When every second counts, you need to be able to share information seamlessly across multiple response teams—regardless of the device or network. Motorola Solutions empowers fire services to better serve and protect lives through reliable communications and by turning data into actionable intelligence.

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Introduction

Getting the AFG communications funding you need

FEMA’s Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) application period is an opportunity for fire departments and other emergency management to fund new equipment, including radio communications.

The AFG program also known as the FIRE Act Grant program is in its 18th year and is expected be reauthorized in October, early November. Even with the change in the federal administration most are confident that this successful program that protects the health and safety of the public and firefighting personnel will be reauthorized.

AFG and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant programs have been funded at $690 million, split evenly between the two programs. This is the same amount the two programs received in 2016 and is expected to be allocated in 2017. During an AFG workshop this past spring, representatives from FEMA indicated that they are looking at an early fall start date for AFG 2017, possibly October or early November.

Priorities for this year include supporting radio communications and their supporting systems that carry information from the street to the dispatcher and out to the first responder to provide them with better situational awareness.

Mission-critical radio communications are essential to firefighters, as they offer reliability even in the most extreme conditions, are interoperable with disparate radio and broadband systems and provide life-saving applications delivered via LMR such as personnel accountability and fire station alerting.

These are a few reasons why FEMA continues to make funding communications a priority in their grant process. To help our readers get ready and apply for an AFG communications grant, we worked with our FireGrantsHelp industry experts to develop the 2017 Guide to AFG: Communications.

This guide will help you understand 2017 AFG communications grant priorities and help you manage your AFG grant application.

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Radio communication equipment purchases fall under the Equipment Category of Operations and Safety section by the Assistance to Firefighters Grants, including mobile radios, portable radios, pagers, base radios, mobile data terminals and in-apparatus repeaters.

To meet AFG’s highest priority for this category, your request should be for equipment that is a first-time purchase to support an existing mission or to replace obsolete or damaged equipment.

Here are the AFG grant priorities you need to know about:

**Priority 1**
**OBsolete Or DAMaged EQUIpMENT**

Obsolete and damaged communications equipment is given top priority in AFG.

In the past, AFG defined an obsolete piece of equipment as one that is 15-years old or older or one that is no longer manufactured.

Recently, FEMA has changed the way they score this category. Equipment is now scored using an additional variable of Age Category. Equipment is assigned an age category of Short (5 to 7 years), Medium (8 to 14 years) or Long (15 to 20 years).

Below is an example of the items that ranked high on the FY16 eligibility list for communications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIORITY</th>
<th>AGE CATEGORY</th>
<th>FIRE AND SFTA</th>
<th>FIRE REGIONAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>Base Station (must be P-25 Compliant)</td>
<td>Base Station (must be P-25 Compliant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>Headsets</td>
<td>Headsets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>Mobile Radios (must be P-25 Compliant)</td>
<td>Mobile Radios (must be P-25 Compliant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>Mobile Repeaters (must be P-25 Compliant)</td>
<td>Mobile Repeaters (must be P-25 Compliant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>Pagers (limited to number of active members)</td>
<td>Pagers (limited to number of active members)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>Portable Radios (must be P-25 Compliant, limited to number of AFG approved seated positions)</td>
<td>Portable Radios (must be P-25 Compliant, limited to number of AFG approved seated positions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>Mobile Data Terminal (MDT)</td>
<td>Mobile Data Terminal (MDT)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These age categories are used to compare like types of equipment. Under this system, an item that should have a useful life of 10 years is competing only against other items that have a similar lifecycle. An application does not score higher or lower based on the product lifecycle of an item. It only serves to ensure a more even scoring of equipment based on type.
Priority 2
EXPANSION OF EXISTING MISSION

The second priority under the equipment category is for equipment that increases the capabilities within the department’s existing mission or to meet a new risk.

Additional consideration is given to equipment that has a direct effect on the health and safety of firefighters, such as handheld radios and communications equipment that supports them.

Consideration also is given to equipment that benefits other departments and equipment that brings your department into compliance with national standards or statutory requirements.

Lowest priority is given to items requested for a new mission or requesting additional supplies or reserve equipment. Grant applicants applying for emergency communications funding are strongly encouraged to work with their Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC). The SWIC should review the application prior to submission to ensure that projects support the state or territory’s strategy to improve interoperable emergency communications.

The SWIC also can confirm that the funding request aligns with the latest versions of their statewide communication interoperability plan and the National Emergency Communications Plan, as these are vital to improving interoperability.

Priority 3
P25-COMPLIANT EQUIPMENT

When applying for a communications project through AFG, the only interoperable communications equipment eligible for acquisition is P25-compliant equipment, which allows first responders to communicate with each other to coordinate their response and mitigate all hazards.

This means purchasing only P25-compliant interoperable communications equipment in accordance with SAFECOM regulations, which require a digital platform that is programmable, scalable and can communicate in analog mode with legacy radios – as well as in both analog and digital mode with other P25 equipment.

Procurement of interoperable communications equipment that does not meet P25 compliance is not allowed. There are no waivers for P25 compliance. AFG applicants do not have to identify a specific P25 product in their application narratives. But they must affirm that the interoperable communications equipment requested is P25-compliant.

If you are awarded an AFG grant and you purchase non-P25-compliant communications equipment, these purchases are ruled ineligible and your award will be in jeopardy.

Assistance to Firefighters Grant
Administrative Steps

Registration can take three to four weeks to complete, so start early. Here are the steps you need to take to get your grant application ready:

1. Identify the Legal Applicant
2. Apply for, update or verify the Legal Applicant’s DUNS number
3. Apply for, update or verify the Legal Applicant’s Employee Identification Number
4. Register, update or verify the Legal Applicant’s System for Award Management account and entity registration
5. Create or update your login to the FEMA Portal

If you have additional questions or need help with your AFG application, contact a FireGrantsHelp expert.
What changes have been made to this year’s application?

In previous applications, applicants were asked under the Characteristics II section if their department had any capital reserve or rainy-day funds. The answer choices were a simple yes or no.

This year if you answer that question affirmatively you will be given the opportunity to explain what that fund is used for. For example, many departments have capital reserve funds, but they are restricted and can be used only for projects like a new station or a new apparatus. By providing the reviewers with this information, it lets them know that these funds are restricted and can’t be used to purchase new radios for the department.

In other cases, a municipally controlled department may find itself in a situation where the municipality has reserve funds but those funds are dedicated for water or street improvement projects and not available to the fire department at all.

‘Request Details’ section changes

Also, this year under the Request Details section of your application, you will be asked if the reason you are requesting communications equipment is to meet a new risk.

Consider any new risks facing your department, such as the following:

- a new risk, such as a factory or other type of industrial or commercial developments in your coverage area
- an increased call volume, especially structure fires
- large festivals, athletic events or other types of gatherings
- special circumstances that you can relay to the reviewer to make a case for your communications request

Requests from departments facing a new risk will score higher during the application review.

If you are requesting portable radios, your request should allow you to provide a portable radio for every seated position on your apparatus. This number should match the seating chart under Department Characteristics.

Mobile radios for personally owned vehicles are not eligible except for the chief fire officer’s personal vehicle, if justified. Also, different types of phones such as telephone, satellite and cell are not eligible for funding.

Should we apply as part of a regional project?

It may be beneficial for departments to apply for communications equipment as a regional application rather than as individual departments.

A regional application is an opportunity for two or more fire departments to collaborate on a communications project that benefits all the applicants and their coverage areas. Regional program activities should achieve cost effectiveness, support regional efficiency and resilience and benefit more than one local department.

Under regional activities, one department must agree to act as the host for the application. As such, the host department must agree, if awarded, to be responsible for all aspects of the grant. This includes but is not limited to accountability for all assets received through the grant and all reporting requirements in the regional application.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU), signed by all parties participating in the application, must be included in the application. The MOU should specify the responsibilities of the participating partners, the participant’s level of involvement in the project and the proposed distribution of all grant-funded assets.

In the Project Description narrative, the regional host department must include a list of all the departments that are participating in the proposed regional project. The narrative should also provide specific details, fully explaining the distribution of any grant-funded acquisitions or grant-funded contracted services.

All departments participating in a regional application must be compliant with AFG requirements, including being current with past grants, closeouts and other reporting requirements.
When completing the Department Characteristics section, the regional host applicant must include data that approximates the characteristics of all eligible organizations participating in the grant.

In addition, when completing the Request Details section, the host department must base their answers on the region and not their individual department. The same is true of the Narrative sections of the application. When calculating the required match for a regional grant, the host will use the total population served by all departments involved in the regional application.

**Is the ‘Legal Applicant’ different than my department name?**

In most scenarios the department is not the direct Legal Applicant – the agency’s governing body is listed as the applicant on behalf of the department.

Here are typical examples of the Legal Applicant based on type of agency.

1. **Career**: Municipality/local government/fire district, depending on organization structure.

2. **Combination**: This should be the city/local government/fire district responsible for paying salaries, benefits and operating costs.

3. **Volunteer**: Varies depending on the entity that controls the budget, pays the bills and owns the vehicles/major equipment items. This can be the local government, fire district or volunteer fire department itself.

**Conclusion**

AFG continues to support radio communications, and in order to ensure your agency qualifies, it is important to focus on some of the changes and important data you must include in this year’s application.

This includes ensuring you update your Request for Details section, apply for radio communications under the Equipment Category of Operations and Safety section, focus on obsolete or damaged equipment or radios for an expanding mission and ask for P25 equipment funding only.

Our team of grant experts is here to help you apply for AFG. If you have additional questions or need help with your AFG application, contact a FireGrantsHelp expert.
Motorola Solutions partners with FireGrantsHelp to assist you with winning communications-based grants. Click on the link and fill out the form for customized grant help for radio projects including grant research, grant alert notices and grant application reviews from our team of grant experts.

RESOURCES

The following are key resources that can assist you in your AFG communications-based application:

- AFG Application Checklist
- Assistance to Firefighters Grants - Grantee Award Year 2016
- FireGrantsHelp.com
- Assistance to Firefighters Grants Success Stories
- FY 2016 Application Assistance Tools
- P25 Technology Interest Group (PTIG)
- AFG grant applications: To partner or not to partner
- Fire grants: What is a DUNS number?
- Fire grants safe in Trump budget

If you have additional questions or need help with your AFG application, contact a FireGrantsHelp expert.
Break through the AFG grants process.

Is your DUNS and SAM registration up to date? Do you know what you need to prepare for the AFG application? If the answer is “No”, contact the FireGrantsHelp team today!

AFG is just around the corner - see how we can help you get started!
866-463-7792 or expert@firegrantshelp.com