



# IAFF Grant Guidance for FEMA's Assistance to Firefighters Equipment and Training Grants (AFG)

## Overview

Administered through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the primary goal of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) is to meet the firefighting and emergency response needs of fire departments and nonaffiliated emergency medical service organizations. Since 2001, AFG has helped fire fighters and other first responders to obtain critically needed equipment, protective gear, emergency vehicles, training and other resources needed to protect the public and emergency personnel from fire and related hazards.

The Guidance, Application Kit, and other materials are posted on the [Assistance to Firefighters Grant \(AFG\)](#) web site. To begin preparing your application, see the "[Get Ready Guide](#)" and be sure the jurisdictions SAM and DUNS registrations are updated.

All AFG applicants should read the Guidance 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](#) web portal. You will need your user ID and login information to begin the application.

## New for FY 2021

For the FY2021 AFG there is **\$414 million dollars** available.

The FY 2021 AFG Program NOFO contains some changes to definitions, descriptions, and priority categories. Changes to the FY 2021 AFG Program NOFO include:

### Under the Personal Protective Equipment Activity:

- Inclusion of pre-scoring emphasis for this Activity to ensure replacing out of service and non-compliant PPE is of high priority.

The following PPE priorities and definitions have been updated:

- Increase supply for new hire/existing firefighters that do not have one set of turnout gear (PPE) or allocated seated position (SCBA). This includes replacing out of service PPE and SCBA as High Priority

- Replace in-service/in-use/damaged/unsafe/unrepairable PPE or SCBA to meet current standard as High Priority
- Replace in-service/in-use/expired/noncompliant PPE or SCBA to current standard as High Priority
- Upgrade technology to current standard as Low Priority

Additional considerations for PPE and SCBA:

- The applicant's call volume has a lesser impact on scoring and therefore the final funding decision.

Under the Equipment Activity:

The following equipment priorities and definitions have been updated:

- Obtain equipment to achieve minimum operational and deployment standards for existing missions as High Priority
- Replace non-compliant equipment to current standard as High Priority
- Obtain equipment for new mission as Medium Priority
- Upgrade technology to current standard as Low Priority

Under Supporting Definitions:

- Paid on-call/stipend departments are added to the definition of Combination Fire Department
- Firefighting personnel definition is added

Under Modifications to Facility Activity:

- New first-time installation of exhaust, sprinkler, carbon monoxide and/or smoke/fire detection systems are now listed as High Priority, while replacement or update/upgrade to existing systems is considered a lower priority

Under Equipment Activity List:

- Respirator decontamination system is added as Medium Priority item

Under Additions to the Application:

- Question about frequency of live fire training is added for statistical purposes only
- Question about self-inflicted fatalities within the department is added for statistical purposes only
- Question regarding quantity of equipped ALS Response vehicles (transport and non-transport) is added

Under Allocations and Restrictions of Available Grant Funds by Organization Type:

- Outline the funding available for Micro Grants applications

Under Application Tips:

- Recommendation to consider non-Per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) gear purchase

## **Requesting a Review by IAFF 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.

## **Data Entry Section and Supporting Narratives**

The IAFF has copies of the data entry sections available if you need to start compiling the required information and do not have immediate access to the application. Please email [firegrants@iaff.org](mailto:firegrants@iaff.org) and we will provide the materials. Also note that FEMA has provided “Help” buttons within the application that provide additional explanation for terms in the application.

## **Getting Started on the Application**

Once you log into the application and complete the basic information, you’ll note that the application has a number of sections (“tabs”) where you must enter department information, including points of contact, call volume, and other data points. ***Note the application will time out after 30 minutes, and you will lose any information that has not been saved.***

Many times applicants put “placeholders” in the application so that they can advance through the grant sections. We highly recommend that you note which sections have placeholders so that you can go back in the system and review any areas where you did not enter complete information. Every year many applications are turned down because the financial need or other section has “XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX” in the narrative box.

Most of the questions in the application are self-explanatory; however, we have provided some details below on specific questions to ensure you score competitively. There are also a number of smaller narratives required within the data section which are detailed below. These are separate and distinct from the narratives required at the end of the application.

### ***Contact Information***

- **We suggest including an IAFF affiliate officer as one of the points of contact. FEMA will not discuss grant specifics with any person not listed as a POC in the application.**

### ***Applicant Information***

- Data Section
  - Be sure you enter your SAM information correctly.
- Narratives

- If awarded, will your organization expend more than \$750,000 in Federal funds during your organization's fiscal year? If yes, your organization may be required to undergo an A-133 audit. Under the Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters Category, reasonable costs incurred for an A-133 audit is an eligible expenditure and should be included in the applicant's proposed budget. (4,000 characters)
  - Check with your jurisdiction's budget and finance office for the answer to this question.

### **Applicant Characteristics (Part I)**

- Data Section
  - Always select “Yes” to protecting critical infrastructure! You will provide details in the narrative.
  - If you have mutual/auto aid agreements, make sure to mention this in the cost benefit narratives and provide details on how often you respond, whether you are the only career staffed dept. avail, etc.
- Narratives
  - “Does your organization protect critical infrastructure? If yes, please describe the critical infrastructure protected.” (3,000 characters)
    - Critical infrastructure protected by your organization
      - Water treatment locations, power plants, stadiums, national security facilities, etc.
      - Terrorism concerns
      - Consider schools, public facilities, police, fire, post office, etc.
      - Major employers/Sources of substantial tax revenue for jurisdiction
  - “Please describe your organization and/or the community that you serve.” (2,000 characters)
    - Keep the details relevant to your department. What can you tell the reviewers to give them an idea of your risk and unique aspects of protecting your community?
      - Number of residents served
      - Number of square miles protected
      - Number and types of responses
      - Describe the area you protect
      - What are your community's greatest needs, risks and challenges and how does your request address these.

### **Applicant Characteristics (Part II)**

- Data Section

- If you show an increase in your year over year budget you will need to provide an explanation in the main narratives financial need section.
- Ensure that you have included all personal salary and benefit costs in your calculation for percentage of operating budget. Be aware that many departments have 90%+ going to personnel costs.
- Does your department have any rainy day funds, rainy day reserves, or emergency funds? If yes, what is the total amount currently set aside? What are the funds ear-marked for? (*1,000 characters*)
  - It is acceptable to have reserve funding, but provide details in the financial need narrative on whether these funds are restricted to certain projects (i.e. station construction, apparatus purchase, etc.)
  - Explain current state of apparatus, stations, etc. if you are setting aside reserve funding. Is your fleet averaging 20 years old and in dire need of replacement? Are fire stations outdated and incompatible with the current fire department mission?
- Applicant Characteristics Narratives
  - “Applicants should describe their financial need and how consistent it is with the intent of the AFG Program.”
    - Departments should provide an overview of the jurisdiction’s financial health over the prior 3-5 years.
      - Have there been major job losses or other factors that meant declining revenues?
      - Is the housing and job market improving?
      - Have there been personnel or program reductions to other agencies or programs?
    - What are the competing priorities in city hall?
      - Perhaps the water treatment plant needs significant work, or there is a new school bond that was floated?
    - Explain if you are you capped out on tax increases or legislatively restricted with regards to tax caps?
      - Have you put a levy on the ballot and it failed? Did you ask your elected officials for increases?
      - What other options have you explored for funding?
    - What are your sources of revenue?
      - Funded by taxes, surcharges, property assessment, etc.?
      - EMS fees/revenues maximized?
    - What has your department done to control costs? Has the union offered concessions? If so, specifically state “IAFF local XXXX has provided concessions...” Have fire prevention or other staff been moved to front line positions to reduce overtime?
    - Has your department had large expenditures which limited your ability to pay for the requested equipment?

- Perhaps you recently added personnel, or are playing catch up after years of neglecting the capital budget because all funding was directed to keeping fire stations open?
- Include a line item budget, listing your 12-15 largest expenditures, so that reviewers can see where you are spending your money.
  - List as both percentage of overall budget as well as amount, in rank order, for example:
    - \$8,000,000 (85%) Personnel
    - \$2,000,000 (20%) Equipment Replacement
    - \$1,000,000 (5%) Fuel
- Also, if you have shown budget increases over prior years, or have a large reserve, tell the reviewers where these funds are directed (station or apparatus replacement, pension obligation increases, etc.)

### Department Call Volume

- Data Section
  - Be aware that FEMA requires you to input call data in NFIRS format. You can use the NFIRS website to get your department's data if you cannot extract it from the dispatch system.

### Request Information

- You will select the program you are applying for. **Please note, if you select “Vehicle” or “Regional” projects you will need to submit separate applications for other requests. For example, if your department wants to apply for an apparatus and EMS equipment, you will need to submit separate applications for both projects.**
- You should answer “Yes” to benefitting more than one organization. Provide details on mutual aid as well as other agencies in your own jurisdiction (police, public works, etc.)
- If you are requesting \$50,000 or less of federal funding (not including your matching funds) you should select the micro-grant. The micro-grants have an abbreviated review process.

### Request Details Section

- Depending on the item(s) you select, be sure to provide a brief description of each item as requested in the application.
- If you are requesting equipment, check the product life cycle in the NOFO for details. The Grant Guidance document/NOFO lists the priority, age category, and other details.
- Apparatus should generally be 20 years old to be competitive, or 15 years with severe issues. Note that FEMA only replaces front line apparatus.

- When requesting PPE (Turnouts or SCBA), you should only include gear that is 10 years/2 NFPA cycles or older, based on manufacturing date, or gear that is beyond repair/out of service. Also, you should not be requesting second sets of gear, which FEMA does not allow at this time.
- The equipment should be bringing you into compliance with one or more NFPA or OSHA standards. If you are not trained in the equipment being requested, you should either be requesting training funds, OR have selected that training will be provided by the manufacturer or other means.
- A department applying for an award may indicate that the item(s) requested are “first time purchases.” If the department already owns or has owned any equipment of the same general type, description, or purpose, the request does not qualify as a first time purchase. For example: A department with older single-band radios applies for digital multi-band radios. This department has never had digital multiband radios before, but because they did have radios, they are seeking to “replace old or obsolete equipment” as opposed to making a first-time purchase.
- For equipment, the High Priority application choices are:
  - Obtain equipment to achieve minimum operational and deployment standards for existing missions (**High Priority**)
  - Replace non-compliant equipment to current standard (**High Priority**)
  - Obtain equipment for new mission (Medium Priority)
  - Upgrade technology to current standard (Low Priority)
- For PPE the high priority choices are:
  - Increase supply for new hire/existing firefighters that do not have one set of turnout gear (PPE) or allocated seated position (SCBA). This includes replacing out of service PPE and SCBA (**High Priority**)
  - Replace in-service/in-use/damaged/unsafe/unrepairable PPE or SCBA to meet current standard (**High Priority**)
  - Replace in-service/in-use/expired/noncompliant PPE or SCBA to current standard (**High Priority**)
  - Upgrade technology to current standard (Low Priority)
- Each category of request will have its own set of narratives. If you are submitting for apparatus you will complete one set of narratives in this application, and a second set for your other requests in your other grant application. If you are requesting turnouts, new saws, and EMS equipment, you would complete two sets of narratives; one for the turnouts, and another for the equipment (both EMS and fire).

## **Main Narratives Guidance**

**\*One point that applies to all of 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 actual, relevant data that is 3-5 years old.**

Remember that these are your peer fire fighters that review the grants, you do not need to spell out every aspect of operations and NFPA standards to them. Simply state "a new vehicle would bring our department into compliance with NFPA 1971" as opposed to "a new engine with a 1,500 gal pump and 750 gallon tank, along with 4 ladders and other equipment would bring our department into compliance with NFPA 1971, the Standard for NFPA 1901: Standard for Automotive Fire Apparatus section 2.1.2."

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

- Section #1 Project Description: In the space provided below, include clear and concise details regarding your organization's project's description and budget. This includes providing local statistics to justify the needs of your department and a detailed plan for how your department will implement the proposed project. Further, please describe what you are requesting funding for, including budget descriptions of the major budget items, i.e., personnel, equipment, contracts, etc. (*\*4000 characters*)
  - Explain how you performed a risk analysis and why you chose this particular item to request.
  - Explain that you have solicited bids and that the request is the most cost effective solution to the current problem that exists
    - Note you will need to save these bids for FEMA's review if you are successful.
  - It is best to put your request in front of the reviewer in the first paragraph. State specifically what you are requesting: "The XYZ Fire Dept. is requesting \$32,000 to replace our 12 year old, non-compliant, torn, and irreparable turnouts."
  - How often do you use the requested equipment?
  - How many members of department will be trained or will operate whatever you are requesting?
  - What NFPA or other standards apply and how will the funding of your request bring you into compliance with the standard?
  - Provide details on the specific issues you are having with your equipment, training, or whatever you are requesting.
    - Just being old/out of compliance is not enough and you must support your request with concrete details.
    - What are the costs of maintaining current equipment/apparatus?

- Is equipment failing NFPA or other certification testing?
    - Is the equipment or training available from other sources or mutual aid partners?
    - Do other departments rely on you as a regional resource for the equipment?
  - Finally, include the cost breakdown, including cost per item, total cost for the total requested items, your cost share, and the federal share requested.
- Section #2 Cost/Benefit: In the space provided below please explain, as clearly as possible, what will be the benefits your department or your community will realize if the project described is funded (i.e. anticipated savings and/or efficiencies)? Is there a high benefit for the cost incurred? Are the costs reasonable? Provide justification for the budget items relating to the cost of the requested items. (*\*4000 characters*)
  - State whether your request is a high priority based on the grant NOFO.
  - How does the cost of request compare to other options that are available?
  - What features does your current equipment lack (12 lead transmission, buddy breathers, etc.)?
  - Is equipment no longer supported?
  - How much have you spent on maintenance or repairs of requested equipment?
  - Have other departments successfully used the product to address a similar need?
  - What is the risk/cost of a fire fighter injury if you continue to operate with existing equipment?
  - Have there been any injuries from substandard equipment, training, or lack of fitness/wellness programs?
  - What are the consequences of not funding this request? What are risks to citizens?
  - On a per incident basis, what does your request equate to?
  - Will regional partners expand the cost benefit of the request?
  - State whether your elected officials have provided approval to accept award and provide matching funds.
- Section #3 Statement of Effect: How would this award impact the daily operations of your department? How would this award impact your department's ability to protect lives and property in your community? (*\*4000 characters*)
  - What can't you do now that you could do with the requested equipment or training?
    - The requested items should have you respond to your most common risk(s).

- Is current equipment out of service and preventing you from responding or being as effective as you could be?
- Have you had instances where the lack of equipment or training resulted in further damage or injuries to fire fighters, civilians, or property?
  - For instance, lack of a tanker/water supply resulted in loss of structure
  - Lack of fitness programs could be linked to on the job injury or things like heat stress
- Are there similar programs or equipment in place in other jurisdictions that has resulted in positive effects in fire ground operations?
- How many fire fighters or civilians are at risk if the program is not implemented?
- Will the requested equipment make you interoperable?
- Thank the reviewers for their time attending peer review.

For additional information on applying for grants, contact the IAFF Grants Department at [FireGrants@iaff.org](mailto:FireGrants@iaff.org) or (202) 824-1559.