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The Service Award Program Benefits for Volunteer Emergency Responders Matched By State

The Service Award Program (SAP), formerly called the Length of Service Award Program, is a tax-deferred benefit program for volunteer fire fighters, emergency medical technicians and first responders. SAP is a long-term, cost-effective way to retain, recruit and reward emergency service volunteers. Receiving benefits is important to families of volunteer emergency responders, especially during a time of high unemployment rates and employers reducing work benefits. Today, benefits provided to volunteers, such as retirement income from SAP, are an invaluable asset for a family's well being and financial security.

According to the National Volunteer Fire Council, volunteer firefighter participation has declined by 10% over the past 20 years. The goals of SAP are:

- To encourage experienced emergency response volunteers to stay in their positions;
- To provide communities a tool to assist in Wisconsin's recruitment and retention challenges; and
- To provide incentives that increase in value over the span of a volunteers' service.

The state matches local investments in a municipality's SAP and provides the benefit to the volunteers. To participate, a municipality must simply adopt a resolution, work with a program vendor approved by the SAP Board, and financially contribute to the program. The state then annually matches municipal contributions up to \$316.38 per responder. Municipalities can choose to contribute more or less than this amount, however, the state only matches up to the set amount. Upon reaching age 60, each volunteer with over 20 years of service collects the full amount in his or her account. Volunteers retiring with more than ten years' experience (but less than 20 years) collect a portion of their account.

Over the program's first ten years, participation increased from 85 departments in 2001 to 229 departments at the end of 2010.

The SAP Board, appointed by the Governor, provides oversight for the program. If you wish to receive further information about specific benefit options available for your volunteers, see the program's web page at <http://www.doa.state.wi.us/section.asp?linkid=56&locid=9>. You can also speak with the following program vendors directly about the benefit options they provide:

- Penflex, Inc. / UBS Financial Services (800) 742-1409
- RBC Wealth Management / BPA (414) 347-7030
- VFIS / The Horton Group (800) 242-9028

For more information, contact Dawn Vick at the Department of Administration at dawn.vick@wisconsin.gov or (608) 266-7043.

SAFER Grants and Service Award Program Funding

A federal grant program called SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) provides direct grants to help departments with staffing shortages. These grants can provide funding for recruiting and retaining volunteers. The funds are distributed over a four-year period by FEMA.

The goal of the SAFER program is to help departments increase their number of frontline firefighters so communities have sufficient protection from fire-related hazards. On or about May 31 each year, the grant application form is posted online at <http://www.fema.gov/firegrants>. Although the grant application period for FY2010 is now closed, the 2011 application will be available this fall. This year, the Ellsworth Volunteer Fire Department of Ellsworth, Wisconsin was awarded a \$120,000 grant to aid in their recruitment efforts.

SAFER grant money may not be used to reward past service of firefighters, but SAFER grant money can be used to implement a SAP (Service Award Program). There are important considerations that must be explored prior to establishing a SAP. It is important to recognize that a SAP is a long-term commitment, while the SAFER grant is limited to four years. There must be an alternative source of funding for the SAP after, and preferably during, the grant years. Generally, the SAFER funding "prefunds" a significant portion of the SAP. As a general rule, to establish a reasonable benefit, the grant request should contemplate no less than \$1,500 per active volunteer.

The SAFER grant process is a valuable tool in providing funds to ensure the continued success of volunteer departments. To obtain more information on SAFER grants, visit <http://www.fema.gov/firegrants>.

2012 Coastal Management Program Grants Available

Wisconsin enjoys nearly 1,000 miles of Great Lakes shoreline. Continuing the state's efforts to enhance Wisconsin's coastal resources, the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program (WCMP) at the Department of Administration (DOA) is accepting proposals for its 2012-2013 grant program. Up to \$1.3 million will be available for coastal land acquisition, wetland protection and habitat restoration, nonpoint source pollution control, coastal resource and community planning, Great Lakes education, public access and historic preservation. Projects must be located in one or more Wisconsin counties on the shores of Lake Superior or Lake Michigan.

Towns, villages, cities, counties, tribal governments, state agencies, colleges and universities, regional planning commissions and nonprofit organizations are all eligible to apply. The application deadline is Friday November 4, 2011 and projects may begin no earlier than July 1, 2012. To assist grant applicants, the WCMP will provide free grant workshops throughout the state:

- Wednesday August 31st at 1:30 p.m. – Port of Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI
- Wednesday September 7th at 1:30 p.m. – Bay Lakes Regional Planning Commission, Green Bay, WI
- Wednesday September 14th at 10:30 a.m. – Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, Ashland, WI.

Application materials and the Request for Proposals are available on the WCMP website at <http://coastal.wisconsin.gov>. Applicants are encouraged to contact WCMP staff early to discuss ideas for project proposals and application requirements.

Contact Michael Friis at the DOA WCMP, (608) 267-7982 or coastal@wisconsin.gov.

Fire Department Grants

The Department of Homeland Security administers the Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG) program. The AFG offers fire departments the chance to submit three grant applications. All three applications are due at the same time. The match for this grant is between 5% and 20% depending on your jurisdiction size. The maximum amount an applicant can apply for is \$1 million.

- Operations and Safety – The Ops and Safety grant application can include requests for many things including: training, equipment (rescue tools, ladders, hose, etc.), personal protective equipment (turnout gear, air packs, etc.), modifications to facilities (sprinkler systems, smoke and fire alarm systems, vehicle exhaust systems, etc.), and wellness/fitness programs (physicals, immunizations, health screenings, etc.).
- Vehicles – Money for vehicles is limited to 25% of the total grant dollars available, competition for vehicles is extremely competitive. Departments can apply for a pumper, tanker/tender, brush truck, aerial, or quint; depending what size your jurisdiction is. Fire departments can also request all the NFPA required equipment as part of their application. The age of the vehicle, age of the total fleet, and your call volume are taken into consideration for the competitive request.
- Regional Communication Projects – Any eligible applicant, including fire departments or nonaffiliated EMS organizations, may act as a “host applicant” and apply for a communications project on behalf of itself and any number of organizations in neighboring jurisdictions. A regional project is one in which multiple organizations serving more than one local jurisdiction benefit directly from the activities implemented with the grant funds. Regional projects should be designed to facilitate interoperability and efficiency among the participating jurisdictions. Law enforcement can benefit from this grant. However, any equipment purchased with the grant must physically be distributed to all the departments in the identified region.

The 2011 application period will be opening soon. Visit <http://www.fema.gov/firegrants> for program guidance, and the electronic application information.

For more information or grant assistance, contact Dawn Vick at the Wisconsin Department of Administration at (608) 266-7043 or dawn.vick@wisconsin.gov.

Wisconsin Personnel Partners

Wisconsin Personnel Partners (Partners) is a program to provide human resources and personnel services for Wisconsin's local governments. This program to support local and Tribal governments is located in the Wisconsin Office of State Employment Relations.

Partners is a familiar entity with a new face. You may remember *Partners* as Wisconsin City/County Services or Wisconsin City and County Testing Services (WCCS). Since 1939, *Partners* has provided services for hundreds of local governments. *Partners* acts as vital business partner to design, develop, and deliver cost effective, comprehensive HR services to Wisconsin's public sector employers.

The program now provides consultation in a wide variety of areas. *Partners* can help construct working job descriptions, design performance appraisal systems, reevaluate your employee compensation plans, and more.

If you would like to find out how Wisconsin Personnel Partners can work with your municipality, or, if you are interested in keeping up with the latest in government HR news and trends, send *Partners* your email address as well as the email addresses of any additional personnel interested in subscribing to the electronic newsletter. Contact (608) 266-1088, e-mail wpp@wisconsin.gov, or visit <http://wpp.wi.gov>.

Locating State Grants at *WiGrants.wi.gov*

The Wisconsin Department of Administration maintains a centralized, online listing of competitive, application-based state grants available to local and Tribal governments located at <http://wigrants.wi.gov>. The catalog is one of several initiatives led by DOA to strengthen the working relationship between state, local and Tribal governments. The site contains information on over 150 programs from 14 state agencies.

The WiGrants catalog is intended to improve local governments' ability to locate grant opportunities so they can continue to improve their local communities. Visit <http://wigrants.wi.gov> for a complete listing of grants offered by state agencies.

Grants for Public Facilities and Buildings

One of the most common needs local and Tribal governments have is funding the construction and maintenance of public facilities and public buildings. Grants and loans for public infrastructure and community facilities such as police and fire stations, town halls, and community centers are available from three key sources.

WI Department of Commerce – Community Development Block Grant for Public Facilities (CDBG-PF) **<http://www.commerce.wi.gov/CD/CD-bcf-cdbg-pf.html>**

CDBG-PF is a financing tool for general-purpose local and Tribal units of government in need of funds to undertake infrastructure and public building projects (excluding buildings for the conduct of government). For *public infrastructure grants*, eligible projects include the installation or repair of public water systems and sanitary sewer systems; storm drainage systems; streets, sidewalks, curb and gutter; parking; street lights; and streetscape. For *community facility grants*, eligible projects include capital expenditures for physical facilities necessary to add or prevent the loss of basic services or critical public amenities. Examples include libraries, community and senior centers, fire stations, health clinics, sheltered workshops, and day care facilities. Costs to remove architectural barriers in structures, including structures used for general government function which limit access or mobility for elderly or handicapped persons are eligible. *Downtown revitalization grants* are available for a range of activities intended to promote the revitalization of downtown business districts.

Board of Commissioners of Public Lands State Trust Fund Loan Program **<http://bcpl.wisconsin.gov/section.asp?linkid=1438&locid=145>**

The State Trust Fund Loan Program finances community and school projects across Wisconsin. Over the last 15 years, two-thirds of the state's school districts and half of its municipalities have taken advantage of these loans, with the interest paid returned to every Wisconsin community in the form of public school library aid. Projects made possible through the State Trust Fund Loan Program include the Bayfield County Courthouse renovation, Kewaskum High School renovation, and La Crosse riverfront restoration and downtown revitalization.

USDA Rural Development Grant Program **http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/HCF_CF.html**

The United States Department of Agriculture offers grants and loans to develop essential community facilities in rural areas and towns of up to 20,000 in population. Grants, loans, and loan guarantees are available for water and environmental projects, as well as community facilities projects. Water and environmental projects include water systems, waste systems, solid waste, and storm drainage facilities. Community facilities projects develop essential community facilities for public use in rural areas and may include hospitals, fire protection, safety, as well as many other community-based initiatives.

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