



A Guide to
Volunteer Fire Department
Funding Opportunities



Karl
Brabenec
New York State Assembly



Introduction

Fire departments and first responders provide necessary and vital public safety services to cities, towns, and villages throughout New York State. Although all the State's city fire departments are staffed by paid professionals, most towns and villages are protected by volunteer firefighters. Due to the structure of fire protection throughout the State, the sources of funding for different entities vary and pose unique challenges to localities. In major cities throughout New York, municipal fire departments are funded entirely through the city's operating budget, which is often hundreds of millions of dollars and can provide a department with an extraordinary amount of funds and resources that can be solely dedicated to fire protection services. Towns, which are grouped together to form fire districts, provide funding to departments through their respective local budget process, almost all of which is levied on properties within the district. Funding issues are prevalent in villages and fire districts that are relatively small and cannot pass budgets with significant increases in order to subsidize the necessary firefighting apparatus.

Frequently, volunteer fire departments and fire districts do not have access to adequate funding in order to purchase critical firefighting equipment. Often, fire departments are using outdated equipment or equipment that does not meet current safety protocols. Depending on what equipment is needed and the size of the department, costs associated with replacing equipment and infrastructure can reach hundreds of thousands of dollars. Many towns and villages cannot approve budgets that account for these increases leaving smaller departments to rely on grants or loans.

Applying for and obtaining grants and loans is a complex process and can be overwhelming for small departments with little experience in State and federal government affairs. To ensure fire districts and departments throughout the State are aware of funding offered at the State and federal levels, the Assembly Minority Conference has created this guide by laying out the process that they can use to obtain funding for critical equipment necessary for fire protection services.

This guide contains various grant and loan programs, along with their eligibility requirements, funding limitations, and application deadlines for local fire departments seeking to utilize financial assistance.



Table of Contents

New York State Emergency Services Revolving Loan Fund.....	Page 3
Training Stipends for Volunteer Firefighters.....	Page 4
Volunteer Fire Infrastructure & Response Equipment Grant Program.....	Page 5
Higher Education Learning Plan (HELP).....	Page 6
Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG).....	Page 7
Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grant (SAFER).....	Page 8
Fire Prevention and Safety Grant.....	Page 9
Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant.....	Page 10
Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant.....	Page 11
Rural Emergency Medical Services Training Grant.....	Page 12
References.....	Page 13



1

New York State Emergency Services Revolving Loan Fund

Overview:

The **Emergency Services Revolving Loan Program** makes loans to cities, villages, towns, fire districts, counties, and not-for-profit fire/ambulance companies at an annual fixed interest rate of 2.5%.

Loan amounts vary by type of equipment or purpose, and some require a local match either in a fixed amount or percentage of total costs. In certain cases, the program allows for loan amounts of up to \$500,000, dependent upon the loan purpose. Principal and interest payments made by recipients are deposited in the Revolving Loan Account and loaned once again to new applicants. Therefore, funding levels in the account will vary throughout the year depending upon the amount of repayment money, interest accrued, and number of new loans made.

Expenses:

Permissible purchases include firefighting apparatus; ambulances or rescue vehicles; personal protective equipment (PPE) and/or communications equipment; repair of firefighting apparatus, ambulances, or rescue vehicles; accessory equipment; renovation, rehabilitation, or repair of facilities that house fire-fighting equipment, ambulances, rescue vehicles, and related equipment; construction costs of facilities that house firefighting equipment, ambulances, rescue vehicles, and related equipment; and construction costs associated with the establishment of facilities for the purpose of live fire training.

Eligibility:

Any city, village, fire district, or incorporated not-for-profit ambulance fire/service company is eligible to apply for a loan. Where a fire protection district exists, a town or a county may apply subject to the limitations in Town Law section 184 and County Law section 225-a. Applicants may only apply in one category, and no applicant shall receive a loan more than once in any five-year period.

Deadline:

Since the program is a revolving loan fund, applications are accepted and reviewed throughout the fiscal year.



2

Training Stipends for Volunteer Firefighters

Overview:

Training Stipends for Volunteer Firefighters totaling \$10 million will be provided by the Office of Fire Prevention and Control (OFPC) for volunteer firefighters that complete certain firefighter training courses for the first-time. Stipends will be awarded for any class completed on or after August 31, 2023. Under this program, local fire companies are also authorized to administer their own fire training stipend program.

Expenses:

The following courses and the amount rewarded for their successful completion are listed below:

\$750.00 –

- ◆ 2021 BASIC EXTERIOR FIREFIGHTING OPERATIONS W/HMFRO (01-05-0101) or
- ◆ 2021 BEFO W/HMFRO (BLENDED LEARNING) (01-05-0103)

\$1250.00 –

- ◆ 2021 SCBA/INTERIOR FIREFIGHTING OPERATIONS-FF1 (01-05-0102)

\$1000.00 –

- ◆ FIRE OFFICER I (NFPA 1021-2020 ED.) w/ FSTFAC (01-11-0176) or
- ◆ FIRE OFFICER I – SUPERVISING FIRE OFFICER MODULE SERIES (01-11-0154)

\$2000.00 –

- ◆ 2021 BEFO-SCBA/IFO-FF1 (BLENDED LEARNING) (01-05-0104)

Additionally, a local fire training stipend may be authorized for the completion of any OFPC training course or equivalents, as determined by OFPC, up to \$500

Eligibility:

The State Fire Training Stipends are available only for individuals completing a qualifying course for the first time. The qualifying course must have been completed after August 31, 2023. Volunteer Firefighters who have already received a Local Fire Training Stipend for a particular course or its equivalent are not eligible for a State Fire Training Stipend for the same course. Stipends will be given out on a first come, first-served basis, as determined by the Office of Fire Prevention and Control (OFPC). Prior to applying, all course equivalents must be reviewed and approved by OFPC, with completion of the equivalent course recorded on the student's training record.

If a Fire Department would like to be eligible for the NYS Fire Stipend Program they must have submitted their annual fire reports to OFPC in the previous calendar year.

Fire Chiefs/Chief Officer must additionally submit an annual FD demographics form including Fire Chief or Chief Officer contact information and number of active firefighters. Upon completion of this regulation, the fire department will be required to provide OFPC with an annual reporting of their internal stipend program to include name of student, course name, completion date and amount of stipend dispensed to the member

Deadline:

Funds are available for this program until allocated funds are depleted. Application forms can be found on the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services website along with additional information relating to the program and tax forms.



3

Volunteer Fire Infrastructure & Response Equipment (V-FIRE) Grant Program

Overview:

The **SFY2023-2024 Volunteer Fire Infrastructure & Response Equipment (V-FIRE) Grant Program** is a state-funded \$25,000,000 competitive grant program that supports the enhancement of the security and safety of the citizens of New York State by providing critical funding to strengthen volunteer fire departments and districts statewide. Eligible applicants can apply for up to \$1,000,000 if proposing projects for construction, renovation, or purchase costs for critical facilities (buildings, training facilities, etc.) that support fire operations, or up to \$500,000 if proposing projects for allowable fire service equipment to upgrade and improve their response capabilities.

Expenses:

Permissible expenses include both the construction/renovation of facilities and the purchase of equipment.

- ◆ Construction and Renovation of Facilities:
 - New construction allowances include fire stations, additions to existing structures, fire training facilities such as training towers and buildings, instructional classrooms, meeting spaces, exhaust systems, shower facilities for decontamination, and the construction of substations and joint/shared stations.
 - Projects available for renovation include updating, improving, or altering the interior and exterior of facilities. Creating dedicated spaces for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to minimize the transfer of carcinogens

- ◆ Purchase of Equipment:

- Permissible items include, but are not limited to, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as SCBA, PPE washer/extractor, PPE dryers, radios and communications equipment, firefighter rehabilitation equipment, and SCBA fill station and testing equipment.

Eligibility:

Any fire companies, nonprofit fire companies, municipalities including villages, towns, cities, and fire districts comprised of 100 percent volunteer firefighters that are located within the State of New York and serve one or more local governments are eligible to apply. Funds will be awarded competitively based on how the applicants articulate how they meet the eligibility requirements.

Deadline:

Applications will be available until April 30, 2024, at 5:00p



4

Higher Education Learning Plan (HELP)

Overview:

As an incentive for individuals to serve in New York's volunteer fire service, FASNY has developed the Higher Education Learning Plan (FASNY HELP). This program provides tuition reimbursement to student-volunteers attending a New York State chartered college or taking online courses through Empire State College, if they are providing active service to a New York State volunteer department.

FASNY HELP "Student-Volunteers" are eligible to have up to 100% of their tuition reimbursed (with any single semester award not to exceed \$1,500) in exchange for maintaining defined grades and fulfilling established service requirements in one of New York's volunteer fire companies.

Eligibility:

To participate in FASNY HELP, you must be an active volunteer firefighter in good standing. Student-volunteers must re-apply each semester they wish to participate in FASNY HELP. There is no restriction on the type of academic course(s) the FASNY HELP student-volunteer can pursue.

The program now covers two- and four-year schools within New York State as well as advanced degrees. HELP can also be applied to online classes taken through Empire State College and recipients can reapply each semester.

Application:

Applications are accepted year-round. Eligible applicants must complete the **online form on FASNY's website** which will require a signature of both the applicant and their respective Fire Chief along with a copy of your Official College Bill indicating your tuition charge



5

Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG)

Overview:

The **Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG)** is a federal program designed to enhance the core capabilities of fire departments in relation to responding to fires and related hazards. The program provides direct financial assistance to fire departments, nonaffiliated emergency medical service (EMS), and state fire training academies for training, equipment, and other critical resources that enhance operational efficiency.

As of July 7, 2023, FEMA has made 448 awards totaling \$74 million. Award amounts depend upon the population of the jurisdiction that the applicant serves. Funding is not to exceed \$1 million for jurisdictions of 100,000 people or less and possible awards are capped at \$3.5 million for applicants serving a jurisdiction of 2.5 million people or more. According to U.S. statute, the grant program requires a local cost share of “an amount equal to not less than 5%, 10%, or 15% depending on the population being served.”

Expenses:

Permissible costs associated with funding are divided into three categories: Operations and Safety; Vehicle Acquisition; and Regional Projects. Within each category are specific criteria that must be met for a given project as well as a classification of funding priorities that are considered when scoring applications. Funding may be used to support training and advanced certifications as well as the purchase of basic equipment, communications, EMS equipment, and Haz-Mat or specialized gear.

Eligibility:

All fire departments or nonaffiliated EMS organizations operating within the 50 states are eligible to apply. Fire departments that receive funding under this program must agree to provide information through the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS).

Deadline:

Applications for the last round of funding opened January 29, 2024 and closed on March 8, 2024. For the most up-to-date timeline information for the upcoming Fiscal Year, applicants should contact FEMA at 866-274-0960, or sign up for the **FEMA email updates**. Applications must be submitted through the **FEMA Grant Outcomes (GO) system**.



6

Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant

Overview:

The objective of the **Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER)** grant program is to provide departments with funding to increase the number of firefighters to meet industry minimum standards and give communities 24-hour staffing for protection and response to fire-related hazards. The program is designed to assist local fire departments with funding to meet minimum staffing requirements by hiring new firefighters and aiding in the recruitment and retention of current volunteers.

Eligible departments can apply for funding to support hiring or recruitment and retention. Departments can submit separate applications for both categories.

Applicants must prove that the costs related to their funding request will be addressed through the grant program and must provide sufficient details on how it will enhance recruitment and retention.

Expenses:

Funding must be used to support the hiring or recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Requests will be reviewed objectively, and scorers will determine whether the activities outlined in the application will support staffing. This program cannot be used for construction, remodeling, or renovation costs.

Eligibility:

For the Hiring of Firefighter Activity portion of the grant, a combination of volunteer and career fire departments are eligible to apply. The Recruitment and Retention portion of the program is limited to only volunteer fire departments.

Deadline:

Applications for the last round of funding opened on March 11, 2024 and closed on April 12, 2024. For the most up-to-date timeline information for the upcoming Fiscal Year, applicants should contact FEMA at 866-274- 0960, or sign up for the **FEMA email updates**. Applications must be submitted through the **FEMA Grant Outcomes (GO) system**.



7

Fire Prevention and Safety Grants

Overview:

The **Fire Prevention and Safety Grants** are part of the Assistance to Firefighters Grants and support projects that enhance the safety of firefighters from fire and related hazards. Awards received from this program will directly fund fire prevention education and training as well as research and development.

Expenses:

Funding opportunities are separated into two categories. Under Fire Prevention and Safety, awards may be used for projects that mitigate community risk, code enforcement, fire and arson investigations, and national/state/regional programs. For Firefighter Safety Research and Development (R&D) permissible costs include clinical studies, technology and product development, database systems development, and research related to reducing firefighter fatalities.

Eligibility:

Fire departments, national, state, local, federally recognized tribal and non-profit organizations, such as academic (e.g., universities), public health, occupational health, and injury prevention institutions as well as both private and public non-profit organizations are eligible to apply for funding under this program.

Deadline:

Applications for the last round of funding opened on March 11, 2024 and closed on April 12, 2024. For the most up-to-date timeline information for the upcoming Fiscal Year, applicants should contact FEMA at 866-274- 0960, or sign up for the **FEMA email updates**. Applications must be submitted through the **FEMA Grant Outcomes (GO) system**.



8

Volunteer Fire Assistance Grants (VFA) Program

Overview:

The **Volunteer Fire Assistance Grants (VFA) Program** is a 50/50 matching grant program that assists rural fire companies in purchasing wildland fire equipment such as portable back pumps, protective clothing, hand tools, hard hats, hoses, portable radios, and dry hydrants. Departments can receive award funding up to \$1,500 to purchase firefighting equipment.

Eligibility:

Single fire departments serving rural communities with a population of 10,000 or less are eligible. Communities serving a population of 10,000 or greater having only a single fire department may qualify if VFA funding is used to support rural areas.

Fire departments eligible to apply may receive grant funding up to \$1,500 for the purchase of firefighting equipment. Fire departments are required to equally match (50/50) the amount of the grant award. As an example, a fire department is required to spend up to \$3,000 on the purchase of approved firefighting equipment in order to be reimbursed an equal grant amount up to \$1,500.

Deadline:

Applications for the last round of funding opened August 31, 2023 and closed on November 15, 2023. For the most up-to-date timeline information for the upcoming Fiscal Year, applicants should visit **Volunteer Fire Assistance Grants** with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.



9

Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant

Overview:

The **Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant** program provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas. An essential community facility is defined as a facility that provides an essential service to the local community for the orderly development of the community in a primarily rural area and does not include private, commercial, or business undertakings.

Expenses:

Funds can be used to purchase, construct, and/or improve essential community facilities, to purchase equipment, and to pay related project expenses. Community facilities include public safety services such as fire departments, police stations, prisons, police vehicles, fire trucks, public works vehicles, or equipment.

Funding is provided through direct loans or approved grants. Loan repayment terms may not be longer than the useful life of the facility, state statutes, the applicant's authority, or a maximum of 40 years, whichever is less. The interest rate is fixed for the entire term of the loan and is determined by the median household income of the service area.

Grants are provided when funds are available at the federal level. Grants are provided on a graduated scale based upon the population of the service area and the median household income.

Eligibility:

Eligible borrowers include public bodies, community-based nonprofit corporations, and federally recognized Tribes.

Rural areas including cities, villages, townships, and towns including federally recognized Tribal lands with no more than 20,000 residents according to the latest U.S. Census Data are eligible for this program.

Deadline:

Applications for this program are accepted year-round through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.



10

Rural Emergency Medical Services Training Grant

Overview:

The **Rural Emergency Medical Services Training Grant** provides support to rural communities to recruit and train EMS personnel in rural areas with a particular focus on addressing substance use disorders (SUD) and co-occurring disorders (COD) and mental health conditions. Recipients will be expected to train EMS personnel on SUD and COD, trauma-informed, recovery-based care for people with such disorders in emergency situations and, as appropriate, to maintain licenses and certifications relevant to serve in an EMS agency.

Expenses:

Funds can be used to ensure EMS personnel are trained on mental and substance use disorders and trauma-informed, recovery-based care for people with such disorders in emergency situations as well as acquire emergency medical services equipment (medical equipment purchased requires approval by SAMHSA).

Funding is provided through approved grants. Grants are provided when funds are available at the Federal level. No more than 20 percent of the award for the budget period may be used for data collection, performance measurement, and performance assessment expenses. No more than 50 percent of funds in the budget can be allocated for the purchase of equipment.

Eligibility:

Eligible applicants are rural emergency medical service agencies operated by a local or tribal government (fire-based and non-fire based) and non-profit emergency medical service agencies.

Deadline:

Applications for the last round of funding opened December 7, 2023 and closed on March 20, 2024. For the most up-to-date timeline information for the upcoming Fiscal Year, applicants should visit **Samasha.gov** with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



References

Below are links to previous Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFO) and FAQ pages distributed by the respective agencies offering grant programs related to fire protection services. These resources provide additional information about the programs such as specific eligibility requirements, cost share matches, and other important details that will further assist local fire departments in understanding the grant process. Information from this guide was taken from the following documents:

New York State Emergency Services Revolving Loan Fund

<https://www.dhSES.ny.gov/nys-emergency-services-revolving-loan-program>

Training Stipends for Volunteer Firefighters

<https://www.dhSES.ny.gov/new-york-state-volunteer-firefighter-stipend-program>

Volunteer Fire Infrastructure & Response Equipment (V-FIRE) Grant Program

<https://www.dhSES.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2023/12/sfy2023-24-volunteer-fire-infrastructure-response-equipment-v-fire-rfa-final.pdf>

Higher Education Learning Plan (HELP)

<https://fasny.com/resources/fasny-help-tuition-reimbursement-program/>

Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG)

<https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/firefighters/assistance-grants/documents>

Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response Grant (SAFER)

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

Fire Prevention and Safety Grant

<https://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/firefighters/safety-awards/documents>

Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant

https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/508_RD_RHS_CF_DirectLoanGuidanceBook_090919.pdf

Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant

https://dec.ny.gov/docs/legal_protection_pdf/vfagrantapp.pdf

Rural Emergency Medical Services Training Grant

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/grants/pdf/fy-2024-ems-training-nofo.pdf>



References

In addition to the grants listed throughout this guide, new grant opportunities may become available in the future. We suggest periodically checking the following links to monitor for new opportunities:

New York State Grants Gateway

The Grant Opportunity Portal provides a one-stop-shop for anyone interested in identifying New York State grant funding opportunities. Anyone can access the Grant Opportunity Portal.

FEMA Grants Outcomes (GO) Portal

FEMA's new platform for submitting, approving, and managing FEMA grants. Note an account must be made to access the portal.

FEMA Grants Resources

Offered by FEMA and other government agencies, this Grants Resources page lists resources where First Responders can obtain grants for a range of needs, including firefighter grants, emergency medical service grants, and pre-disaster mitigation grants.



**If you have any questions on this or any other legislative matter, please contact
Assemblyman Karl Brabenec's office:**

28 North Main Street, Suite 2
Florida, NY 10921
845-544-7551
brabeneck@nyassembly.gov



Karl
Brabenec
New York State Assembly