17. From Need to Narrative: AFG Grant Writing for the Fire Service

Instructor: Beth Bishop

A strong AFG application does more than identify what your department needs. It must clearly communicate why the need exists, how it affects firefighters and community safety, and why federal funding is necessary.

This practical, fire-service-focused class guides participants through developing an Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) application, from documenting departmental needs and gathering supporting data to writing a compelling narrative. Participants will explore how to demonstrate financial hardship and operational impact and explain how the requested project will improve firefighters and community safety. They will also examine common application mistakes and learn to assess an application from a peer reviewer's perspective.

Participants will also learn what data to gather to support their AFG applications and how to begin organizing it before the application period opens. Topics will include department and community demographics, call volume and response information, equipment inventories and condition, training needs, financial records, and project cost estimates. By identifying data sources and gaps early, firefighters can begin documenting their needs and preparing supporting information rather than waiting until the application period begins.

The class will conclude with an interactive question-and-answer session, giving participants an opportunity to ask questions about the AFG process, discuss challenges their departments may be facing, and gain additional insight into developing stronger applications.

Whether you're preparing your first AFG application or looking for ways to strengthen an application you've submitted before, this class is designed to provide practical tips and strategies you can take back to your department and apply to your next AFG application.

About the Instructors:

Beth Bishop is a Grants Manager and former firefighter who has been developing public safety grant applications since 2012. During that time, she has helped secure more than $15 million in grant awards for fire departments throughout Kentucky and Indiana.

With 18 years of experience as a firefighter, Beth brings firsthand knowledge of the challenges fire departments face when trying to fund the apparatus, equipment, training, technology, and facilities needed to protect their personnel and communities. Her grant-writing experience includes the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG), Port Security Grant Program (PSGP), Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER), Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S), local community grants, and nonprofit funding opportunities, with a primary focus on fire departments and public safety agencies. Beth has developed grant applications supporting a wide variety of projects, including fire apparatus, PPE, equipment, training, communications equipment, drones, firefighting vessels, and facility improvements. In 2026 alone, AFG awards for applications she worked on exceeded $3.2 million.

Adding another valuable perspective to her experience, Beth served for three years on AFG Peer Review Panels, giving her insight into both sides of the grant process. She brings that perspective into the classroom with a practical, straightforward approach focused on helping fire departments better understand what reviewers are looking for, avoid common mistakes, identify and gather the data needed to support their applications, clearly communicate their needs, and develop stronger, more competitive grant applications.