



Homeland
Security

Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program

Writing a Good Narrative

Narrative Development

In order to apply for a grant under the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG) and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) you must complete an electronic application, which can be found on their website (www.firegrantsupport.com).

Your application is scored electronically matching the items you have requested and the current risk you have identified with published funding priorities (these are listed in the transient ischemic attack applicable version of “program guidance”). The highest electronically scored applications are sent to the peer review panels. (**Note:** for the Fire Prevention and Firefighters Safety grant opportunity, all applications are sent to peer review panel.)

At peer review panel at least three independent reviews and scores are applied to your application. These three scores are added up and divided by three to create your final score. The highest scoring applications from this second round of review will be sent to the Grant Program Office for final award consideration and processing.

All three grant opportunities (fire grants; SAFER and FP&S) require that you answer specific questions about your department, your community, the nature of your problem/risk and your solution. The application for all three grants also requires that you further explain your grant request in narrative form. Many applicants find the narrative portion of the application to be the most challenging aspect of the grant application process.

When drafting a narrative request many find that the most difficult aspect of writing an essay or proposal is the development of an outline. In this case the grant program has already done that for you. They lay out specifically what you are to discuss in your narrative, and they tell you in what order these items should appear! So essentially, you are asked to fill in the blank. The AFG for example requires you to discuss four items. The first item you discuss is project description and budget. This item has four parts. They follow:

1. Who are you?
2. What is your identified risk/problem?
3. What is your solution/remedy?
4. How much will it cost?

Narrative Apprehension

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In the AFG (“fire grants”) they go on to ask you to describe cost/benefit, your financial need and what effect receiving the grant will have on daily operations. Remember that panelists are assigned to a classroom type atmosphere for five days and have to read for eight hours a day. It is important to be direct, organized, concise, and convincing in your request.

Do not use the maximum narrative size unless it is absolutely necessary. Know and use the format parameters. In each case the objective is to be direct, concise, and persuasive.

Brief Definitions

Cost/Benefit What are you receiving in return for the investment of funds, or how will you make sure the money was spent wisely?

Financial Need Why do you need money from the Federal government? You may want to enter a very brief description of your expenses in recent years and your income, to illustrate your current economic situation. Also, a description of attempts at funding your needs previously will demonstrate a continuing need and financial shortfall.

Effect on Daily Operations: How will the funds from this grant improve your ability to perform tactical operations, improve firefighter safety, or mitigate civilian casualties? Quantifying the effect on daily operations will further your case for funding the application. For example, “Funding this training program will facilitate our ability to begin providing basic EMS care to the thirteen thousand citizens of our community by December 31, 2007.”

In most cases the specific requested information can be presented in one to three paragraphs. Remember it is your peers reviewing your narrative; so write narrative as you would like to read it. You are attempting to persuade someone to allot a significant amount of money to you organization.

Picture yourself sitting at your desk and a person walks into your office and requests \$100,000 dollars to support or enhance their organizations operation. What questions would you have for them?

They might look something like this:

- ◇ Who are you
- ◇ Why do you need this money?
- ◇ What are you getting for this money?
- ◇ What difference will it make?

Final Thoughts

Typically when we read, we are looking for an introduction or theme, an explanation, and an ending, or summary.

Professional writers often say that when you are trying to persuade someone to do something there needs to be a beginning, middle and an end. Often referred to as persuasive writing, this format is looked upon as critical to ensuring your request is received in a manner that easily understandable.

Do not use national statistics. Use local statistics, and use only enough to validate problem statements or as proof of best practices used by an organization against which you are benchmarking.

Check your work. Have someone who is disassociated from the project read over the entire application, and provide a critique of your work. Be open to their thoughts. After all you trusted them enough to review the result of your hard work.

Summarize your case. Restate the problem/risk, and the facts, the solution and a statement of cause and affect, or prediction.

Remember that there is help available. The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program Office maintains a help desk during normal business hours (866-274-0960) and there are representatives at each of the FEMA Regional Offices. You may also receive help at the website www.firegrantsupport.com At the AFG website, program guidance, frequently asked questions and grant specific applicant tutorial are available. The tutorials are narrated training that will help you through filling an application, highlight grant priorities and include helpful hints to enhance your ability to develop a good application.