



**THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY'S
UNITED STATES FIRE ADMINISTRATION**

REPORT ON THE

**ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANT PROGRAM
FOR FY 2001**

October 9, 2001



Prepared by the U.S. Fire Administration's Grants Program Office

Summary

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), through its United States Fire Administration (USFA), has successfully completed the initiation and awards phase of the FY 2001 Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. In a nine-month period, FEMA/USFA created and administered a new grant program that was unlike anything the Agency had previously undertaken. Between July 23 and September 30, 2001, FEMA/USFA awarded 1,855 grants to local fire departments throughout the country, and 31 grants to fire service organizations, for a total of 1,886 grants worth \$96,586,668.¹

The following is a summary of the legislative history, the establishment of the grant program, the application and evaluation process, the grant awards, and FY 2001 closeout activities.

Legislative History

The FY 2001 Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program met the goals and requirements delineated by Congress in the FY 2001 Defense Authorization bill [Public Law 106-398] that amended Section 33 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15 U.S.C. 2201 et seq.). Congress appropriated \$100 million in the FY 2001 Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and related Agencies Appropriations Act [Public Law 106-544] to fund this program.

The legislation passed by Congress outlined a new federal program to provide direct assistance to local fire departments in order to protect “the health and safety of the public and firefighting personnel against fire and fire-related hazards, and to provide assistance for fire prevention programs.” The law also gave FEMA the discretion to make grants directly to “organizations that are recognized for their experience and expertise with respect to fire prevention or fire safety programs and activities, for the purpose of carrying out fire prevention programs...[giving] priority to organizations that focus on prevention of injuries to children.”

FEMA was directed to establish an office to administer the program and criteria for the selection of recipients. The law also outlined 14 possible grant “categories,” required a cost share based on the population protected by fire departments, mandated at least 5% of the funds be used for fire prevention, and limited the total amount that could be spent in the vehicles category to a maximum of 25% of appropriated funds. Congress also emphasized the importance of the balanced distribution of the funds to departments staffed by paid firefighters and those staffed by volunteers (or a combination of paid and unpaid firefighters), as well as geographical considerations such as departments located in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

¹ Grant totals were compiled on October 9, 2001. Some minor adjustment of these figures may occur as awards are modified and financial records are reconciled.

Establishment of the New Grant Program

The rapid development of this unprecedented grant program is a credit to the dedication and close participation of the U.S. fire service community. Working to achieve the goals and priorities established by Congress, FEMA/USFA and the major fire service organizations developed the specifics of the first Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. On January 10, 2001, FEMA/USFA convened a meeting of representatives of the fire service organizations that led to the development of the following consensus decisions to:

- Limit applications for FY 2001 to grants in six priority categories:
 1. Fire Prevention
 2. Firefighting Equipment
 3. Personal Protective Equipment
 4. Training
 5. Firefighting Vehicles
 6. Wellness and Fitness;
- Establish the competitive criteria by which applications were evaluated;
- Allow each local fire department to apply for a grant in up to two categories;
- And create a peer review process for evaluating applications.

On March 21, 2001, FEMA/USFA published an Interim Final Rule in the Federal Register, and the Agency's new Grants Program Office began to administer the program by developing the application and providing grant writing assistance to applicants over the phone, by email, and on the Internet.

Application and Evaluation Process

During the application period from April 1, 2001 - May 2, 2001, local fire departments were able to download applications from the Internet and receive them by mail. The response from local fire departments during that month was tremendous. FEMA/USFA received more than 11,000 calls on a new toll-free hotline established to answer fire grant questions² and responded to 8,615 e-mailed requests for grant writing assistance. The collaboration that occurred between FEMA/USFA program and financial management staff was crucial to ensure the constituency and accuracy of the assistance provided.

Fire departments were required to fill out paper applications and mail them to FEMA/USFA by May 2, 2001. The Agency received 31,295 grant applications from 18,915 fire departments totaling \$2.99 billion in requests. All applications were manually entered into a database and then initially scored based on responses to category-specific questions in the application developed to reflect the priorities of the grant program. This initial scoring was used to determine which applications qualified for a "competitive range" of applications that merited peer reviews.

² Volunteers from local fire departments in the Washington Metropolitan Area helped FEMA/USFA respond to this high volume of calls.

More than 200 fire service personnel volunteered to help FEMA/USFA carry out the peer review of the highest scoring applications during three week-long panels held at the U.S. Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, MD in May and June of 2001. A total of 7,500 applications that scored in the competitive range were reviewed by examining the project narratives and other required components, especially the extent to which the narratives established need and described a cost effective solution. The applications that scored in the excellent and good ranges were then ranked and reviewed again for any questions or outstanding issues that may have been raised by the reviewers. After taking into account the priorities of the grant program, including the legislative instruction to ensure geographic distribution of the funding, the Grants Program Office began to make recommendations for awards. On July 23, 2001, the first awards were announced by the Director of FEMA.

Grant Awards

By September 30, 2001, FEMA/USFA had awarded 1,855 competitive grants to local fire departments for total federal funding of \$91,996,440. Including the cost shares required from the departments, this resulted in total spending of \$115,147,345. In addition, FEMA/USFA provided 31 grants to fire service organizations³ totaling \$4,590,228. Including cost shares from these organizations, total spending associated with these 31 grants amounted to \$5,334,773. **These figures add up to federal funding of \$96,586,668, yielding total spending on firefighter and public safety of \$120,482,118.**

A detailed list of all grant recipients will be available at the USFA web site (www.usfa.fema.gov). However, the following table provides a brief overview of how the federal grant funding was distributed:

Category	Grants to Local Career Departments		Grants to Local Volunteer/Combination Departments		Grants to Fire Service Organizations		TOTALS	
	#	Amount	#	Amount	#	Amount	#	Amount
Fire Prevention	72	\$4,053,961	137	\$5,017,524	31	\$4,590,228	240	\$13,661,713
Firefighting Equipment	96	\$6,431,688	308	\$8,487,776			404	\$14,919,464
Personal Protective Equipment	176	\$14,566,894	530	\$19,569,915			706	\$34,136,809
Training	31	\$2,019,768	129	\$3,179,588			160	\$5,199,356
Firefighting Vehicles	52	\$6,507,451	156	\$13,905,155			208	\$20,412,606
Wellness and Fitness	53	\$4,327,181	115	\$3,929,539			168	\$8,256,720
TOTALS	480	\$37,906,943	1,375	\$54,089,497	31	4,590,228	1,886	\$96,586,668

³ Grants went to national fire prevention and safety campaigns, State and National burn associations, foundations, associations and programs focused on high-risk populations, and local prevention initiatives.

A further discussion of the competitive grants to local fire departments is useful:

- Volunteer/combo departments received 58.80% of the funds⁴ and 74.12% of all grants awarded to local fire departments. The average award was \$39,338.
- Career departments received 41.20% of the funds and 25.88% of all grants awarded to local fire departments. The average award was \$78,973.
- Urban departments (located in communities with populations over 250,000) received 48 grants totaling \$7,535,313.
- Suburban departments (located in communities with populations between 20,000 and 250,000) received 428 grants totaling \$29,083,329.
- Rural departments (located in communities with populations under 20,000) received 1379 grants totaling \$55,377,798.

The remaining \$3,413,332 that was not awarded in the form of grants was expended as follows:

- \$3,072,122 was used for administrative costs associated with managing the 31,295 grant requests.
- \$275,710 (of a possible \$300,000 authorized by the law) was obligated for a study to assess the needs of the nation's fire service, in conjunction with the National Fire Protection Association. As required by law, this study will be completed no later than June 2002.
- \$65,500 is the current estimate of the unobligated balance for FY 2001. The actual amount is expected to diminish as the final financial information is reconciled.

FY 2001 Closeout Activities

Grant recipients have one year to expend their funding and report on their expenditures. FEMA will continue to disburse funds and monitor grant activity during the FY 2001 grant period that began August 15, 2001 and ends August 14, 2002. Grant recipients are also required to provide information to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) during the grant period. This increased participation in the NFIRS reporting network will improve the collection of fire data that FEMA/USFA uses to more accurately assess and combat the fire problem at a national level. FEMA/USFA intends to review all of this information to evaluate the benefits of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and to quantify the results of the program.

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⁴ The law required that volunteer/combo departments receive funding "not less than the [56.8%] proportion of the United States population that those firefighting departments protect."