

Initiative

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Grant programs should support the implementation of safe practices and procedures and/or mandate safe practices as an eligibility requirement.

Executive Summary

In the keynote address before the 2006 Grants and Training National Conference, Department of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff said, “Now it may startle you to hear me remind you that since 9/11 the federal government has provided more than \$18 billion in grants to state and local governments, and that is a lot of money.” Indeed it is. The fire service has been the recipient of this largess as have other public safety entities. In 2007, thousands of fire departments will apply for Assistance to Firefighter Grants and others for a myriad of purposes, including the quest to improve firefighter safety. Some have questioned whether more can be done to promote safety through the grant process. While it is difficult to measure the exact impact of grant money relative to increased safety, a positive relationship certainly exists. Without such assistance, fire departments with limited local or public funding would find it very difficult to meet safety training mandates and standards. While it will take more than grants to change the culture of the fire service, grant money can go far in helping departments implement safe practices. Reasonable efforts should be made to ensure that grants reinforce safety whenever practical. The 10th Initiative asks us to examine the grant process and look for opportunities to make improvements in safety.

Introduction

Ensuring that grant programs support the implementation of safe practices and/or

mandate safe practices, as an eligibility requirement for emergency responders, may seem like a logical step forward. Life Safety Initiative #10 strives to institutionalize a connection between grant funding and safety. Because grants intersect as so many areas within the fire service, we must also remember that in order to change how grants are allocated, we must also focus on the important areas of culture, technology, and safety-related training.

Questioning the efficacy of grants, especially the billions of dollars that have come to the fire service since 9-11 is entirely appropriate. Have we spent this money well? Has the government been clear enough on how programs monies should be spent? Has any effort been made to evaluate where we have come so far? Have these funds come too late? Should we have made the connection between dollars and safety years ago? Why don't we know what's good for us, and have grants made any difference? Finally, what impedes our progress and can grants impact change regarding firefighter line-of-duty injuries and deaths?

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES

Twenty years ago, one of the most feared standards in the fire service, NFPA 1500, [*Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program (1987)*] was developed because, "there was no consensus standard for an occupational safety and health program for the fire service," while fire service organizations were being increasingly subject to regulations that were "developed for general industry and that did not provide for many of the specific needs and concerns of an organization involved in the delivery of emergency services" (NFPA, 2006).

Whether all the apprehension associated with 1500 was warranted or not, it is certainly true that it had the effect of forcing most fire departments to change their safety practices over the last two decades. The 1500 Standard was a far reaching and revolutionary document that many departments still struggle to implement in its entirety. In its wake, the NFPA has introduced other standards to support safety dealing with apparatus, protective equipment and training. To this day, many fire service organizations seek grants to implement the 1500 Standard; it is even included as a worthy goal in the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) guidance process. The point here is that even though many grants were applied for in light of the 1500 Standard, the Standard was the impetus for the grant writing increase.

In light of the durability and longevity of national consensus safety standards like 1500, it seems logical to ask whether there is a relationship between grants and increased safety. In other words, can we accurately claim that funding will increase safety for firefighters? Are we improving our safety profile, or are we wasting precious dollars that could be spent elsewhere. We are constantly reminded of safe practices in magazines, websites, and in training, yet we do not seem to reach a continued reduction in firefighter deaths and injuries. Does money solve the problem or do we need to mandate additional policies as part of the approval for a grant? Even the creation of a standard such as 1500 did not change the fire service but with grant

money AND a Standard we may go a long way towards progress that will be seen in future results.

In a recent issue of the International Association of Fire Chiefs *On Scene* magazine, Garry Briese, Executive Director of the IAFC, commented on the relationship between firefighter safety and Fire Act Grants: “there are many initiatives and yet nothing is changing” (IAFC, 2006, p. 3). The article went on to say, “The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is looking carefully at the Fire Act Grant Program. They expect federal programs to perform well and better every year. Their evaluation of this program: it’s not performing; benefits have not been demonstrated. The OMB has concluded that no demonstrable results from the \$4 billion in Fire Act Grants have been seen. The funds have not been targeted to the risk, and data collection is inconsistent” (p. 9).

At first glance, we might suggest OMB is applying high standards to a new program, instead of providing enough guidance to walk the fire service through the initial years of grant implementation. It should be remembered that this is the first massive grant program aimed at the fire service specifically and there were bound to be questionable outcomes. There is a certain level of grant expertise that organizations need to acquire before they become savvy grant managers. With no time to waste, fire departments across the country—both large and small, are struggling to meet the criteria to be good grant managers. Clearly, not enough time has elapsed for some Fire Act Grant successes to be measured.

Take for example one of the numerous Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) “success” stories listed on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) web page regarding the Margaretta Township (OH) Fire Department and its purchases as a result of their 2003 and 2004 grants. The chief of the department is quoted as saying: “The first grant has improved the health and safety of our members by removing carbon monoxide and diesel soot from the building. The second grant for the Life-Pak 12s, Rapid Attack Monitors, and hose has already allowed us to provide better quality EMS care for our residents and save property” (DHS, 2006a, p. 1-2). Implicitly, we should understand that the value of these purchases is not in the short run, but must be measured over time. Fewer firefighters will get cancer due to the removal of soot, and many citizens will be saved over many years due to improved EMS care.

Another success story comes from the City of Los Angeles Fire Department. which, through a Fire Act Grant, received funding to allow periodic physical exam/health screenings for its members. Of the 1,965 medical examinations performed under the grant, 92 members were found to be at risk for heart disease. These members received immediate counseling on diet, exercise and significant lifestyle modifications (DHS, 2006b, p. 2). How do we measure the success of this grant? Is there really a dollar amount that can be put on the fact that there may be fewer heart attacks in the City of Los Angeles Fire Department?

Perhaps the Department of Homeland Security would be wise to change the

designation of “success story,” to “success stories in progress.” Certainly, monies from grants will be spent on immediate priorities (such as computers) whose results can be measured. But, more often than not, success stories tied to increased safety have to be monitored and measured over many years to make a judgment regarding success or lack thereof.

RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM

In the 2001, Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program Guidance documents (available on the DHS website) stated, “We also believe that funding of basic firefighting has greater cost benefit than funding of officer or safety officer training which in turn earns a higher rating than specialized training. We will also accord higher rating to applicants seeking to implement statutorily required training rather than non-mandatory or strictly voluntary training.” It’s interesting to note that initially, safety was not the highest concern for scoring points toward during the proposal review.

But, have things changed? In later years the AFG grants were split into two programs by adding a category earmarked for Fire Prevention & Safety Programs (FPS). In addition, the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants were also added, both of which deal with important aspects of firefighter safety. Still, by 2005, only 4% of the matched awards and only 4 % of the granted funds went to wellness and fitness programs (Assistance to Firefighters Grants to the Reported Needs of the U.S. Fire Service, <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/fireservice/grants/matching.shtml>).

In the 2006, AFG program guidance documents state that emergency responders are well represented in the process of developing criteria for the AFG program and this appears to be the case (DHS, 2006c, p.5). Funding areas include those areas that are important to firefighter safety, such as “training, equipment, personal protective equipment, wellness and fitness. Additionally, requests for equipment, personal protective equipment, and training to prepare for response to incidents involving chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or explosive agents (CBRNE) are eligible under the appropriate activities in this program area” (DHS, 2006c, p. 7).

Funding proposals written that are aimed at health and wellness are supported by the Fire Act Grant programs. Standards such as NFPA 1500 are indirectly supported by the following statements in the FY2006 AFG program guide:

The most effective wellness/fitness activities of fire departments must offer 1) periodic health screenings, 2) entry physical examinations, and 3) an immunization program. Applicants for grants in this activity must currently offer, or plan to use grant funds to provide, **all three benefits** to receive consideration and funding for any other initiatives under this activity. After entrylevel physicals, annual physicals, and immunizations, high priority is given to formal fitness and injury prevention projects. Lower priority is given to stress management, injury/illness rehabilitation, and employee assistance. In accordance with the recommendations of the criteria development panel, the

greatest benefit will be realized by supporting new wellness and fitness projects and higher competitive ratings will be provided to those applicants lacking wellness/fitness activities over those applicants that already employ a wellness/fitness activity. Applicants that already provide the three requisite benefits and wish to expand their wellness and fitness activity will receive a slightly lower consideration than departments that are seeking to initiate a wellness and fitness activity.

Finally, since participation is critical to achieving any benefits from a wellness or fitness activity, we will give higher competitive ratings to departments whose wellness and fitness activities mandate participation and are open to all personnel” (DHS, 2006c, p. 22).

It is important to realize though, that the existing grants are not exclusively driven by safety concerns. We know, for instance, that national preparedness and antiterrorism response are also high, perhaps, driving priorities. But, we should not use this as an excuse to denigrate the Assistance to Fire Grant Act, but realize that the program will only survive if it takes into account political realities—even though most firefighters will never directly be involved in a terrorism event.

We should not give up on federal support for firefighter safety. The 2006 Fire Prevention & Safety guidance documents listed eligible projects for the Firefighter Safety Research and Development Activities as activities to *improve firefighter health and life safety through research and development projects*. This is a positive and important caveat within the guidance document.

Clearly, the trend toward understanding firefighter LODD risk factors is upward. Proposals in 2006 included those which seek specifically to enhance firefighter safety behaviors, department or fire service organization, safety policies, and analysis aimed at the identification of contributors to high-risk behavior, cultural values for risk taking, and other circumstances that may be predictors of or associated with firefighter nearinjury, injury, and death.

Still another study sought to solidify the relationship between technology and LODD reduction by “research into the effectiveness of firefighting equipment or personal protective equipment.” Such research may examine the relationship between the equipment, the user, and the fire and environmental circumstances. Study questions may address non-use, inconsistent use, equipment barriers and limitations, and the influence of cultural or social norms for equipment use.

Outcomes may include process events such as “equipment use” but also must address near-injury, injury, and death. Training for safety improvements was also a feature of the 2006 proposals where the relationship between training and firefighter behavior regarding safety are examined. The 2006 award to the Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives program, managed by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, heralded a sea change when for the first time a program exclusively dedicated to LODD reduction was given a major award.

The Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives have a broad perspective on firefighter safety throughout them, and also illuminate many areas where grants could be focused. Problem Focused Technology Studies are also considered for funding in the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program as long as they:

- Develop new equipment or technology that can be incorporated into the Fire Service;
- Improve firefighter's safety through an enhanced understanding of hazards posed by various incidents, buildings, and environments to which firefighters respond (DHS, 2006d, p. 9 – 10).

Other Grants

Although the Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program (including the SAFER and FP&S) is the most well-known of the current grant programs available for fire service organizations, there are others. The United States Fire Administration has a USFA Grants and Funding website that should be consulted. The National Institutes of Health, OSHA (through the Susan Harwood Training Grant Program) and other federal agencies have grant programs which could be tailored to firefighter risk behavior and safety needs. Within the federal government, there are programs for rural and wildland firefighters, volunteer organizations and training agencies. There are also funding opportunities at the state levels. Make sure to include the following in your searching:

- Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance
- DHS Office of Grants and Training
- Firehouse.com
- Fire and Emergency Services Equipment
- Firefighter - EMT Next Door Home Sales Program
- Grants.gov
- GrantsNet
- GSA Surplus Federal Property
- Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness Grant Program
- Local Governments Reimbursement Program (Hazardous Substances)
- Forest Service

CONCLUSION

It is entirely appropriate to support firefighter safety through strategic grant seeking and funding. But, it will be much more difficult to get to a point where safety practices are mandated requirements in order to obtain a grant. Until that time we must each adopt a personal mandate to live the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives and challenge each firefighter we meet to do the same. We must change the mindset of every American firefighter to one of personal accountability, to where getting injured on the job is a rare event. Grants can be used to support culture change by strictly supporting initiatives which have a strong probability of supporting firefighter safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation # 1: Consider a department or organizational requirement that all grant proposals you seek will have a safety dimension as a high priority.

Recommendation # 2: Mandating of safe practices is important but it is difficult to measure the true outcome, so do not expect to have immediate measurable outcomes; continue to develop data collection systems to support grant re-funding.

Recommendation # 3: The fire service has continued to accept additional services within its mission, such as technical rescue, haz-mat and large scale incident management. Seek grants to conduct research on how these additional services will impact injuries and LODDs.

Recommendation # 4: Encourage fire service manufacturers to give grants to departments and organizations for testing their products, especially PPE along with fire apparatus and equipment.

Recommendation # 5: Make sure that at least one person in your department or organization has some training in grant-writing in order to submit highly competent and professional proposals. Also realize that there are record-keeping and data collection requirements for all grants which will require requisite training.

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WHITE PAPER SERIES ON THE 16 FIREFIGHTER LIFE SAFETY INITIATIVES

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Firefighter Close Calls - <http://www.firefighterclosecalls.com/>

Dynamic Risk Assessment -

<http://www.mike.everley.freeuk.com/manage/dra/dra1.html>

National Fire Protection Association -

<http://www.nfpa.org/index.asp?cookie%5Ftest=1>

Occupational Health & Safety - <http://www.osha.gov/>

Rules of Engagement for Structural Firefighting –

<http://www.iafc.org/associations/4685/files/rules.pdf>

The Safe Person Concept – http://www.safefromfire.org/section2_3.asp

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