

Chapter – 15

Rural Fire Assistance/Ready Reserve Programs

Rural Fire Assistance (RFA) and Ready Reserve have not received any funding for the last two fiscal years. The direction in this chapter has not changed but funding is not expected in FY14 or in the near future due to reduced budgets.

Policy

The DOI and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, Fiscal Year 2001 (PL 106-291) provided legislative authority to implement the RFA program in Fiscal year 2001. The authority to fund and implement this program is established by Congress on a year-to-year basis. This funding is not guaranteed for subsequent fiscal years.

Supporting Documentation

- Draft *DOI Interagency Rural Fire Assistance Handbook*;
- *Department of Agriculture Volunteer Fire Assistance Handbook*;
- Public Law 106-291;
- 41 CFR Public Contracts and Property Management;
- 48 CFR Federal Acquisition Regulations System;
- OMB Circular A-110 Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-Profit Organizations;
- FEMA web site (<http://www.fema.gov>); and
- National Fire Plan web site (<http://www.fireplan.gov>).

Program Purpose

The RFA program provides funding to improve the capacity and capabilities of rural and volunteer fire departments that protect rural communities and play a substantial cooperative role in the suppression of wildland fires within, or in the vicinity of lands managed by the DOI.

RFA is intended to increase local firefighter safety and enhance the fire protection capabilities of RFD's by providing basic wildland firefighting supplies and equipment to qualifying RFD's for initial and extended attack at the local level. The RFA program also seeks to decrease wildland fire-related losses to rural economies through enhanced local fire protection; and to help reduce Federal, State, Tribal and local expenditures on wildland fire suppression, particularly in the wildland-urban interface.

National Rural Fire Assistance Leads

Each DOI wildland fire agency established National RFA leads for the RFA program. They function under the direction of the DOI, OWFC.

The DOI bureaus, in coordination with the OWFC, will periodically review the RFA program. These periodic assessments will gauge the overall success of the program, strengthen the program administration, provide insights as to whether administrative or procedural changes are indicated, and improve coordination and management. The National leads, in consultation with the OWFC, will then be responsible for implementing any recommended changes in the RFA program.

Program Administration

- Program priorities and criteria may change with each fiscal year at the discretion of the Secretary;
- The maximum allowable award to each rural fire department (RFD) is \$20,000 annually;
- The RFA grant administrative timeline will be determined by the DOI bureaus in coordination with the OWFC and to the greatest extent possible, coordinated with the application and review periods established for other federal service grant programs;
- Grant announcements will be consistent with applicable sections of P.L. 106-107 (Federal Financial Assistance Management Act of 1999) and the Office of Management Budget Policy and Guidance;
- Within each State, State compact, region, zone or equivalent, DOI RFA representatives, State foresters or equivalent and appropriate partners will review applications, and submit a single prioritized list of RFA grant applicant; and

- National DOI RFA leads, in collaboration with partners, will review submissions, and allocate funds to bureaus based on priorities determined by the DOI Secretary and in coordination with partners, cooperation organizations and appropriate stakeholders.

Eligibility Criteria

All rural/volunteer fire departments must meet the following minimum eligibility criteria for assistance through the RFA program:

- The department must be party to a Cooperative Agreement with an Interior Agency or Bureau, or their respective State Forester, or Tribe, or an equivalent entity;
- The RFD must have a DUNS number required for all grant applicants. The DUNS number is a required nine character identification number available free of charge from Dun & Bradstreet, Inc;
- Local DOI bureau must be dependent on RFD for response to wildfire incidents; and
- Must share a minimum of 10% of the total proposed project costs. The 10% share may be direct funding of this portion of the total (cash) or may be covered by the allocation of in-kind goods or services.

Examples of in-kind goods or services may include, but are not limited to:

- Facility use costs incurred by a RFD for hosting training courses, travel and per diem costs incurred by a RFD when personnel attend training courses; and
- Administration costs related to purchasing RFA equipment and supplies.

Examples of in-kind goods or services that may not be claimed:

- Funding or in-kind resources derived from other federal funding programs and they may not be in-kind contributions that are counted towards any other federal grant contribution requirement; and
- Administrations cost or grant preparation fees incurred by Fire Departments for an RFA grant.

- The department serves a community with a population of 10,000 or less; and
- A department serving communities with populations over 10,000 may qualify for RFA funding under the following circumstances:
 - The service area of the department includes a rural area or community with a population of 10,000 or less. RFA funding must be used to benefit the rural service area;
 - Departments operate entirely within the boundaries of the county or town of more than 10,000 that is serviced by two or more fire districts. The service area of a given district includes a rural area or community, or the population of the district's jurisdiction is less than 10,000. The RFA funding is used exclusively for the rural portion of the district;
 - A fire department with at least one station that serves a community of more than 10,000 that also encompasses a rural zone or community with a population not exceeding 10,000. RFA funding must be used to benefit the rural service area; and
 - A fire department that serves a community of 10,000 or more that also provides fire protection services through contract or agreement to an adjoining rural community. RFA funding must be used to benefit the rural area services through the contract or agreement.

Evaluation Criteria

Evaluator(s) must utilize general criteria to rank eligible RFD's for funding.

- To ensure consistency and compatibility with existing fire service assistance programs, the DOI bureaus, Tribes, and State foresters (or equivalent) will coordinate to cooperatively establish priority ranking of RFA applicants.
- The workgroup must verify each RFD's level of significance. Factors to be considered in this assessment include:
 - The RFD's proximity to DOI managed lands and protection role for the wildland urban interface;

- DOI reliance of the RFD for expedient initial attack in remote DOI areas of responsibility. RFD's in close vicinity to DOI lands may play a major role in initial attack due to their close vicinity and have a moderate or high level of significance to DOI; and
- Other local or regional criteria, disclosed in advance to grant applicants.
- State foresters (or equivalent) must concur with prioritization of funding requests;
- Favorable consideration should be directed to those RFD's that are in compliance with DOI and state regulations, have promptly expended previous funds awarded, comply with monitoring and reporting requirements in a timely fashion, and have been consistent with honoring cost-share commitments;
- The workgroup should evaluate the RFD's relationship in supporting initiatives such as the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy and its Implementation Plan, State fire plans, community wildfire protection plans or equivalent(s) and fire management plans; and
- Local and regional workgroups must use available systems and networks to ensure funding requests are not duplicated by another Federal bureau, agency or Tribe.

Property Acquisition and Management

Property Acquisition

- The RFA program typically funds the following basic wildland firefighting equipment and supplies:
 - PPE and Basic Gear;
 - New Generation Fire Shelters and Case (Training shelters also allowable);
 - Communications equipment (P-25 compliant hand-held radios, mobile units for ground vehicles, pagers);
 - Basic Tools/Equipment;

- Basic Wildland Fire Training;
 - Apparatus purchased from local DOI units through “negotiated fixed price sale” authority; and
 - Other equipment.
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- Equipment purchases such as new fire engines or other such apparatus are usually not feasible. The dollar amount of individual RFA grants is not sufficient to fully fund large purchases of this type. However, the funding can be utilized to assist with the conversion, improvement or modification for fire suppression use of other purchased, contributed or FEPP vehicles. RFA grants can be applied with other funds towards equipment purchases.
 - RFA funds may not be used to purchase or construct “capital assets”. “Capital assets” are defined as property or improvements which increase the value of real property. Examples of capital assets include utility, hydrant systems or sprinkler systems, building construction or improvement, etc. Alternate sources of funding and grants are available for these types of projects, such as FEMA grants.

Property Management

The Departmental standards governing management and disposition of property furnished by the federal government whose cost is charged to a project supported by a Federal award are in 43 CFR, Part 12. Recipients shall be required to observe these standards and shall not impose additional requirements. The recipient may use its own property management standards and procedures provided it observes the provisions of Sections 12.931 through 12.937.

Equipment – Title (ownership) to equipment obtained under a RFA grant vest with the recipient or sub-recipient. For this reason, DOI bureaus will not maintain inventory records of equipment. Equipment procured by local governments and non-profit fire departments shall be used, managed and disposed of according to local requirements.

At a minimum, property records should include the following:

- Description of the property;

- A serial number or other identification number;
 - The source of property;
 - Who holds title;
 - Acquisition date;
 - The cost of the property;
 - Percentage of federal participation in the cost of the property;
 - The location of property;
 - Use and condition of the property; and
 - Any ultimate disposition data including the date of disposal and sale property must be maintained.
- The recipient should take a physical inventory of the property and the results reconciled with the property records at least once every two years. A control system must be developed to ensure adequate safeguards to prevent loss, damage, or theft of property. Any loss, damage, or theft shall be investigated;
 - Adequate maintenance procedures must be developed to keep the property in good condition. Disposition procedures must be established; and
 - Supplies – Title (ownership) to supplies acquired under a grant or sub-grant will vest, upon acquisition, to the recipient or sub-recipient, respectively.

Program Funding

Procedures for Requesting Funds

Each DOI bureau has designated regional or state contacts for the RFA program. These contacts may be the first point of contact for an RFD in obtaining information pertaining to the RFA program. Bureaus may further designate local contacts at the appropriate level to work with their respective cooperating RFD's.

To be considered for funding, eligible RFD's must complete the SF-424 "Application for Federal Assistance" and SF-424A "Budget Information Non-Construction Programs". The entire package must be submitted to the appropriate agency or designated cooperating partner.

This date varies, as dictated by Congressional approval of budget appropriations.

Assistance agreements may be authorized from a period of one to five years. An RFD may apply for federal assistance annually even if they received awards the previous years.

Program Account Structure

The funding program code for the RFA program is 92620 with an allocation code of 92R00. The national office will establish one PCAS number for each Region. Regions and Agencies will use their organizational code when obligating funds. The national BIA-NIFC Budget Officer will prepare the funding distribution document to be signed by the Deputy Director, Trust Services.

Reporting of Annual Program Accomplishments

The DOI bureaus will utilize the NFPORS to enter and store RFA program data.

All program requests and awards will be consolidated only from NFPORS data. Each bureau is responsible for entering data into the NFPORS database. OWFC will establish timeframes for fiscal year and quarterly accomplishments.

RFA Program Monitoring and Accountability

Grants and agreements will be administered in accordance with applicable sections of CFR 43.12

FBMS or equivalent FBMS may be used for further program obligation review and verification.

Ready Reserve (RR)

Policy

The RR program was a pilot program in FY-2006.

The emphasis of the RR program is to provide funding to support wildland firefighter training for non-federal cooperators to improve the capacity and capabilities of RFD's that protect rural communities and play a substantial cooperative role in the suppression of wildland fires within, or in the vicinity of lands managed by the DOI.

The purpose of the RR program is to increase wildland fire operational safety, effectiveness, and the capacity of rural fire departments serving as cooperators with the DOI. RFD's can provide needed local initial and extended attack, protection of wildland-urban interface communities, and multi-agency wildfire attack and coordination activities.

The RR program is not a grant program.

Criteria For Rural Fire Departments To Participate

For RFD's to participate in the RR program, they must meet the minimum eligibility criteria:

- The department must be party to a Cooperative Agreement with an Interior Agency or Bureau, or their respective State Forester, or Tribe, or an equivalent entity, with wildland fire responsibilities;
- The RFD must have a DUNS number required for all grant applicants. The DUNS number is a required nine character identification number available free of charge from Dun & Bradstreet, Inc;
- The fire department plays a consistent role as cooperator with DOI bureaus in initial /extended attack on or adjacent to DOI – managed lands; and
- The department protects a community of 10,000 persons or less that is located in the vicinity of DOI lands.

Implementation

The program will be administered by DOI bureaus with each bureau responsible for implementation of the program within geographic areas.

Eligible Applicants are:

- Chief's associations, local fire districts;
- County and state fire management and forestry agencies, State Forester or equivalent; and
- Publicly funded, not-for-profit fire academies, universities, and community colleges.

Eligible proposal categories include:

- National Wildfire Coordinating Group courses, with emphasis on FFT1, ENGB, and STEN positions;
- Field Day Sessions for students completing online Firefighter Training (S-130) and Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior (S-190);
- Instruction for United States Fire Administration Crosswalk Gap Courses ;
- Wildland fire courses meeting USFA, NFPA, or other standards that address core wildland firefighting and leadership competencies;
- Non-NWCG courses such as local engine academies, multi-agency preparedness drills, simulation exercises, wildland urban interface operations etc., particularly those providing opportunities for completion of non-incident position task book elements;
- Activities enhancing the ability of local departments to safely and effectively conduct wildland urban interface protection operations;
- National Wildfire Coordinating Group instructor training courses or other development sessions to increase availability of locally-based wildland fire instructors;
- Courses, exercises or other developmental sessions to facilitate training of local Type 3 incident management organizations; and

- Firewise Home Ignition Zone Assessment training for local fire departments.

Allowable Expenses will be used only for expenses directly associated with wildland fire training for firefighters affiliated with cooperating fire departments (current paid or active volunteer staff):

- Instruction Facility Use Costs (i.e. meeting room rental);
- Instructional materials (books, DVDs, handouts, etc.);
- Training Fire Shelters; and
- Instructor Salary and travel costs, if applicable (not to exceed government per diem/lodging allowances).

Not Allowable Expenses

- Cameras, televisions, DVD players, computers other durable equipment;
- Trailers or training equipment storage facilities;
- Tools (basic tools may be allowable under specific circumstances);
- PPE will no longer be funded; and
- County, State or Federal firefighters are not eligible for ready reserve funded training.

Administration Procedures

Regional and State DOI bureau contacts will:

- Coordinate internally, and with the State Forester and other federal and local partners, as applicable, to jointly assess specific training needs within States and regions;
- Solicit and collect applications;
- Coordinate with partners to ensure:
 - Applicants, and intended recipients, are eligible to receive program benefits;

- Proposed training addresses needs consistent with local priorities;
- Information on application is complete, and in the specified format; and
- Redundant or duplicated requests are eliminated.
- Indicate collaboratively determined preference for funding priority, if more than one project is submitted per state;
- Ensure electronically submitted files are clearly named with the corresponding two-letter state identifier first. Example: CA California FY 10 RR Narrative;
- Verify the State Forester (or State official with wildland fire responsibility) or their designee (i.e. State Training Officer) reviewed and approved the RR submission package. An e-mail notification is sufficient; and
- Ensure U.S. Regions each have a National Bureau Lead assigned to the coordination of RR activities, as listed at the end of this memorandum. They are available to answer questions and provide assistance.

DOI National Office Program Leads:

- In coordination with the NIFC Fire Directors, will apportion funds to states and regions;
- Provide a secondary quality control review of proposals. Leads may contact State or regional leads if further information is needed;
- Will not adjust project priorities determined at State/region level except in unusual circumstances, and only after consultation with state leads and cooperators; and
- Ensure funds are apportioned to states using criteria to include:
 - Level of dependence on rural or volunteer fire departments for initial attack and extended operations support;
 - Documented safety issues indicating training needs;
 - Past funding levels, relative to other states;

- Fire occurrence and severity: past and present trends, predictive services forecasts;
- Past performance in the use of funds; and
- Demonstrated regional need for specific skills sets.

Leads prepare apportionment spreadsheet among States, and between DOI bureaus in coordination with NIFC budget staff.

- Award documents are submitted to Bureau and National Association of State Forester Fire Directors for approval;
- Package is forwarded to the DOI OWFC for administrative processing; and
- Bureaus advise state/regional leads of selections.

Reporting Requirements

State fire academies will be responsible to submit a report of the firefighters trained and PPE distributed at the completion of the training, number of courses offered, name of individual and their fire department, and an inventory of equipment purchased. Included will be a detailed report of expenditures and copies of all receipts should be made available.

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