

FY 2023 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Program

The Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Program will make available \$360 million to fire departments and volunteer firefighter interest organizations to assist fire departments in increasing the number of frontline firefighters.

Overview

The FY 2023 SAFER Program is one of three grant programs that constitute the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) focus on enhancing the safety of the public and firefighters with respect to fire and related hazards. Since FY 2005, the SAFER Program has awarded approximately \$5.5 billion in grant funding to provide critically needed resources to hire new, additional firefighters (or to change the status of part-time or paid-on-call firefighters to full-time firefighters), to rehire laid off firefighters or to retain firefighters facing layoff, as well as to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. The FY 2023 SAFER Program will award another \$360 million to an estimated 300 eligible fire departments and volunteer firefighter interest organizations to assist fire departments in increasing the number of firefighters to meet industry minimum standards and attain 24-hour staffing to provide adequate fire protection from fire and fire-related hazards. For more information, see page 5 of the FY 2023 SAFER Program Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

Purpose

The purpose of the SAFER Program is to award grants directly to eligible fire departments and volunteer firefighter interest organizations to assist local fire departments with staffing and deployment capabilities to respond to emergencies. Using a competitive process that is informed by fire service subject-matter experts, grants are awarded to applicants whose requests best address the priorities of the SAFER Program.

Funding

The DHS Appropriations Act, 2023 (Pub. L. No. 117-328) appropriated \$360 million to carry out the activities of the SAFER Program. The statute, 15 U.S.C. § 2229a, authorizes the SAFER Program to make competitive grants to fire departments and national, state, local, federally recognized tribal, and non-profit interest organizations representing the interests of volunteer firefighters. No less than 10% of the funding must be awarded to projects under the Recruitment and Retention (R&R) Activity, and 10% of the funding is set aside for awards to volunteer or mostly volunteer fire departments under the Hiring of Firefighters (Hiring) Activity. For more information, see page 5 of the FY 2023 SAFER Program NOFO.



FEMA

Eligibility

Eligible applicants for the FY 2023 SAFER Program include fire departments and national, state, local, federally recognized tribal, and non-profit interest organizations operating in any of the 50 states, as well as fire departments in the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico¹, or any federally recognized Indian tribe or tribal organization. For more information, see pages 7 and 8 of the FY 2023 SAFER Program NOFO.

Definitions

- A *fire department* is an agency or organization that has a formally recognized arrangement with a state, territory, local government, or tribal authority (city, county, parish, fire district, township, town, village or other governing body) to provide fire suppression on a first-due basis to a fixed geographical area.
- A *national, state, local, federally recognized tribal, and non-profit interest organization* is an organization that supports or represents the interests of firefighters in front of legislative bodies at the local, state, tribal and/or federal level. Such organizations include state or local firefighter and/or fire chiefs' associations, and volunteer firefighter relief organizations and associations.
- A *career fire department* is a fire department that has an all-paid force of firefighting personnel other than paid-on-call firefighters (fire departments that provide reimbursement on a paid-on-call basis are considered to be a “combination fire department” for the purposes of the FY 2023 SAFER Program).
- A *combination fire department* is a fire department that has paid firefighting personnel and volunteer firefighting personnel. A combination fire department must have at least one active firefighter who receives financial compensation for their services (including paid-on-call) and at least one active firefighter who does not receive financial compensation for services, other than life, health, and workers' compensation insurance.
 - FEMA considers a department to be majority volunteer if more than 50% of its membership is made up of personnel who do not receive financial compensation for their services.
 - FEMA considers a department to be majority career if more than 50% of the active firefighting membership is salaried staff.
- A *volunteer fire department* is a fire department that has an all-volunteer force of firefighting personnel. To be an all-volunteer force, no member may receive financial compensation (in the form of salary or wages) for their services other than life and health insurance, workers' compensation insurance, and/or a nominal stipend per call.

¹ The District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico are all defined as “States” in the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974.

Program Highlights

Under the FY 2023 SAFER Program, eligible organizations may apply for grants for the following activities:

R&R Activity

- Assist fire departments with the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters who are involved with or trained in the operations of firefighting and emergency response.

Hiring Activity

- Hire new, additional firefighters (or to change the status of part-time or paid-on-call firefighters to full-time firefighters);
- Rehire laid off firefighters; and
- Retain firefighters facing layoff.

The following requirements are being waived for the FY 2023 SAFER Program:

- Position Cost Limits: There are no annual salary limits under the Hiring Activity. _
- Cost-share: There is no prescribed cost-share or match under the Hiring Activity. _
- New Additional Firefighters Requirement: Grant funds can be used to rehire laid off firefighters and retain firefighters facing layoff under the Hiring Activity. _
- Period of Performance: Extensions to the period of performance under the Hiring Activity are allowable. _
- Supplanting Requirement: There is no supplanting requirement under the Hiring Activity. _
- Minimum Budget Requirement: There is no minimum budget requirement. _

For more information, see Appendix B of the FY 2023 SAFER Program NOFO.

Application Process and Evaluation Criteria

SAFER Program applications are reviewed through a multi-phase process. All complete and eligible applications are electronically pre-scored and ranked based on the substance of the application relative to the established funding priorities. Applications will then undergo further evaluation by a peer-review panel, composed of individuals from the fire service and volunteer firefighter interest organizations.

A minimum of three peer review panelists evaluate the applications using the narrative statement, answers to general questions, and answers to activity-specific questions. Each application is judged on its own merits against established criteria and is not compared to other applications.

Applications most consistent with the established SAFER Program funding priorities that score the highest and are determined to be in the “competitive range” will undergo a Technical Review by the FEMA Program Office, which will assess the request with respect to costs, quantities, feasibility, eligibility, and recipient responsibility. For more information, see pages 20 to 25 of the FY 2023 SAFER Program NOFO.

Program Coordination

The following entities were involved in developing the FY 2023 SAFER Program guidance:

DHS

- FEMA
- U.S. Fire Administration

Major Fire Service Organizations

- International Association of Fire Chiefs
- International Association of Fire Fighters
- National Volunteer Fire Council
- National Fire Protection Association
- National Association of State Fire Marshals
- International Association of Arson Investigators
- International Society of Fire Service Instructors
- North American Fire Training Directors
- Congressional Fire Services Institute

SAFER Program Resources

For additional information on the FY 2023 SAFER Program, please visit our website at:

<https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/firefighters/safer>.

You may also contact the SAFER Program Help Desk at (866) 274-0960 or firegrants@fema.dhs.gov.

The SAFER Program Help Desk is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. ET.