



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

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 FY2021 cycle there is \$560 million dollars available. This includes a one-time increase of \$200 million dollars appropriated by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. 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.

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 the salaries and benefits of the SAFER-funded positions.**

Highlights for the FY2021 SAFER Hiring of Firefighters Activity?

- No annual salary limits.
- No prescribed cost-share.
- Grant funds can be used to rehire laid off firefighters and retain firefighters facing layoff.
- Extensions to the period of performance are now allowable.
- There is no supplanting requirement.
- There is no minimum budget requirement.

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.**

FAQs to consider:

What type of firefighter positions will be funded?

- 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 additional new firefighters.
- 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.

I have an open SAFER Program award(s). May I still apply under the FY 2021 SAFER Program?

- Yes. However, because the possibility exists that the period of performance on the open grant award(s) and the FY 2021 grant period of performance will overlap, you need to ensure that the start of your FY 2021 grant does not depend on the completion of your open grant(s), or that receipt of a FY 2021 SAFER Program award will not impact your ability to continue with and/or complete your open grant award(s). The grant activities requested in the FY 2021 SAFER Program 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 Program award who wish to apply under the FY 2021 SAFER Program are subject to the guidelines and requirements outlined in the FY 2021 SAFER Program NOFO.

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 on January 3, 2022. 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 February 4, 2022, the layoffs must become effective on or before June 4, 2022. 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, it 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.

Economic Hardship Waivers

- Because there is no minimum budget requirement, no cost share requirement, and no position cost limit, an economic hardship waiver process is not necessary. Therefore, no economic hardship waiver process applies to the FY 2021 SAFER Program.

Period of Performance Guidance for the Hiring Activity

- The period of performance is 36 months for all grants awarded under this activity.
- 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 is able to 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

The AFG SAFER Application:

The first sections of the application are about your organization.

Applicant characteristics: includes a narrative section where you must describe your critical infrastructure.

Discuss:

- Schools and Universities
- Health Care Facilities
- Chemical or Manufacturing Facilities
- Transportation Infrastructure – Roads, Bridges, Ports, Rail

- Large Commercial or Industrial Sites
- Power plants, water / sewer treatment, dams, etc.
- Other high-consequence infrastructure that is not listed above

Operating budget: includes a narrative section where you must describe your organization's need for Federal financial assistance. There is a *4,000-character limit* to this narrative.

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 the "**Add Activity**" button

Grant request details



Instructions

Add the positions you are requesting by using the Add position to Hiring of Firefighters button below. Select the type of position(s) being requested: only one type of position (New/Additional, Re-Hire Laid-Off, or Retain Firefighter(s)) can be requested per line item. If you are seeking funding for more than one type of position, you MUST enter each one separately. You can have multiple line items for each position type, and this should be used when the salary and benefits are different for each position/activity being requested.

Grand total: \$0

Add activity

- There has to be at least one activity
- Total charges MUST be greater than \$0

- Select **"Hiring of Firefighters"**

Instructions

Add activity to Request Details

Select activity:

Select

Select

Hiring of Firefighters

Confirm

✕ Cancel

- This adds a number of other fields and small narratives to the application.

NFPA standard	Department characteristics	Demographic	Assembly staffing	Response time	Frequency of time
1710	Career	With aerial	15	8 min	90%
1710	Career	Without aerial	14	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

How many budgeted, but vacant operational positions does your department have at the start of the application period?

- 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)

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 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).*"

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

Project Description (30 percent) (2,500 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 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

- **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? (2,500 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? (1,500 characters)**
 - Discuss both 4-minute/4 personnel first unit and 8-minute/15 personnel full alarm statistics.
 - 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 personnel provide that information.
 - If you can make a good estimate of how often you would assemble 15 personnel 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) for additional information.

Cost Benefit (10 percent) (3,500 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?
- Do you need to modify your CAD system to maintain accurate “people count” and markups at working fire incidents?
- What type of real-world data will you gather?
- How will you present this to elected officials who may be wary of adding staffing in a difficult economic environment?

Additional Information (2,000 characters):

- For any additional information you would like to include about the department and/or this application in general
 - We suggest a simple *“thank you for reviewing our application, we appreciate your efforts on behalf of the fire service.”* At this point, reviewers have already made their decision and unless you have something very important that could not fit in the other sections, you should have answered all their questions in the prior sections.

Now go back to the Request Detail Section under the Hiring of Firefighters Activity and click on **“Add Position to Hiring of Firefighters”** This opens a window to add the costs to your request.

Grand total: \$0

Program area: Hiring of firefighters

Total requested for Hiring of Firefighters activity: \$0

Remove activity
Add position to Hiring of Firefighters

Staffing levels

SAFER intends to restore or improve local fire departments' staffing and deployment capabilities so they can more effectively respond to emergencies. With the enhanced staffing, a SAFER grant recipient's response time will be reduced sufficiently and an appropriate number of trained personnel will be assembled at the incident scene.

The following questions are designed to help us understand the staffing changes that have occurred in your department over the past several years and how the grant will assist in restoring or improving your staffing levels. The information provided must be a true and accurate depiction of your department on the timelines listed below.

For more information regarding these standards please see the Notice of Funding Opportunity or go to www.nfpa.org/freeaccess

Select the type of positions that you are requesting:

Add position to Hiring of Firefighters

Select position:

Select

Select

New, Additional Firefighter(s)

Rehire Laid-Off Firefighter(s)

Retain Firefighter(s) Facing Layoff

[✖ Cancel](#)

Add position to Hiring of Firefighters

Position

New, Additional Firefighter(s)

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 anticipated annual costs per position, per year? 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.

Year	Annual salary	Annual benefits	TOTAL PER FIREFIGHTER
1	\$ <input style="width: 150px;" type="text"/>	\$ <input style="width: 150px;" type="text"/>	\$0.00
Year 2	\$ <input style="width: 150px;" type="text"/>	\$ <input style="width: 150px;" type="text"/>	\$0.00
Year 3	\$ <input style="width: 150px;" type="text"/>	\$ <input style="width: 150px;" type="text"/>	\$0.00

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 result in reductions to the requested amounts.

Benefits funded

- 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

Requesting a Review by IAFF Staff

The IAFF [Grants Administration Department](#) is available to assist affiliates and their fire departments through the application process. For more information or to request a review of an application prior to submission, affiliates can send their narratives to firegrants@iaff.org.