



## IAFF Grant Guidance for FEMA's Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant

### Disclaimer:

This IAFF SAFER Grant guidance is designed to help IAFF Locals draft FEMA SAFER applications but does not replace or modify the FEMA FY2025 SAFER NOFO or other FEMA documents. Refer to official FEMA resources for complete program information.

### SAFER Overview

Administered through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), SAFER has put thousands of firefighters back to work, prevented layoffs, and hired many new firefighters, giving a much-needed boost to public safety in countless struggling communities.

For the FY2025 cycle there is \$324 million dollars available. The Guidance, Application Kit, and other materials are posted on the [SAFER website](#).

All SAFER applicants should read the [SAFER Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) (NOFO) to fully understand the award criteria, funding priorities and important special application instructions for completing the application. The application is available through the [FEMA GO portal](#). You will need your user ID and login information to begin the application.



## **Requesting a Grant Review by IAFF Grant Staff**

The IAFF Grants Department is available to assist IAFF affiliates and their fire departments through the application process. For more information, contact the IAFF Grants Department via email - [firegrants@iaff.org](mailto:firegrants@iaff.org). To request a review of an application prior to submission, or any application that was turned down in a prior application cycle, affiliates can send their completed application, including both the data entry and narrative portions, to the IAFF Grants Department.

## **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.

To achieve this purpose, the SAFER Grant Program is a competitive, discretionary grant program comprised of two activities:

### **1) Hiring of Firefighters Activity:**

Provides federal financial assistance to help fire departments hire new firefighters or change the status of part-time or paid-on-call firefighters to full-time firefighters. **This activity provides three-year grants to assist fire departments by paying part of the salaries and benefits of the SAFER-funded positions.**

### **2) Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Activity:**

Assists fire departments and national, state, local, or federally recognized tribal organizations with the recruitment and/or retention of volunteer firefighters.

**\*\*This guidance will focus on the Hiring of Firefighters Activity.**

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



## The FY 2024 SAFER Program NOFO contains changes to definitions, descriptions, and priority categories, including:

- Under Supporting Definitions:
  - The terms Grant Administrator, Program Manager, and R&R Coordinator are defined.
  - The term Explorer, Cadet, or Mentoring Program is defined.
- Under Recruitment and Retention (R&R) Activity – Eligible Costs: Medium Priority:
  - Training supplies and nominal stipends are now eligible costs to support an explorer, cadet or mentoring program.
  - Medium Priority wellness program costs are not eligible unless paired with a request for a High Priority wellness and fitness cost (e.g. physicals). Eligible Medium Priority wellness program costs are also now limited to those described in the R&R Activity – Eligible Costs: Medium Priority table.
- Under Appendix C – Award Administration Information:
  - Restrictions on the use of excess funds have been updated.

See the FEMA FY2025 SAFER NOFO for complete details of the changes and requirements.

## FAQs to consider:

### What type of firefighter positions will be funded?

- The Hiring Activity offers grants to support applications to hire **new, additional firefighters** (or to change the status of part-time or paid-on call firefighters to full-time firefighters). National, regional, state, local, Tribal Nation, and nonprofit interest organizations representing the interests of volunteer firefighters are not eligible to receive a SAFER Program award under the Hiring Activity.
- Full-time positions are those that are scheduled for at least 2,080 hours per year (e.g., 40 hours per week, 52 weeks per year).
- Since the goal of the SAFER Grant Program is to enhance incident scene safety, all applicants must certify that the primary assignment (**more than 50 percent of the time**) of all SAFER-funded positions will be on an operational fire suppression vehicle, regardless of collateral duties.

### 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, contractually obligated, and reimbursed via payroll. 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 the Fair Labor Standards Act, are eligible.

## Is there a cost share for all applicants?

- For Hiring Activity grants, recipients are required to contribute 25 percent of the actual costs incurred in each of the first and second years of the grant; and 65 percent of the actual costs incurred in the third year of the grant.
- In the first and second years of the grant, the amount of federal funding may not exceed 75 percent of the usual annual cost of a **first-year firefighter** in that department at the time the grant application was submitted; and in the third year of the grant the amount of federal funding may not exceed 35 percent of the usual annual cost of a **first-year firefighter** in that department.
- **IAFF NOTE: FEMA is only funding part of the cost of a FIRST YEAR FIREFIGHTER for the 3 years of the grant. There are no longer any step raises, or cost increases funded by FEMA.**
- The "usual annual cost" includes a firefighter's base salary (excluding non-FLSA overtime) and standard benefits package (including the average annual cost of health, dental, and vision insurance; FICA; life insurance; retirement and/or pension contributions; etc.) offered by the fire department to first-year firefighters. For R&R Activity grants, there is no cost share requirement.

## What standards does the SAFER Program focus on?

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

- Applications resulting in the largest percentage increases in compliance with the relevant section of NFPA 1710 (for career departments) or 1720 (for volunteer departments) receive higher prescores than applications resulting in smaller percentage increases in compliance.



- 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.
- 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.

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

### Period of Performance Restrictions

- Hiring Activity: The period of performance for applications funded under the Hiring Activity will be 36 months. A default 180-day recruitment period 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 cannot start later than 180 days after the award date. If a recipient can hire all SAFER Program-funded firefighters during the 180-day recruitment period, the period of performance may begin at that time.
- In these instances, recipients must submit an amendment requesting that the period of performance start before the end of the 180-day recruitment period if they wish to begin the period early.

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### **The AFG SAFER Application:**

The first sections of the application are about your organization.



## Applicant characteristics section:

### For a Hiring of Firefighters Application:

Select Hiring of Firefighters Activity from the drop-down menu:

**My grant**

- Summary
- SAM.gov profile
- Applicant information
  - Applicant characteristics
  - Operating budget
  - Applicant and community trends
  - Community description
  - Call volume
  - Grant request details
    - Hiring of Firefighters
    - Grant request summary

**Applicant characteristics**

The SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) program intends to improve or restore local fire departments' staffing and deployment capabilities so they may more effectively respond to emergencies. With the restored or enhanced staffing, grantees should see a reduction in response times and an increase in the number of trained personnel assembled at the incident scene. Grant funds are available in two activities: Hiring Firefighters and Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters. Please review the Notice of Funding Opportunity for information on available program areas and for more information on the evaluation process and conditions of award. Please provide the following additional information about the applicant.

**Applicant type**

Fire Department/Fire District

**What kind of organization do you represent?**

All Paid/Career

**Which activity are you applying for?**

Hiring of Firefighters

Select

Hiring of Firefighters

**Operating budget**

## Operating budget section:

This includes a narrative section where you must describe your organization's need for Federal financial assistance.

- **Income vs. expense breakdown of the current annual budget**
- **Budget shortfalls and the inability to address financial needs without federal assistance**
- **Actions taken to obtain funding elsewhere (i.e. state assistance programs or other grant programs)**
- **How your critical functions are affected without this funding**

This is one narrative with a *4,000-character limit*.

Your **Financial Need** narrative (**30 percent of your score**) should address why your organization has been unable to fund your request locally, including such details as:

- Describe why you cannot complete this project without the assistance of federal funds.
- Compare your income to expenses in order to illustrate current funding deficiencies.
- Show other attempts you have made to fund department needs.
- Describe your community/agency budgets including:
  - Where money comes from



- Where money goes
- What are your funding challenges?
- Provide attempts to acquire funding from other sources.
- Describe operating budget limitations.
- What does the future look like? Are revenues likely to increase or decrease and why?
- List primary sources of revenue, average annual operating budget over the last several years, how much is dedicated to personnel costs etc.?
- What are the consequences for not receiving the award?
- Describe financial stressors:
  - Other capital projects
  - Unemployment rate
  - Loss of tax base
  - Non-tax paying entities
  - Any deficit spending from previous years that must be paid this year.
  - Anything putting a strain on your budget.
- What has your department done to control costs? Has the union offered concessions?
  - If so, state, “IAFF local ## has provided concessions...”
  - Have fire prevention or other staff been moved to front line positions to reduce overtime?
- Define and explain local terms.
  - For example, explain any tax levy limiting legislation that you may have in place in terms that someone not familiar with your area will understand.
- If you have shown budget increases for prior years, or have a large reserve, explain where funds are directed and why they can’t be used.
  - For example, station or apparatus replacement, pension obligation increases, etc.
- Provide an itemized budget breakdown.

**Applicant and community trends:** include statistics on injuries and apparatus information.

**Community description:** includes a narrative section where you must describe your organization and/or community that you serve. There is a *4,000-character limit*.

Discuss:

- Number of residents served



- Number of square miles protected
- Number and types of responses
- Describe the area you protect
- Critical infrastructure protected by your organization
- What are your community's greatest needs, risks and challenges and how does your request address these?

**Call volume:** Department Specific Call Volume Data

### Grant request details:

This is where you begin to complete the information specific to the Hiring of Firefighters Activity

- Click on "Add activity" tab

## Grant request details



### Instructions

Add the positions you are requesting by using the Add position to Hiring of Firefighters button below. You can have multiple line items for this position type, and this should be used when the salary and benefits are different for each position/activity being requested.



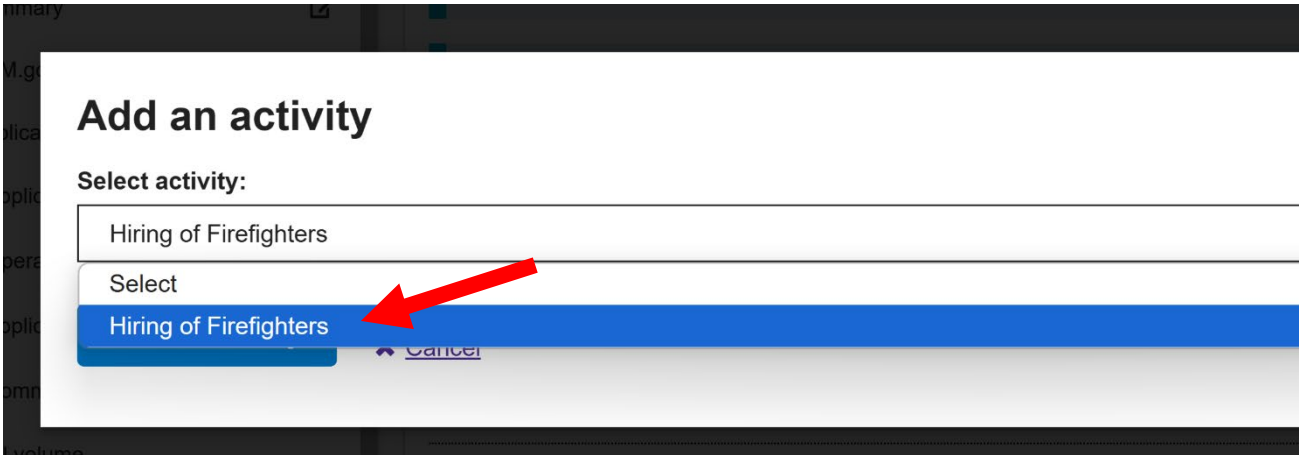
### Help Guides

FEMA has developed a Narrative Development Toolkit and Self Evaluation Sheets available on FEMA website: [Staffing For Adequate Fire And Emergency Response \(SAFER\) Documents](#). The documents are designed to assist applicants with narrative preparation and provide specific criteria used by a panel of peer reviewers when evaluating each application. FEMA encourages applicants to use these documents to prepare their applications.

+ Add activity



**Grand total: \$0.00**



Select "Hiring of Firefighters"

- This adds several other fields and small narratives to the application as well as the Narrative Statements fields.

1710	Career	With aerial	17	8 min	90%
1710	Career	Without aerial	16	8 min	90%
1720 - Urban	Urban combo/volunteer	> 1,000 pop/square mile	15	9 min	90%
1720 - Suburban	Suburban combo/volunteer	500 - 1,000 pop/square mile	10	10 min	80%
1720 - Rural	Rural combo/volunteer	< 500 pop/square mile	6	14 min	80%
1720 - Remote	Remote combo/volunteer	Travel > 8 mi	4	N/A	90%

Select the item that best describes the NFPA standard your department is attempting to meet:

Select

- Select
- 1710 - with aerial
- 1710 - without aerial
- 1720 - urban
- 1720 - suburban
- 1720 - rural
- 1720 - remote

- This includes selecting which NFPA Standard you are trying to meet
  - 1710 (Career with aerial)
  - 1710 (Career without aerial)



- 1720 (Urban combo/volunteer)
- 1720 (Suburban combo/volunteer)
- 1720 (Rural combo/volunteer)
- 1720 (Remote combo/volunteer)
- You will need to describe the department's existing staffing model to include the number of shifts, number of positions per shift, chief level officer staffing per shift (i.e., Battalion Chief, District Chief, etc.), and contracted shift hours per week/pay period. If the contracted shift hours included FLSA overtime or Kelly Days, please be sure to include details. *(3,000 characters)*
- You will need to describe the department's step-by-step hiring process (application period, written test, physical, approval) and the timeline for each step *(2,000 characters)*
- How long after award will the department be able to start a recruit class? *(1,000 characters)*
- How often are your recruit classes held? *(1,000 characters)*
- Does the department need governing body approval to accept and implement the award? Provide details on the timeline needed to accept the grant award. *(1,000 characters)*
- Is your request for hiring firefighters based on a risk analysis, staffing needs analysis, or an Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating? Describe how the analysis was conducted and the outcome of the analysis or ISO rating. *(1,000 characters)*
- Does your department currently have a policy in place to recruit and hire veterans? Please provide a brief description of the policy in place. *(1,000 characters)*

## **Main Narratives Guidance**

The Narrative Statements of the application must provide unique and 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.

Under the Hiring Activity, the peer review panel score is 50% of the total application score.



Note: FEMA conducts reviews of a random sampling of applications to compare them for duplication including the narrative statements and statistical data. Therefore, all elements of the narrative statements must be specific and unique to the applying entity, and all statistical data must be accurate.

Applications with narrative statements that have substantial duplication of statements, sentences, or paragraphs to other submitted applications, and/or inaccurate data that may mislead reviewers may be disqualified. Discovery of falsification, fabrication, or plagiarism of other grant proposals will disqualify the application(s).

One point that applies to all the following narratives is the use of superlatives and adjectives to describe a department's call volume or situation. Anytime you find yourself stating "more than," "less than," "steadily increasing," or any words that describe increases or decreases, make sure you support your claim with concrete data and statistics. Everyone applying for these grants is "doing more with less." Stick to relevant data that is 3-5 years old.

Remember that these are your peer firefighters that review the grants, you do not need to spell out every aspect of operations and NFPA standards to them. **Simply state** *"with 4 personnel we would comply with NFPA 1710 initial staffing recommendations"* **as opposed to** *"with 4 personnel we would comply with NFPA 1710, the Standard for the Deployment of Career Fire Fighters, recommendations for first arriving fire suppression apparatus Section 5.2.2.2(2)."*

- Do not overuse or over mention standards in your narratives
- If you are going to reference a standard, make sure you use the right one. Putting the wrong one in leads to confusion and questions whether you know what you are talking about and makes the reviewer score lower.

The Narrative Statement blocks do not allow 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.

The following are the narrative headings you are required to answer:

## **Project Description (30 percent) (3,000 characters max each question):**

- **Why does the department need the positions requested in this application?**
  - Consider opening this section with *"The XYZ Fire Department is requesting*



*\$XXX,XXX to hire XX positions so that we can (move towards, become) compliant with NFPA (1710/1720)."*

- One paragraph summary of your deployment, population, pertinent call volume and economic conditions.
- One paragraph about why you need the positions. For example, *"XYZFD was unable to replace firefighter positions vacated through attrition during 2013-2014. This ultimately forced XYZFD to permanently remove a 4th unit (aerial ladder company) from service in 2015. Since FY 2013, XYZFD has experienced an overall budget reduction of 15%, while experiencing a 5% increase in operational costs over the same years. To meet NFPA and OSHA requirements for fire and emergency response, we are requesting assistance to hire (12) firefighters to permit us to re-staff an aerial ladder company to ensure NFPA 1710 Staffing Requirements for Initial Arriving Company and Initial Full Alarm Assignment Capability. Staffing three engines, an aerial ladder company, and a command vehicle will ensure compliance with NFPA 1710. Currently, the ladder company is dispatched 2nd to neighboring automatic aid partners. If available, firefighters from one of the engine companies will respond."*

▪ **How will the positions requested in this application be used within the department** (e.g., fourth firefighter on engine, open a new station, eliminate browned out stations, reduce overtime)?

- Be very clear where the SAFER positions will be placed.
- If you have a browned out or closed station, provide statistics for how often the station will be open with these personnel.
- If the SAFER personnel will also be able to stand up an additional service (medic, hazmat, etc.) provide some details.
- Provide concrete specific details, for example:
  - *We could open up a third engine company on the west side of town, an area currently underserved by the nearest station. Current response time to the 125 fire and 300 EMS incidents in this area average over 7 minutes. With the new station, response times would average under 4 minutes.*

▪ **What unique and specific services will the requested positions provide to the fire department and community?**

- If you have had a browned-out or closed station, provide statistics for how many incidents that station runs.



- Have response times in that area, or in general, increased?
  - Include reference to NIST or other staffing study statistics.
  - Explain anything that these new positions will help you accomplish in your community.
- **Describe how funds awarded through this grant enhance the department's ability to protect critical infrastructure within the primary response area?**
    - Make sure you provide direct linkage back to the structures you listed earlier in the application and provide specific operation details. For example: *due to overtime costs, we removed 2 firefighters from a station in our high-rise district. Without sufficient staffing we now cross-staff the engine and ladder at this station. The engine runs 1,500 incidents a year and is often unavailable to respond with the ladder truck. On multiple occasions, including two working fires, the second due ladder responded to this district. The average response time for the second due ladder is 10 minutes compared with 4 minutes for the closer station.*

## Impact on Daily Operations (30 percent):

- **How are the community and the current firefighters employed by the department at risk without the positions requested in this application? (3,000 characters)**
  - What can't you do now that you could do before the personnel reductions/layoffs/attritions, or, if you are applying for new hires, what can't you do now that you could do with additional personnel?
  - Reiterate what you stated in the risk analysis question in the data section of the grant application.
  - What types of incidents are you responding to most often?
  - What types of incidents have proven to be problematic? What is your typical turnout?
  - Do you have high hazard buildings or occupancies? What does NFPA say about staffing for these responses?
  - Remember, the most important thing is for you to tell your story and why this funding is critical to your members and the community you protect.
- **How will that risk be unequivocally reduced if awarded? (3,000 characters)**
  - Explain how your firefighters and community will be safer.
  - What specifically is making them safer.



- Discuss the statistics and importance of the additional arriving personnel based on the standards.
- Discuss EMS priority incidents and response times.
- Do you only dispatch a single engine for most responses?
- Do you staff with less than 4 firefighters currently? If you would staff with 4 firefighters after the grant you would then be 100% compliant.
- If your CAD system is capable of determining how many times you arrive at structural response with 15-17 personnel (depending on the standard), provide that information.
- If you can make a good estimate of how often you would assemble 15-17 personnel (depending on the standard) within 8-minutes at full alarms you can provide that detail.
- For more complex jurisdictions, you may need to complete a Geographic Information Systems computer modeling assessment. Contact the IAFF Grants Department staff ([firegrants@iaff.org](mailto:firegrants@iaff.org)) for additional information.

## **Cost Benefit (10 percent) (3,000 characters):**

- **Describe the benefits (e.g., quantifying the anticipated savings and/or efficiencies) the department and community will realize if awarded the positions requested in this application.**
  - Number of firefighters who will be affected in your department as well as mutual and auto aid departments.
  - Number of residents who will be better protected.
  - Relevant call data.
  - Working fires and critical EMS runs.
  - Include mutual/auto aid areas if your call volume supports your involvement in outlying areas.
  - Will you collect data and evaluations that demonstrate the effectiveness of your training and how will you collect that information?  
What type of real-world data will you gather?
  - Provide a cost/benefit analysis. Take the cost of the grant divided by your population then again by the 3 years of the grant then again by the number of requested positions.

At the end of the request details section of the Hiring of Firefighters Activity and click on **"Add a Position"** This opens a window to add the costs to your request.



**Additional information**

If you have any additional information you would like to include about the department and/or this application in general, please provide below. *Optional*

[+ Add a position](#)

**Position**

**An activity must contain at least one position. You must add a position or remove this activity.**

Select "New, Additional Firefighter(s)"

**Add a position**

Select position:

Select

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Select

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New, Additional Firefighter(s)

[Cancel](#)

- Fill out the number of positions you are requesting and the salary and benefits information.
- Describe what benefits are included in the standard benefits package your department provides to first-year firefighters? You must provide details on the dollar amounts or percentages for each benefit being provided (health costs (family, employee only, employee plus one), dental, vision, FICA, life insurance, retirement/pension, etc.). Note: Failure to provide this information may result in reductions to the requested amounts. (2,000 characters max)
- The system will calculate the total cost of your request



## Add a position

Position

New, Additional Firefighter(s)

What benefits are included in the annual benefits amount? You must provide details on the dollar amounts or percentages for each benefit being provided (health costs (family, employee only, employee plus one), dental, vision, FICA, life insurance, retirement/pension, etc.). Note: Failure to provide this information may results in reductions to the requested amounts.

Benefits funded

How many full-time firefighter positions are you requesting? "Full-time" is considered 2,080 hours or more worked per year.

Number of firefighters

What are the usual annual costs of a first-year firefighter? Annual costs include the base salary (exclusive of non-FLSA overtime) and the standard benefits package (including the average health cost, dental, vision, FICA, life insurance, retirement/pension, etc.) offered by the fire department. To get the "average" health care costs, average the annual cost among various health insurance plans offered (i.e., self only, family, etc). Do not use figures that assume all employees will select self or family coverage.

Annual Salary

\$

Annual Benefits

\$

Total per firefighter

\$0.00

YEARLY TOTAL

3 YEAR TOTAL

## Reminder, Requesting a Review by IAFF Staff

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For additional information on applying for grants, contact the IAFF Grants Department at [FireGrants@iaff.org](mailto:FireGrants@iaff.org) or by phone at (202) 737-8484.