

FY2020 Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response Grant Program - Frequently Asked Questions

This document addresses Frequently Asked Questions related to the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant Program.

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What is the purpose of the SAFER Grant Program?

The purpose of the SAFER Grant Program is to provide funding directly to fire departments and volunteer firefighter interest organizations to assist with increasing the number of firefighters to help communities meet industry minimum standards, to attain 24-hour staffing to provide adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards, and to fulfill traditional missions of fire departments. The SAFER Grant Program is separated into two activities: Hiring of Firefighters (Hiring) Activity and Recruitment and Retention (R&R) Activity. Using a competitive process that is informed by fire service subject-matter experts, grants in both activities are awarded to applicants whose requests best address the priorities of the FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program.

What changes were made to the SAFER Grant Program since last year?

The FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program Notice of Funding Opportunity contains some changes to definitions, descriptions, and priority categories, including:

- Under authorities provided under Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2020 (Pub. L. No. 116-93), the following requirements are being waived for the FY 2020 SAFER Program:
 - Position Cost Limits: There are no annual salary limits under the Hiring of Firefighters Activity.
 - Cost-Share: There is no prescribed cost-share under the Hiring of Firefighters Activity.
 - New Additional Firefighters Requirement: Grant funds can now be used to rehire laid off firefighters and retain firefighters facing layoff under the Hiring of Firefighters Activity.
 - Period of Performance: Extensions to the period of performance under the Hiring of Firefighters Activity are now available.
 - Supplanting Requirement: There is no supplanting requirement under the Hiring of Firefighters Activity.
 - Minimum Budget Requirement: There is no minimum budget requirement.
- Under sections D – Application and Submission Information, E – Application Review Information, F – Federal Award Administration Information, G – DHS Awarding Agency Contact and Resource Information, and H – Additional Information:
 - Various grants management changes due to recent Office of Management and Budget (OMB) revisions to 2 C.F.R., particularly regarding the System for Award Management (SAM) registration, performance measures, procurement, closeout and termination
- Under Supporting Definitions:
 - Definitions added for Primary Fire Due.

Reminders for FY 2020

The online FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program application is only available in the FEMA GO (FEMA Grants Outcomes) application portal at <https://go.fema.gov>.

Applicants must complete the following to start, complete and submit a SAFER Grant Program application:

- The applicant organization must provide a valid Dun & Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) to apply in FEMA GO system. Instructions for obtaining a DUNS number can be found at the following website:
<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-1-obtain-duns-number.html>.
- The applicant organization must be currently registered and active in the System for Award Management (SAM) in order to apply. SAM is available from Grants.gov at
<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-2-register-with-sam.html>.

Environmental and Historic Preservation (EHP)

It is FEMA policy that actions initiated and/or completed without fulfilling the specific EHP requirements will not be considered for funding.

SAFER Grant Program projects that involve the installation of supplies/equipment not specifically excluded from a FEMA EHP Review, per the GPD Programmatic Environmental Assessment, such as ground-disturbing activities, or modification/renovation of existing buildings or structures, will require an EHP review. Some equipment activities will require an EHP review, as well. Such activities include but are not limited to the installation of:

- Building renovations such as removal of wall or installation of electrical or water lines;
- Training/exercises in natural settings such as rope or swift water;
- LED Signs; and
- Any scope of work that involves ground disturbances.

Please see FEMA's EHP Screening Process. EHP Screening form and instructions are available at [EHP Screening Form](#). EHP policy guidance can be found at [Preparedness Grants EHP Compliance webpage](#). Recipients will be notified of their EHP responsibilities in the grant award package.

Help FEMA Prevent Fraud, Waste and Abuse

If you have information about instances of fraud, waste, abuse or mismanagement involving FEMA programs or operations, you should contact the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General Hotline at 1-800-323-8603; by fax at 202-254-4297; or online at <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/hotline>.

Who is eligible to apply under the SAFER Grant Program?

Eligible applicants for the SAFER Grant Program include fire departments, any federally recognized Indian tribe or tribal organization, and national, regional, state, local, tribal and nonprofit interest organizations representing the interests of volunteer firefighters.

What activities may I apply for under the SAFER Grant Program?

The SAFER Grant Program is separated into two activities:

- **Hiring Activity:** Provides federal financial assistance to help fire departments hire new, additional firefighters (or change the status of part-time or paid-on-call firefighters to full-time firefighters), rehire laid off firefighters, or to retain firefighters facing layoff. National, regional, state, local, tribal, and nonprofit interest organizations are not eligible to apply for funding under the Hiring Activity.
- **R&R Activity:** Assists fire departments and national, state, local, or federally recognized tribal organizations with the recruitment and/or retention of volunteer firefighters who are involved with or trained in the operations of firefighting and emergency response. Career fire departments are not eligible to apply for funding under the R&R Activity.

How many applications may I submit?

Eligible applicants may submit only one application for each eligible activity under the SAFER Grant Program (one under the Hiring Activity and/or one under the R&R Activity). Applicants interested in applying under both the Hiring Activity and the R&R Activity must submit two separate applications, one for each activity. All submissions of duplicate applications may be disqualified.

I have an open SAFER Grant award(s). May I still apply under the FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program?

Yes. However, since the possibility exists that the period of performance on the open grant award(s) and the FY 2020 Grant will overlap, you need to ensure that the start of your FY 2020 Grant does not depend on the completion of your open grant(s), or that receipt of a FY 2020 Grant will impact your ability to continue with and/or complete your open grant award(s). The grant activities requested in the FY 2020 SAFER Grant must supplement the current award(s) and cannot be for the same activities, expenditures or personnel funded under the open grant award(s). Applicants with an active SAFER Grant award who wish to apply under the FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program are subject to the guidelines and requirements outlined in the FY 2020 SAFER Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

How much funding is available for the FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program?

There is \$355 million available for funding FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program Activities. However, the following specific funding parameters are either required by law or are the outcome of recommendations from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program Criteria Development Panel:

- 10% of the funding is set aside for the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

- No more than 33% of the total amount allocated for the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters can be awarded to national, state, local, territorial or federally recognized tribal organizations that represent the interests of volunteer firefighters.
- 10% of the funding is set aside for grants awarded to all volunteer or majority volunteer departments for hiring of firefighters.
 - If FEMA awards less than 10% of the funds available for the hiring of firefighters to volunteer and majority volunteer fire departments, it must transfer the remaining funds to provide grants for the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

What is the maximum amount of funding a recipient may be awarded?

There is no maximum award amount for FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program awards.

Is there a cost share for all applicants?

There is no cost share or match or position cost limit for the FY 2020 SAFER Program.

How do I apply for a SAFER Grant?

The online FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program application is available through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program's FEMA GO (FEMA Grants Outcomes) application portal at <https://go.fema.gov>. The application will also be linked with the US Fire Administration's (USFA) website <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/grants> and the Grants.gov website <https://www.grants.gov>.

Which internet browsers are compatible with FEMA GO?

FEMA GO is compatible with the most recent major release of Google Chrome, Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Apple Safari and Microsoft Edge. Users who attempt to use tablet type devices or other browsers may encounter issues with using FEMA GO.

When can I apply?

Applications will only be accepted only from 8 a.m. Eastern Time (ET) on Monday, February 8, 2021 until 5 p.m. ET on Friday, March 12, 2021. Applications received after the close of the application period will not be accepted.

How do I sign-up for e-mail notifications about the SAFER Grant Program?

To register for automatic e-mail notices of NOFO availability and other important program information go to: https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDHSFEMA/subscriber/new?topic_id=USDHSFEMA_409.

Do I need to register with the System for Award Management (SAM)?

Yes. Per 2 C.F.R. § 25.205, SAM registration is required to both begin and submit a SAFER Grant Program application in the FEMA GO system. Organizational SAM.gov registrations are only active for one year and must be

renewed annually. Therefore, applicants must ensure the applicant entity has a valid and active registration in SAM.gov before starting an application.

Step-by-step instructions for registering with SAM can be found at <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-2-register-with-sam.html>. Applicants should contact SAM.gov with questions or concerns about their SAM registration.

DHS may not make a federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable DUNS and SAM requirements. If an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time DHS is ready to make a federal award, DHS may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and may make a federal award to another applicant.

The submission of payment requests and amendments are also contingent on the information provided in the entity's SAM.gov registration. It is imperative that all information in the application is correct, current, and matches the information in the SAM.gov registration. Please ensure that your organization's name, address, DUNS number, and EIN are up to date in SAM.gov and that the DUNS number used in SAM.gov is the same number used to apply for all other FEMA grant program awards.

More information on SAM.gov may be located in the FY 2020 SAFER NOFO and on the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Programs (AFGP) Website. If applicants have questions or concerns about a SAM registration, please contact the Federal Support Desk at <https://www.fsd.gov/> or call (866) 606-8220, Monday – Friday between the hours of 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. ET.

May I change or edit my application after it has been submitted?

You will be able to review or edit the entire application prior to submission. However, if you would like to edit or change your application after submission, you will have to withdraw the application from consideration of award to edit. Then, the application must be resubmitted to FEMA to be considered for an award.

How can I obtain help with the application?

The SAFER Grant Program Help Desk at 866-274-0960 will be available to provide technical assistance with completing your SAFER Grant Program Application(s).

During the application period, the Help Desk will be staffed between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. ET, Monday through Friday; and until 5 p.m. ET on the last day of the application period. However, these hours may change as the application period progresses. The toll-free number also accepts voicemail messages after hours or if the line is busy. Questions may also be e-mailed to FireGrants@fema.dhs.gov.

Where can I find SAFER Grant Program documents and other information?

You can find SAFER Grant Program documents and additional information on the [Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Program webpage](#).

When will the awards be announced?

Award announcements will be made at the beginning of spring 2021 and on a continuous basis until all available funds have been awarded (but no later than September 30, 2021).

What is program income?

Although not common, recipients may generate income in the course of carrying out grant-supported activities during the period of performance under the SAFER Grant Program award. This is referred to as program income. This income can be used to defray program costs, where appropriate, consistent with 2 CFR § 200.307. The Budget Summary section of the grant application contains a field for program income. The response should be \$0 unless the recipient anticipates generating program income during the period of performance. If the recipient plans to generate program income, it should be explained in the narrative. The FEMA GO application will not include program income estimates in the total budget. FEMA will review the program income submitted and adjust the budget as appropriate, prior to award. Any program income must be used and managed in accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.307.

What is Management and Administration (M&A)?

M&A costs are administrative expenses that are incurred during the administration of a SAFER Grant Program award. Applicants may apply for M&A costs if the costs are directly related to the implementation of the program for which they are applying. M&A costs are identifiable costs directly associated with the implementation and management of the grant and cannot exceed 3% of the federal share of SAFER Grant Program funds awarded. If you are requesting M&A expenses, you must list the costs under the "Other" category in the budget and explain the purpose for the administrative costs in your Project Narrative. All M&A costs must be in accordance with 2 C.F.R. Part 225, Cost Principles for state, local and Indian Tribal Governments (OMB Circular A-87) or 2 C.F.R. Part 230, Cost Principles for Non-Profit Organizations (OMB Circular A-122), as applicable and should be based on actual expenses only, not a percentage of the overall grant. Examples of eligible administrative costs include shipping, office supplies.

M&A costs are not eligible under the Hiring Activity.

Where do I submit the federally approved Indirect Cost Rate Agreement?

Applicants required to have a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement that desire to charge indirect costs to an award must provide a copy of their negotiated indirect cost rate agreement at the time of application. Applicants that are not required by 2 C.F.R. Part 200 to have a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement but are required by 2 C.F.R. Part 200 to develop an indirect cost rate proposal must provide a copy of their proposal at the time of application. Copies of the indirect cost rate agreements or proposals, along with the SAFER Grant Program application number, must be submitted electronically to FireGrants@fema.dhs.gov. Please ensure that the request details budget portion of your application includes information pertaining to your indirect cost rate agreement or proposal. Post-award requests to charge indirect costs will be considered on a case-by-case basis and based upon the submission of an agreement or proposal as discussed above or based upon on the de minimis rate or cost allocation plan, as applicable.

Indirect costs are not allowable under the Hiring Activity.

When a SAFER Grant Program award is accepted, when does the period of performance start?

Recipients are notified via email and through the FEMA GO system of the award offer. The recipient shall notify the awarding agency of its intent to accept or decline the award. Recipients must accept their grant awards no later than 30 days from the award date. Funds remain on hold (for a maximum of 90 days) until the recipient accepts or declines the award. The grant award date can be found in the award agreement within the Obligating Document for Award in section 14. - Performance Period.

The period of performance under the Hiring Activity is 36 months for all grants awarded. A default 180-day recruitment period, which allows grant recipients to begin hiring SAFER-funded firefighters, begins when FEMA approves an application for an award under this activity. The 36-month period of performance automatically starts after the 180-day recruitment period, regardless of whether the recipient has successfully hired the requested firefighters.

The period of performance under the R&R Activity is 12, 24, 36 or 48 months for all grants awarded. A default 90-day recruitment period, which allows recipients time to gather resources, initiate processes, and finalize contracts needed to implement SAFER grant, begins when FEMA approves the application for award. The period of performance automatically starts after the 90-day recruitment period ends, regardless of whether the recipient has begun implementing its grant award.

What standards does the SAFER Grant Program focus on?

The SAFER Grant Program focuses on the Deployment or Staffing and Deployment compliance standards of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA):

- NFPA 1710 Assembly Requirements – Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Department (Section 5.2.4.1 – Single-Family Dwelling Initial Full Alarm Assignment Capability): This standard applies primarily to career fire departments and combination departments if the combination department chooses it. and
- NFPA 1720 Assembly Requirements – Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments (Section 4.3 – Staffing and Deployment): This standard applies primarily to all-volunteer fire departments, but it may also apply to combination departments if the combination department does not choose to comply with the NFPA 1710 standard.

FEMA prioritizes bringing non-compliant (NFPA 1710 or 1720) departments into compliance in the most cost-effective manner.

Do applicants have to report to the National Fire Incident Reporting System?

No. FEMA does not require FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program applicants to report to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS).

Do applicants have to comply with the National Incident Management System?

SAFER Grant Program applicants are not required to comply with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) to apply for federal assistance under the SAFER Grant Program. However, any applicant who receives an FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program award must achieve the level of NIMS compliance required by the Authority Having Jurisdiction over the applicant's emergency service operations (e.g., a local government), prior to the end of the grant's period of performance. Information about NIMS can be found at <https://www.fema.gov/national-incident-management-system>.

What type of firefighter positions will be funded under the Hiring Activity?

Grants awarded under the Hiring Activity enable volunteer, combination, and career fire departments to restore staffing levels to attain a more effective level of response and a safer incident scene. FEMA awards Hiring Activity grants directly to volunteer, combination, and career fire departments to help fire departments increase their cadre of frontline firefighters by providing financial assistance in three categories:

- Rehire: Rehiring firefighters who were laid-off within the two years prior to the start of the application period;
- Retention: Retaining firefighters facing imminent layoff – within 120 days of the close of the application period; or,
- New Hire: Hire new, additional firefighters.

What are the requirements if a Hiring Activity applicant wants to apply under the Rehire or Retention categories?

Eligible positions for funding under the Rehire category must have been laid off in the two years prior to the start of the application period (February 8, 2021). Copies of the official, signed, and issued layoff notices will be required at the time of application.

Firefighters who have been issued a formal layoff notice, which includes a specific date for the layoff action, prior to the start of the application period, and those who face imminent layoff – within 120 days of the close of the application period – are eligible for SAFER Program funding under the Retention category. As the application period closes on (March 12, 2021), the layoffs must become effective on or before (July 10, 2021). Copies of the official, signed and issued layoff notices will be required at the time of application.

Eligible positions under the Retention category must be employees of the department at the time the application is submitted. Note: if a retention position becomes vacant after the application is submitted, departments must fill the vacancy with a new hire in order to maintain the operational staffing level.

A layoff notice that is not executed within the specified terms will be considered void unless an additional notice is provided within 14 days of the original action date will not qualify for funding in the Rehire or Retention categories. Applicants who do not meet these parameters must apply under the New Hire category.

Any layoff action not executed in accordance with the terms of the official layoff notice or which does not meet the above requirements will not qualify for funding in the Rehire or Retention categories. Applicants who do not meet these parameters must apply under the New Hire category.

What are the eligible expenses under the Hiring Activity?

The only eligible expenses are the salary and associated benefits (actual payroll expenses) for the positions funded under the SAFER Program grant. Costs are reimbursable if they are included as part of the standard package, available to all operational firefighter positions, and contractually obligated. Compensation for a firefighter's normal, contracted work schedule is reimbursable, but overtime costs are not eligible for reimbursement by the SAFER Program grant award (including overtime for holdovers, extra shifts, to attend training, etc.). Only costs for overtime that the fire department routinely pays as a part of the base salary or a firefighter's regularly scheduled and contracted shift hours, in order to comply with FLSA, are eligible.

What are the eligible expenses under the R&R Activity?

Applicants must correlate the activities for which funding is being requested with the identified recruitment and/or retention problems/issues being addressed. FEMA will not provide funding for a budgeted line item if an applicant does not provide enough information detailing how the item and/or activity will enhance the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters and allowable costs may be limited to reasonable amounts, as determined by FEMA.

All grant-related purchases and activities must be incurred, received, and completed within the period of performance. Additionally, all funded activities under the R&R Activity must be governed by formally adopted Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Minimally, these SOPs should specify who qualifies for each of the incentives, specific requirements for earning the incentives, and the disposition of the awarded incentives if an individual fails to fulfill the stipulations. FEMA may ask for copies of SOPs prior to, or after being awarded.

Examples of eligible expenses include but are not limited to the following:

- Marketing Program (e.g., media and print advertising) to recruit new volunteer firefighters;
- New recruit basic training;
- Leadership/career development training; and
- Personal Protective Equipment for new recruits.

For the full list of eligible and ineligible costs, please refer to Appendix B – Programmatic Information and Priorities, in the FY 2020 SAFER NOFO.

How is “new recruit” defined according to the SAFER Grant Program?

The SAFER Grant Program defines a “new recruit” as a volunteer that joins the department with the intent to serve as a firefighter after the recipient is notified of the grant award (i.e., the date of the award notification email in FEMA GO).

Does the SAFER Grant Program allow regional applications?

Yes. Eligible applicants may apply for a regional R&R Activity grant if the request will have a direct or local regional benefit beyond the immediate boundaries of the applicant’s first-due response area. Direct or local regional benefit means that other eligible organizations will receive a portion of the grant awarded funds, or the department will receive items purchased with the grant funds.

An eligible applicant will serve as the “host applicant” and can apply for funding on behalf of itself and any number of other participating R&R Activity eligible organizations. The application must include a list of all the participating organizations, including the point of contact information and Employer Identification Number (EIN) for each organization benefitting from a proposed regional project.

If awarded, the host applicant must agree to be responsible for all aspects of the grant. This includes, but is not limited to, accountability for all assets and all reporting requirements. Regional host applicants and participating partner agencies must execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or equivalent document, signed by all parties participating in the award, before applying under the Regional Program activities.

The Hiring Activity is not eligible as a regional project.

How important is it to address all Narrative Statements in the application?

The Narrative Statements of the application must provide specific details about the activity for which applicants seek funding, including budget details. Peer Review Panelists will evaluate and score each activity based on the narrative elements within each activity. The weighted evaluation criteria used by the peer reviewers in determining the grant award, as described in the NOFO, make up the elements of the Narrative Statements’ score. FEMA reviews and compares applications for duplication. Therefore, all elements of the Narrative Statements must be original.

What are the character limitations for text boxes in FEMA GO?

The Narrative Statements blocks do not allow for formatting. Do not type the Narrative Statements using only capital letters. Additionally, do not include tables, special characters or fonts (e.g., quotation marks, bullets), or graphs. Space for the Narrative Statements is limited. Although each element must have a minimum of 200 characters, the maximum amount of characters varies based on the questions being asked. Once the Narrative Statements are saved to the online application, log-out and then log back into the application to verify that the information was successfully saved.

How are the SAFER Grant Program applications reviewed?

SAFER Grant Program applications are reviewed through a multi-phase process. All applications are electronically pre-scored and ranked based on how well they align with the funding priorities outlined in the FY 2020 SAFER Grant Program NOFO. Applications are then scored competitively by no less than three members of a Peer Review Panel.

Applications with the highest score rankings per activity will also be evaluated through a series of internal FEMA review processes for completeness, adherence to programmatic guidelines, technical feasibility, costs/quantities, and anticipated effectiveness of the proposed project(s).

Should I include a discussion of the possible impact of the pandemic on my application, if it is awarded?

Yes, you should incorporate into the narrative a discussion about how you will implement the grant in a pandemic environment. Reviewers will consider the ability of a project to be completed successfully during the proposed period of performance. Be sure to also consider the ability of staff to conduct all hiring or recruitment practices in a pandemic setting. Suggest ways you could alter or change your process to meet all objectives of the grant award by the end of the period of performance.