

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**Federal Emergency Management Agency****Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program**

AGENCY: U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), FEMA, Emergency Preparedness and Response, Homeland Security.

ACTION: Notice of funds availability.

SUMMARY: We, USFA, are publishing this Notice to announce the availability of grant funding for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFGP) for fiscal year 2003 and to provide the details and guidance regarding the 2003 program year.

The program is intended to make grants directly to fire departments of a State for the purpose of enhancing the departments' ability to protect the health and safety of the public as well as that of firefighting personnel facing fire and fire-related hazards. A portion of this year's grants will be awarded on a competitive basis to the applicants that best address the program's priorities as described in this Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA), then demonstrate financial need and maximize the benefits to be derived from the grant funds.

DATES: This notice is effective March 14, 2003.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Brian A. Cowan, Director, Grants Program Office, USFA, DHS, 500 C Street, SW., Room 330, Washington, DC 20472.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Authority: Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, 15 U.S.C. 2201 *et seq.*, and the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution, 2003, Pub. L. 108-7.

Appropriations

For fiscal year 2003, Congress appropriated \$750,000,000 to carry out the activities of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFGP). From this amount \$4,875,000 was rescinded leaving \$745,125,000 to carry out the AFGP. We are also authorized to spend up to \$37,500,000 for administration of the AFGP (five percent of the appropriated amount). In addition, we may set aside as much as \$27,500,000 of the funds available under the Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program in order for us to make grants to, or enter into contracts or cooperative agreements with, national, State, local or community organizations or agencies, including fire departments,

for the purpose of carrying out fire prevention and injury prevention programs. This leaves approximately \$680,000,000 for competitive grants to fire departments. We have until September 30, 2004, to obligate the appropriated funds.

Background

The purpose of the AFGP is to award grants directly to fire departments of a State to enhance their ability to protect the health and safety of the public, as well as that of firefighting personnel, with respect to fire and fire related hazards. We will award the grants on a competitive basis to the applicants that first address the AFGP's priorities then demonstrate financial need and adequately demonstrate the benefit to be derived from their projects.

For the purpose of the AFGP, "State" is defined as the fifty States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. We will provide the chief executives of the States with information concerning the total number and dollar amount of awards made to fire departments in their States.

Applicants may apply for any number of activities within one grant proposal that address all of their needs within a programmatic or functional area. The programs, and associated activities are as follows:

(a) *Fire Operations and Firefighter Safety Program.* Eligible activities under this function are Training, Wellness and Fitness, Firefighting Equipment, Personal Protective Equipment, and Modification to Fire Stations and Facilities.

(b) *Fire Prevention Program.* Eligible activities under this function include, but are not limited to Public Education and Awareness, Enforcing Fire Codes, Inspector Certification, Purchase and Install Smoke Alarms, and Arson Prevention and Detection.

(c) *Emergency Medical Services Program.* Eligible activities under this function are Equipment Acquisition, Training, and Wellness and Fitness Activities. Vehicles are not eligible in this programmatic area.

(d) *Firefighting Vehicle Acquisition Program.* Eligible apparatus under this program include, but are not limited to, pumpers, brush trucks, tankers, rescue, ambulances, quints, aerials, foam units, and fireboats.

Applicants seeking funding from this grant program in fiscal year 2003 may apply for assistance in only one of the four programmatic areas listed above. Within the selected programmatic area, applicants may develop a

comprehensive program and include in their application as many of the eligible activities as necessary to address their needs. For example, if a fire department determines that it has needs in the area of fire operations, that fire department could apply for any one of the activities, or any combination of activities, or all of the activities listed within that program. If a department wants a vehicle, it would apply under the vehicle program.

We anticipate 20,000 to 25,000 fire departments will apply for assistance. Of these, we anticipate awarding approximately 7,000 grants. However, due to the length of time that it will take us to make these awards, we anticipate that approximately half of these awards will be made before September 30, 2003. We anticipate the balance of the awards will be made before June 30, 2004.

The law requires a certain distribution of grant funds between career departments and combination/volunteer fire departments. Specifically, we must ensure that fire departments that have either all-volunteer forces of firefighting personnel or combined forces of volunteer and career firefighting personnel receive a portion of the total grant funding that is not less than the proportion of the United States population that those departments protect. According to a 2001 survey by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), volunteer and combination departments protect 56 percent of the population of the United States and career departments protect 44 percent of the population. Therefore, we will ensure that no less than 56 percent of the funding available for grants will be awarded to volunteer and combination departments.

In order to fulfill our obligations under the law, we will make funding decisions using rank order after the panel evaluation as the preliminary basis. We may deviate from rank order and make funding decisions based on the type of department (career, combination, or volunteer), size and character of the community the applicant serves (urban, suburban, or rural), and/or the geographic location of the fire department. In these instances where we are making decisions based on geographic location, we will use States as the basic geographic unit. Geographic location of an applicant may be used primarily as a final discriminator, *i.e.*, in cases where applicants have similar qualifications, we may use the geographic location of the applicants to maximize the diversity of the awardees.