



Homeland Security

FY 2013 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER)

Overview

SAFER Authority is derived from Section 34 of the *Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, as amended* (15 U.S.C. §2229a *et seq.*) **Appropriation Authority for Program:** *Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2013* (P.L. 113-6, Division D)

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response program (SAFER) is a funding initiative designed to strengthen the nation's ability to respond to fire and fire-related hazards and improve the nation's overall level of preparedness.

The goal of any SAFER grant is to enhance the ability of grantees to attain and maintain 24-hour staffing and to assure that their communities have adequate protection from fire and fire-related hazards. The objective of the program is to award grants directly to volunteer, combination, and career fire departments to help the departments increase the number of frontline firefighters, and to rehire firefighters who were laid-off due to the economy. The objective of the Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters activity is to create a more favorable working environment for volunteer firefighters. Such an environment would encourage current volunteers to continue with their volunteerism as well as entice new volunteers to join. Ultimately, it is hoped that the recruitment and retention activity will create a net increase in the number of trained, certified, and competent firefighters capable of safely responding to emergencies likely to occur within the fire department's geographic response area. The primary focus of this activity is to enlist and/or retain volunteer firefighters who are trained in the operations of firefighting and emergency response.

*In Fiscal Year 2013, the DHS will award approximately **\$320 million** directly to fire departments and volunteer support groups to expand the number of firefighters available to more effectively protect the health and safety of the public with respect to fire and all other hazards.*

Funding

The SAFER program provides approximately \$320 million in competitive grants to fire departments and statewide or local volunteer firefighter support groups. No less than ten percent (10%) of the funding must be awarded for Recruitment and Retention activities and no less than ten percent (10%) must be awarded to volunteer and/or mostly volunteer fire departments for hiring of firefighters. In addition, at least fifteen percent (15%) of the appropriated amount is set aside for the hiring of new firefighters.

Program Highlights

- The various activities that the SAFER can fund are detailed below according to the type of eligible entity:

Career Fire Departments:

- Hiring of Firefighters

Combination Fire Departments:

- Hiring of Firefighters
- Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters

Volunteer Fire Departments:

- Hiring of New Firefighters
- Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters

Statewide or Local Firefighter Support Groups:

- Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters

- Funding for hiring of firefighters is limited to salaries and associated fringe benefits.
- There is no limit to the amount of Federal funds that may go toward any firefighter position. There is no limit to the number of positions that may be requested if hiring new firefighters. However, applicants seeking to rehire laid off firefighters must limit their request to the number of positions that have been subject to layoff action since January 1, 2008.
- No less than ten percent (10%) of the appropriation must be awarded for Recruitment and Retention activities.
- No less than ten percent (10%) of the appropriation must be awarded to volunteer or mostly volunteer fire departments for hiring of firefighters.
- No less than fifteen percent (15%) of the appropriation must be awarded to fire departments for hiring of new firefighters.

Eligibility

Hiring of Firefighters Activity

Eligible Applicants: Volunteer, career, and combination fire departments are eligible to apply under the Hiring of Firefighters Activity. Municipalities and fire districts may submit applications on behalf of fire departments when the fire department lacks the legal status to do so, e.g., when the fire department falls within the auspices of the municipality or district. Each eligible applicant is limited to one application per application period. However, eligible applicants wishing to apply for funding in both the Hiring Firefighters and the Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters activities must submit two separate applications.

Recruitment and Retention of Firefighters Activity

Eligible Applicants: Eligibility for this activity is limited to volunteer and combination fire departments (see “SAFER Grants Definitions”). Local, statewide and national organizations that support volunteer firefighters and individual fire departments (volunteer or combination) may apply for assistance for regional projects. An individual fire department may act as a “host applicant” and apply for regional projects on behalf of itself and any number of neighboring fire departments. For example, a host applicant could apply for a regional media campaign promoting volunteerism.

- A “fire department” is defined as an agency or organization that has a formally recognized arrangement with a state, territory, local, or tribal authority (city, county, parish, fire district, township, town, or other governing body) to provide fire suppression to a population within a fixed geographical area on a first-due basis.
- A “local and statewide organizations that represent the interests of volunteer firefighters” is an organization that is in existence to support fire departments and firefighters through education, advocacy, etc. Such organizations include State or local firefighter and/or fire chiefs associations, fire department auxiliaries, volunteer firefighter relief organizations and associations.
- A “career fire department” is a fire department in which all members receive financial compensation for their services (organizations that provide reimbursement on a paid-on-call basis are considered to be a “volunteer fire department” for the purposes of this program).
- A “combination fire department” is a fire department in which at least one active firefighter receives full-time compensation for their services (paid-on-call is NOT considered full-time compensation) and/or at least one active firefighter does not receive financial compensation for their services, other than life and health insurance and workers’ compensation insurance.
- A “volunteer fire department” is an agency or organization in which no member receives financial compensation (salary, wages) for their services other than life and health insurance and workers’ compensation insurance. We consider a department to be “mostly volunteer” if more than 50 percent of its membership is made up of personnel who do not receive financial compensation for their services.

Career fire departments, combination fire departments and volunteer fire departments are eligible to receive funding for the hiring of new firefighters activity, while only career fire departments and combination fire departments are eligible for funding to rehire laid off firefighters. Combination fire departments and volunteer fire departments are eligible to receive funding under the recruitment and retention activity. Statewide or local organizations that support volunteer firefighters are also eligible for recruitment and retention funding. Career fire departments may NOT receive funding under the recruitment and retention activity and statewide or local organizations may NOT receive funding under the hiring of firefighters activity.

Changes in Program Requirements

For Fiscal Year 2013, Congress provided the Department with authority to waive significant SAFER program requirements. The term of the SAFER grants have changed from a 4-year term to

2-years, giving departments much more flexibility in the short term; the salary cap of \$100,000 per position has been eliminated, enabling departments to employ veteran firefighters and maximize their funding across their workforce; the local matching requirement has been eliminated; and departments are now allowed to request a waiver to keep SAFER funding in the event that they cannot backfill firefighting positions if the positions are vacated via normal attrition— previously, grantees were required to maintain staffing throughout the period of performance.

Program Coordination

The following entities were involved in developing the FY2013 SAFER guidance:

- Department of Homeland Security
 - Federal Emergency Management Agency
 - U.S. Fire Administration (USFA)
 - Grant Programs Directorate (GPD)
- Major Fire Service Organizations
 - International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC)
 - International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)
 - National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC)
 - National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)
 - National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM)
 - International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI)
 - International Society of Fire Service Instructors (ISFSI)
 - North American Fire Training Directors (NAFTD)
 - Congressional Fire Service Institute (CFSI)

Application Process and Evaluation Criteria

All complete and eligible applications are evaluated relative to SAFER Grant funding priorities. Answers to activity-specific questions as well as information submitted under the Department Characteristics section of the application will determine an application's standing relative to stated priorities. This initial evaluation assesses how closely each application matches the program's established priorities.

Applications most consistent with the SAFER Grant funding priorities score higher in the automated evaluation. Automated evaluation scores are combined with peer review evaluation scores, with each score representing 50 percent of the total application score.

A panel of at least three Peer Review Panelists performs the second phase of an application's evaluation. These panelists evaluate the application using the Narrative Statement, answers to the general questions, and answers to the activity-specific questions. Each application is judged on its own merits against established criteria and is not compared to other applications.

Panelists will evaluate and score the following criteria:

1. Hiring of Firefighters Activity
 - a. Project Description
 - b. Impact on Daily Operations
 - c. Financial Need
 - d. Cost Benefit
 - e. Performance (additional consideration)
 - f. Veterans Preference (additional consideration)
2. Recruitment and Retention of Volunteer Firefighters
 - a. Project Description
 - b. Impact on Daily Operations
 - c. Financial Need
 - d. Cost Benefit
 - e. Performance (additional consideration)

SAFER Resources

There are a variety of resources available to address programmatic, technical, and financial questions which can assist with SAFER.

- The FY 2013 SAFER FOA is located online at: <http://www.fema.gov/staffing-adequate-fire-emergency-response-grants> as well as on <http://www.grants.gov>.
- You may also contact the SAFER Program Help Desk by calling 1-866-274-0960 or via email at firegrants@dhs.gov