

grantee must agree to provide information to the system for a twelve-month period commencing as soon as they develop the capacity to report. Capacity to report to the NFIRS must be established prior to the termination of the one-year performance period. [NFIRS is under review for approval by the Office of Management and Budget under OMB control number 3067-0161.]

(c) FEMA activities:

(1) We will ensure that the funds are awarded based on the priorities and expected benefits articulated in the statute, this part, USFA's strategic plan, and the Notice of Funds Availability.

(2) We will ensure that not more than twenty-five (25) percent of the appropriated funding will be used to purchase firefighting vehicles.

(3) We will ensure that not less than five (5) percent of the funds are made available to national, State, local, or community organizations, including fire departments, for the purpose of carrying out fire prevention programs.

(4) We will ensure that fire departments with volunteer staff, or staff comprised of a combination of career fire fighters and volunteers, receive a proportion of the total grant funding that is not less than the proportion of the United States population that those firefighting departments protect.

(5) We will ensure that grants are made to fire departments located in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

(6) We will strive to ensure geographic diversity of awards as stipulated in §152.6.

(7) We will strive to ensure that activities funded under this grant program are consistent with the programs goals and intent, and generally in the government's best interest.

(8) 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; the program areas and activities supported by these grants; and other information about specific awards when generated and available.

§ 152.5 Review process and evaluation criteria.

(a) Every application will be evaluated based on the answers to the activity-specific questions during our initial screening. The applications that are determined to best address the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program's established priorities during this initial screening will be in the "competitive range" and subject to a second level of review. We will use the narratives/supplemental information provided by the applicants in their grant applications to evaluate, on a competitive basis, the merits and benefits of each request for funding. In selecting applications for award, we will evaluate each application for assistance independently based on established eligibility criteria and the program priorities. Eligible applicants that best address the priorities will advance to a second level of review. The second level of review involves an assessment of the financial needs of the applicant, and an analysis of the benefits that would result from the grant award.

(b) In order to be successful at this second level of the evaluation, an applicant must complete the narrative section of the application package. The narrative should include a detailed description of the planned program, uses for the grant funds including details of each budget line item. For example, if personnel costs are included in the budget, please provide a break down of what those costs are for. The narrative should explain why the grant funds are needed and why the department has not been able to obtain funding for the planned activities on its own. A discussion of financial need should include a discussion of any Federal funding received for similar activities. Finally, the applicant's narrative should detail the benefits the department or community will realize as a result of the grant award.

(c) This second level of review will be conducted using a panel of technical evaluation panelists. These panelists are largely made up of non-Federal experts with a fire service background. The panelists will assess the application's merits with respect to the clarity and detail provided in the narrative

about the project, the applicant's financial need, and the project's purported benefit to be derived from the cost. Technical evaluation panels will independently score each application before them and then discuss the merits/shortcomings of the application in an effort to reconcile any major discrepancies. A consensus on the score is not required. The highest scoring applications resulting from this second level of review will then be considered for award. We seek to maximize the benefits derived from the funding by crediting applicants with the greatest financial need and whose proposed activities provide the greatest benefit versus the cost.

(d) In addition to the project narrative, the applicant must provide an itemized budget detailing the use of the grant funds. If an applicant is seeking funds in more than one eligible activity within a program, separate budgets will have to be generated for each activity and then an overall or summary budget will have to be generated. For those applicants applying on line, the summary budget will be automatically generated by the e-grants system.

(e) Specific rating criteria for each of the eligible programs will be published in a Notice of Funding Availability that we will publish pursuant to the program's annual appropriation.

§ 152.6 Application review and award process.

(a) As stated in § 152.5, we will evaluate each application in the preliminary screening process to determine which applications best address the program's established priorities. The best applications as determined in this preliminary step will be deemed to be in the "competitive range." All applications in the competitive range will advance to a second level review by a technical evaluation panel. Using the evaluation criteria detailed in the Program Guidance and in the NOFA (both of which are published pursuant to this program's annual appropriation), the panelists will score each application they evaluate. The assigned score will reflect the degree to which the applicant: clearly relates their proposed project; demonstrates financial need; and, details a high benefit to cost value of the pro-

posed activities. We will provide the panelists the complete application content for their evaluation. We will also provide them with reference materials for national standards or regulations and guidelines with respect to typical costs for proposed apparatus and equipment purchases.

(b) Our award decisions will be based on the stated priorities of the grant program first, then on the demonstrated need of the applicant and the benefits to be derived from the proposed projects. We will make awards on a competitive basis, *i.e.*, we will fund the highest scored applications before considering lower scored applications.

(c) In a few cases, to fulfill our obligations under the law to make grants to a variety of departments, we may also make funding decisions using rank order as the preliminary basis, and then analyze the type of fire department (paid, volunteer, or combination fire departments), the size and character of the community it 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. We may also base our funding decisions on previous grant awards funded by this program and/or grantees' performance on previous grants and a technical evaluation of reasonable costs for labor, services, materials or equipment.

§ 152.7 Grant payment, reporting and other requirements.

(a) Grantees will have twelve months to incur obligations and complete the scope of work to fulfill their responsibilities under this grant program. The performance period of each grant will be detailed in the Articles of Agreement that we provide each grantee. Grantees may request funds from FEMA as reimbursement for expenditures made under the grant program or they may request funds for immediate cash needs under FEMA regulations (44 CFR 13.21). Advances of funds may also be approved to meet immediate cash needs.

(b) Generally, fire departments cannot use grant funds to pay for products