

## Hiring Narrative Questions

**Please describe critical infrastructure. 3000 cl**

**Please provide details on the department's existing staffing model (i.e., number of shifts, number of positions, contracted work hours, et.). 3000 cl**

We currently have a total of 10 full time career fire fighters, 5 part time paid positions, and 35 volunteer personnel. Current career full time staffing is 2 FF/Paramedics per shift with a 3 platoon system for a total of 6 shift work positions. We have one Lieutenant and 1 FF/Paramedic that work M-F 0700-1700. These two daytime career personnel provide staffing during our heaviest call volume periods when we do not have sufficient volunteers available. The Fire Chief and Fire Marshal also work M-F 0800-1700 in primarily administrative positions and respond to working fires and other major incidents (extrications, large gas leaks, etc). When our shift personnel are on leave, the part time paid personnel fill in so that we avoid burnout and reduce overtime expenses. This also provides a recruiting pool for the department.

Our current staffing model and average turnouts for structural incidents are as follows:

Monday-Friday 0700-1700

4 Career FF/Paramedics (including one Lieutenant)

1 Chief Officer

1 Volunteer

2-3 Mutual Aid Fire Fighters from 2 Volunteer home response departments

Monday Friday 1700-0700 And Weekends

2 Career FF/Paramedics

1 Chief Duty Officer

2-3 Mutual Aid Fire Fighters from 2 Volunteer home response departments

**If your department utilizes paid part-time firefighters, provide details on how they are used within your department to include the number of part-time firefighters, the number of full-time NFPA compliant positions these part-time firefighters occupy, if applicable, and how they are scheduled to meet your staffing needs. 3000 cl**

Our part time paid personnel fill in as needed, primarily to fill vacancies in our existing full time positions due to vacation or illness. These personnel also serve as our "farm system" as we push to expand career positions in the department.

**If your department utilizes reserve/relief paid firefighters, provide details on the number of reserve/relief firefighters, the number of full-time NFPA compliant positions these part-time firefighters occupy and how they are scheduled to meet your staffing needs. 3000 cl**

N/A

**If the department has rainy day funds, what are the funds earmarked for? 1000 cl**

The Fire Department does not maintain any reserve funds. Our volunteer component does have a fund that is under their control, not the Fire Chief or City Manager, and is for their use with approval of the

City Council. Current balance is approx. \$75,000 intended for banquets and uniforms and picnics. Comprised of donations from public that are received periodically throughout the year. Not intended for salaries or operational needs.

**Please describe the department's hiring practices and timelines including how long after award will you be able to start a recruit class and how many recruits can be trained in one class. If you are requesting more positions than can be trained in one recruit class, please discuss when you will be able to hold the second class. If your department will need governing body approval before the award can be accepted, please be sure to include details on the timeline needed for acceptance. 2000 cl**

Due to our small size we have generally hired personnel from the local area. We frequently employ social media, state and regional job boards, and other measures to advertise the position. The personnel who have previously applied were mostly local career or volunteer fire fighters and/or EMS providers with existing certifications. The job announcement shall specify title and salary range of the position, the nature of the duties performed, qualification requirements, the time and place to apply, and the application requirements. Job announcements will be posted "in-house" and will be advertised concurrently.

Applicants must meet some minimum training requirements to apply and the top candidates are interviewed by a panel. The panel then makes recommendations to the chief. We have begun developing additional testing requirements and have spoken with both our human resources and finance offices regarding hiring procedures. We will have these processes developed over the next 3 months, and will have an eligibility list so that if we are awarded we can immediately begin the hiring process.

**Please describe the risk analysis and/or staffing needs analysis. 1000 cl**

The fire chief produces monthly and annual reports and presents this information to elected officials as well as the city manager. The report contains information on the total responses, average response times, effective fire fighting force/assembly, and failure to respond due to inadequate staffing. Our department also performed a GIS analysis that graphically illustrated our responses, incident concentrations, and incidents for which we failed to respond due to inadequate staffing. We also had a recent ISO certification study that pointed out the primary need for additional staffing. All studies indicated that while we can reach a large portion of our population and call volume, we simply do not have sufficient personnel to respond in a safe and effective manner. This information has been shared with our council and residents in an attempt to garner support for additional tax dollars to fund fire staffing.

**Please provide a brief description of the policy to recruit and hire veterans. 1000 cl**

While we do not currently have a policy, we are in consultation with our elected officials and expect to reach a decision in the next 3 months. We recognize that veterans also have significant training and valuable work ethic that would support the mission of the department, and an inherent understanding of paramilitary organizations. In recognition of these qualities, we are discussing a policy that would reward veterans who apply with additional points on the hiring test. The City of XYZ is an EEO and actively recruits minority participation. Currently 2 of our 16 employees are female and we have several volunteer females and other minorities.

**If your department's intent is to sustain the positions filled under this grant after the completion of the period of performance, please provide a brief description on how the positions will be sustained. 1000 cl**

The department fully intends to continue these much needed positions beyond the period of performance. We have implemented a 1 cent tax rate increase, which provided funding for two additional fire fighters in the next budget cycle (starting July 2016). We will also be monitoring the recent increase in property values and its impact on the general fund. We believe we will be able to sustain these positions with that funding stream, but if not, we will be seeking up to a 6 cent increase in the mill rate to sustain the positions we are requesting with this grant. We have the support of our city manager and our elected officials have provided a letter stating their commitment to maintain the personnel beyond the two year period of performance.

### **Request Details Narrative Questions**

**1a. Why does the department need the positions requested in this application? When were the positions requested vacated (or will they be vacated) and under what circumstance? If your request is based on a needs assessment or Insurance Services Office rating, please provide details of those outcomes. 3000 cl**

The XYZ Fire Department (XYZ) is requesting \$469,660 to hire 4 new fire fighters. This amount includes funding for two (2) FF/EMT-Paramedic and two (2) FF/EMT-Basic positions. Combined with the 2 personnel that will be hired under the department's budget in July 2016, these positions will fully bring our department into compliance with NFPA 1720 (suburban) response requirements. We will also be addressing a critical capability gap by ensuring that we have sufficient staffing to respond to dispatched incidents. Over the past three years, we have failed to respond to 117 incidents due to an insufficient number of career and volunteer personnel.

The XYZ provides fire and EMS services to an area encompassing 56 square miles and a population of 18,000. We respond to almost 1,000 suppression runs and 2,100 EMS incidents/transport, with an average of 30 working fires each year between first due and auto/mutual aid. The recent consolidation of a separate rescue squad into our fire department meant that our call volume increased by approximately 400 incidents.

Over the past two years, we have increased our career staffing and now have a total of 10 employees. This includes 4 career personnel that staff the first due units M-F during daytime hours, but only allows for 2 career personnel in the evenings and on weekends. Our CAD data indicates that call volumes are more heavily concentrated during the daytime hours, however, roughly 40% of our call volume occurs during our short staffed periods.

Our volunteer base has continued to dwindle, despite efforts to recruit and retain members. We recently created and promoted a volunteer incentive program including stipends and other benefits; however, we are still losing volunteers. It is also difficult to recruit new volunteers with the training requirements becoming a part time job. Given the average availability of only 1-2 volunteers during the day and 2 in the evening, the facts show that we need to increase our full time career staffing to 4 on duty at all times, to achieve the desired NFPA recommended staffing of 6 fire fighters people on duty.

Despite our efforts to address the call volume and response time issues with additional employees, the increased call volume has strained our department both financially and with regards to volunteer participation. We see this every week in our run reports, which list the number of times our department has failed to respond due to concurrent and simultaneous incidents (which occur approximately 30% of the time), and a lack of available personnel.

**1b. How will the positions requested in this application be used within the department (i.e., 4th on engine, open a new station, eliminate browned out stations, reduce overtime )? What are the specific benefits the positions will provide to the department and community? 2000 cl**

The 4 positions requested in this grant application, along with the 2 new positions that were approved for our 2016-2017 budget, will provide a total of 6 new fire fighters for our department. Two additional fire fighters will be assigned to each of our three shifts, with primary responsibility for staffing the engine company with 4 personnel at all times.

During peak call volume hours (M-F, 0700-1700) we will have six career personnel available, as well as our Fire Chief and Fire Marshall. Adding 2 positions, funded by this grant, will allow us to staff our engine with 4 personnel and either a second fire suppression unit or the transport unit with 2 personnel. This is critical as the medic unit is fairly busy with 2,100 runs per year. When that medic unit is on EMS runs, we currently only have 2 fire fighters remaining to staff the engine. With the added personnel, if the medic unit is in station, we could respond two suppression units, enabling us to deploy a ladder at our many high rise occupancies. The chief and fire marshal may supplement staffing as incident commanders but are not dispatched on every call.

On nights/weekends, we will be able to staff the engine with 4 career personnel supplemented by our volunteer staff (avg. of 2). If we use 2 personnel to respond to an EMS incident, that still leaves 4 personnel to immediately respond the first due engine. This staffing ensures that we never have a situation where the engine fails to respond with a sufficient number of personnel to satisfy OSHA "2 In/2 Out" and immediately begin suppression and rescue operations.

**1c. Please describe how the awarding of this grant would enhance the department's ability to protect the critical infrastructure discussed in the Applicant Characteristics section of the application. 1000 cl**  
XYZ dates to the late 1700's and still has a considerable building stock from the mid 1800's making for an extremely high fire risk potential. Surrounding the business district is a variety of residential properties from small to extremely large, many of which are as old as the business district. As noted in our critical infrastructure, we have significant hazards that require that the department respond with sufficient personnel to address these risks. We currently lack that capability as demonstrated by a fire this past April at a telephone switching station that serves all of XYZ and Rockbridge County. The first arriving engine with 3 firefighters battled the blaze by themselves until mutual aid arrived 17 minutes into the incident. The crew managed to save the building that houses all of the telephone switching networks for almost 600 square miles with minimal interruption, however, they should never have been put in that position.

**2a. How are the community and the current firefighters employed by the department at risk without the positions requested in this application? How will that risk be reduced if awarded? 2000 cl**

In the past year there have been 73 instances where a citizen dialed 911 and nobody from the XYZ Fire Department showed up to their emergency. On a recent Saturday morning we had a reported structure fire on Main St. in our downtown. The chief arrived to heavy smoke coming from a 1 story with basement office/support facility for the local hotels. Building personnel reported that they were unable

to locate two employees who had gone into the building to fight the fire. The 2 fire fighters on duty were on an ambulance call that came in five minutes before the fire. When the Chief arrived he put his life at risk because there was an immediate threat to life, and made entry by himself to find the missing workers and try to extinguish the large commercial dryer that was on fire. The first arriving fire apparatus were from the next town over which is 10 miles away and took 20 minutes to arrive. Had this incident escalated beyond an appliance fire capable of being knocked down with an extinguisher, it easily could have extended into the walls and building resulting in significant loss.

During calendar year 2014 there were 248 fire responses by XYZ where there were insufficient personnel on the fire engine using a standard of 3 people as a minimum crew. During those 248 responses XYZ averaged sending 2.45 persons to the citizens' request for help. Of these 2.45 personnel, some are junior members (16-18 years of age) who have minimal training and are exterior only. Some are over 18 years of age but have not yet completed basic firefighting training yet. These junior and untrained members further reduce the effectiveness and safety of the responding personnel.

**2b. What impact will the positions requested in this application have on the departments NFPA compliance, if awarded? 2000 cl**

We are currently not meeting any of the ISO or NFPA benchmarks. This grant would ensure that we are moving towards full compliance with 1720 in a logical and economical viable manner. These positions will be used to increase our compliance with 1720 (suburban) response requirements. Specifically, initial arriving engine company staffing will increase from 2 to 4 career personnel at all times, and our full alarm assembly of 10 personnel within 8-minutes will increase from the current 0%, to approximately 60% of the time. This staffing will be accomplished using a combination of career positions, part time paid positions, volunteer staffing when available, mutual and automatic aid, and voluntary call backs.

A typical EMS incident has a response of our paramedic transport unit staffed with 2 members. With our current staffing of 2 career personnel per shift, and a shortage of volunteers, there is often no one left to respond the engine when another emergency arises. The amount of time spent on each transport varies, but on average, each of our 1,500 EMS calls takes approximately 1 hour. With this average in mind, approximately 1,500 hours of every year our jurisdiction does not have adequate fire protection coverage. Just as importantly, we cannot respond to a second concurrent EMS incident. Both of these situations occurred over 115 times over the past two years, and will continue to occur as call volume increases.

If the staffing requested were awarded, there would be two additional members working on each shift. When 2 personnel were committed on other calls, we would still have between 4 firefighters available to respond immediately with an initial engine crew. This additional staffing allows us to remain more efficiently staffed even during the critical 20-25% of the time when we have 2 of our personnel committed to medical emergencies.

**3a. Please provide additional details on the departments operating budget. This should include an income verse expenses breakdown of the annual budget indicated in Applicant Characteristics section of the application. 2000 cl**

Primary income sources are property taxes and EMS billing. In addition we have a small amount of state grant funding (2% of operating budget). The majority of the tax funding comes from city residents with a small portion also coming from county residents as part of a contract for services. We spend our limited dollars effectively and efficiently. Out of a \$1.64M budget, personnel represent our largest and

growing expenditure at \$1.05M (65%). Utilities, cell phone, insurance, vehicle repair, and supplies represent \$250K (10%). Contractual services, which include equipment repairs and maintenance, service contracts, computer software, and other items, represent \$115K (8%). We contribute \$165K to capital reserve projects (10%) which fund major replacement projects such as SCBA, PPE, and apparatus. The remaining 7% is used for our volunteer incentive program, uniforms, misc/petty cash, printing and postage, dues and memberships, and equipment leases.

- \$1,060,748 Salary and Benefits
- \$165,000 Equipment Repair Contribution (Capital Budget for equipment and apparatus replacement)
- \$90,000 Vehicle and Equip Supplies
- \$35,000 Repairs and Maintenance
- \$35,000 Contractual Response Services
- \$28,000 Durable Goods
- \$25,000 Repairs and Service Contracts
- \$25,000 Travel and Training
- \$21,200 Utilities
- \$21,150 State Grant Purchases
- \$17,100 Insurance
- \$14,500 Medical Supplies
- \$12,500 Uniform and apparel
- \$10,500 Employee Relations and Incentive Program
- \$8,000 Computer Software
- \$7,500 Emergency Services Grant Purchases
- \$7,500 Electronic Data Services
- \$5,000 Other Operating Supplies
- \$5,000 Special Projects
- \$4,500 Fire Prevention Supplies
- \$4,000 Professional Services
- \$3,800 Laundry
- \$3,400 Lease/Rent Equipment
- \$3,400 Telephone
- \$3,000 Repair and Maint Supplies
- \$3,300 Government Services
- \$2,800 Cellular Service
- \$2,000 Janitorial Supplies
- \$2,000 Uniforms
- \$1,500 Books and Subscriptions
- \$1,500 Dues and Memberships
- \$600 Postage
- \$500 Data Processing
- \$500 Generator Supplies
- \$500 Office Supplies
- \$75 Advertising
- \$50 Photocopying

**3b. Please describe the department's budget shortfalls and the inability to address the financial needs without federal assistance. What other actions have you taken to obtain funding elsewhere (i.e., state assistance programs, other grant programs, etc.)? 2000 cl**

After an extensive education campaign detailing numerous failures to protect citizens and fire fighters, council has finally agreed to add 2 fire fighters, funded through a 1 cent tax increase, starting July 2016. While a great start, it does not get the department to a point where we can meet NFPA staffing standards. Numerous efforts for volunteer recruitment and retention programs, intended to supplement the full time career staffing to a total of 6 personnel on duty at all times, have failed to produce adequate staffing levels.

Economic conditions are forcing us to modify our apparatus replacement plan to delay planned equipment purchases and to seek alternative funding via grants for others. We have currently extended the Aerial Ladder replacement plan by 5 years, implemented a plan to reduce the EMS fleet by 25%, delayed replacement of 4 support vehicles, delayed replacement of cardiac monitors that are 10 years old, failed to upgrade EMS patient handling equipment to prevent back injuries, and delayed replacement of personal protective equipment.

Our situation is such that we are limited in our ability to hire personnel that are needed to provide a minimum level of safe staffing for our workload. This grant would allow us to the needed financial booster to immediately address critical life safety hazards and provide safer, more effective and efficient services. Over the following two years sufficient funding could be provided to sustain the positions through increasing tax revenues, combined with a possible tax increase.

Prior city commitments to fund projects such as new schools (\$14M), new public safety radio system (\$8M), infrastructure repairs including EPA requirements and a waste water treatment plan (\$50M) have already increased taxes approximately 30% and citizens are unwilling to bear any additional increases. Once these improvements are paid for, elected officials have expressed their support for sustainment funding for these SAFER positions.

**3c. How are the critical functions of your department affected without this funding? 2000 cl**

The best way to illustrate the impact of insufficient staffing on our department is to provide a sampling of significant incidents in 2015. What they all have in common is that they endangered our personnel and those we protect. If we had these grant positions the staffing issues would have been prevented resulting in better outcomes:

January – Commercial structure fire/Sat. afternoon. Chief arrives by himself to find 2 story working commercial with report of workers missing. XYZ fails to respond due to only available staffing being on an EMS call. Chief makes entry by himself to search while awaiting first arriving suppression unit from mutual aid department 10 miles away.

February – Three simultaneous incidents involving 5 acre brush fire impinging on a two structure, a tree down with a person trapped under it, and two hikers trapped on a rock cliff that required high angle rope rescue

March – Accident w/2 entrapments. First responding unit driver only with our Fire Marshal since XYZ was out of district assisting mutual aid company on a 2nd alarm structure fire.

April – Fire in telephone switching station. First engine with 3 firefighters battles the blaze by themselves until mutual aid arrives 17 minutes in. Saved building that houses the telephone switching networks for 600 square miles.

July – High angle rope rescue with 5 fire fighters who were only staffing available on Sat. afternoon.

November – Two story, four unit apartment building fire at 0500 hours - 1 civilian fatality. Fire on both floors of the building, first engine responds with 3 fire fighters, mutual aid does not arrive for 18 minutes.

February 2016 – Two alarm apartment building fire at 0100 hours. 1st engine on the scene in 3 minutes with only 2 fire fighters, heavy fire showing from an occupied apartment. Second unit from XYZ arrives in another 3 minutes with 3 more fire fighters. Next help arrived with 4 people in 16 minutes.

**4. Please describe the benefits (i.e., anticipated savings, efficiencies) the department and community will realize if awarded the positions requested in this application. 3000 cl**

The grant request of \$469,000 spread over the cost of all incidents over the next two years averages \$131 per incident. Considering that our department runs 30 working structure fires per year, the cost per working fire incident is \$12,000. Take that one step further and put yourself in the position of a resident dialing 911 because your family member had a heart attack (which occurs 15-20 times per year) and being told that there were no units available to respond. That patient went from a viable patient to a person with zero percent chance of survival. When you consider that cost of fire fighter burn injuries, civilian injuries, deaths, and average fire loss during exponential fire growth, the cost seems very manageable.

Studies from NIST have shown the significant reductions in time to complete various fire ground tasks with varying crew sizes and confirmed that NFPA recommendations to staff our engine with 4 personnel is a critical life safety measure. With the increased personnel, we will have two additional personnel on every shift. We would be able to respond to a medical incident and still have a crew available to staff the engine. Additionally, we would be able to staff a second fire suppression unit when the medic unit is in quarters.

Without this critical funding we would only be able to add two additional personnel this year, and possibly add another two personnel in two more years. That still would not allow us to staff the engine with 4 personnel at all times. Our City is doing its best to help our fire fighters, and this grant would provide the extra assistance to get us over the financial hump. With the additional grant funding, the required number of volunteer shifts to fill shifts will be reduced. We plan to again increase the stipend amount paid to the volunteers in the hopes that they will expand participation with the additional incentives. This SAFER funding satisfies the grant priorities, will allow us to immediately staff the engine with 4 personnel at all times, and will have a significant and immediate impact on fire fighter and civilian life safety. Combined with our mutual/auto aid to 14 departments, increasing our response area to 65 square miles and population to approximately 23,000 persons, this provides the most effective use of taxpayer dollars.



**5. 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. 2000 cl**

We thank you for taking time away from your family, and fire department family, to serve as a peer reviewer. Your service on all levels is appreciated.