EDUCATION
TRAINING
CONSULTING

BASIC GUIDE TO
GRANTS
FOR EMERGENCY SERVICE
ORGANIZATIONS

INSTRUCTIONAL HANDBOOK

VFIS Grant Manual

Introduction

This is a basic guide to help Emergency Service Organizations (ESOs) obtain grant funding needed to sustain and improve operations. This guide will help your ESO find available sources of grant funding, identify the steps required to pursue grants, and provide guidance on some of the most popular grant programs.

Objectives

- Identify available sources of grant funding
- Categorize high-priority projects for each grant program
- Describe the steps required to prepare a grant application and the resources available to assist your ESO with the application process
- Demonstrate how to build relationships with stakeholders in your community that are potential sources of funding
- Recognize common obstacles that ESOs face in pursuing grant funding

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Abbreviations

AED	Automated External Defibrillators
AFG	Assistance to Firefighter's Grant Program
AHJ	Authority Having Jurisdiction
ESO	Emergency Service Organization
CBRNE	Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosives
DoD	Department of Defense
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DUNS	Data Universal Numbering System (provided by Dun and Bradstreet)
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FAQ	Frequently Asked Question
FEPP	Federal Excess Personal Property
FMA	Flood Mitigation Assistance
FPP	Federal Firefighter Property
FP&S	Fire Prevention and Safety
HMA	Hazard Mitigation Assistance
HMGP	Hazard Mitigation Grant Program
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTSA	Maritime Transportation Security Act
NOFO	Notice of Funding Opportunity
NVFC	National Volunteer Fire Council
PDM	Pre-Disaster Mitigation
POP	Period of Performance
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PSGP	Port Security Grant Program
SAFER	Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response
SAM	System for Award Management
SFTA	State-level Fire Training Academies
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USFS	United States Forest Service
VFA	Volunteer Fire Assistance

1 General Strategy for Pursuing Grants

Emergency Service Organizations can pursue grant funding from a variety of sources. These sources exist at local, regional, and national levels, with funding from both public and private sources. Grant programs generally exist to support non-profit organizations that perform missions which strengthen the community or serve the public interest. Some of these opportunities are specifically tailored for ESOs.

While each grant program has its own rules and regulations, there is a common strategy that ESOs can utilize in evaluating grant funding opportunities: ***match up the priorities of the grant program to the priorities of your organization.*** Understanding where these priorities intersect will help focus your efforts and generate the best results for your ESO.

Virtually every ESO has funding needs beyond its own resources. Your organization may be facing new challenges from higher call volume, expanded service territory, or new hazards in your response district that require additional resources. Perhaps your organization simply needs to replace aging, broken, or outdated equipment for basic operations. Grant funding can be a great way to fund projects like these, but it's important to understand that the things you consider a high priority may not be seen in the same way by the administrator of a grant program.

This guide will elaborate on some of the most well-known grant programs and highlight these programs' priorities. Please note that the priorities of each program may change from year to year. Before committing significant resources on a grant application, the department should conduct further due diligence.

1.1   The Grant Application Process

While the specific steps involved will vary depending on the program, the process of applying for grant funding follows a common conceptual process.

1)   Identify Sources of Funding

While there are hundreds (if not thousands) of programs and foundations that donate or issue grants to non-profit organizations, there are relatively few that are specifically geared towards emergency services. The Federal government operates a number of grant/loan programs for ESOs, and your state may also have similar programs. Look for private foundations and grant programs that specifically characterize their mission as supporting the emergency services. Generally speaking, the likelihood of submitting a successful grant application to a private organization that focuses on supporting ESOs will be much greater compared to more general-purpose, community-oriented grant programs. You should consult directly with each program to

confirm that your organization is an eligible applicant *before* devoting significant effort into an application.

2)   Categorize High-Priority Projects

Even if you find a grant program that is focused on supporting ESOs, you must still match up the priorities of the program with the priorities of your organization. For example, while your organization may be most in need of renovations or additions to your station, there are very few grant programs available that are willing to fund construction projects. Conduct your own due diligence by talking to someone involved with the grant program or reading through supporting documentation. Many programs will explicitly tell you what projects they will and will not fund.

3)   Gather required information

The amount and type of information you need to provide in a grant application will vary widely. For some local grants it can be as simple as filling out a single page, whereas applications for the FEMA-administered grant programs are often 40 pages or longer. You may be required to gather information such as your organization's tax ID number, a budget or balance sheet showing your organization's financial situation, multiple years of call volume data from NFIRS reporting software, the exact age of equipment you are trying to replace, or staffing levels and response times - these are just a few examples. Read each grant application carefully and gather all the required information well ahead of time. For federal grant opportunities, you're organization will need to obtain a DUNS number (provided by Dun and Bradstreet) and maintain an active registration of that DUNS number in SAM.gov (System for Award Management).

4)   Prepare the Application

Aside from technical information like call volume data and response times, you will likely have to prepare a narrative describing your organization's need and the benefits that will be achieved from the proposed project. Be sure to review the stated mission and priorities of the program for which you are applying, and try to match up your request with those priorities. For example, if a stated objective of the grant program/foundation is to improve firefighter safety, your application's narrative should clearly describe how the proposed project will improve firefighter safety. Although that advice may seem obvious, failure to communicate how a project will directly address a program's objective is a common misstep in unsuccessful applications.

In addition to preparing a well-organized, comprehensive, compelling, grammatically correct, and spell-checked narrative, it is critical to follow the rules of the application. Due to the highly competitive nature of most grant programs, the administrators of these programs will not afford you any leniency if an application is submitted late or filled out improperly. Be sure to fill out every required field and provide all the information that is requested. Misspellings, typos, or an incoherent narrative can also derail an otherwise strong application. You may want to consider hiring a grant writer to review or help you prepare the application to avoid these problems.

5)   Review Process

After your application is submitted, it will be reviewed by the administrators of the grant program. Some programs, such as those administered by FEMA, are "peer reviewed" by a panel of emergency services personnel who are familiar with fire & EMS concepts and terminology (it may be helpful to inquire about the review process ahead of time; knowing your audience may be helpful in tailoring your application to the needs of the reviewers). The entire review process can take several weeks or months, but the grant administrator will usually contact you at the time awards are made or if your application is unsuccessful.

6)   Letters of Support

At the time your application is submitted, consider reaching out to elected officials or community leaders to request letters of support from them on behalf of your application. You will need to provide them with a concise summary of the application or you may have to provide them with a draft letter of support that they can modify and send to the grant administrator.

7)   Award Announcements

Some programs may make awards on a rolling basis, while others may issue awards (or rejections) all at once. Your award may also be granted but with a modified amount or special conditions with which your organization must comply. If your application is rejected, the program may be able to tell you why or provide information on how to improve your application for the next round. Some programs may not allow you to re-apply for a period of time if you are successful; if your application is not successful, there is generally no such restriction. You should seek guidance, revise, and reapply at the next opportunity.

8)   Post-Award Implementation

Almost all grant programs will have conditions and measures in place to ensure that grant funds are used properly. You will almost certainly be required to submit documentation such as invoices to show that grant program funds were spent on what was requested/awarded in your application. Federal programs may also require documentation on your organization's procurement process, inventory management, safekeeping, and documentation. If paperwork is not filled out properly, the grant program may have the right to rescind the award. You are strongly encouraged to maintain a grant folder (hard copy or electronic) and maintain all documentation. In addition to application preparation, a grant writer or consultant may also be able to advise you on the process of implementation or take care of the paperwork for you.

1.2   Developing a Grant Project

Why should a foundation or corporation give your ESO money? We've already discussed how these organizations are established to achieve specific goals and how your project must match

up with these goals. Grant makers want to see a specific request that meets their funding objectives.

To convince a grant maker that your organization should receive a grant, you must have a specific project that needs funding. Grant makers think in terms of projects that address a definite need or solve a specific community problem. Before you ask for grant money, you must have a specific project planned that will solve a specific problem the grant maker is committed to solving. A project is a plan for accomplishing the work it will take to solve the problem.

Therefore, before you search for, or prepare an application, it's important to conduct an internal needs or problem assessment. Is there a problem that your community faces that your ESO can solve with help from a foundation or government grant? Does your ESO have needs that hinder or prevent it from fully serving the community? Once your organization's needs are documented and prioritized, you can begin to develop a project that will solve the problem or improve the community.

1.3   Elements of the Grant Proposal

Once you have developed your project, you will describe it in a written proposal to the grant maker. The proposal requests financial support in the form of a grant. Your proposal should go into detail about specific benefits to the community and how the project matches the interests or objectives of the organization from which you are requesting grant funds.

Most grant programs have a specific application format that you must fill out; on the other hand, some foundations or organizations may have a more open-ended process. Regardless, most grant proposals will include a few specific elements: the problem, the impact on the community, the proposed solution, and a project budget.

Needs/Problem Assessment – What is the problem? What does your ESO need in order to serve the community better? Your needs may include equipment, training, special projects in the community, or public education programs.

Community Impact – Explain what impact the problem has on the community. You must explain how the community suffers because of the problem you want to solve. Perhaps the community is deprived of some aspect of emergency services because you operate without certain equipment. What is the impact of the problem your project will overcome?

Proposed Solution – How do you propose to solve the problem? What are you asking for? You must describe all the details of your project. How will your project solve the problem, relieve the suffering of the community, or improve the community situation?

Project Budget – You must determine how much your project will cost. Costs may include equipment, personnel, or services required to accomplish the goals and objectives. Include an itemized list of needs that detail the scope of the project, as well as an implementation schedule. The organization from which you are requesting funds wants to see exactly how and when you will spend their money.

In addition, your proposal may address other elements, including:

Financial Need – Why does your ESO require outside funding? Why are you unable to fund the project without outside assistance? What experience does your organization have in successfully implementing projects or similar scope and size? You may be required to provide financial statements for your ESO and go into detail about your organization's fundraising and spending.

Partners – Grant makers are often interested in whether you have any community support. Foundations in particular like to see that you have made partnerships with people and other organizations. Does your project have help from others? Do you expect to receive funds or in-kind donations from another foundation, corporation, business, or individual?

1.4   Sample Grant Proposal

The following example demonstrates how your organization might utilize these elements of the grant proposal. Try to see how one of your ESO's projects fits into the different elements.

Situation: A volunteer fire department wants to equip its fire apparatus with automated external defibrillators (AEDs). However, AEDs are expensive and the department can't afford them.

Needs/Problem Assessment - The problem to be solved is not that the department wants to buy AEDs. No grant maker would consider this "want" a problem. The department must explain its need in terms of a problem in the community. In other words, defibrillators help reduce deaths from ventricular fibrillation, which typically occurs in victims who suffer a heart attack. Therefore, the problem can be framed in as an increased risk of death from cardiac incidents when there is not an accessible AED in the community. Equipping the department's apparatus with AEDs will help make the community safer from potentially fatal heart attacks.

Community Impact – Who is the community that you are protecting? In this example, the answer is the people who are most at risk for a heart attack. It might be helpful to cite statistics about heart attacks or even a recent example of someone in the community who suffered a heart attack and how access to an AED (or lack thereof) impacted the outcome.

Proposed Solution – Now that we know the problem and the community affected, we need to define our project and its goals and objectives: In order to reduce the threat of death from heart attacks among a large segment of the community, the department needs five AEDs. One AED will be placed on each piece of apparatus: two engines, and one ladder. The goal of the project

is to reduce heart attack deaths by 15% over the next three years. To implement the project, we will also train all department personnel in the use of the AEDs.

Project Budget – We must be able to describe exactly how much each piece of the project will cost. In our example, there are a few potential items: the purchase price of the AEDs themselves; insurance and maintenance on the AEDs; and training costs. Our budget should show an itemized list with all of these expenses. Conduct market research by consulting several vendors for each aspect of the project.

Our proposal might also address the department's financial situation and include a copy of the department's most recent budget. We might also discuss potential community partnerships, such as inviting other members of the community to attend training sessions.

This is a very basic example. Once again, format and guidelines will vary with each grant program. However, you can expect that you will have to address each of these elements at an absolute minimum.

1.5   Common Obstacles and Pitfalls

Many ESOs are unsuccessful with grants simply because they fail to match up their own priorities with the priorities of a grant program. For example, your department may rank the need for a tow vehicle as a high priority project. However, this project is unlikely to be funded through the Assistance to Firefighter's Grant Program (AFG) because such vehicles are typically considered to be a low priority project by the grant program. You can save your organization (and yourself!) a lot of time and heartache simply by researching the priorities of a grant program beforehand and identifying a project that is likely to be successful. This strategy applies to both public and private grant programs of all types and sizes.

Similarly, many organizations are unsuccessful because they do not pursue projects which actually benefit their communities. You should be honest with yourself and recognize the difference between "need to have" and "nice to have" types of projects. Focus on projects that address a serious need of your ESO or community. In many cases, your grant application will be evaluated by people who work in emergency services who will be able to see through applications for frivolous projects.

Lastly, many ESOs do not communicate the needs of their organization in an effective and professional manner. Many applications fail simply because ESOs simply do not address all the required elements of the application. Grant making organizations want to know that their funds will be going to a competent and trustworthy organization. Make sure to represent your organization professionally in the application; mistakes such as spelling and grammatical, incoherent or unstructured paragraphs, or narratives copied from other organizations (especially without changing department names) will raise doubts about your ability to successfully manage the project. Depending on the complexity of the grant program, it may be advisable to seek

outside assistance from a grant writer. Many grant writers are current or former members of ESOs themselves and specialize in preparing grant applications for other ESOs.

2 Sources of Grant Funding

Grant funding sources generally fall into two categories:

Public – Agencies at all levels of government operate grant programs geared towards ESOs. These programs utilize funds appropriated by Congress or another legislative body to support emergency preparedness, improve public safety, educate the public, boost security, or protect the environment.

Private – Outside of government funding, the largest source of potential support for ESOs is private foundations. A private foundation may be a large independent organization that operates on a national basis. It may be part of a corporation's community relations organization. It may be a regional or local community foundation or a charitable organization established by an individual or family. Foundations give grants for many reasons, most often to improve the community with regards to a specific issue like health or education. There are thousands of independent grant-making foundations in the United States.

The following sections will go into more detail on some of the most common grant funding programs utilized by ESOs.

2.1   Government Sources of Funding

2.1.1 Federal Grant Programs

The Federal government operates several grant programs with opportunities for ESOs totaling more than $1 billion per year. These programs are administered by agencies within the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), Agriculture (USDA), and Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

2.1.1.1   Department of Homeland Security - FEMA Grant Programs

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is an agency of DHS. FEMA currently administers three large and well-known grant programs where an individual ESO is considered an eligible applicant:

● **Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG),** which funds equipment, vehicles, and training.

- **Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response Grants (SAFER),** which funds volunteer recruitment & retention programs as well as hiring of new firefighters.
- **Fire Prevention & Safety Grants (FP&S),** which funds fire prevention initiatives and fire science research.

The Federal government's appropriation for these programs has fluctuated over the years but averages around $700 million. Funding is split between the three FIRE Act Programs: 50% to SAFER, 45% to AFG, and 5% to FP&S (note: some sources describe funding being split evenly between AFG and SAFER; this is true when FP&S funding is included as part of the AFG appropriation).

All organizations wishing to apply for any of the FEMA programs must have a valid DUNS# (provided by Dun and Bradstreet which manages a database of global businesses) which must be registered with the System for Award Management (SAM), a system used by entities who want to participate in contracts or grants with the Federal government. You can register or make changes to your organization's database information through Dun and Bradstreet. Registration in SAM.gov must be renewed annually. In 2018, as a security measure to discourage fraud, SAM.gov also began requiring that each organization's contact person submit a notarized letter confirming their status with the organization. Your organization should be registered (or your registration renewed) *before* submitting an application to any of the FEMA programs; failure to properly register on SAM.gov can result in termination of an otherwise successful grant application.

2.1.1.1.1.   Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG)

- Program Size: *~$310 million (average FY2014-2018)*
- Eligible Entities: *fire departments, non-affiliated EMS organizations, regional applicants (including multiple fire and/or EMS departments), state-level fire training academies*
- Typical Projects: *firefighting equipment, EMS equipment, firefighting vehicles, training*
- Cost Share: *5% to 15%, depending on the population served in the applicant's primary district*
- Frequency: *Annual (each fiscal year), but actual dates fluctuate*
- Website: https://www.fema.gov/welcome-assistance-firefighters-grant-program

AFG is perhaps the most well-known grant program for ESOs, with roughly 10,000-12,000 applications submitted and around 2,000 – 2,500 awards made each year. ESOs may apply under any of the following activities:

- Operations & Safety
- Vehicle Acquisition
- Regional Projects

ESOs may actually apply under multiple activities in the same year. For example, a fire department could apply under Operations & Safety to replace old rescue tools *and* under Vehicle Acquisition to replace an old engine. In addition, organizations may host or participate in regional projects which encompass more than one organization, such as a county-wide radio replacement project. A single ESO can participate in a regional application and file its own individual application in the same year so long as each application doesn't request any of the same items. Regional applicants must establish a documented Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between all participating departments.

AFG categorizes projects for each activity as high-, medium-, or low-priority. Given the competitive nature of the program, projects which are medium- or low-priority rarely get funded. A complete list of eligible projects and the corresponding priority designation are provided in Appendix B of the AFG Notice of Funding Opportunity which can be found at https://www.fema.gov/assistance-firefighters-grants-documents

The specific program areas under the Operations and Safety activity are as follows:

- Training
- Equipment
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Wellness and Fitness
- Modifications to Facilities

The most commonly-funded projects under the Operations & Safety activity are for replacement of basic operational equipment that is at least 10-15 years old, such as SCBA, PPE, rescue tools, hose, radios, PPE washers/dryers, and compressors/SCBA fill stations. High-priority EMS projects include replacement of old cardiac monitors, purchase of automatic chest compression devices, EMS PPE, and powered cots and loading systems for ambulances. AFG also funds a limited number of building modifications, including source-capture vehicle exhaust systems, sprinkler systems, and fire alarm systems.

While many ESOs seek to replace apparatus through an AFG grant, the Vehicle Acquisition category is notoriously competitive. AFG typically awards just 100-200 vehicles per year across the entire country. In addition, the law limits the percentage of AFG funds which may be allocated to vehicle awards (maximum 25%). To be successful with a vehicle application, the ESO must have a very old vehicle to replace, an older average fleet age within the category of vehicle being replaced, sizeable population served in the primary district, and reasonable call volume. Specific priorities for vehicle applications can also be found in Appendix B of the AFG Notice of Funding Opportunity.

Most non-Federal, not-for-profit fire departments are eligible for AFG. In addition, non-affiliated EMS agencies that provide transport services may also apply, but no more than 2% of AFG funds are awarded to these organizations. In addition, state-level fire training academies (SFTA)

are also eligible, but no more than 3% of funding can be awarded to SFTAs, and awards are capped at $500,000 per SFTA applicant.

The AFG application is long and complex, consisting of both a technical portion (call volume data, information about your district, details about the specific project, etc.) and several narratives describing your organization, the project, its impact, and your organization's need for Federal financial assistance. Applications are only accepted during a single four-week period each year. It can take several weeks to gather the information needed for the application and to prepare all the narrative statements, so don't wait for the start of the application period to get started.

AFG applications go through a two-step evaluation process. First, applications are assigned a "pre-score" based on factors including the priority level of the requested project, the dollar amount requested, the applicant's call volume, and population served. The pre-score is **highly dependent** on selecting a project that is aligned with the high priorities of the program. The pre-score process typically eliminates the majority of applications; only applications which score above a certain threshold will advance. Departments (especially those that serve smaller communities) may benefit from limiting their request to no more than $50,000 in Federal funds, as FEMA considers these "micro-grants" which may increase the chance of funding. Applications that advance beyond the pre-score process are then reviewed by panels of emergency services personnel who volunteer to read and score the applications according to criteria that are generally stated in the AFG Self Evaluation Sheets. Applications which are recommended for awards are then forwarded to technical reviewers at FEMA who make the ultimate decision to award the request and at what level of funding. The entire review process can take upwards of 6-8 months.

Successful applicants are expected to pay a cost share in proportion to the Federal award amount. The cost share is dependent on the applicant's population served as follows:

- Population 20,000 or less - 5% of the federal funds awarded
- Population 20,001 to 1,000,000 - 10% of the federal funds awarded
- Population 1,000,001 or more - 15% of the federal funds awarded

The period of performance (POP) for AFG is one year, meaning that successful applicants typically have 12 months from the date they receive an award to implement their project. Awardees have 90 days after the end of the POP to submit any remaining requests for reimbursement of federal funds. Organizations receiving grant funding from AFG must go through a very specific procurement process that complies with Federal regulations intended to ensure fair and open competition. Important details regarding grant administration can be found in Appendix C of the AFG Notice of Funding Opportunity as well as in the AFG Grants Management Guide.

AFG documentation changes year-to-year. FEMA posts the following documents online around the start of each application period:

- **Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO),** which contains most of the specifics. The NOFO will detail everything from important dates to project priority categories and procurement regulations. This document is specific to each application year (e.g,. FY2018 v. FY 2019 AFG) and is updated each year prior to the grant period opening.
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs),** which may be helpful if digging through the NOFO wasn't.
- **Application Checklist**, a list of the information you'll need to gather or prepare before filling out the application.
- **Self-Evaluation Sheet,** a listing of the general criteria that peer reviewers will use to score your application. Before submitting your application, compare your narrative statements with the Self-Evaluation sheet and make changes as necessary to ensure you're addressing all of the important points.
- **Cost-Share Calculator,** which will help you determine your organization's financial obligations if you are successful. As detailed above, the cost share changes depending on the population served in your organization's primary district. This may be helpful for planning purposes or in determining the size of your request (especially if you intend to keep your application below the "micro grant" threshold).

Documentation for each year's AFG grant round, as well as a complete list of awardees, may be accessed at: https://www.fema.gov/welcome-assistance-firefighters-grant-program

2.1.1.1.2.   Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response Grants (SAFER)

- Program Size: *~$340,000,000 (average FY2014-2018)*
- Eligible Entities: *fire departments, regional applicants (including multiple fire departments) for recruitment and retention only; state, local, or federally-recognized tribal organizations representing the interests of volunteer firefighters. EMS organizations are not eligible to apply.*
- Typical Projects: *Programs to encourage recruitment & retention of volunteer firefighters; hiring of career firefighters*
- Cost Share: *0% for recruitment & retention projects; 25% (first and second years), 65% (third year) for hiring projects*
- Frequency: *Annual (each fiscal year), but actual dates fluctuate*
- Website: https://www.fema.gov/staffing-adequate-fire-emergency-response-grants

SAFER provides funding to improve firefighter staffing levels at volunteer, combination, and career fire departments. Departments interested in improving volunteer staffing will request funds under the "Recruitment and Retention" activity whereas departments that want to hire their first or additional career personnel will request funds under the "Hiring" program. Before considering a SAFER project, it is important to note that the primary goal of SAFER is to

improve compliance with NFPA 1710 or 1720, the national standards for staffing levels and response times. Applications submitted under either activity will be scored based on how the proposed project impacts the department's compliance with these standards. Make sure to identify which standard applies to your department and develop a project which will help you comply. The most successful SAFER applications are those that achieve a large improvement in NFPA compliance in a cost-effective manner, so make sure to structure your application around this concept.

There are two available activities under SAFER:

- Recruitment & Retention of Volunteer Firefighters
- Hiring of Firefighters

Only volunteer and combination fire departments are eligible to apply under the Recruitment & Retention activity (100% career departments are not eligible for recruitment and retention projects). Organizations representing the interests of volunteer firefighters (e.g., state or county firefighter or chief's associations) may also apply for recruitment and retention projects. For the Hiring activity, any fire department (career, combination, or volunteer) may apply, but interest organizations are not eligible. Volunteer and combination fire departments may technically apply for funding under both activities in the same year (in separate applications), though this is unusual.

Departments pursuing a recruitment & retention project may organize a regional grant application in conjunction with neighboring departments. This may be advisable if several departments in a contiguous response area are facing similar recruitment or retention challenges. As with AFG, SAFER regional applicants must establish a MOU between all participating departments. Regional grants are not possible for the Hiring of Firefighters activity.

Similar to AFG, SAFER categorizes Recruitment & Retention project elements into high-, medium-, and low-priority criteria. Generally speaking, although low-priority projects may be funded, applicants must incorporate high-priority projects into the overall program. Applications that only request low-priority projects are unlikely to be funded. For the Recruitment & Retention activity, some (but not all) of the eligible costs include:

High-priority
- recruitment marketing programs
- tuition assistance for student firefighters
- entry-level physicals and new PPE for newly recruited members
- paying a coordinator to manage the R&R project

Medium-priority
- insurance packages
- exercise equipment

- LOSAP or stipend programs (Note: continued funding of an existing LOSAP program is not eligible)

This is not a comprehensive list; as a general rule recruitment & retention projects can be more open-ended to address the specific needs of your department and community. However, SAFER specifically excludes certain costs, including award banquets, furnishings for the station, "giveaways" for recruitment events, and anything already covered under the department's normal operating budget. Consult the SAFER NOFO for a comprehensive listing of eligible and ineligible projects. The Period of Performance (POP) for the Recruitment & Retention activity can range from 12 to 48 months (1 to 4 years).

The Hiring of Firefighters activity is much narrower in scope: grant funds can only be used to hire new, additional firefighters. Funds may not be used to rehire recently laid-off firefighters or replace firefighters lost due to retirement or attrition. SAFER will fund a portion of the salary and benefits for new firefighters only, as well as some very specific costs associated with hiring and training new firefighters, but not much else.

SAFER hiring projects are best suited for departments experiencing rapid growth in call volume and/or the size of their community or coverage area that need to increase their career staffing levels. Examples might include a combination department in a fast-growing suburb, or a volunteer department with high call-volume that needs to hire firefighters for the first time. Firefighters may be cross-trained to provide EMS services, but their "primary assignment" (>50% by time) must be on an operational fire suppression vehicle. Volunteer or combination departments struggling with volunteer staffing levels may also benefit from a SAFER hiring award if they intend to maintain increased career staffing levels in the long run.

A SAFER hiring project should be looked at as a "step-up" or stopgap measure to help departments transition to higher career staffing levels. The Period of Performance (POP) for hiring projects is always 36 months (3 years); SAFER will pay for 75% of salary and benefits for new firefighters in the first two years, and 35% in the third year. In other words, your department will end up paying 25% of the costs in the first two years, 65% in the third year, and 100% thereafter. Again, the concept is to help your department transition as the SAFER funding is scaled down. Since hiring projects typically involve a significant commitment by a municipal government, your application for a hiring project must include a letter from the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) which states they support the project and pledge to pay the required cost share and maintain staffing levels consistent with pre- and post-award commitments.

SAFER applications under both activities are evaluated through a process similar to AFG applications: first, applications are assigned a "pre-score" based on factors like call volume, population served, and the project's projected impact on NFPA 1710/1720 compliance. The highest-scoring applications are then forwarded to a peer review panel comprised of fire service representatives who read and score each application. The narrative statements are critical to communicating your department's individual situation, need for funding, and plan to increase compliance with NFPA 1710/1720.

SAFER attracts fewer applicants than AFG, but is equally or more competitive considering that each applicant's request is typically much larger. Accordingly, there are also relatively few SAFER awards made each year despite the program's larger funding pool (about 300 awards each year, versus 2,000 for AFG). It is not uncommon for larger career departments to receive multi-million dollar awards. To ensure minimum distribution of funds to various types of departments/organizations, statutory restrictions on funding are as follows: 10 percent is set aside for the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters, and two-thirds of the money awarded for recruitment & retention projects must be given to actual fire departments (as opposed to organizations which represent their interests). Another 10 percent is set aside for all-volunteer or majority-volunteer departments for hiring of firefighters.

As with AFG, the SAFER documentation contains many additional details regarding procurement procedures and grant administration. This documentation also changes from year-to-year. FEMA posts the following documents online around the start of each SAFER application period:

- **Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO),** which contains most of the specifics. The NOFO will detail everything from important dates to project priority categories and procurement regulations.
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs),** which may be helpful if digging through the NOFO wasn't.
- **Application Checklist**, a list of the information you'll need to gather or prepare before filling out the application.
- **Self-Evaluation Sheet,** which shows some of the criteria that peer reviewers will use to score your application. Before submitting your application, compare your narrative statements with the Self-Evaluation and make changes as necessary to ensure you're hitting on all the important points.

Documentation for each year's SAFER grant round, as well as a complete list of awardees, may be accessed at: https://www.fema.gov/staffing-adequate-fire-emergency-response-grants

2.1.1.1.3. Fire Prevention & Safety Grants (FP&S)

- Program Size: *~$35,000,000 (average FY2014-2018)*
- Eligible Entities: *fire departments; public and private non-profit organizations*
- Typical Projects: *community fire prevention programs; fire science research*
- Cost Share: 5%
- Frequency: *Annual (each fiscal year), but actual dates fluctuate*
- Website: https://www.fema.gov/staffing-adequate-fire-emergency-response-grants

There are two activities available under FP&S:

- Fire Prevention & Safety
- Firefighter Safety Research and Development (R&D)

Unlike the other FEMA-administered grant programs, both public and private non-profit organizations are eligible to apply. For the fire prevention activity, eligible applicants include fire departments and organizations recognized for experience/expertise with fire prevention and safety programs. For the research & development activity, fire departments are actually *not* eligible; this activity is geared towards academic, public health, occupational health, and injury prevention institutions.

Eligible project categories for the FP&S activity include:

- Community risk reduction (e.g. programs focused on smoke alarms, sprinkler awareness, risk assessments, public education, training, general prevention/awareness, juvenile firesetter projects, and wildland fire prevention)
- Code Enforcement Awareness
- Fire & Arson Investigation
- National/State/Regional Programs & Studies

Community risk reduction projects are evaluated based on factors such as a decrease in fire incidents among the target population, percent of target population trained, or local number of lives saved. Code enforcement projects are evaluated based on factors including the number of fires or deaths in inspectable properties, while fire & arson projects are evaluated based on the projected increase in conviction rates and frequency that a cause is determined. Projects under this activity are capped at $1.5 million Federal share, with a 12 to 24 month POP.

In practice, the FP&S program is typically geared towards larger fire departments and organizations. The most successful departments are those serving particularly large and/or impoverished communities with specific community risk reduction goals/programs (e.g. smoke alarm distribution), as well as those with an existing community risk assessment. Department's seeking to respond to a surge in fire-related injuries or fatalities may also find success with an FP&S application. A fire department may apply for FP&S funding for the sole purpose of

conducting a risk assessment, but they may not apply for any other projects in the same application.

2.1.1.2   FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grants

FEMA also administers the Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) program for areas where a Presidential Disaster Declaration has been made. There are three opportunities under the HMA program:

- Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)
- Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Program
- Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) Program

The amount of grant funding available for the HMGP is determined as a percentage of the total Federal funds provided for assistance to a disaster area. PDM funds are provided directly by a Congressional appropriation, and FMA funds come from the National Flood Insurance Fund.

Individuals, businesses, and private non-profit organizations (including ESOs) can apply for these funds through their local government or a state agency (the subapplicant). For HMGP applications, private non-profit organizations (such as ESOs) may be the subapplicant. The subapplication includes details of the project such as the scope of work, projected schedule, and a cost estimate. From there, the subapplicants forward their applications to state-level emergency agencies, which are the only eligible applicants. FEMA makes determinations for each subapplication and doles out funds to the applicants (i.e., state agencies), which in turn give the money to subapplicants.

Eligible projects that may be of interest for ESOs include:

- Generators
- Floodproofing
- Structure elevation or relocation
- Retrofitting of buildings
- Wildfire mitigation

The Period of Performance for projects under all three programs is 36 months. The required applicant cost share is usually 25%, but may be less in some cases.

2.1.1.3 Department of Homeland Security - Preparedness (Non-Disaster) Grants

Aside from the FEMA-administered grant programs, DHS directly administers a number of other grant programs. For the most part, individual ESOs are not eligible to apply; in most cases, only state-level emergency agencies (e.g. Texas Department of Public Safety, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, etc.) are eligible. A few other programs are focused on border security, transportation, etc., but individual ESOs are not eligible for these grants, either.

However, there is one DHS grant program that may be of interest to ESOs that respond to major port facilities:

2.1.1.3.1. Port Security Grant Program (PSGP)

- Program Size: *$100,000,000*
- Eligible Entities: *state and local government agencies providing port security services (including fire departments), port authorities, and facility operators*
- Typical Projects: *maritime firefighting vessels; security projects*
- Cost Share: *25%*
- Frequency: *Annual (each fiscal year), but actual dates fluctuate*
- Website: https://www.fema.gov/port-security-grant-program

The Maritime Transportation Security Act (MTSA) provides funding for this program to agencies that have MTSA-regulated port security areas in their jurisdiction. Fire agencies are eligible to apply for NFPA 1925-compliant marine firefighting vessels, firefighting foam, and purple-K powder. For agencies requesting a fire fighting vessel, the program specifically emphasizes CBRNE capabilities as a priority. For a vessel to be considered a CBRNE platform, it must include a radioisotope identification device or another form of radiation detection equipment. Only one application may be submitted per Port Area, so be sure to coordinate with other agencies should you choose to apply.

2.1.1.4 Department of Agriculture (USDA)

USDA Rural Development

USDA offers several programs through its Rural Development office, typically consisting of grants, low interest loans, loan guarantees, or some combination of these initiatives. The definition of what is "rural" varies - even between USDA programs! - so check the documentation or contact your local USDA office to determine eligibility. ESOs in particular may be eligible to apply for the following programs:

2.1.1.4.1.   Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program

- Program Size: *$2.2 to $2.83 billion*
- Eligible Entities: *public bodies; community-based non-profit corporations*
- Typical Projects: *station construction; vehicle acquisition; other major equipment purchases*
- Cost Share: *for grant funding, varies from 15% to 75% depending on community size and median income*
- Frequency: *Applications accepted on an ongoing basis with no specific deadline*
- Website: https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program

To be eligible for this program, your ESO must serve a rural area with no more than 20,000 residents. In addition, grant funding is only available if the median income for your community falls below a certain threshold (ranging from 60 to 90 percent of the state median, depending on the population). Your ESO may still be eligible for a low interest loan even if your community's population or median income is too high to be eligible for a grant.

Grant funding is typically capped at $50,000 per project. If your project exceeds that amount, you may apply for a combination of grants and loans. Historically, total project sizes have ranged from $10,000 to $165 million. Loans have a maximum term of 40 years; interest rates are fixed and set by USDA. Applicants must be able to show they are unable to obtain financing at reasonable rates from another source.

This program is one of the few possibilities for ESOs embarking on a station construction project, and one of the only programs other than AFG that funds vehicle acquisition. In fact, the law authorizing the program specifically mentions "fire, rescue, and public safety" facilities and "fire service equipment" as eligible projects. Furthermore, healthcare and public safety projects are prioritized in the selection process.

2.1.1.4.2.   Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program

- Program Size: *$148,287,461*
- Eligible Entities: *public bodies; community-based non-profit corporations*
- Typical Projects: *station construction; vehicle acquisition; other major equipment purchases*
- Cost Share: *1% of loan principal guaranteed*
- Frequency: *Applications accepted on an ongoing basis with no specific deadline*

Website: https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities-guaranteed-loan-program

This program has similar parameters to the Direct Loan & Grant Program, but instead provides a Federal guarantee of a loan made by a private lender. This project may be preferable for organizations that have access to financing through a bank at reasonable interest rates, but require help with a major project. USDA will guarantee up to 90% of the loan amount.

The terms of the loan must be approved by USDA. A loan note guarantee is issued upon completion of the project or when specified conditions are met. USDA must also be paid a one-time fee equivalent to 1% of the loan principal they are guaranteeing. In some cases, a loan guarantee may be combined with a direct loan and/or grant from USDA.

ESOs may be eligible for several additional USDA Rural Development programs. A complete list of USDA programs for which communities and nonprofits are eligible may be found here: https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/programs-services-communities-nonprofits

For ESOs specifically interested in building a new station, USDA has published a "Community Facilities Infrastructure Toolkit" which provides considerable detail on the long and complicated process for building construction projects: https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RDCFIToolkit_Jan2016.pdf

For further information, reach out to your local USDA office. A list of contacts at each state's USDA office may be found here: https://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices

2.1.1.5   US Forest Service (USFS)

The Forest Service, a USDA agency, offers one grant program for which fire departments are eligible:

2.1.1.5.1.   Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA)

- Program Size: *$11.6 to $13 million*
- Eligible Entities: *volunteer fire departments*
- Typical Projects: *wildland fire suppression equipment*
- Cost Share: *50%*
- Frequency: *Varies*
Website: https://www.fs.usda.gov/naspf/topics/fire/volunteer-fire-assistance

Formerly known as the Rural Community Fire Protection program, this program provides grants to volunteer fire departments serving rural communities (defined as serving a population under 10,000) that protect publicly-owned forestland. Though technically a Federal program funded by the US Forest Service, the money is portioned out to each state's designated forest management agency. Each state's agency administers its own application process for this program.

Eligible projects include:

- Wildland Fire Protective Gear
- Installation of Dry Hydrants
- Wildland Suppression Equipment
- Communication Equipment
- Wildfire Mitigation or Preventive Projects
- Wildland Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Unlike some other grant programs, this grant effectively functions as reimbursement and does not provide "up-front" funding. The department is expected to fund and complete the project itself. Upon completion, the department then provides documentation and receives a reimbursement for up to 50% of the project cost. Funding is capped at $10,000.

Additionally, USFS operates two programs which allow fire departments to obtain Federally-owned equipment (vehicles, most commonly):

2.1.1.5.2.   Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) Program

The US Forest Service may loan firefighting vehicles and other equipment to state forest management agencies. In some cases, the state agency may in turn place the equipment with individual fire departments through this program. The equipment remains titled to the Federal government but is operated by local departments. As with the VFA program, each state's forest management agency administers the program.

2.1.1.5.3.   Federal Firefighter Property (FFP) Program

The FFP is similar to the FEPP program, but for Department of Defense (DoD) equipment. Ownership of equipment acquired through this program may eventually pass to the fire department itself after a certain period of time. In addition, this program is more flexible; there is no restriction that equipment be used only for rural/wildland firefighting.

Both FEPP and FFP may be economical ways for departments to acquire a used firefighting vehicle.

A list of contacts for these programs at each state's forest management agency is available here: https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/fire/fepp/contacts

2.1.1.6   Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

2.1.1.6.1.   Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

- Program Size: *$3 to $3.24 billion*
- Eligible Entities: *local government units*
- Typical Projects for ESOs: apparatus, *station construction or improvements*
- Cost Share: *N/A*
- Frequency: *Varies*
- Website: https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/cdbg/

Unlike most grants, a block grant is issued to a grantee which disburses the funds under certain guidelines. Under the CDBG program, states or larger local governments receive block grants from HUD for community revitalization projects. There are a variety of eligible projects, including enhancements to public facilities, so it may be possible to use CDBG funds for station construction. There are numerous regulations that local governments must follow; generally speaking, the Federal guidelines stipulate a use that benefits the community or low-income residents in some way.

Individual organizations are not eligible to receive funds directly, but can apply for funds through their local government. Some larger communities (central cities of a metro area, cities of at least 50,000 people, and counties with over 200,000 people) are considered "entitlement communities" and receive funds directly from HUD; smaller local government units must apply to their respective state/regional/local agency (typically a Department of Commerce or Department of Community & Economic Development).

You may search for a list of CDBG grantees here:
https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/#/byProgram

2.1.2 State Grant Programs

Many individual states offer their own grant programs for ESOs. These programs may be funded by a special tax on insurance policies, fees for vehicle registrations/inspections, or simply out of the state's general fund. In addition, several states also operate their own low-interest loan or loan guarantee programs to assist ESOs with large capital purchases.

Here are a few examples of state-operated grant programs:

2.1.2.1   Illinois (Office of State Fire Marshal)

Small Equipment Grant Program

- Program Size: *$2.2 million*
- Eligible Entities: *Illinois fire & EMS departments*
- Typical Projects: *firefighting equipment; EMS equipment; vehicle rescue equipment*
- Maximum Award: *$26,000*
- Cost Share: *None*
- Frequency: *Yearly*
- Website: https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/sfm/Iam/FireDepartment/Grants-and-Loans/Pages/default.aspx

2.1.2.2   North Carolina (Office of State Fire Marshal)

Volunteer Fire Department Fund / Volunteer Rescue, EMS Fund

- Program Size: *$8 to $9 million*
- Eligible Entities: *volunteer fire & EMS departments, and combination fire departments with 6 or fewer paid positions*
- Typical Projects: *firefighting & EMS equipment*
- Maximum Award: *$30,000*
- Cost Share: *Usually 50%; for departments receiving less than $50,000 in municipal and county funding, 25% with a $20,000 maximum award*
- Frequency: *Yearly*
- Website: http://www.ncdoi.com/OSFM/Fire_Rescue_Grants_and_Relief_Funds/Default.aspx

2.1.2.3   Ohio (Department of Public Safety)

Emergency Medical Services Priority 1-5 Supplemental Grant Program

- Program Size: *$2.9 million*
- Eligible Entities: *Ohio EMS departments*
- Typical Projects: *EMS training & equipment*
- Maximum Award: *$47,000*
- Cost Share: *None*
- Frequency: *Yearly*
- Website: https://www.ems.ohio.gov/grants-applications.aspx

Pennsylvania (Office of the State Fire Commissioner)

Fire Company, Emergency Medical Service Grant Program

- Program Size: *$30 million*
- Eligible Entities: *PA volunteer fire departments, EMS, and rescue squads*
- Typical Projects: *equipment, debt reduction, training, minor facility improvements*
- Maximum Award: *$15,000 for fire departments and $10,000 for EMS departments*
- Cost Share: *None*
- Frequency: *Yearly*
- Website: https://www.osfc.pa.gov/GrantsandLoans/Volunteer%20Fire%20Company%20And%20Ambulance%20Grants/Pages/default.aspx

Volunteer Loan Assistance Program

- Eligible Entities: *PA volunteer fire departments, EMS, and rescue squads*
- Typical Projects: *equipment, apparatus, station construction*
- Maximum Loan Amount/Term: *$400,000 / 20 years*
- Website: https://www.osfc.pa.gov/GrantsandLoans/Pages/Volunteer%20Loan%20Assistance%20Program.aspx

2.1.2.5   Virginia (Department of Fire Programs)

Live Fire Training Structure Grant

- Program Size: *N/A*
- Eligible Entities: *VA local jurisdictions*
- Typical Projects: *burn building construction or repair*
- Maximum Award: *$480,000 for new construction; $50,000 for repair projects*
- Cost Share: *Varies*
- Frequency: *Biannual*
- Website: https://www.vafire.com/grants-and-local-aid/burn-building-grants/

This is far from a comprehensive list and is only intended to show the types of state-level grant/loan programs that are available. Contact your state fire marshal's office or department of public safety to learn about programs for your ESO.

2.2　Private Sources of Grant Funding

There are countless foundations (some associated with corporations and some independent) that provide grant funding to non-profit organizations including ESOs. These foundations have widely varying missions and funding levels. To maximize the possibility of success, an ESO should review the foundation's objectives to determine whether there is a match with the department's mission. Below are highlights of a few foundations that are specifically geared to support ESOs.

2.2.1 Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation

Firehouse Subs is a Florida-based sandwich chain founded by two brothers from a firefighting family. The foundation was founded in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and is now funded with a mixture of corporate profits and outside donations. The foundation provides grants of up to $25,000 for lifesaving equipment to a variety of organizations. Applications are accepted quarterly, with over $1 million is distributed in each round. To be eligible, ESOs must be located within 60 miles of a Firehouse Subs location.

- Program Size: *~$4,000,000*
- Eligible Entities: *fire/EMS departments, law enforcement, public safety organizations, non-profits, and schools*
- Typical Projects: *lifesaving equipment, including AEDs, thermal imaging cameras, SCBA, firefighting PPE, and ballistic protective equipment (BPE); training/fire prevention equipment*
- Cost Share: *None*
- Frequency: Quarterly
- Website: http://grants.firehousesubs.com/

2.2.2 FM Global Fire Prevention Grant Program

FM Global is a property insurance and loss prevention engineering company based in Rhode Island. The company issues modest grants to fire departments and municipalities around the world for fire prevention activities. There is technically no limit, but most projects range from $5,000 to $10,000.

- Program Size: *~$400,000*
- Eligible Entities: *all non-profit fire departments; local municipalities*
- Typical Projects: *fire prevention education/training; arson prevention; fire investigation; pre-incident planning*
- Cost Share: *None*
- Frequency: *Triannual*
- Website: https://firstrespondergrants.com/fm-global-fire-prevention-grant-program/

2.2.3 Georgia-Pacific Bucket Brigade Program

Georgia-Pacific, headquartered in Atlanta, is one of the world's largest wood and paper producers. The company issues grants of up to $10,000 to fire departments located within 30 miles of a Georgia-Pacific facility.

- Program Size: *~$200,000*
- Eligible Entities: *fire departments*
- Typical Projects: *firefighting equipment, including personal protective equipment (PPE), hose, nozzles, etc.*
- Cost Share: *None*
- Frequency: *Yearly*
- Website: https://www.gp.com/community/bucket-brigade

2.2.4 Globe Gear Giveaway

Globe is a subsidiary of MSA and one of the largest manufacturers of firefighting PPE. In partnership with the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), Globe and DuPont operate a modest donation program. Each year, the program donates 52 sets of new PPE (4 sets to 13 departments). Departments must be all-volunteer or majority-volunteer to apply, and must serve a population of less than 25,000.

- Program Size: *~$150,000*
- Eligible Entities: *volunteer or majority-volunteer fire departments*
- Typical Projects: *personal protective equipment (PPE)*
- Cost Share: *None*
- Frequency: *Yearly*
- Website: https://www.nvfc.org/programs/globe-gear-giveaway/

2.2.5 Other Corporate Grant Programs

Several other large corporations operate more general community-oriented grant programs which award $5,000 or less to ESOs and other non-profit organizations. A few companies with a national presence include:

- Wal-Mart Community Grant Program
- Home Depot Community Impact Grants
- State Farm Good Neighbor Citizenship® Company Grants

There may be more regionally-focused companies or even local businesses that have grant or charitable programs for which your ESO is eligible. ESOs are encouraged to develop personal relationships with local managers of large, medium, and small businesses within their district. These relationships can lead to innovative partnerships where the department may be asked to support the business (e.g., attend a fire prevention event, grand opening, community clean up-day, etc.) which may ultimately lead to opportunities to receive direct grant funding or other meaningful support.

Researching and Pursuing Additional Funding Opportunities

There are dozens of other programs and foundations which may be able to help your ESO with funding needs. Here are some general guidelines to consider when researching additional grant funding opportunities:

-**Carefully consider the stated goals of the programs you research.** Almost every private charitable foundation has a mission statement and/or funding objectives, as do most public agencies. The grant programs themselves may have even more specific goals in mind. The key to getting support from one of these large funding sources is to match your need and proposed project to their stated objectives. For example, if you are looking to purchase new rescue equipment, you might start by identifying organizations interested in making highways safer, improving emergency care of accident victims, or improving workplace safety.

-**Consider all of your organization's needs and identify multiple projects.** It's likely that your ESO has several funding needs. Even if you set out to get funding for one project, you may find programs that could potentially fund another project down the road, or one that is a slightly different priority. Depending on your organization's financial situation, getting outside funding for one project may help to free up funds for another. Don't limit your opportunities for funding by focusing on just one project.

-**Pursue several sources of funding.** You may not be able to find one organization that is willing or able to fund the entire project, but partial funding from several sources can add up quickly. You probably will not have a 100% success rate with every grant application, and it may require multiple attempts to get funding.

3 Building Relationships with Stakeholders in Your Community

You won't find every funding opportunity through an online search. Also consider local organizations and individuals in your community who are willing to support your ESO. However, you should think of support at the local level as more than just giving dollars. The success of your ESO in the long run is predicated on the support you receive from your community.

Not all businesses or individuals will be willing or able to make financial donations; some businesses or individuals may prefer to provide in-kind support, such as material, equipment, or services that your ESO needs. Examples include legal support, writing, advertising, public relations, strategic planning, and budgeting. Other professionals may partner with you to help you search for other sources of support. They may help you gain access to businesses or individuals who in turn may be able to provide financial support. Consider all the potential resources available to your ESO that are right in your community.

Here are a few more examples. Perhaps you have never thought of some of these groups as potential partners:

Business and Professional Groups – In your community there may be various organizations comprised of businesspeople and professionals. Many of these people may be actively looking for service projects. Some of the more common organizations in this category are Kiwanis, Rotary, Jaycees, and Optimists. But also consider professional organizations such as the local Bar Association, Chamber of Commerce, Medical Society, or Better Business Bureau.

Veteran Groups – Many communities are home to American Legion Posts, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and related groups.

Religious Groups – Men's and women's "circles" and groups, religious school classes, and clergy members are an excellent source of talent, ideas, and support for your ESO.

Social and Service Groups – Groups such as the Elks, Moose, Masons, Junior League, and Women's Club may be worth contacting.

Scouting Organizations – Scouts of all ages look for service projects. They can be an exceptionally valuable resource (and a potential source of volunteer recruits!).

Neighborhood Associations – Particularly in fast-growing communities, neighborhood organizations are increasingly common. Also don't forget groups such as Welcome Wagon and Newcomers.

Large Employers – Some large employers may recognize their civic duty and will lend a hand to worthy causes.

Local Media – Local newspapers, TV, and radio stations can help support your ESO. Build a relationship with them now so you don't have to wait for a catastrophic event to get publicity. Invite them to run stories about your ESO, its mission, and its successes.

Partner Agencies – You should also develop relationships with other public service entities, including the police, state or local forest management agencies, highway management departments, etc.

This list barely scratches the surface. Look within your own organization to see how you might build bridges to partner organizations - it's likely that some members of your ESO are also involved with another organization on this list.

Building Relationships with Individuals

Many ESOs completely overlook individual citizens in their community. Individuals may have talents or connections that can improve your ESO and its service to the community.

Here are some very important individuals that can help your ESO:

Graphic Designers – A graphic artist or someone in the advertising field can help you market your organization by designing brochures or a newsletter. They can also help make signs or other materials for special projects or activities with partner groups. A graphic designer might also help design your ESO's web page or develop software for administrative activities.

Professionals – A local CPA might be willing to help by doing volunteer accounting work. They can provide audits of your financial activities, do your financial statements, and prepare year-end reports. A local lawyer might be willing to provide "pro-bono" level services if needed.

Business Executives – A business executive can help solicit other executives or businesses for donations or grant support. If you don't have access to corporations, executive roundtables, or the wealthy people of your community, then seek out someone who does and build a relationship with them.

Retirees – Retired teachers, writers, businesspeople, and other retirees are wonderful assets. Ask them to help. You will be giving them a way to use their talents or influence to help you protect the community. They will be doing their part to make the community safer. They will be partnering with you as you build coalitions.

Community Partners Are Your Customers

Here's another way of looking at partner organizations. As an ESO, who are your customers? Normally, they are simply the residents of your community. However, when you think of grants and strategies for winning financial support, your customers are also the groups, foundations, businesses, or individuals that give financial support and enable your organization to serve the community.

Why look at these groups as your customers? If you are going to request their financial assistance, you must have a relationship with them that is like the relationship of a business to its customers. You want repeat business; in other words, you want them to assist you in the future. You must think of them as your customers and stay in touch with them through your marketing efforts.

When you build relationships with other organizations and individuals, you develop a pool of assets that can and will assist your ESO. Like your ESO, these groups and businesses all have a stake in the welfare and safety of your community. Your ESO can assist them in reaching their goals of serving and improving the community. By building a relationship with these potential partners and demonstrating how your ESO can help them achieve these goals, they will be more willing to give assistance when its needed. That is the essence of building relationships with stakeholders in your community.

Benefits of Community Partnerships

Look beyond the obvious: aside from direct financial support, there are countless other ways a partner organization could help. You can look at every new relationship in three ways:

Things a group can do for you - A community group could adopt your ESO and pay for a new piece of equipment. Properly trained citizens could help conduct fire safety inspections or install smoke detectors. Some organizations could help you identify volunteer recruits from among their own ranks. Depending on their own goals or needs, other organizations may be able to help you fight your budget battles with local or state authorities (and you can do the same for them when the time comes).

Things you and a partner organization could do together - Hold a joint open house or parade with a local veteran group. Jointly sponsor a series of lectures on workplace safety with local business associations. Help another group with a project of their own, like parking cars at a school fair, or helping a school group with Homecoming Day festivities. Organize an explorer program with a local school or scouting program to teach young people how to be emergency responders. Team up with the police department to teach a class on firearm safety.

Things you could do to help a community group - Offer CPR classes. Conduct blood pressure screenings at local churches or synagogues. Help wait on tables at the next banquet held by the Junior Women's Club. Provide travel assistance to elderly members of a senior citizens group. Offer the use of the fire station's community room for another organization's meetings. Set up a department speaker's bureau to talk about public safety issues at meetings of local civic groups. Teach a babysitting safety course. Pick a neighborhood and spend a day cleaning up trash. Offer the station to be used as a polling place on election days. On Halloween, post department members at busy intersections to help trick-or-treaters cross the street.

What does all this have to do with managing an ESO? Everything, because having the support of your community is necessary for your ESO's future success.

Partner Organizations and Grant Funding

Another benefit of building these relationships is that it can improve your chances of getting grant money from other sources. A very important factor many grant programs look for when evaluating grant proposals is the level of community support for the project. If you can show that local businesses, community organizations, and individuals support your project, you can enhance your chances of receiving grant funds. Funding sources are impressed with in-kind contributions, volunteer time, outright financial support, and fundraising campaigns in support of projects. Funding sources commonly ask applicants to provide a list of other organizations that you expect to provide donations or other support. Building relationships with partner organizations can be a big part of seeking grant funding.

Recognizing Community Partners

We've discussed how your ESO's relationship with partner organizations is like that between a business and its customers. Be sure to recognize your partners, especially those that give you financial or other support. Once a partner provides grant funding or other support to your ESO, they have a stake in the relationship. They know your ESO and have enough faith in your ESO to invest their resources. Keep the relationship alive!

Here are a few ways you can recognize community partners:

- Send them invitations to special events and ceremonies, or just to make a visit.
- Send them periodic reports. Grant making organizations will expect you to formally report on your project; community partners may not make a formal request, but you should still take the opportunity to keep your partners up-to-date on your ESO's activities.
- Hold an appreciation dinner for partners and friends of the ESO, or invite them to your annual banquet. Consider giving them an award as you would any valued member of the organization.
- Issue a press release or invite local media to do a story about a project or activity done in conjunction with a partner organization.
- Publicly recognize your partners whenever possible.

4 Summary

Let's summarize what we have learned about grant proposals and building partnerships.

- There are many grant funding sources available for ESOs, including both public and private programs.
- Conduct research to learn about the organizations you plan to ask for grant funds. Learn about what areas they are involved in, what areas they address, and the kinds of projects they are likely to support.
- Perform an internal needs assessment to identify and prioritize the needs of your ESO and the types of projects that (if funded) would result in the greatest positive impact for the department and the community.
- Tailor your project and proposal to match the goals and objectives of the organization from which you are requesting funds.
- Carefully follow the process and guidelines provided by the grant maker. Regardless of format, your proposal should address a specific problem, the impact of that problem on the community, a proposed solution, and a detailed list of costs.
- Consider hiring a grant writer or utilizing outside resources to help prepare the grant application and increase your chances of success. If you choose to prepare the application yourself, make sure to represent your organization professionally.
- Work within your community to build mutually beneficial partnerships. Think outside the box about how these partnerships might benefit your ESO financially and otherwise.

Avoid the Top 10 Pitfalls of Grant Writing:

1. Including false or inaccurate information.
2. Copying a narrative written by somebody else.
3. Preparing an application without reading and understanding the program's rules and regulations.
4. Requesting funding for low priority or ineligible projects.
5. Failing to focus the request on your department's highest priority project(s).
6. Not providing enough detail about your proposed programs.
7. Not providing enough detail to demonstrate financial need.
8. Not asking an objective third-party to review your narrative.
9. Waiting until the last minute to prepare your application.
10. Failing to write with the reviewer in mind.

About the Authors

Firehouse Grants specializes in preparing grant applications for fire departments, EMS departments, and other public safety agencies. We have substantial experience in successfully obtaining funds from FEMA Fire Act programs (including AFG, SAFER, and FP&S), the Port Security Grant Program, Community Development Block Grants, corporate grants, and foundation grants (including Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation). Our success is built upon our in-depth knowledge of the grant programs, our expertise in technical writing, and our understanding of fire and emergency services.

Firehouse Grants is led by David Schwartz who is an experienced grant writer specializing in the emergency services industry. David has been a volunteer firefighter in the suburbs of Philadelphia since 2001. The rest of our staff are also firefighters and we are all committed to serving you and your community.