grant recipient. The Office of Inspector General or the Comptroller General of the United States may also require access to a grantee's books and records.
6. Provide periodic performance reports in conjunction with the quarterly payment requests to the AFG program office. In the fifth and final grant year for grants involving the hiring of firefighters, grantees will have to submit a performance report at the mid-point of the year and then at grant closeout. All grantees will be required to produce a final report on how the grant funding was used and the benefits realized from the award. An accounting of the grant funds must also be included in the performance reports.
7. Follow the audit requirements of OMB Circular A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Nonprofit Organizations, which calls for grantees who expend \$500,000 or more in Federal funds in a year (from all Federal sources), to have a single audit performed in accordance with the Circular. (For more information about the Circulars, go to www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars.)
8. Notwithstanding any provision of other laws, firefighters hired under these grants shall not be discriminated against for, or be prohibited from, engaging in volunteer activities in another jurisdiction during off-duty hours.
9. Homeland Security Presidential Directive-5 requires that, beginning October 1, 2005, all recipients of Federal preparedness funds (including recipients of Federal grants and contracts) adopt the National Incident Management System (NIMS) as a condition for the receipt of the Federal funds. Recipients of FY2006 SAFER grants will be considered to be in compliance with the NIMS requirement if the grantee (1) has an operational knowledge of the Incident Command System (ICS), (2) has an understanding of NIMS' principles and policies, and (3) agrees to adopt and/or comply with all directives, ordinances, rules, orders, edicts, etc., passed down by the local or State authorities with respect to incident management.

Responders who have already been trained in ICS do not need retraining if their previous training is consistent with DHS standards. In order for us to document compliance, grantees will be required to certify to their compliance with the NIMS/ICS requirements as part of their grant closeout process.

10. Grantees, to the extent possible, will seek, recruit, and appoint members of racial and ethnic minority groups and women to increase their ranks within the applicant's department.
11. Failure to fulfill the recipient's responsibilities may result in requiring the recipient to return a portion, or all, of the grant funding as per section 24 (15 USC 2229a).

Excess Funds

Occasionally, due to successful competitive bid processes, breaks on service etc., some grantees have funds remaining after the completion of their obligations outlined above. Grantees awarded under the Hiring of Firefighters Activity that complete the approved scope of work and still have grant funds available, must return all excess funds to the AFG program office. Grantees awarded under the Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters that have completed the approved scope of work and still have grant funds available may use the excess funds to continue with recruitment or retention activities consistent with the original scope of work, as long as it is within the originally approved period of performance. There will be no extensions to any SAFER grants.